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Fight and Propaganda. The Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto from the Perspective of the Polish Government in London

Walka i propaganda. Powstanie w getcie warszawskim z perspektywy polskiego Londynu

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The Fighting and the Propaganda: The Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto from the Perspective of 'Polish London'

We are so cruelly alone. And it seems there is nothing to be done about it.

Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, 19 May 1943

With all my heart I join the Jewry in mourning for the heroic defenders of the Warsaw ghetto. In suffering Poland, a relentless struggle against our mortal enemy, the Germans, bound together our brethren's fates, and once again bore testimony to the friendship of the Polish nation for the Jews, which, during the battle of the ghetto, took the real and, at that time, only possible form of the weapons and trained officers that were sent to them. The flags, white-and-red and white-and-blue, that were proudly unfurled over the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto became the symbol of the brotherhood of arms and lasting friendship between the two nations living on the same soil.

a fragment of the letter of Prime Minister Stanisław
Mikołajczyk to the Federation of Polish Jews in Great
Britain, *Dziennik Polski* and *Dziennik Żołnierza*,
20 May 1944

As might have been predicted, the 70th anniversary of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto brought with it a new surge of publications about the uprising itself, the Holocaust, as well as the overall topic of Polish-Jewish relations. The number of scholarly articles was relatively small. Contrary to popular belief, however, not every aspect of the uprising has yet been examined and documented. Most of the issues still require more extensive research, corrections still need to be made and gaps filled in our current vision of the past. Into this category falls the response of the Polish government in London to the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. This article focuses on the question, what government officials knew about the situation in the ghetto during the period between mid-April and the end of May 1943. It analyses official statements and comments made by

representatives of the various governmental branches, actions they took, and, finally, the treatment of the subject in the Polish press.¹ In writing this article, I relied on primary source materials housed in London in the archive of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, and the archive the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust, namely the files of the President of Poland Władysław Raczkiewicz, the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief Władysław Sikorski, minutes of the sessions of the National Council from April, May, and June 1943 and correspondence sent to London during that period from occupied Poland. The other source materials used in this study are contents of two newspapers: the official government organ *Dziennik Polski*, based in London, and *Dziennik Żołnierza*, the Polish daily published in Glasgow, Scotland; both are housed in the National Library of Poland in Warsaw. The diary of the Jewish representative on the National Council, Ignacy Schwarzbart (in the possession of the Archives of the Yad Vashem Institute), constitutes another exceptional and invaluable source.² Some of these documents have already been published and quoted in anthologies, but usually without scholarly commentary.³ The minutes of the National Council sessions have also been published previously,⁴ as well as the log listing the daily activities of Władysław Raczkiewicz,⁵ nonetheless, they have escaped the attention of historians in the context of the subject matter of this study.

¹ To date, no thorough analysis of the question has been carried out from this perspective. The literature concerning the Polish government-in-exile hardly mentions this subject, see Eugeniusz Duraczyński, *Rząd polski na uchodźstwie 1939–1945. Organizacja, personalia, polityka* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1993), pp. 206–208. Among the Polish historians who wrote most extensively on the subject are: Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *Kto ratuje jedno życie... Polacy i Żydzi 1939–1945* (Warsaw: IPN, 2008), pp. 267–270, English edition: *He Who Saves One Life* (New York: Crown Publisher 1971); Dariusz Stola, *Nadzieja i Zgłada. Ignacy Schwarzbart – żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP, 1940–1945* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1995), pp. 177–178, 203, 206, 239, 242. Among foreign authors, see: David Engel, *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 70–78.

² I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to Witold Mędykowski who helped me to obtain this material.

³ See, for example, *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945* (later: AKD), editorial committee Halina Czarnocka, Józef Garliński, Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, Włodzimierz Otocki, and head of the editorial board Tadeusz Pełczyński (Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków: Ossolineum, 1990), vol. 2, 3 and 6, first edition: London 1976.

⁴ *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, vol. 5: *Wrzesień 1942–lipiec 1943*, ed. Marian Zgórniak, Wojciech Rojek, cooperation Andrzej Suchcitz (Kraków: Secesja, 2001).

⁵ *Dzienniki czynności Prezydenta RP Władysława Raczkiewicza 1939–1947*, vol. 2: *1943–1947*, ed. Jacek Piotrowski (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004).

19 April – 3 May

The first cable about the fighting in the ghetto, signed by Stefan Korboński, head of Directorate of Civil Resistance [*Kierownictwo Walki Cywilnej*, KWC], was sent *via* the KWC's radio station and decoded without any delay on the following day, April 20. The message was very concise: "Yesterday the Germans began the liquidation of 35,000 in our ghetto. The Jews are defending themselves. We can hear shots and explosions of grenades The Germans are using tanks and armored cars. They have losses. There are fires in several places. Speak to the ghetto today."⁶ It was immediately handed over to Prime Minister Sikorski and Deputy Prime Minister Mikołajczyk, along with the cables relating to the Katyń affair.⁷ The members of Sikorski's cabinet received the information on the same day, April 21. A meeting of the Council of Ministers began at 11.15 a.m. Present at the meeting were Prime Minister Sikorski, Ministers: Stanisław Mikołajczyk, Józef Haller, Henryk Strasburger, Stanisław Kot, Karol Popiel, Marian Seyda, Władysław Komarnicki, Jan Kwapiński, Edward Raczyński, and General Marian Kukiel. Ludwik Grosfeld filled in for Minister Jan Stańczyk. Adam Romer took the minutes. The first item of the agenda, preceded by Sikorski's account of his conversation with Churchill, was Deputy Prime Minister Mikołajczyk's report on the latest news from the "recent dispatches from the homeland" which had confirmed "the bloody liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto" (where the remaining thirty five thousand Jews still lived) and "the German revelation about the victims of the Katyń Forest massacre."⁸ The Katyń affair was discussed at the previous, special cabinet meeting on April 17. As expected, the topic of Polish-Soviet relations overshadowed this meeting as well.⁹ Nevertheless, other issues were also discussed. The cabinet accepted for approval a draft of the Polish-British protocol relating to disability provisions; passed a motion to allocate 300 pounds for a visit by a worker's union representative to the United States; and approved a motion that the Council's recommendation for the appointment of the new chairman of the National Economic Bank be submitted to the President.

⁶ Studium Polski Podziemnej [The Polish Underground Movement Study Trust, later: SPP], MSW 73/I, dispatches from the homeland; radio station 'Kazia', coded dispatch [*depesza-szyfr*] No. 70, signed N [Nowak, alias of Stefan Korboński], copy, p. 68. English translation after Stefan Korboński, *The Polish Underground State. A Guide to the Underground, 1939–1945*, transl. Marta Erdman (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1978), p. 134.

⁷ SPP, MSW 73/I, dispatches nos. 61 and 65; both sent on April 19, p. 60, 65.

⁸ *Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów z dnia 21 kwietnia 1943* [The Council of Ministers, minutes of the meeting of 21 April 1943], in: *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów...*, p. 388; minutes of the entire meeting to page 390.

⁹ On 13 April 1943, Radio Berlin broadcast a report concerning the discovery of the graves of Polish officers in Katyń. On the Polish government activities see, for example, Tadeusz Wol-sza, *„Katyń to już na zawsze katy i katowani”. W „polskim Londynie” o sowieckiej zbrodni w Katyniu, 1940–1956* (Warsaw: IH PAN, 2008).

The fifth point on the agenda was the discussion on passing the motion put forward by the Minister of Industry, Trade, and Navigation to purchase English thoroughbred horses for breeding purposes in Poland after the war. Lastly, the sixth item was to fix (at £55) the maximum monthly payment relating to commissioned work agreements. The cabinet also authorised continuation of a subsidy of 800 Swedish crowns for Mrs Wanda Thuggutt and accepted a monthly subsidy of £25 for Mrs Jadwiga Pohorecka. The meeting ended at 1.05 p.m. The situation in Warsaw was not even once mentioned during the meeting. At least that is what we can conclude from the minutes.

The next urgent cable from Korboński arrived on April 22: "The fighting in the ghetto continues. Throughout the night we could hear shots, explosions, and fires."

The cable was decoded on the same day¹⁰ and handed over to the parties on the distribution list (the commander-in-chief, the minister of defence, and the minister of the interior). We do not know whether members of the National Council had already obtained information that the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto had entered the next stage or news about the outbreak of the fighting. The session of the Council was held on April 19, before anyone had been apprised of the new situation in Warsaw. In fact, the two Jewish representatives: Zionist, Ignacy Schwarzbart and the representative of the Bund, Szmul Zygielbojm, did not even take the floor.¹¹ The subsequent session did not take place until May 6. Calling the special session had not been deemed necessary, because the National Council had already assembled three times during the first half of the month: on April 2, 16, and 17. In addition, the Easter holiday fell on April 25 and 26 of that year. At the session of the council on April 17, a proposal of Zygielbojm and some of his fellow representatives was read to the council. They requested that the council adopt a resolution to appoint an action committee to undertake the information campaign on the German atrocities in Poland and also appeal to the Polish government to initiate extraordinary measures appropriate to the needs of the moment. The council also debated the urgency of organising an exhibition that would show the Nazi treatment of the civilian population in Poland, including the slaughter of the Jews, as well as making a documentary about the martyrdom of the Polish and Jewish population. A suitable proposal was sent to the Committee on Political and Legal Affairs.¹² On April 23, Ignacy Schwarzbart, a member of the National Council, met Deputy Prime Minister

¹⁰ SPP, MSW 73/I, dispatch no. 71, sent on April 21, copy, p. 69; cited from Korboński, p. 134.

¹¹ Archiwum Instytutu Polskiego i Muzeum im. gen. Sikorskiego [The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, later: AIP], A.5.3/74, Stenogram z 74 posiedzenia Rady Narodowej RP, 19 IV 1943 r. [The National Council in Exile, minutes of the 74th session of 19 April 1943].

¹² AIP, A.5.3/73, Stenogram z 73 posiedzenia Rady Narodowej RP, 17 IV 1943 r. [The National Council in Exile, minutes of the 73rd session of 17 April 1943], pp. 2–4.

Mikołajczyk. The account of their hour-long conversation, that he provided, raises numerous questions. The starting point of their discussion was a plea of the Jewish National Committee (*Żydowski Komitet Narodowy*, ŻKN) for financial assistance to Polish Jews sent to the Jewish Agency and Schwarzbart prior to the uprising. (The cables sent by the committee were decoded on April 20.¹³) Mikołajczyk informed Schwarzbart that a cable had been sent to the homeland authorities requesting the allocation of funds for this purpose within their budget. He also notified him that there had been some disruption of the courier traffic. They also discussed the question of the underground railway for Polish Jews escaping to Hungary. Schwarzbart expressed a wish to meet a rabbi who had arrived from Budapest. Finally, Mikołajczyk reported that “the active resistance in the ghetto in Warsaw continues. Jews in the ghetto received weapons from our authorities. The German troops [*wojsko*] patrol the ghetto. Even using tanks.” He added that the extermination action “is intensified at the moment” in the “incorporated part” (i.e. in the territories incorporated into the Reich) and in Cracow. They discussed seven other issues, especially elaborating upon the Katyń massacre (the Polish diplomatic action and the Allies’ stance).¹⁴ Surprisingly, Schwarzbart’s account of this conversation contains no reference to the beginning of the liquidation of the ghetto, the fighting there, the raging fires. It might have been that Mikołajczyk’s explanations were highly inaccurate, or Schwarzbart did not entirely understand his words. We do not know whether Schwarzbart passed this information on, or if so, to whom as there are no entries in his diary for the period between April 24 and April 27.

In addition to Korboński, the Polish Underground State authorities sent cables concerning the outbreak of fighting in the ghetto. The cables sent by Home Army Commander Stefan Rowecki and Delegate Jan Stanisław Jankowski to the minister of foreign affairs on April 21 provided precise information:

The liquidation of the central ghetto in Warsaw began on April 19, at 4 a.m. A strong cordon of German and ‘blue’ police forces surrounded the ghetto, and large units of the German military police and SS entered the ghetto area. Even armoured cars and several light tanks were used in the action. The Jewish Fighting Organization (*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, ŻOB) put up strong resistance. The regular battles have continued in the streets for three days now; tremendous explosions shake the whole of Warsaw, clouds of smoke from numerous outbreaks of fires are drifting over the ghetto. Today, April 21, the battle continues. The liquidation action did not affect the Jewish enclaves that had already been separated from the ghetto, such as the Toebe’s factories on Prosta Street.

¹³ SPP, MSW 73/I, coded dispatches nos. 67B, 67C, 67D.

¹⁴ Yad Vashem Archive (later: YVA), M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart’s Diary 1943, Conversation with Deputy Prime Minister Mikołajczyk, 23 April 1943, from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., p. 91.

The cable did not arrive until five days later, on April 26, at 6.30 p.m. It was decoded on April 27, at 11.20 a.m.¹⁵ It contained a strictly factual account. The Delegate and the Commander of the Home Army did not suggest that one or another action should be taken by the government. The head of Bureau VI of the General Staff, Michał Protasewicz, who was overseeing contacts with the occupied country, had distributed the radiogram marked "Top Secret" to (in addition to the commander-in-chief), the minister of defence and the minister of internal affairs.¹⁶

Earlier, however, the Bureau VI decoded another radiogram signed by General Rowecki and dispatched from Warsaw on April 24. It indicated that the Germans had been surprised by the magnitude of the resistance and that a report on the course of the fighting would be sent. (Beginning April 19, "as the Germans started the next stage of the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, the Jews took up the fight. The Germans [were] taken by surprise by the resistance. The fight continues. Many fires. Shall submit a detailed report about the course of the fighting. Kalina."). The report arrived the same day at 4.20 p.m. and was decoded at 5.00 p.m.¹⁷ It was delivered to the commander-in-chief and, on April 26, to the ministries of defence and interior affairs. (It was the day when the Soviet news agency TASS published a communiqué announcing that the Soviet Union had broken off relations with the Polish government.) It is not known exactly when the radiogram ended up on the desk of Sikorski.¹⁸ The time is not, however, essential. It is more important that the commander-in-chief issued the following directive in response: "The fighting that unfolded amid the Warsaw ghetto liquidation, which itself calls for the strongest condemnation, should by no means spread throughout the Homeland, and should not be a call for a spontaneous uprising. All aid to Jews is permissible, but this line should not be crossed." A cable containing this message was sent to Warsaw.¹⁹

On the same day, April 24, a cable sent by the Polish Bund to Szmul Zygielbojm arrived in London. It was sent two days before the fighting broke out and reported on the liquidation action in the ghetto in Stanisławów and deportations from Warsaw to labour camps in the Lublin district. ("Fearing an active resistance in the Warsaw ghetto, the occupier relocates its remnants, transferring the large

¹⁵ SPP, A3.1.1.13.4, Radiogram no 711/F, radio station 'Wanda', p. 67, in: *AKD*, vol. 2, p. 500.

¹⁶ SPP, A3.1.1.13.4, p. 67a.

¹⁷ Ibidem, Radiogram no. 707, p. 68A; English translation from Iranek-Osmecki, p. 213.

¹⁸ The logbook of the commander-in-chief contains an entry on Zygmunt Borkowski's (his chief of staff) arrival with 'materials' at 1:30 p.m. (AIP, Kol. 1/45, *Dziennik czynności Naczelnego Wodza* [The Logbook of the Commander-in-Chief] Przebieg dnia 25 IV 1943 r. [Log of 25 April 1943], p. 25).

¹⁹ SPP, A3.1.1.13.4, Radiogram no. 707, with handwritten notes, p. 68A; ibidem, coded dispatch, Rawa (Col. Protasewicz) to "Kalina" (Rowecki), 26 April 1943, sent 27 April 1943.

workshops to the Poniatowa and Trawniki camps.”) There was also a request that a rescue attempt be made and money sent.²⁰

While delivering the cable, Mikołajczyk must have mentioned to Zygielbojm, as well as to Schwarzbart, the additional news from Warsaw acquired from other telegrams sent from the homeland.²¹ A few days before the fight in Warsaw began, Zygielbojm requested that a message be sent from him to the Bund in Warsaw informing about the assassination of the leaders of their party, Henryk Erlich and Wiktor Alter, in the Soviet Union²² and asking after the fate of his family.²³ Mikołajczyk, on his part, conveyed Zygielbojm’s request to the delegate and instructed that \$13,000, handed over by Zygielbojm, should be transferred to the Bund.²⁴

The next meeting of the Council of Ministers commenced on April 27, at 11.30 a.m. It was of course overshadowed by the issue of the crisis in Polish-Soviet relations. In the context of Stalin’s note threatening a break of diplomatic relations with Poland, which Ambassador Majski delivered it to Churchill on April 25, Sikorski reported on his conversation with Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary, held on April 24. The president of the Republic of Poland (*Rzeczpospolita Polska*, RP) joined the meeting after the break, and those assembled drew up a declaration of the Polish government. The meeting ended at 3.00 p.m.²⁵ No one said a word about the situation in Warsaw.²⁶ The cabinet

²⁰ Ibidem, coded dispatch, Sobol (Jankowski) to Stem (Mikołajczyk) with request to hand over to addressee (Zygielbojm)], sent April 17, received April 24.

²¹ Zygielbojm wrote to Emanuel Nowogrodzki, the secretary-general of the Bund on April 30, informing him about the fighting in the ghetto; cited from Isabelle Tombs, “*Morituri vos salutant*: Szmul Zygielbojm’s Suicide in May 1943 and the International Socialist Community in London” (*Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2000, no. 14, p. 264).

²² “Litvinov, on behalf of the Soviet government, announced that they had been executed on a charge of conducting propaganda for making an immediate, separate peace with Hitler. The murder and slander of their memory are met with great indignation. Protests are taking place in America and England. We expect it will spark a protest of Jewish and Polish groups waging the underground struggle against the occupiers.” (SPP, A3.1.1.13.5A, dispatch, Artur (Zygielbojm) to Bund, 12 April 1943, p. 131.

²³ Ibidem, dispatch, Stem (Mikołajczyk) to the delegate for Berezowski (Feiner), 13 April 1943, p. 132.

²⁴ Ibidem, dispatch, Stem to the delegate, 13 April 1943, p. 133.

²⁵ *Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów z dnia 27 kwietnia 1943* [The Council of Ministers, minutes of the meeting of 27 April 1943], in: *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów...*, pp. 406–408.

²⁶ Sikorski did not mention the fighting in the ghetto during his heated conversation with the British foreign secretary Anthony Eden – in the opinion of the British administration, the Polish government had reached an impasse – despite the fact that, refuting the Soviet line of reasoning, he stressed the significance of the anti-German resistance in the occupied country and declared that it would carry on. (*Sprawozdanie z rozmowy z ministrem Edenem, 24 IV 1943 r.* [Sikorski’s report on the conversation with Secretary Eden, 24 April 1943], in: ibidem, pp. 408–415).

met once again on the following day to discuss briefly and approve changes in the declaration introduced after the consultation with Churchill and Eden at Downing Street.²⁷ The subsequent cable, that was prepared by Korboński on April 28 and arrived in London on the following day, April 29, contained the next message concerning the ghetto: "The fighting continues in the ghetto. The Germans are burning houses systematically, one after another."²⁸

In conclusion: five dispatches containing information on the fighting in the ghetto were decoded in London between April 20 and May 3 (three sent by Korboński, one by Rowecki, and one signed jointly by the government delegate and the commander of the Home Army). The recipients of information about the situation in Warsaw were the commander-in-chief and the members of the Council of Ministers, and of course the president of the Republic of Poland.²⁹ The radiograms sent from Warsaw were, of necessity, concise. Their content, however, has testified to the gravity of the situation and the strength of the Jewish organised resistance. The dispatches mentioned the Jewish Fighting Organisation but did not provide any detailed data on its potential.

The response of the Polish authorities to these reports was very limited, a fact also reflected in the content of the government newspaper, *Dziennik Polski*,³⁰ the pages of which were understandably dominated by the issues of Katyń and Polish-Soviet relations. Still, dozens or so texts and notes devoted to Jewish matters appeared there as well. For example, the resolution issued by the National Council in the wake of the murder of Erlich and Alter was printed in full on April 19.³¹ The leaders of the Bund were mentioned in subsequent issues, also in the context of Katyń. On April 21, the slaughter of Polish Jews was mentioned

²⁷ *Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów w dniu 28 kwietnia 1943* [The Council of Ministers, minutes of the meeting of 28 April 1943], in: *ibidem*, pp. 171–172.

²⁸ SPP, MSW, coded dispatch no. 77, sent April 28, received April 29, copy, p. 75. Korboński, on behalf of the KWC, requested to appeal (via the radio station 'Świt') for a peaceful May Day celebration and to warn against possible Communist provocation; he also advised to celebrate the 3rd of May by organising "lectures and talks, a mass".

²⁹ On April 21 and 22, he met with several members of the National Council. On April 22, he had a nearly hour-long meeting with minister Mikołajczyk (*Dzienniki czynności Prezydenta RP...*, p. 58).

³⁰ The Ministry of Information and Documentation published the first issue of *Dziennik Polski* on 12 July 1940. Marcei Karczewski, who had worked in a daily, *Kurier Polski*, before the war, had been its editor-in-chief until 30 June 1943, when Stanisław Sopicki was appointed. With the circulation of 10 to 15,000 copies, the daily became the main source of news for Poles living in Great Britain. For more on its history and content, see Jolanta Chważyk-Kowalczyk, *Londyński „Dziennik Polski”, 1940–1943* (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Akademii Świętokrzyskiej, 2005).

³¹ "Wobec stracenia przez władców ZSRR Wiktora Altera i Henryka Erlicha," *Dziennik Polski*, 19 April 1943, p. 2. The newspaper began to provide extensive coverage of this affair in March, when the Soviets revealed the fate of two activists.

in connection with the conference, which was being held in Bermuda.³² On April 29, a petition to President Roosevelt, sent by the Federation of Polish Jews from Chicago pleading that “rebuilt Poland would not be mutilated and robbed, but would rise to new life in full possession of its rights in accordance with the Atlantic Charter,” appeared on the front page of *Dziennik Polski*.³³ The daily also published stories about celebrations of Jewish holidays in the Middle East, and quoted Schwarzbart’s speech to Jews in Poland that was delivered on April 17 and broadcasted on the BBC. It did not decide, however, to exploit the Jewish theme while writing on the Katyń affair. A representative of the Labour Party in the National Council, Stanisław Sopicki, suggested to Minister of Defence Marian Kukiel that the list of Katyń victims should be published starting with names of Jewish officers. He believed that it is a way to influence international public opinion. Kukiel, however, according to an entry in the diary kept by Sopicki, “assessed the case to be so important and of such magnitude that no stratagem [żadnych *bocznych dróg*] needs to be used.”³⁴

The entry of April 28 in the diary of Ignacy Schwarzbart, who attended a meeting of the Presidium of the National Council that day, indicates that no one talked with him about the situation in Warsaw. Nor was the subject brought up during his meeting with the the minister of justice, Karol Popiel. That evening, a meeting of the British section of the World Jewish Congress took place at which the attendees ‘hammered away’ at the issues of the Bermuda Conference. At night Schwarzbart talked on the telephone with the vice-president of the National Council, Władysław Banaczyk (of the Peasant Party), mainly about the broadcast of the Polish government’s declaration on the subject of Polish-Soviet relations.³⁵ As there are no entries in his diary, we do not know whom Schwarzbart met from April 24 through April 27. He was not preoccupied with the issues of the ghetto for the next two days, either. Actually, the events of April 30 were quite bizarre. At 1.30 p.m., Schwarzbart received a call requesting that he come to Mikołajczyk’s house as a matter of urgency. Paweł Siudak was there as well as and a man introduced to Schwarzbart as ‘Kozłowski,’ former Polish vice-consul in Budapest. His real name was Edmund Fietz (his other alias was Fietowicz) and he was the head of the

³² “O pomoc ginącym,” *Dziennik Polski*, 21 April 1943, p. 1. During the conference (held from April 19 through April 22) representatives of the United States and Great Britain discussed the question of Jewish refugees but they did not reach any binding agreement.

³³ “Apel Żydów polskich do Roosevelta,” *Dziennik Polski*, 29 April 1943, p. 1. The letter was sent shortly after the Katyń affair had been revealed.

³⁴ Stanisław Sopicki, “Dziennik 1943–1944,” *Przegląd Polonijny* 2 (1998): 31–71, here p. 39 (entry of April 23). Sopicki was a committed Christian Democratic activist before the war, an editor in chief of *Polonia*, a Katowice-based daily published by Wojciech Korfanty. His diary (preserved in the AIP) has been published in its entirety with an introduction by Mirosław Dymarski (*Stanisława Sopickiego dziennik londyński 1943–1944*, *ibidem*, p. 25–30).

³⁵ YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart’s Diary, 28 April 1943, p. 92–95.

station 'W'³⁶ dispatched on a mission by the Hungarian prime minister. Their half-hour conversation focused on the situation of Jews in Hungary. As Schwarzbart put it in his diary, 'Kozłowski' had placed particular emphasis on examples of the Polish assistance to Jews. After returning home, Schwarzbart took up the subject and wrote some letters that 'Kozłowski', departing London that day, was to take to Hungary. He also wrote a message to the ŻKN briefing the committee on this matter. Later, he once again met Siudak and Mikołajczyk. Unfortunately, the entry pertaining to this last meeting is extremely terse: "Conversation with Siudak about providing additional help to the ghetto. Also with Mikołajczyk. Prospects are good." His conversations with other Polish politicians concerned the situation within the cabinet.

Let us, however, return to the contents of *Dziennik Polski*. Two notices regarding Jews in Poland were published there during the period in question. The first one appeared on April 22 and quoted an article from a Swedish daily that had cited as a source a report of the Polish government on murdering Polish Jews; the article was out of date.³⁷ The next notice appeared on April 30. It confirmed news published in the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* that the Wilno ghetto had been liquidated and the fate of its inhabitants was unknown. The article also contained information that, in Lithuania and Latvia, the Jews who survived had been subject to "mobilisation for war work" and Jews deported from Norway were put to work in mines in Regierungsbezirk Kattowitz [the administrative district of Katowice].³⁸

The information on the battle in the Warsaw ghetto appeared only in the Saturday, May 1 edition, on page four. The story entitled *Tanks, Armoured Cars and Grenades Helping the Thugs in the Final Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto* was 62-words long; it was based on reporting by the Polish Telegraphic Agency (*Polska Agencja Telegraficzna*, PAT). According to messages from Warsaw – the story said – the ten day long, brutal, and cruel liquidation action has met with "constant resistance from the Jewish populace." "Shots are being heard from inside the ghetto walls night in and night out, smoke from fires is visible in places. The Germans use tanks, armoured cars and hand grenades to break the remaining resistance of residents of the ghetto."³⁹

On the same day, information about the fighting in the ghetto (53 words) was published by Glasgow *Dziennik Żołnierza*⁴⁰ under the title *Tanks in the Warsaw*

³⁶ Station "W" (*Cywilna Baza Łączności Zagranicznej i Wywiadowczo-Politycznej*), a civilian outpost in Budapest providing political intelligence and responsible for handling the contacts between the underground state in the occupied country and the Polish government in London.

³⁷ "W Sztokholmie o mordowaniu polskich Żydów," *Dziennik Polski*, 22 April 1943, p. 3.

³⁸ "Likwidacja getta w Wilnie," *Dziennik Polski*, 30 April 1943, p. 4.

³⁹ "Czołgi, samochody pancerne i granaty pomagają zbirom w ostatecznej likwidacji getta warszawskiego," *Dziennik Polski*, 1 May 1943, p. 4.

⁴⁰ A newspaper with a circulation of 10,000 of copies, published in Glasgow by the 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade. In 1943, Tadeusz Horko and Aleksander Bergman were its editors.

Ghetto. The story was based on the same PAT announcement, but here, it was placed on the front page.⁴¹

We do not know what might have caused such a significant delay. Had the information not been released to the Polish Telegraphic Agency and press, or had there been an order issued to withhold the news from Warsaw?⁴² As I have already mentioned, on April 22, *Dziennik Polski* carried news of the previous day's meeting of the Council of Ministers, during which Mikołajczyk had briefed the cabinet about the beginning of the fighting in Warsaw. Nonetheless, the story did not revealed any details of the meeting; it only briefly mentioned that "after the prime minister's report, current political issues were discussed and some resolutions were passed, among them disability provisions and the chairmanship of the National Economic Bank."⁴³ One can find more than a dozen stories relating to events in occupied Poland in April issues of *Dziennik Polski*. The newspaper invariably published them with a delay and put in an effort to disguisethe source. The delays were partly a result of technical reasons such as the speed of the flow of information between the homeland and London, or the time required for decoding and declassifying messages and releasing them to the press. The Operation Arsenal, for example, was not reported until ten days later. On April 30, the newspaper printed several items relating the situation in Warsaw (about ongoing arrests, street blockades, and house searches – the information provided by the cable of April 10) and reporting on the operations carried out by the KWC on April 5 and 6.⁴⁴ The cables from General Rowecki and Delegate Jankowski certainly influenced the decision to publish the story on the fighting in the ghetto. Sopicki wrote in his journal entry of April 30: "news on the final liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto arrived from the homeland. The Jews have been defending themselves."⁴⁵

The prolonged silence of *Dziennik Polski* and *Dziennik Żołnierza* was certainly not caused by lack of information, as the radio station 'Świt' (located in Bletchley Park but pretending to broadcast from occupied Poland)⁴⁶ reported on the

The newspaper, being more independent than *Dziennik Polski*, did not refrain from criticism of the Polish government. In 1944, it was forced to merge with *Dziennik Polski*.

⁴¹ "Czołgi w getto warszawskim," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 1 May 1943, p. 1.

⁴² Unfortunately the announcements of the Polish Telegraphic Agency from the period in question have not survived. The AIP has material dated until March 1943 (AIP, A.10.9/18, announcements of the PAT, 1943).

⁴³ *Dziennik Polski*, 22 April 1943, p. 2.

⁴⁴ "Kraj w cierpieniu i walce. Dalsze zbrodnie Niemców w Warszawie i reakcje bojowców," *Dziennik Polski*, 30 April 1943, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Sopicki, "Dziennik 1943–1944," p. 40. This is the first entry on this topic.

⁴⁶ The radio station operated from the end of 1942. After the reorganisation in the spring 1943, it aired two 15-minute programmes daily. 'Świt' was responsible to the Polish Ministry of the Interior, but was also controlled by the British. For more about its staff and operation, see the memoirs of Janusz Laskowski, the head of the station from February to the end of

fighting in Warsaw from its beginning. It based its coverage on the dispatches from Korboński, which were provided by the Polish authorities from London. As the dispatches were very terse, the broadcasters were compelled to improvise.⁴⁷ The suggestion, "Speak to the ghetto today," contained in the first cable, was addressed to Radio 'Świt' itself. Since it was mentioned by the underground press several times, we know that one of the first broadcasts of the radio had reached the ghetto;⁴⁸ but unfortunately, I have not been able to locate its transcript.⁴⁹ The most accurate account comes from a Lvov bulletin; it seems that 'Świt' was its only source of information at the time: 'Świt' reports that the Gestapo has been fighting a battle with the Jews in Warsaw since Monday; it is the most tragic fight known to history. On one side armour-plated murderers, on the other, ghostly shadows of old men, women, and children defending themselves against slaughter in the gas and electric chambers. 'Świt' concludes its broadcast with the words: "Hello, here speaks Warsaw to the whole world. Germans are murdering the last 35,000 Jewish people in Warsaw."⁵⁰ A Warsaw bulletin cites fragments of another broadcast: "The Germans are building a great tomb in Warsaw; they are demolishing the ghetto and building a monument to their barbarity. The last

November 1943 (idem, "Radiostacja Świt," *Zeszyty Historyczne* 9 (1966): 101–130 (part 1); 10: 203–224 (part 2).

⁴⁷ Czesław Straszewicz, who authored several of these programmes, wrote in his memoirs: "The burning of the ghetto in Warsaw, followed hour after hour, through the lens of [incoming] dispatches gave a birth to many powerful programmes, which, as being up-to-date [*robione na żywo*], became in turn an inspiration to the leading [*pryncypialny*] press agencies. As the subject was pitiful, we did not take much 'author's satisfaction' from it." (idem, "O 'Świcie,'" *Kultura* 10 (1953): 64–65).

⁴⁸ Mordechai Anielewicz wrote to Icchak Cukierman [Yitzhak Zuckerman] in his letter sent on 23 April 1943: "On our radio station we listened to a beautiful programme of Radio 'Świt' about our fighting. That we are remembered outside the wall, gives us the strength to fight."

⁴⁹ Transcripts of the programs were made in three copies; one intended for the British, another for the Polish Council of Ministers. Additional transcripts were made in the homeland, but none of them survived other than those made in and after August 1943 (Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archive of Modern Records, later: AAN], 202/I-680). The files of Stanisław Mikołajczyk, housed in the Hoover Institution Archives in Stanford (later: HIA; see Dokumenty Stanisława Mikołajczyka, 800/22/0/-/38, access online: <http://szukajwarchiwach.pl/800/22/0/-/38#tabJednostka>), do not have the earlier transcripts either.

⁵⁰ *Różne* [Various], *Komunikat* [Announcement] no. 33, 23 April 1943. Perhaps the first article quoting the radio station reported that "The battle between the regular German army and Jewish units has raged on the streets of the Warsaw ghetto since Saturday." It also reported about 35,000 Jews still living in Warsaw, which was taken from Korboński's dispatch, and recounted the fierce battle and heroic resistance of the Jewish units. Then, it reads that – according to 'Świt' – "all inhabitants are fighting: men, women, and children. The Germans have brought tanks, armoured cars and the artillery. Warsaw echoes with the roar of cannons, the rattle of machine guns, and explosions of hand grenades" (*Dziennik Polski*, 22 April 1943); cited from *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka. Polska prasa konspiracyjna 1943–1944 o powstaniu w getcie Warszawy*, ed. Paweł Szapiro, Londyn: Aneks, 1992, pp. 41, 44–45).

moments of the ghetto are approaching and the whole populace of Warsaw is witnessing it. The voice of the murdered will stay forever in their memory. We demand that Berlin be bombed [in retaliation] for the monstrous slaughter of the Jews of Warsaw.”⁵¹

Although the British and Polish governments both supervised the operations of the radio station, the radio producers were the ones who decided on the tone and content of the broadcasts. No one questions, however, that it was the ministry of the interior – more precisely Minister Mikołajczyk who kept in regular contact with the head of the radio station ‘Świt’ – gave the order to report on the fighting in the ghetto.⁵² The archival material of Radio ‘Świt’ contains a copy of the first cable from Korboński that the authorities handed over to the radio station with the instruction that “the broadcast must have the quality of great directness.” The annotated text of the cable was sent to the station on April 21.⁵³ It is actually possible that the fear of exposing Radio ‘Świt’ was one of the reasons for the decision to broadcast news about the ghetto. After all, as a radio station broadcasting from the homeland it could not hold back information on events occurring in the middle of Warsaw!⁵⁴ Besides, that spring, Radio ‘Świt’ programmes started to gain popularity in ‘Polish London’. The monitoring of the radio was maintained, news transcripts were made and printed in internal bulletins circulated in various ministries. Thus, ‘Świt’ transferred information from the homeland, which was not to be found in the London press.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, *Dziennik Polski* that repeatedly quoted Radio ‘Świt’ (for example, while describing reactions in the country to the Katyń massacre⁵⁶), remained silent about the dramatic appeals broadcast when the ghetto was being liquidated.

⁵¹ *Iskra*, 24 April 1943; cited from *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka...*, p. 46.

⁵² From time to time, Mikołajczyk wrote a piece for broadcast by the radio station. Both Laskowski and Straszewicz noticed that, of all Polish politicians in London, he had had the strongest influence on ‘Świt’ (“O ‘Świcie,’” p. 60).

⁵³ HIA, Government service file, 1942–1944, Dokumenty Stanisława Mikołajczyka, 800/22/0/-/38, image 180. We do not know whether the dispatches from Rowecki and the delegate received at the end of April had been handed over to ‘Świt’.

⁵⁴ Although Laskowski does not mention the programmes about the ghetto, he gives another example, pointing out that it was obligatory to react immediately to news on the Polish Armed Forces in the West, provided by the special supplement to *Nowy Kurier Warszawski* (part 1, p. 113). A homeland radio station that broadcast daily had to keep up with current affairs (p. 117).

⁵⁵ “At the end of March and throughout all of April [1943], all of London went crazy over this [‘Świt’]” (Laskowski, “Radiostacja Świt,” part 1, p. 124). For the programme aired on May 12, on the anniversary of Marshall Piłsudski’s death, a huge sensation, the head of the station received an admonition from Mikołajczyk. (HIA, Government service file, 1942–1944, Dokumenty Stanisława Mikołajczyka, 800/22/0/-/38, List Mikołajczyka do Laskowskiego [letter, Mikołajczyk to Laskowski], 25 April 1943, image 225).

⁵⁶ *Dziennik Polski*, 22 April 1943, p. 1. According to Laskowski, the first broadcast about Katyń was not an improvisation aired without the approval of the foreign ministry (idem, “Radiostacja Świt,” part 1, p. 115).

It seems even more odd that *The New York Times* published the story *Warsaw's Ghetto Fights Deportations* (142 words) on April 23. It was based on the previous day's news from London and reported that "tanks and armoured cars" had moved into the ghetto inhabited by 35,000 residents, and that the most active elements remaining in the ghetto after the deportations had put up a resistance. The Polish underground movement had supplied weaponry and sent trained commanders. It is expected that this 'last battle' would inflict losses on the Germans. Then, after Warsaw, the time would come for Cracow, where deportations had already begun. The 'new concentration camps' had already been set up in the territories incorporated into the Reich. Information that, according to Polish sources, about 1.3 million Jews had been killed in the occupied territories, concluded the story.⁵⁷ It was placed on page nine and there were no follow-ups, the next story about the ghetto did not appear in *The New York Times* until May. Equally important here, however, is the source of information. As it could not have been furnished by Schwarzbart, apparently someone from government circles had made it available to the newspaper.⁵⁸ Thus, any attempts to prevent the information flow about the events in Warsaw proved utterly ineffective.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, as I have already mentioned, *Dziennik Polski* did not publish the first information on the fighting in the ghetto until a week later. The notice was even shorter than the one in *The New York Times* and, more surprisingly, it was placed on the last (fourth) page. While editors of *The New York Times* might have been sceptical of the reports from Warsaw, no such excuse applies to *Dziennik Polski*, the newspaper controlled by the ministry of information and documentation, which had access to the reports from civil and military underground organisations in the occupied country. The first page of the May 1 issue of *Dziennik Polski* was devoted almost entirely to the Polish-Soviet conflict and the Katyń affair.⁶⁰ It also featured two other stories: a short item on a disciplinary transfer of Ludwig Fischer, the governor of the Warsaw district, to Lublin (it cited 'Świt' as a source and was incorrect), and an announcement that the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS) would hold

⁵⁷ "Warsaw's Ghetto Fights Deportations," *New York Times*, 23 April 1943, p. 9.

⁵⁸ David Engel shares this opinion (see *Facing a Holocaust...*, p. 70).

⁵⁹ The news broadcast by 'Świt' also reached Canada. On April 25, a Polish consul notified a member of the Canadian parliament (in his letter, he informed about the "extermination of the populace of Warsaw"). He reported that machine-guns positioned on church towers and buildings were massacring the civilian population, and the radio 'Świt' sent the SOS call to the Allies. (HIA, Government service file, 1942–1944, Dokumenty Stanisława Mikołajczyka, 800/22/0/-/38, image 178).

⁶⁰ "Polityka i moralność. Akcje dyplomatyczne i dyskusje prasowe," *Dziennik Polski*, 1 June 1943, p. 1.

the May Day celebration in London.⁶¹ The article on the fighting in the ghetto⁶² was placed on page four, next to a short account of Minister Kwapiński's visit to Sweden (41 words). Much more space was allotted to the fighting in North Africa, on the Eastern front and in the Far East, and even to the response of the Turkish press to the Polish-Soviet conflict.⁶³

We do not know whether it was the editorial decision to place the story about the fight in Warsaw on page four, or the ministry made it, but it does not appear to have been a casual choice.⁶⁴ *Dziennik Żołnierza*, which was subject to less rigorous control, displayed the story properly; it made the first page and appeared in the middle of the column, as the gravity of the events required.

The silence of the highest authorities on the subject of the ghetto fighting in their speeches and statements delivered during the celebration of the anniversary of the Constitution of May 3 raises another question that has been overlooked thus far. General Sikorski issued an order to the 'Soldiers of the Commonwealth', on this occasion. "At this critical moment to Poland," he appealed for unity that the Germans wanted to destroy using the "martyr blood of our brethren". He recalled the heroism of the soldiers during the 1939 September campaign, during the combat operations in France and Norway, and in the Middle East, the heroic deeds of Polish airmen and marines, "which prove undoubtedly to the whole world our iron will to fight to the final triumph."⁶⁵ Apparently, the Jews defending the ghetto did not fit into this vision. Similarly, there were no references to the situation in Warsaw in the BBC radio speech to the Homeland delivered by President Władysław Raczkiewicz on May 3.⁶⁶ Yet, he said the following words: "Today the Polish Republic is experiencing a new turmoil, a new period of greatest suffering and greatest heroism. Crime and barbarity have taken over in Poland. The enemy has announced to the Polish people and the world that there will be no more Poland. That he has erased her name from the family of nations so that she shall never return to it. The enemy is mistaken.

⁶¹ Needless to say, much news from the homeland made the front page of *Dziennik Polski*, even such events as important as the Operation Arsenal.

⁶² The editors of 'Świt' protested strongly against an inaccurate naming of the source of information – it should be "PAT, Stockholm" instead of PAT," as the latter could expose the radio station (HIA, Government service file, 1942–1944, Dokumenty Stanisława Mikołajczyka, 800/22/0/-/38, List [letter], 30 April 1943, image 197).

⁶³ The fourth page featured press agency reports and dispatches, information for the refugees, announcements (by government, RAF, Red Cross), classified news, advertisements and announcements, obituaries and sports news.

⁶⁴ The governmental supervision of the content of *Dziennik Polski* was not thorough. At the end of June, editor-in-chief Karczewski was fired by minister Kot for "careless remarks" – as his successor, Sopicki recorded in his diary – "in the English, Czech and Yugoslav areas" (*Dziennik* 1943–1944, p. 46, entry of 20 June 1943).

⁶⁵ "Rozkaz nr 3 Naczelnego Wodza," *Dziennik Polski*, 3 May 1943, p. 1.

⁶⁶ "Przemówienia w dniu święta narodowego. Prezydent RP Władysław Raczkiewicz," *Dziennik Polski*, 4 May 1943, p. 2.

The name of Poland is indestructible. It keeps returning throughout years of war and a sea of suffering and resistance, every time returning in a greater blaze of glory. It keeps returning in the struggle of the nation and its attitude towards the enemy, through the torment of prisoners and the exiled, heroic deeds of airmen, marines, and soldiers. Finally, it keeps returning in anticipation of the role and significance of Poland to Central and Eastern Europe, where there will be no order and justice without a strong Poland." Even if the words "crime and barbarity" were an allusion to the extermination of Jews,⁶⁷ we still should consider the reason for resorting to such a circumlocution. The object of the president's concern was the 'Polish nation' that had been fighting continuously for the ideals of the Constitution of May 3. When he talked about the heroism of the "soldiers of the underground Polish state" or "the glorious and indomitable in fight attitude of the Homeland" which remained a source of inspiration for soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces and of pride for the millions of Poles staying abroad, he could not refer to the fighting Jews. To mention them in this context could undermine the clarity of his message to the nation that it should unite against the threat and behind the common objective. The president met many people during the May 3 celebration, but there were no representatives of Jewish organisations amongst them. The same was true of Prime Minister Sikorski.

The Jewish circles in London also celebrated the national holiday. The event took place on Sunday, May 2, the same day as the main celebration attended by Polish authorities. The head of the Nationalities Division of the Ministry of Information and Documentation, Olgierd Górka, was amongst the speakers. He talked about the significance of the Four-Year Sejm [parliament] for the Jewish population. The speeches were followed by a concert. On behalf of the Polish Jews living in Great Britain, the assembled addressed a telegram to Prime Minister Sikorski in which they expressed their "unwavering faith in the victory of Poland's sacred cause and the future of the great democratic Republic," as well as their belief in the success of diplomatic actions taken by the government in "defence of the Polish Cause."⁶⁸

It is hard to understand the absence of any reference to the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, at least in the context of the article published in *Dziennik Polski* on the previous day. Later that day, Schwarzbart accidentally met Górka, who appeared satisfied with the telegram to Sikorski and was eager to use it to the government's advantage for propaganda purposes. Schwarzbart summed it up with the sarcastic comment: "Here is the position [on this subject]. Jews

⁶⁷ Jacek Piotrowski, the editor of the president's logbook holds the view that this excerpt indirectly concerns the uprising in the ghetto (*Dzienniki czynności Prezydenta RP...*, p. 63).

⁶⁸ "Uroczystości 3 maja w Towarzystwie 'Ohel'", *Dziennik Polski*, 4 May 1943, p. 2. *Gazeta Polska* published in Palestine ran a piece on the subject two days later (see *Polacy-Żydzi. Polen-Juden, Poles-Jews 1939-1945. Wybór źródeł*, ed. Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert, Warsaw: Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa and Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2001, p. 426).

are [seen as] a centre [*ośrodek*] and a tool of propaganda, but not as fellow citizens.”⁶⁹ Despite receiving some clues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych*, MSZ), Schwarzbart and Zygielbojm were not, as I have already mentioned, entirely aware of the tragedy of the Warsaw ghetto. The cables sent to them by the Bund and ŻKN were delayed on the way. Nevertheless, that Schwarzbart did not make any note in the journal in response to the *Dziennik Polski* story seems astonishing. Two days earlier, the PPS held a celebration of May Day and, although Bund representatives led by Zygielbojm took part in it, there was no reference made to the ghetto whatsoever, at least according to Schwarzbart’s account.⁷⁰

May 4 to 12

On May 4 at 11.15 p.m., the BBC radio station broadcast Władysław Sikorski’s speech to the occupied homeland. He directed his speech to two audiences: the Polish people (both at home and abroad) and the Allied powers. The speech contained a clear presentation of the Polish position towards the Soviet accusations. Sikorski placed emphasis on the importance of the Polish resistance against the Germans and the “implacable stance of the nation” to continue it. The “revelations, concerning the fate of the Polish officers whose bodies had been discovered in a forest near Katyń would not alter anything in this regard and the “perfidious wooings” of the Germans must be rejected. Referring to reports from the homeland, the commander-in-chief reminded his audience of German atrocities. He talked about the Lublin district where 10 villages had been burnt down and their inhabitants killed or deported for forced labour as “a reprisal for an act of armed self-defence.” This was accompanied by atrocities towards women and children. Thousands of Polish villages were destroyed in the same way. He also mentioned concentration camps where the perpetrators were trying in vain to wipe out traces of their crimes. Then he referred to the situation in the Warsaw ghetto:

On April 16th [sic!] at 4 a.m., the Hitlerite gangsters proceeded to ‘liquidate’ – by means which we know already – the remnants of the Warsaw ghetto, in which a few tens of thousands of Jews were still vegetating; after having blocked all exits, they invaded the ghetto in armour cars and light tanks in order to kill the remaining men and women and children with machine-guns. The Jewish population, driven to despair, offered heroic, armed resistance and the battle continues. The rattle of machine guns, bomb explosions, and fires, have attracted the population of Warsaw, who, though overcome with horror, are helping wherever and however they

⁶⁹ YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart’s Diary, 30 April 1943, p. 98.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, 1 May 1943, p. 98.

can the helpless victims of a barbarism the like of which has never been known history.

In the name of the Government and my own name, I wish to thank you, Countrymen, for this noble ministrations and, while asking you to offer all succor and protection to the threatened victims, I condemn these cruelties before the whole mankind, which has already been silent too long.⁷¹

In the following section of the speech, the commander-in-chief stressed repeatedly that "All persecution has failed to break the Poles so far." They have continued their fight, suffering great casualties "[e]verywhere, wherever they are" on all fronts and in the occupied country since September 1 [of 1939]. "In the face of such facts, not words, is not the accusation of passivity, or worse still, of sympathy with the Germans, an obvious denial of facts?"⁷² Such propaganda against the Polish government is futile, claimed Sikorski, because the broadest masses in Poland know that this government is aware of its responsibility and that it expresses Polish thoughts and desires, and it is set on a course of action. Although Poland does not represent material power, it symbolises "the powerful moral idea, on behalf of which this war has been taken up and which must prevail". A military capacity is not enough to win a war. Therefore, the attitude of thirty million people who are right behind the Eastern front lines should not be underestimated: "Do not underestimate the significance of the Polish resistance; treat our nation as it deserves." Nobody should accuse Poland of passivity. "We believe that our suffering and struggle for the sake of the common cause will shield us from reckless accusations and render it impossible to make any claims to our lands, for which we have paid dearly with our blood." The main objective is to defeat the enemy and render him harmless. Those who endanger the unity of the Allies take upon themselves a great responsibility. One of the main guidelines of this government is still to establish our relationships with the Soviets. "The facts that divide us should be removed as quickly as possible." Poland expects that the USSR should release tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians and allow [us] to take those deported in 1939 under our care. There are the limits of compromise which no one of the Polish Nation will [agree to] cross." The nation, unified around its president and its government, which also consists of representatives of peasants, workers, and working intelligentsia, demonstrates great maturity and fortitude. The speech ended with a call for Poles to persevere, continue the fight and resistance, as this road, however bloody and hard, was the only one that would lead back to the democratic and just Poland.

⁷¹ The English translation cited from David Engel, *Facing the Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945* (Chapel Hill, London: The University of North Carolina Press 1993; chapter 2, e-reader version).

⁷² Ibidem, footnote 147.

Dziennik Polski printed his speech the following day.⁷³ *Dziennik Żołnierza* published the full text on May 6, adding titles to the most important paragraphs. The passage about the ghetto was entitled: "The tanks are liquidating the ghetto."⁷⁴ The entire text of the speech was printed by the British press and widely commented upon. Thus, the uprising in the ghetto received attention despite its being given secondary importance in his speech." It should be stressed that the announcement released by the PAT to the press, including to the Jewish Telegraph Agency, had originally omitted the references to Jews in Sikorski's speech. After an intervention,⁷⁵ it was corrected and the head of the PAT, Stefan Litauer, who was reprimanded for it, admitted his mistake.

Regardless of the wording of the speech, the fact that the commander-in-chief raised the issue of aid to the Jews was of critical importance. It was the first unequivocal statement on the subject made by the Polish government (despite the fact that the need for such a statement had been emphasised since the end of 1942), and as such, it has already been analysed extensively by researchers interested in the government's approach towards the Holocaust.⁷⁶ According to Dariusz Stola, after the Warsaw ghetto had taken up the fight, further evasion of a public statement by the Polish government was impossible.⁷⁷

⁷³ "Raport złożony krajowi. Przemówienie radiowe generała Sikorskiego w dniu 4 maja 1943 r." [A Report to the Nation. General Sikorski's Radio Address, 4 May 1943], *Dziennik Polski*, 5 May 1943, p. 3. The entire speech has never been reprinted after the war. For an unknown reason, the editors of *AKD* have decided to omit the fragment relating to help for Jews, (vol. 6, pp. 332–333). The passage itself appears in a book edited by Kunert (*Polacy–Żydzi...*, p. 128), but, as it is taken out of context, it is difficult to determine the tone of the whole speech.

⁷⁴ "Przemówienie gen. Sikorskiego do Kraju" [Gen. Sikorski's Address to the Homeland], *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 6 May 1943, p. 2. The summary of the speech, printed in the previous issue, omitted the ghetto topic.

⁷⁵ YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, 5 and 11 of May 1943, p. 103, 108. Sikorski supposedly was warned by Mikołajczyk.

⁷⁶ Both Jewish representatives in the National Council, as well as some Jewish organizations called for it; see AIP, PRM, 142/48, List Reprezentacji Żydostwa Polskiego w Tel Awiwie do Rządu Polskiego w Londynie [Letter of the Representation of Polish Jewry in Tel Aviv to the Polish Government in London] 14 July 1944, p. 206. All appeals to the National Council to issue such a statement were in vain as they were torpedoed by representatives of the right. They argued with a blend of hypocrisy and cynicism that no one should instruct 'the homeland' since the protests were coming from there.

⁷⁷ Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada...*, p. 203. In his most recent article, he writes that the government has probably adjusted its position, being swayed by a change of attitude within the country. As proof of this change, he quotes the cable sent jointly by the government delegate and the AK commander with the suggestion "speak to the ghetto" (see Dariusz Stola, "The Polish Government-in-exile: National Unity and Weakness," in *Governments-in-exile and the Jews during the Second World War*, eds. Jan Láníček, James Jordan, London–Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2013, p. 104). The suggestion, however, was addressed to the radio station 'Świt'. The leaders of the Polish Secret State had not initiated it; neither Jankowski, nor Rowecki made such a demand in their dispatches.

David Engel, however, points out other reasons for this turnabout. On the one hand, because the Bermuda conference and the outbreak of the uprising in the ghetto had generated a stronger public interest in the fate of Jews, displays of sympathy towards them were necessary for the sake of public image. On the other hand, the Katyń crisis brought a radical and terrible shift to the position of the Polish government. Instead of the anticipated empathy and support, it had come under criticism for weakening the unity of the Allies. Therefore, the government decided to seek support from Jewish circles, and, at the same time, point to the scope of the German terror. A risk that Soviet propaganda could take advantage of the weaker position of the Polish government might also have been of some significance. Engel, however, admits that this interpretation cannot be supported by any documents.⁷⁸ A scrutiny of the archival material shows that the fragment concerning the ghetto, exactly as it was delivered by Sikorski, had been introduced during the early stages of the work on his speech.⁷⁹ Among those documents, there is also a memorandum that the Nationalities and Religions Desk [*Referat Narodowościowo-Wyznaniowy*] of the Ministry of Information and Documentation wrote on 15 March 1943 in response to a request to draft an appeal to the Polish population for assistance to Jews. An author of the memorandum claimed, that while issuing such an appeal would have been justified in the fall of 1942, immediately after the arrival of the reports from the homeland, it might now be considered late, and “the government could face the justified accusation that the decision to issue the appeal had been taken at a time when there was already no one left to save.” Therefore, the formation of the Council for Aid to Jews ‘Żegota’ “should be exploited for propaganda purposes” without “the necessity of issuing the appeal.” This was to be done by instructing all Polish ambassadors to pass “confidential” information on the existence of ‘Żegota’ to Jewish organisations, emphasising Polish-Jewish solidarity in the homeland. In addition, one of the celebratory speeches should “contain a passage” in which the government refers to “active assistance by the Polish people and expresses the conviction, that despite the most sophisticated methods employed by the occupier to set the two communities against one another, the Polish people will not swerve from the chosen path.”⁸⁰ The draft of the appeal reads:

The [Polish] government has submitted the crimes of the German executioners of the Jewish population in Poland, that are shocking and beyond the wildest imagination, to be judged by the conscience of the world [...]. The government proudly states that the Polish community in the homeland was the first to fight for the lives and degraded human dignity [*godność pohańbionego człowieczeństwa*] of the Jewish population.

⁷⁸ Engel, *Facing a Holocaust...*, pp. 71–73.

⁷⁹ The drafts of the speech, manuscripts and typescripts in English, in: AIP, PRM, 111, vol. 2, *Przemówienia Władysława Sikorskiego* [Speeches of Władysław Sikorski].

⁸⁰ The English translation from Engel, chapter 2, e-reader version.

The draft then addresses the Polish people:

Neither equally [to those being meted out to the Jews] savage persecutions nor the occupier's most elaborate methods for arousing hatred in you toward the Jewish people, nor even the threat of cruel death have been able to restrain you from rendering active and effective aid to the suffering, dying Jewish population.⁸¹

Finally it stresses importance of the help given to Jews:

All the news, that we hear every day, about your self-defence in solidarity with and your active help to the Jewish people [...] do prove that the political instinct of our nation is healthy, [that] it is deeply rooted in the Christian culture and it displays the true democratic spirit; on this foundations we shall build a new Poland.⁸²

The outbreak of uprising in the Warsaw ghetto created the right moment for issuing the call to the Polish people. Although the lion's share of the rather unfortunate – to put it mildly – wording of the draft did not appear in General Sikorski's speech, its main argument concerning the continuous help extended to Jews by Poles has remained unchanged.

According to Schwarzbart, a representative of the World Jewish Congress expressed a very favourable opinion of Sikorski's speech (it made a "great impression") during his meeting with Foreign minister Edward Raczynski.⁸³ Schwarzbart's reaction was more restrained. In his diary, he summarised his efforts over the course of many months, and then commented briefly: "Better late than never." He pointed out that Sikorski had read this passage "emphatically and with strength" but criticised his "tone of paternalistic care [*taskawej opieki*]." "The whole speech is on the honour and interest of the Polish nation; [it is] a silly position, as thus the government separates the rest of the population from its responsibility."⁸⁴

Never the less, it seems that Sikorski's words about the assistance did not affect Jewish organisations' outlook on the Polish-Soviet conflict in any significant way.⁸⁵ They, however, made an immediate impact in the homeland, as both the commander of the Home Army and the government delegate issued their own

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² AIP, A.9.V/61, Dział Narodowościowy [Nationalities Division.]. Sprawy żydowskie, Notatka [Jewish issues, note], 15 March 1943, e.g. Most likely written by Antoni Serafiński, the head of the Nationalities and Religions Desk, see Engel *Facing a Holocaust...*, p. 232, f. 123).

⁸³ AIP, A.9.V/61, Dział Narodowościowy. Sprawy żydowskie, Notatka [Nationalities Division. Jewish issues, note], 5 May 1943, p. 105.

⁸⁴ YVA, M2/752, Dziennik Ignacego Schwarzbarta [Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary], 4 May 1943, p. 101–102.

⁸⁵ For an extensive elaboration of this subject and the press response, see Engel, *Facing a Holocaust...*, p. 74.

proclamations containing the calls for assistance; thus the public received a clear signal how they should act. At the same time, however, one should notice that the commander-in-chief had nothing to say to the Jews fighting in Warsaw in his "report submitted to the Nation." An appeal to 'compatriots' for help is not the same as expressing solidarity in the face of a common enemy. On the other hand, the picture drawn by General Sikorski was entirely different from what was really happening just beyond the walls of the ghetto. (There was a reason why the underground press printed a warning to *szmalcowniki* [blackmailers]). Finally, evaluating the content of this speech, we need to remember that the government has regularly been criticised, and not only by the right, for "oversensitivity" to the Jewish issues.⁸⁶

A brief reference to the annihilation of the ghetto appeared in Sikorski's policy statement read during the National Council's closed session on the Polish-Soviet relationships held on May 6:

With the Germans, who perpetrate – in each of the ghettos, lately in the Warsaw ghetto – the most appalling massacres of Jews known to history, with the Germans, who hunt us in every way seeking not only the destruction of the intelligentsia, not only the destruction of workers, not only the destruction of peasants, not only the destruction of our prosperity and all material assets, but the complete destruction of our moral assets, [with them] we will not make any compromise.

Adam Ciołkosz asked whether there was a chance that representatives of the Jewish, Belorussian, and Ukrainian minorities could be appointed to the cabinet. Sikorski answered that as for Jews, Schwarzbart and Zygielbojm were here in the room. The discussion was resumed during the session on May 8. Schwarzbart also took the floor, but there were no references to the ghetto situation in his lengthy speech! (No reason is given for his silence in his diary.) However, he pledged unconditional support of the Jewish organisations he represented to the Polish government struggling in the name of democracy with the Communism that set out to conquer the world. Mikołajczyk, who reported on the situation in the homeland, indicated that the government delegate had issued a proclamation to

⁸⁶ There are countless examples of attacks on the government and Sikorski personally in the underground press. The dispatch of the 'Grot' is most often quoted in the literature. 'Grot' sent it to London as a reaction to General Sikorski's greetings on the Jewish New Year, broadcast by the BBC on 21 September 1941. He wrote: "All the decisions [*posunięcia*] of the Government and the members of the National Council regarding Jews in Poland produce the worst impression in the country and facilitate propaganda that is unfavourable or hostile towards the government". He stressed that "the overwhelming majority of the country," including the socialists displayed "anti-Semitic feeling." The only difference between the various groups is a matter of "tactics of dealing [with the problem]." "I do not know", 'Grot' wrote, "what motivates the Government's actions, but they rapidly lower its popularity here in the country, and the 'Sanation' [*sanacja*] takes advantage of them."

Poles (published by the underground press) that called for help to the Jews who escaped the ghetto.⁸⁷ Zygielbojm was present at the session (as confirmed by his signature on the attendance register), but he did not take the floor. He voted for a resolution in which the National Council expressed its full support for the government.⁸⁸

The Council of Ministers still had not devoted any attention to the battle in the ghetto. Its next meeting was held on May 7 and lasted only an hour. The cabinet talked about British hopes of establishing Polish-Soviet relations and a pertinent advice offered by Minister Eden who had suggested to censor the Polish press and to control statements issued by the National Council. The Polish-Soviet conflict also remained the central question three days later, on May 10.

The cabinet debated some ongoing conflicts (among others with General Sosnkowski) and instructions for the Polish ambassador to the Holy See in Rome and the government delegate in the Middle East, as well as on the controversy over the 'Red Polish Division'. The cabinet agreed upon actions to be taken on all of the abovementioned issues.⁸⁹

One would be mistaken to think that the frequency of press publications on the Warsaw ghetto had increased in the wake of the publication of General Sikorski's speech. *Dziennik Polski*, proceeding on its own momentum, printed only the announcements of some Jewish events related the May 3rd celebration.⁹⁰ For five consecutive days, there was not even one mention of the Warsaw ghetto, although, on May 10, the newspaper reprinted the story about Warsaw from the Spanish press. During that time, the daily focused mainly on the Polish-Soviet conflict, but it also covered other subjects, for example, forming a Polish division in the USSR, not to mention the news from the front lines, especially updates on the decisive battle for North Africa. There was also news of homeland subjects, such as a proclamation issued by the municipal governor [*starosta*], Ludwig Leist, that called for Poles to volunteer to work in the Reich (May 8), and one on an attempt on the life of Wilhelm Krüger, the SS and Police commander in the Generalgouvernement. The coverage in *Dziennik Żołnierza* appeared very similar.

On May 9, the commander-in-chief as well as the ministers of defence and internal affairs received a cable from 'Grot' [General Rowecki], which had been sent a few days earlier, summarising the events of the struggles in the ghetto. Rowecki described the subsequent stages of the battle fought by the Jewish Fighting Organisation that "was holding the previously prepared positions." Until April 23, the Germans "used both airplanes and tanks together. One tank

⁸⁷ Information from Korboński's dispatch of May 7 (dispatch no. 85).

⁸⁸ AIP, A.5/76, Posiedzenie RN [The National Council session], 8 May 1943, pp. 19–21.

⁸⁹ *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów*, minutes of the meetings of 7 and 10 of May 1943, pp. 418–423.

⁹⁰ "Żydzi i Polska," *Dziennik Polski*, 6 V 1943. The PAT report from New York. Jakub Apenzslak said, that "The Polish Jews are with their heart and soul on the side of Poland" (p. 2).

was burned." From April 23rd to 28th, "the resistance continued in the form of guerrilla street fighting, mainly at night," then the fighters put up resistance in "various fortified houses." The Germans' main weapon was "systematic burning of the ghetto, which is still burning today." 14,000 Jews have been deported, 3,000 have been burnt to death, 2,000 have been murdered on the spot. "The figures grow with the liquidation of particular hiding-places". 'Grot' announced that he would send a special dispatch summarising the armed assistance given to the Jews.⁹¹ The day before, the previously mentioned cable arrived stating that the underground bulletin *Rzeczpospolita Polska* had published the appeal for help for Jews.

In the wake of these cables, *Dziennik Polski* published another story on the situation in the ghetto. On May 11, the short notice released by the PAT appeared on the first page under the title *Całkowite zlikwidowanie getta w Warszawie* (The Complete Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto): "According to the clandestine Radio 'Świt', despite the fierce resistance of the Jews, the Germans succeeded in liquidating the Warsaw ghetto. 'Świt' appeals to Poles to give all manner of help and shelter to the Jews who managed to escape."⁹² The notice was 30 words long. A text about the Majdanek concentration camp where the Germans had allegedly interned the former president of France, Léon Blum, was placed right next to it. The other stories on the first page reported on the Western Allies' talks with Moscow and the German defeat in North Africa.⁹³ There was more news from the homeland in this issue. The last paragraph of the story on Krüger reminded readers that he had been responsible for liquidations of the ghettos in the occupied homeland, and the Warsaw ghetto was among them.⁹⁴ On May 11, editors of the Polish Telegraphic Agency had a much better understanding of the situation in Warsaw than they had had when the news of the ghetto uprising was first broken, but this was not reflected in writing this press release. The same statement (27 words) appeared in *Dziennik Żołnierza*.⁹⁵ In the following issue, the daily repeated the call to help the Jews, quoting the notice published by the underground publication *Rzeczpospolita Polska* that had also contained words of praise and compassion for the fighting Jews.⁹⁶

But what has happened to the dispatches sent from Warsaw by the ŻKN and the Bund *via* the government delegate's radio station? A few cables addressed

⁹¹ SPP, A3,1.1.13,4, Radiogram 783/ES, received on May 8, decoded on May 9 at 2 p.m., p. 72 (published in *AKD*, vol. 3, p. 3–4). The dispatch describing the AK activity outside the ghetto's walls has probably never been sent.

⁹² "Całkowite zlikwidowanie getta w Warszawie," *Dziennik Polski*, 11 May 1943, p. 1.

⁹³ On May 3, Korboński sent a dispatch with the hearsay that Blum was held in Majdanek (coded dispatch no. 79).

⁹⁴ "Radiostacja 'Świt' o obozie śmierci w Majdanku," *Dziennik Polski*, 11 May 1943, p. 1; "Zbrodnie kata Krugera," *ibidem*, p. 4.

⁹⁵ "Niemcy zlikwidowali ghetto w Warszawie," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 11 May 1943, p. 1.

⁹⁶ "Kraj piętnuje zbrodnie niemieckie," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 12 May 1943, p. 1.

to Zygielbojm, Schwarzbart and some Jewish organisations abroad, which had been sent before the outbreak of the battle, arrived in London on April 20. They reported on preparations for resistance and included a heartbreaking appeal for help. We know that the messages reached the addressees as it is confirmed by the entries in Schwarzbart's diary that have been cited above. We also know that the replies to them were ready to be dispatch on May 5 and 6.⁹⁷ It is noteworthy that these were the only cables sent to the homeland during the uprising in the ghetto.

The status of the first cable sent by the Bund and ŻKN and dated April 20 is not clear. According to the records stored in the London archives, it was decoded on May 4. The cable, sent by the delegate to Mikołajczyk, was supposed to be forwarded to Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart. It outlined the heroic resistance of the ghetto led by the Jewish Fighting Organisation, which had managed to unite "almost all the groups". It described the sound of gunfire heard from the ghetto, explosions, and fires. "The result of the combat is set. In the evening, a banner [was visible] over a post of the ghetto defenders bearing the words: "We will fight to the last man". Great agitation spreads through the entire city. The people of Warsaw watch [it] with admiration and an apparent sympathy for the fighting ghetto. We call for immediate retaliation. Demand that the International Red Cross also visit ghettos and death camps in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Bełżec, Sobibor, Majdanek, and other concentration camps in Poland [a reference to the visit of the Red Cross at Katyń – D.L.]." Although the government delegate had marked the message as "very urgent", it had been on the way for two weeks!⁹⁸ What is more, Schwarzbart did not record in his diary that he had received it! By the end of April, the ŻKN and Bund had sent four more messages. One arrived in London with a great delay; the others vanished into the blue.

May 12 to 22

On this morning, at 9.30 a.m., President Władysław Raczkiewicz, along with several ministers and members of the National Council, participated in a memorial service for Marshal Józef Piłsudski. At 12.40 p.m., a meeting of the

⁹⁷ SPP, A3.1.1.13.5, Dispatch, Schwarzbart to the Council of Zionist General organisations and Poale Zion Right, Ignacy Menachem, Kantor Jochanan, Józef [original spelling – D.L.]; dispatch, Artur [Zygielbojm] to Berezowski [Feiner], both dispatches of 6 May 1943, p. 141–143. Schwarzbart wrote in the last sentence: "We have got news on your heroic self-defence and your cooperation with Polish brethren." Zygielbojm stated that he had sent 58,000 dollars and asked whether they had arrived. He also asked what else was needed. "We are prepared to do anything to save [you]".

⁹⁸ AAN, 202/1-7, coded dispatch no. 74, sent through the radio station 'Lena'; the fragment published in *AKD* (vol. 3, p. 4) is dated May 4. The copy held in the SPP is divided into two parts. The first part was to come on May 2, the second one on May 4. It is possible that a mistake occurred when the copy was made.

Council of Ministers was held; it lasted 35 minutes. Sikorski introduced a draft of the memorandum, prepared by the ministry of foreign affairs, on forming a Polish division in the. He also underscored the need to counter Communist propaganda in London and talked about a report on interrogation methods used by the Soviets on Polish citizens that had been obtained by of the ministry of justice. Furthermore, he complained about an article in *Dziennik Polski* that had drawn a comparison between Soviet and German propaganda, saying that the article “may do us great harm.” Finally, he briefed those assembled on his correspondence with President Roosevelt, and the council discussed and agreed on the content of a pertinent communiqué.⁹⁹

In the afternoon, Szmul Zygielbojm’s body was found. It is possible that the reports on the final liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto have directly affected his decision to take his own life.¹⁰⁰ Representatives of the Polish authorities were immediately notified, including the president of the Republic of Poland.¹⁰¹ The next day, Sikorski informed Raczkiewicz during a ten minute phone conversation that Zygielbojm’s death was a political demonstration against “inaction of the world in the face of the slaughter of Jews in Poland” and that he had left some letters. The president declared himself in favour of the disclosure of their contents and charged his chief of staff August Zaleski with sending a letter of condolence to the chairman of the National Council. Then, the president returned to his numerous duties. At 4.40 p.m., the police delivered Zygielbojm’s letter to his residence. Schwarzbart spent this day in the House of Commons attending a press conference devoted to the conference at Bermuda. He learnt of the death of Zygielbojm over the phone from a staff-worker at the National Council. Some Polish politicians who had been in touch with Zygielbojm informed him that, only the day before, Zygielbojm had planned to go to Lisbon. Schwarzbart’s feeling was that: “He apparently suffered a breakdown and wanted to protest against what is happening. From a social perspective [*społecznie*], he did wrong;

⁹⁹ *Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów w dniu 12 maja 1943 r.* [The Council of Ministers, minutes of the meeting of 12 May 1943], in: *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów*, p. 435–436.

¹⁰⁰ I do not tackle the topic of the immediate reasons of Szmul Zygielbojm’s death here, or the broader context of his activities in April and May of 1943, as it requires preliminary archival research in the YIVO Archive in New York. (Zygielbojm, like Schwarzbart, used to hold meetings with some Polish politicians, among them were Mikołajczyk, Siudak, Stroński; he also regularly communicated with Adam Ciołkosz of the Polish Socialist Party). Daniel Blatman has written on this subject (in Polish), see *Reakcje działaczy i organizacji żydowskich na wiadomości z Polski (1942–1943)*, in: *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, ed. Dariusz Libionka (Warsaw: IPN, 2004), pp. 280–282. See also Aleksander Rowiński’s reportage, *Zygielbojma śmierć i życie*, that includes accounts of Poles, who met Zygielbojm during the final days of his life.

¹⁰¹ *Dzienniki czynności Prezydenta RP...*, p. 69, entry for 13 May 1943. Rowiński has interviewed Andrzej Kamieniecki, director of the press department of the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in London, who organised the funeral ceremony (idem, *Zygielbojma śmierć i życie*, pp. 23–24).

but as an act of self-sacrifice, we should take our hats off to him.”¹⁰² Zygielbojm’s death came as a shock to Schwarzbart. Their paths had crossed a few times in the preceding weeks, mostly during National Council sessions and at public events.

On May 13, the National Council held its previously planned meeting. At the opening, Chairman Stanisław Grabski delivered a speech in honour of Zygielbojm. He did not bring up the reasons for Zygielbojm’s action but talked about his life and mentioned his great concern for “the fate of the Jewish people in Poland” and for the Polish people. Grabski maintained that Zygielbojm had defended the interests of the nation and the entire Polish Commonwealth until his final moments. In recent days, he still spoke of “certain plans to inform the British public properly about our most vital issues. [...] Long live his memory!” In Schwarzbart’s opinion, the speech was: “formal, laconic, heartless, he couldn’t have said less.” From that point on, the meeting continued according to its agenda. The only item on it was Mikołajczyk’s report on the situation in the occupied homeland. Zygielbojm’s death did not change the outlook on domestic policy one iota. Mikołajczyk did not comment on Zygielbojm’s tragedy, but began by presenting a study prepared in advance of materials that had been sent from the homeland. The most pressing issue was the “accelerated extermination of the Polish nation.” He estimated the loss of “indigenous Poles” at 600,000 and Jews at 1,500,000. As usual, the “Jewish issue” was the last item on the agenda. Mikołajczyk mentioned that ‘Żegota’ had been set up, and that the first armed clashes had taken place in the Warsaw ghetto (he incorrectly cited the date as February 1943), and the fighting had broken out there in April. Then, he explained what were the repercussions for helping Jews (the death penalty). He paid far more attention to the Ukrainian question. His verbal report lasted three hours, its transcript is 35 pages long. The part concerning the extermination of Polish Jews takes up less than one page of the transcript.¹⁰³ The discussion had been postponed and the meeting had already ended, when Mikołajczyk revealed the last cable from Korboński, informing that the Warsaw ghetto had ceased to exist and members of the Judenrat had been killed. Paweł Siudak showed Schwarzbart the last cable sent from Warsaw by the Bund. (Most likely it was one of the cables that had been dispatched before the ghetto uprising, since we do not know any of material sent directly to Zygielbojm later. It seems impossible that it was the cable of April 20, because that one had been addressed to both the Jewish representatives in the National Council). Mikołajczyk allegedly said that the Jews were fighting, but “for the first time.” He also did not want to reveal to

¹⁰² YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart’s Diary, 12 April 1943, p. 109.

¹⁰³ AIPMS, A.5/77, Stenogram z 77 posiedzenia Rady Narodowej RP, 13 V 1943 [The National Council in Exile, minutes of the 77th session of 13 May 1943], p. 2, 18–19. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Mikołajczyk’s report. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that he questioned the news that Jews from other countries had been deported into the Polish territory. They allegedly ‘never arrived’ there.

Schwarzbart the content of Zygielbojm's last letter, informing him only in general terms that it contained "accusations against other nations."¹⁰⁴ Schwarzbart's suspicions that there was a reluctance to publish the letter have proved to be unfounded.

The first reports of Zygielbojm's death were published by *Dziennik Polski* and *Dziennik Żołnierza* on May 14, in the context of a ceremony commemorating him at the National Council's meeting.¹⁰⁵ *Dziennik Polski* published a small selection of articles about the deceased: his biographical note, a statement issued by the members of the Bund from London, and, finally, statements by the Polish government. The public was informed that he "[d]ied suddenly under tragic circumstances, he collapsed under the burden of the dreadful news that kept coming from Poland about the ongoing murder of the Jews, especially the latest news on the liquidation of the ghetto in Warsaw."¹⁰⁶ The letter of condolences wired by the commander-in-chief to the National Council seems particularly remarkable: "Deeply shocked by the unexpected death of a member of the National Council, Szmul Zygielbojm, a distinguished Polish patriot and eminent representative of Jewish workers, I express the most sincere and heartfelt condolences to the Chairman of the National Council on behalf of myself, the government of the RP, and the Polish Armed Forces. He died like a soldier, killed in the line of duty, causing an irreparable loss to us all. He shall remain forever in our memory as one of the most outstanding Polish patriots and social activists of Jewish origin."¹⁰⁷ It is interesting, that, on the one hand, the letter did not mention the motivation behind Zygielbojm's suicide and, on the other, it compared his death to the death of a soldier killed in the line of duty.

On May 15, *Dziennik Polski* and *Dziennik Żołnierza* both placed articles (60 and 62 words respectively) about the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto on their front pages. The articles contained all the information from Korboński's cable to the radio station 'Świt' including the number of destroyed houses and the names of the murdered members of Judenrat.¹⁰⁸ On the same day, at the session of the National Council, the representatives held a discussion on Mikołajczyk's report, but first, they read the materials provided to them. For unspecified reasons, the condolences of Sikorski and the head of the president's civilian office were not read. During the three-hour discussion, two representatives brought up Jewish matters. First, Stanisław Sopicki spoke of the deportations from the Zamość

¹⁰⁴ YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, 13 June 1943, p. 110.

¹⁰⁵ "Po zgonie Sz. Zygielbojma," *Dziennik Polski*, 14 May 1943, p. 1; the obituary signed by the National Council was placed in the same issue (*ibidem*, p. 4); "Śmierć członka Rady Narodowej," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 15 May 1943, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ "Szmul Zygielbojm," *Dziennik Polski*, 14 May 1943, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁸ "Z walk podczas likwidacji getta," *Dziennik Polski*, 15 May 1943, p. 1; "Rozstrzelanie zakładników z warszawskiego getta," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 15 May 1943, p. 1. Also there is the story about Zygielbojm (p. 4).

district and liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto as the latest German atrocities. He strongly emphasised the necessity of seeking an agreement with the national minorities and the need to counter (through radio propaganda) the hatred, which was spread by the Germans and was poisoning the minds of Poles with un-Christian slogans of racial hostility. He stated, "we greet with great joy" all displays of help offered to Jews – such as hiding fugitives, providing food aid to the ghettos, and any other instances of "Poles putting themselves at risk to protect Jews" – taking them as signs of solidarity in the struggle against the occupiers."¹⁰⁹ Józef Beloński of the PPS spoke after him, complaining that Poles were not like the Czechs, who had known how to make the most of the atrocity committed in Lidice [for propaganda purposes]. Poles were not capable of doing so, although similar atrocities amounted to hundreds [in Poland]. Representative Zofia Zaleska (of the *Endecja*, right-wing National Democratic Party), struck a similar chord fulminating against the PAT's information policy and demanding governmental instructions to journalists and the politicians who maintain relations with the British. Jan Szczyrek (of the PPS), who spoke after her, in making a reference to the materials from the homeland, denounced "brute nationalism" that existed within some émigré circles. The strength of Poland, he argued, has always arisen from putting into effect the motto "For your freedom and ours." After the discussion had ended, Banaczyk motioned to accept Mikołajczyk's report and forward it for editing to the Committee on Legal and Political Affairs. There was not a single word in it about Jews ("the homage" was paid "to self-sacrificing heroism and the indomitable will of the Homeland [to continue its] determined fight against the enemy"). Then, the council proceeded to further motions and questions. At the end of the session, Banaczyk had "very sad news" to communicate, namely that Zygielbojm had left a letter to the president and the prime minister. Adam Ciołkosz asked to make a copy of it for every member of the Council, as it was "a significant document." Banaczyk read the letter out loud. Rep. Zaleska put forward a motion to translate it into English.¹¹⁰ With that, the meeting ended. Schwarzbart remained silent throughout the discussion. In his journal, he wrote: "I was so depressed by the Zygielbojm affair that I was unable to speak. And I regarded it as contrary to certain political aesthetics to take the floor at that moment." While these last explanations seem rather unconvincing given his activity during this period,¹¹¹ he offered a no-nonsense evaluation of the discussion stating that it had been

¹⁰⁹ He did not mention this part of the speech in his diary. Commenting on Zygielbojm's death, he wrote that the news from the homeland concerning the fate of Jews, which was reported by Mikołajczyk at the session of the National Council, was horrendous (Sopicki, "Dziennik 1943–1944," p. 42, entry of May 16).

¹¹⁰ AIPMS, A.5/78, Stenogram z 78 posiedzenia Rady Narodowej RP, 15 V 1943 r. [The National Council in Exile, minutes of the 78th session of 15 May 1943], p. 4, 23, 34, 35.

¹¹¹ In this article, I almost entirely omit efforts of Jewish organisations and activists, as well as the correspondence of Schwarzbart.

confirmed once again that the Jewish question is of secondary importance to the Poles. He was particularly bitter about the motion proposed by Zaleska: "Not the Jewish tragedy but propaganda concerns were foremost in her remarks; not Zygielbojm's sacrifice, but the question how best to use them for propaganda purposes; it is the main line of interest of these beloved right-wing politicians of ours."¹¹²

The proceedings of the Council of Ministers held on May 17 fully justified Schwarzbart's pessimism. There were five items on the agenda. First, Sikorski reported on the conditions of Poles in the Soviet Union and Roosevelt's response to the request by the Polish government for the protection of Polish interests in the U.S.S.R. (Great Britain undertook it later). Subsequently, the council turned to certain naval affairs (the issue of ownership of ships handed over by the British), reviewed and approved a draft of the statute of the Government Delegate Office in the Middle East, discussed Polish interests in North Africa and contacts with the French administration of General Henri Giraud. The fourth point on the agenda was Minister Kwapiński's account of his visit to Sweden. Sikorski asked the ministry of defence to handle "a request from the Polish sailors, who had been interned in Sweden, to send a good priest, books, and cigarettes" and to bring Polish civilian seamen back from Sweden. Then they moved to 'any other business', which was the last item on the agenda and Sikorski, in answering the question of Grosfeld and Mikołajczyk, "*explained that he had already arranged with the minister of information and documentation [Stanisław Kot – D.L.] for the death by suicide of the member of the National Council Zygielbojm and the letters, he had left, to be fully exploited for purposes of propaganda* [my emphasis – D.L.]" The meeting concluded at 1.40 p.m.,¹¹³ and cabinet members went to lunch. This was only the second reference to 'the Jewish issues' during the Council of Ministers' proceedings in almost a month. None of the members of the cabinet had anything to say about the situation in the occupied capital of Poland during that time. Nor did anyone ask, on his own initiative, what was happening in Warsaw. Sikorski informed [them] neither of the cables incoming from the homeland, nor of his activities, such as the instructions given to Rowecki some time earlier or the content of his radio speech to fellow countrymen. While the lack of references to the situation in Warsaw may be, to some extent, understandable (at that time, no homeland issues were a subject of debate at the cabinet meetings), it is still puzzling as to why the Polish government did not bring the topic of the culminating episode of the extermination of the Polish Jews into the international arena.

On that day, a subsequent cable, addressed to Sikorski and Mikołajczyk and providing information about the fighting in the ghetto, was decoded. It arrived in

¹¹² YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, 15 May 1943, p. 115.

¹¹³ *Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów w dniu 17 maja 1943 r.* [The Council of Ministers, minutes of the meeting of 17 May 1943], in: *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów...*, pp. 437–439.

London on May 14, but was only delivered to the addressees four days later. In its first paragraph, Commandant Rowecki and Delegate Jankowski called attention to the German propaganda, which tried to take advantage of the Katyń tragedy.

The second item of the dispatch concerned the ghetto:

The battle fought by the Jewish combat organisations in the Warsaw ghetto has already continued for ten days. In addition to the SS and gendarmerie [units], the Germans put into action the Latvian-Turkmen troops, artillery, tanks, aircrafts (incendiary bombs), and flamethrowers. Recently, to avoid losses, they have been conducting the operation mostly by setting entire blocks on fire. The ghetto is deprived of water supply, gas, and electricity. Industrial workers had been separated from the main ghetto [*właściwe getto*], and the part of the population that had answered the call to present themselves was deported. The fighters have rejected the call for capitulation and continue defending themselves. During the last week, the ghettos in Cracow and Stanisławów were completely liquidated with [their inhabitants] being murdered outright or taken to Auschwitz.¹¹⁴

About the same time, another cable was decoded, this one sent by Jankowski to Mikołajczyk and marked with the word "urgent." It concerned the situation in the homeland, particularly the issue of "dragging Poles into the anti-Bolshevik campaign" in the context of Katyń. Its last passage, however, concerned the ghetto: "The ghetto has kept fighting bravely since April 19; despite using artillery and tanks, the occupier has not captured it. This new front line does not suit the Germans at all."¹¹⁵

About that time, the issue of extermination of the Jews in Poland made it to the front pages of the both Polish press organs. Following the announcement released by the PAT on May 18, the newspapers described the situation in Vilnius¹¹⁶. *Dziennik Polski* additionally reported on reactions to the death of Zygielbojm and his forthcoming funeral service.¹¹⁷

The funeral of Shmuel Zygielbojm took place on Friday, May 21 at 11 a.m. Among those in attendance were a number of representatives of the Polish authorities. Minister of Information and Documentation Stanisław Kot spoke on behalf of the Polish government, Stanisław Grabski on behalf of the National Council, and Adam Ciołkosz on behalf of PPS. Schwarzbart delivered a speech, along with representatives of the Socialist International, the Labour Party,

¹¹⁴ Dispatch no. 804, sent 29 April 1943 through the radio station *Wanda* (AKD, vol. 6, p. 313). It was delivered on May 18 marked as "Secret" (AIPMS, A.9.III.2a/15, Depesze [Dispatches]).

¹¹⁵ AAN, 202/I-7, Dispatches to the Government, dispatch no. 80, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ "Masakra 6 tys. Żydów na Wileńszczyźnie," *Dziennik Polski*, 18 May 1943, p. 1; "Straszną masakra Żydów w Ponarach," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 18 May 1943, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ "Po zgonie Sz. Zygielbojma," *Dziennik Polski*, 18 May 1943, p. 2; "Przed pogrzebem bł. pamięci S. Zygielbojma," *Dziennik Polski*, 20 June 1943, p. 4.

and Zygielbojm's colleagues from the Bund. President Raczkiewicz delegated Minister August Zaleski and Mr Piotrowski to attend the funeral.¹¹⁸ Deputy Prime Minister Mikołajczyk, Ministers Kwapiński and Popiel, Foreign Minister Raczyński, members of the National Council, and representatives of the Polish and foreign political organisations. The address that Minister Kot's delivered on behalf of Prime Minister Sikorski and his cabinet carried the greatest weight. Kot talked about the "too slow-footed, too calm, perhaps even bordering on indifferent reaction of the civilised world to this historically unprecedented slaughter" and a sense of helplessness as the motivation behind Zygielbojm's action. He was to be especially shaken by the news of the Warsaw Jews being murdered and accounts of "the heroic resistance of the doomed in the ghetto, their struggle, and determination never to surrender." Kot stated that the government had received dispatches from "Jewish organisations in the homeland," addressed to their representatives in the National Council, but Zygielbojm had not lived to see their arrival. He read some excerpts from those cables containing a dramatic appeal to the Allies for retaliatory actions: "Let our closest Allies finally become aware of the magnitude of historical repercussions for their idleness in the face of this unparalleled, Hitlerite crime committed against a whole nation, the tragic epilogue of which is still continuing. Let the heroic, unparalleled in history rising of the doomed people of the ghetto finally prompt the world to act on this matter in accordance with the gravity of the moment." Zygielbojm had hoped that his death would contribute to the awakening of the public opinion in the world and the Allied nations. "The Polish government," said Minister Kot, "expresses the deepest respect for this sacrifice and this seemingly futile protest." The death of 40,000 Jews in the capital of Poland, as well as Zygielbojm's death, "cannot fall on deaf ears." "The government of the Republic of Poland, the mother and protectress of all her citizens, has considered its duty to demand with its full might that essential steps are taken to save, even at this late date, this [small] number of Jews in Poland whom the German occupiers have not yet managed to exterminate. May this cry of despair and protest by a noble victim, to whom we are paying our last tribute here, help to strengthen these efforts. Then the sacrifice of Zygielbojm, this truly distinguished son of Poland, will not be wasted." In his speech, Grabski called Zygielbojm a fighter, and his death – a tragic chapter that the Jews of "our country" are going through, and with them, all of Poland. Jews are persecuted more than Christians. Their death is a consequence of the defeat of the [Polish] Commonwealth, which had defended "life, property, and the human dignity of our Jewish fellow citizens as well." Zygielbojm was aware of this connection. He stood firmly behind [*na gruncie*] "Polish statehood, independence, and the integrity of our country." "To such a sacrifice, everyone, who loves his nation, must take off his hat." In the end, he promised that Zygielbojm's sacrifice would not be in vain.

¹¹⁸ *Dzienniki czynności Prezydenta RP...*, entry of May 21, p. 72.

Dziennik Polski gave extensive coverage of the funeral, *Dziennik Żołnierza* confined itself to a brief note. On their front pages, both newspapers published a story released by the PAT on the resistance of the Warsaw ghetto. Although the Swedish press and the 'Świt' were indicated as its sources, the news came from cables sent by Rowecki and Jankowski in the preceding days. Contrary to previous reports, the release stated that the ghetto fighters were still defending themselves against the SS troops and "Latvian Quislings and Turkmenian volunteers." Finally, it mentioned the aerial bombardment of the ghetto.¹¹⁹ These reports were as inexact as they were utterly outdated.

The excerpt read by Minister Kot originated from a dispatch sent from Warsaw by Leon Feiner and Berman on April 28. The delegate had marked it as "urgent," but it was not decoded until May 19.¹²⁰ Schwarzbart received it shortly before the funeral. "Siudak [who brought him the dispatch – D.L.] 'blames the transmission device – says an entry in his diary. – I do not believe him,'" Schwarzbart also wrote that it was not an accident that the minister of propaganda had delivered the speech instead of the interior minister, which means that he correctly recognised the intentions of the government. He regarded the funeral itself as a serious and moving demonstration.¹²¹ Schwarzbart's irritation grew during those days. He became especially sensitized to any signs of the exploitation of the tragedy of the Jews. When he learnt from Ciołkosz that perhaps Sikorski would give a speech at Zygielbojm's funeral, he commented, "Why not? Everything for the sake of a dead Jew."¹²² Ultimately, Sikorski did not give a speech. Also noteworthy is an entry from Sopicki's diary: "E[manuel] Szerer, the author of the book *Żydzi a Polska* [The Jews and Poland] is reportedly the Bund's candidate for Zygielbojm's seat. I think there is no need to expedite this nomination. You can save some money on allowance."¹²³

After Zygielbojm's funeral

In the days following Zygielbojm's funeral, subsequent horrific messages sent through the delegate's radio arrived in London. On May 22, Siudak brought Schwarzbart a radiogram addressed to both of the Jewish representatives in the National Council, which had been dispatched from the homeland 10 days.

¹¹⁹ "Bomby zapalające, artyleria, samochody pancerne, czołgi likwidują bohaterski opór Żydów," *Dziennik Polski*, 22 May 1943, p. 1; "Niemcy mordują masowo Żydów z zemsty za zbombardowanie zapór wodnych," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 22 May 1943, p. 1.

¹²⁰ Dispatch no. 81, sent through the radio station code-named 'Lena' (*AKD*, vol. 2, pp. 506–507).

¹²¹ YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, 21 May 1943, p. 123. Adam Ciołkosz's speech, regarded by Schwarzbart as "excellent," has not been published.

¹²² YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, 18/19 May 1943, p. 119.

¹²³ Sopicki, "Dziennik 1943–1944," p. 43, entry of May 22. From the author's point of view, it was more important to co-opt a representative of the Ukrainian population onto the Council.

It contained another account of the battle: there were still several centres of resistance in the ghetto, but Michael Klepfisz of the Bund ("one of the pillars of the [Jewish] resistance movement") had died, as well as members of the Judenrat. There were murders, deportations, raging fires, ("Many Jews were burned alive, thousands were shot dead or sent to camps"), 'shops' were being liquidated, escaped Jews were hunted and seized on the Aryan side. Finally, the cable described the ongoing liquidation of other ghettos in the country. "While the world of freedom and justice sits idly by in silence. Bewildering. [...] Telegraph immediately, what you have been able to do. We await financial help for those few who are still trying to rescue themselves."¹²⁴ Schwarzbart translated both of the cables; then they were copied and distributed to politicians and journalists. The ministry of the interior also sent them to Radio 'Świt'.¹²⁵

A dispatch from the ŻKN to Schwarzbart, which had been sent more than three weeks earlier, was deciphered on May 24. The message included a bitter question as to why the last five dispatches had been left unanswered, as well as a plea to send funds to rescue the last surviving Jews and to contact the Joint regarding this matter.¹²⁶ The cable requesting 100,000 dollars, addressed directly to the Joint, arrived in London on May 21.¹²⁷ No entry in Schwarzbart's diary confirms that he has received any of these cables. On May 27, however, he received a file from the Homeland Desk of the Ministry of Interior accompanied by a suggestion to him to edit and translate into English the attached materials that had lately been sent from the occupied homeland. This 40 page account of the extermination of Jews disappointed Schwarzbart and, as far as the uprising was concerned, reinforced his earlier impressions:

The episodes of battle in the ghetto [are being] ignored. The eagerness to defame Jews, because they have not defended themselves, oozes from all sides. [And] this happens at a time when the Polish populace in the homeland has not helped Jews in any way to defend themselves. Moreover, the Polish government, upon which I have called repeatedly for defence, insists that is not in the interest of the government to instigate riots in the country at the moment. I am bitterly disappointed by the attitude towards the Jewish issue, which the interior ministry is demonstrating even now. Nothing but propaganda.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, 22 May 1943, p. 124.

¹²⁵ Forwarded on May 22 (HIA, Government service file, 1942–1944, Documents of Stanisław Mikołajczyk, 800/22/0/-/38, image 221). A dispatch no. 804, obtained on May 18 was also forwarded (May 20). The radio station made use of both of them in preparing the next broadcasts.

¹²⁶ Dispatch no. 92, through the radio station 'Lena', sent May 1, received May 24 (AKD, vol. 3, pp. 2–4).

¹²⁷ Dispatch no. 93, through the radio station 'Lena', sent May 15 (AKD, vol. 3, p. 10).

¹²⁸ YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, May 27 and 28, p. 129.

There was a meeting of the Council of Ministers on May 22, two days before General Sikorski left for Gibraltar on his way to the Middle East. The main topics were the international situation, with the focus on Polish-Soviet relations, and the government's delegation in the Middle East. The Prime Minister called for unity and calm. The last topic was a temporary provision for Minister Stoński; the council voted to pay him 70 pounds per month.¹²⁹ Mikołajczyk, who filled in for Sikorski, presided over the next meeting held on May 27. There were many items on its agenda, including the question of the succession to Zygielbojm's position. The topics of his letter and the situation in Warsaw were waved aside.¹³⁰

Another and so far the most accurate account of the battle in the ghetto (184 words) appeared in *Dziennik Żołnierza* on May 25. Once again, it was based on a press release from the PAT that allegedly had cited Radio 'Świt' as the source (in fact, it had summarised the recent cables from Poland). The story stated that the resistance in the ghetto was dying down though "the Jewish fighting organisation that leads the defence is still in the ghetto, and its members are fighting with great courage." It informed its readers about Klepfisz's death, German brutality, the fires, the gendarmerie patrolling the wall, and liquidations carried out in other cities. The rising of the ghetto was called "an epic of heroic defence." Finally, the newspaper reported that "Polish organisations are providing help and harbour to those who were somehow able to escape the massacre in the ghetto," and that 'Świt' called for retaliation bombing of German cities. Next to the story, there was the article from the PAT summarising the Swedish press's commentaries on the battle in the ghetto. Once again, the PAT cited 'Świt' as its source and accentuated similarities in the workings of Soviet and Nazi propaganda.¹³¹ The story, already outdated when published, was nevertheless important, as it was the first time that the name of the Jewish Fighting Organisation appeared in print. 10 days later, *Dziennik Żołnierza*, consistently citing Radio 'Świt' as the source, reported that the German losses in the ghetto had amounted to 300 men killed and 1,000 wounded and estimated that 90% of the Polish Jews had been murdered.¹³²

¹²⁹ On 15 March 1943, Stanisław Stroński, being in conflict with Sikorski, handed in his resignation as a minister of information and documentation, threatening that he would rather get a job as a factory worker (*Duraczyński, Rząd polski...*, p. 222), which was what he did (see Sopicki, "Dziennik 1943–1944," p. 45).

¹³⁰ *Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów w dniu 22 maja 1943 r.* [The Council of Ministers, minutes of the meeting of 22 May 1943], in: *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów...*, pp. 440–442; *Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów w dniu 27 maja 1943 r.* [The Council of Ministers, minutes of the meeting of 27 May 1943], in: *ibidem*, p. 443–446. When questioned on the matter, Mikołajczyk declared that he would be willing to consult the Bund's headquarters in the USA before submitting his proposal to the president.

¹³¹ "Opór Żydów warszawskich zbliża się ku końcowi," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 25 May 1943, p. 4.

¹³² "Trzystu Niemców zabitych w ghetto," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 5 June 1943, no 130, p. 1.

On June 2, *Dziennik Polski* and *Dziennik Żołnierza* published Zygielbojm's letter to the president and prime minister. The official organ added the headline *Ostatni apel do sumienia świata* [The Last Appeal to the Conscience of the World].¹³³ In the accompanying editorial one may read: "It is a shocking testimony to the tragedy of man and the tragedy of the nation." Zygielbojm has done everything he should have done; he was deeply engaged. "His voice sounded. But the echo remained silent. This weak response of the world to the tragedy of the Jews was one of the underlying causes of Zygielbojm's words: "I cannot remain alive." "He did not act out of resignation, as he believed that his sacrifice would not be in vain." "The vast masses, who condemned to death by the invaders are dying on Polish soil every day, cling to the same hope, the last one in which they are finding solace: knowing that they cannot live any longer, they believe, they have something to die for." "Zygielbojm's letter has to draw the attention of the world not just to the tragedy of those masses, but, above all, to their hope, and [our] responsibility to fulfil it."¹³⁴ And yet, no fresh news from Warsaw made it to the front page of this issue. Zygielbojm wrote in his letter: "This I must state, that although the Polish government has in great measure contributed to stirring world opinion, it has not done so sufficiently, it has not risen to anything extraordinary to match the extent of the drama taking place in Poland."¹³⁵ These words of disappointment over the government's actions were met with silence. No one in 'Polish London' felt personally responsible, or if they did, no one admitted it in public. This subject was not mentioned at all during a two-day cabinet meeting on June 4 and 5.¹³⁶

On June 3, *Dziennik Polski* printed on its front page two PAT stories, which reported on the reactions to the rising in the ghetto on the other side of the ocean. The first one informed that *The Christian Science Monitor* had published "a lengthy story on the recent fighting in the ghetto and the condition of the Jews in occupied Europe." The second story described the celebration that the Central Union of [Polish] Jews in Argentina had organised in Rio de Janeiro on May 31. The PAT correspondent focused on the speech given by the consul of the Republic of Poland, Władysław Mazurkiewicz. Addressing the gathering of 5,000 people, the consul had "emphasised the aid given by Polish fighters to the Jews of Warsaw and affirmed the complete solidarity of Poles of all denominations in

¹³³ "Ostatni apel do sumienia świata. List Zygielbojma do prezydenta i premiera," *Dziennik Polski*, 2 June 1943, p. 2; "List Szmula Zygielbojma," *Dziennik Żołnierza*, 2 June 1943, p. 1 and 4. Information that the letter had been commented upon in the Swedish press appeared a few days earlier, see "Echa śmierci Zygielbojma," *Dziennik Polski*, 28 May 1943, p. 2. Among those that reprinted it was the English newspaper *News Chronicle* (1 June 1943).

¹³⁴ "Na marginesie. List Zygielbojma," *Dziennik Polski*, 2 June 1943, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Cited from Iranek-Osmecki, p. 216.

¹³⁶ *Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów w dniach 4 i 5 czerwca 1943 r.* [The Council of Ministers, minutes of the meeting of 4 and 5 June 1943], in: *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów...*, pp. 450–454.

their struggle against the German oppressors."¹³⁷ This last story is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, from the moment when the news of the fighting first arrived until the beginning of June 1943, *Dziennik Polski* had not published any "lengthy accounts of the recent fighting in the ghetto or the condition of the Jews" in occupied Poland. Secondly, the main points of the consul's speech seemed to be taken out of the guidelines set out by the ministry of foreign affairs. One can also find such a message, that placed emphasis on the Polish aid and solidarity, in official political statements and press releases issued later.¹³⁸

On June 4, Schwarzbart approached Mikołajczyk about transferring to the homeland the funds that had been obtained from the Jewish Agency. Mikołajczyk promised that they would be sent, along with the radiogram to the members of the ŻKN hiding on the Aryan side. Schwarzbart asked whether the fight in the ghetto had ended and Mikołajczyk confirmed it. Schwarzbart also learnt that no decision had yet been made regarding the distribution of subsidies to Jewish organizations. He left depressed and disappointed.¹³⁹ On June 8, he had a meeting with Minister of National Defence General Kukiel. Their discussion focussed on the issue of anti-Semitism in the Polish army. They did not talk about the uprising in the ghetto. (Needless to say, the minister of defence had better knowledge of the current situation in the ghetto than a Jewish member of the National Council did.) The General asked only about the estimated number of exterminated Jews. "He was courteously polite. He did not deny the facts I had stated in my memorandum."¹⁴⁰ In addition, Schwarzbart met with a journalist of *The Manchester Guardian* who wanted to write a story on the battle of the Warsaw ghetto. He called this battle "the epic." "He would like to put the spotlight on it, as there had only been some brief notices on it in the press. Unfortunately – commented Schwarzbart – my knowledge is, in fact, limited. I am under the impression that the Polish government is not very keen on sharing more information on this heroic period of the Jewish struggle with me. I gave him some material about Treblinka."¹⁴¹

The following session of the National Council took place on June 8. A draft of the homage to the homeland that the council debated in the previous session (on May 15) was returned by the Committee on Political and Legal Affairs, reduced to just three words. The council unanimously passed the following resolution: "The National Council of the Republic of Poland, after hearing the report of Minister of Internal Affairs Stanisław Mikołajczyk confirms that the policy

¹³⁷ "W Ameryce o ghetcie warszawskim," *Dziennik Polski*, 3 June 1943, p. 1.

¹³⁸ It seems noteworthy, the Polish-Jewish brotherhood of arms had already been mentioned by the correspondence from London, reporting on the battle in the ghetto and Zygielbojm's funeral, which was printed in *The New York Times*. ("Battle in Warsaw Ghetto was Aided by Armed Squads of Polish Guerillas," 22 May 1943, p. 4). Minister Kot had already mentioned it in his speech at Zygielbojm's funeral.

¹³⁹ YVA, M2/752, Ignacy Schwarzbart's Diary, 4 June 1943, p. 138.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, 8 June 1943, p. 140. The diary includes a copy of the memorial.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem, 9 June 1943, p. 146.

of the Government of the RP complies with the position and demands of the Homeland, which fights heroically for the liberation of the entirety of Poland and for her rightful place among the free nations of the world.” A discussion of the report on Polish-Czechoslovakian relations was the main item on the council’s agenda. Schwarzbart also took the floor.¹⁴² The situation of the Jews in Poland was not mentioned at all. Zygielbojm’s name, struck off the attendance list, was the only reminder of it.¹⁴³ A proposal to provide active support to the Jews dying in Poland, which was put forward by Zygielbojm in the session of April 17 and then, in accordance with the rules, submitted to the Committee on Political and Legal Affairs, fell through. As Adam Ciołkosz commented years later, “It has been – to use the bureaucratic jargon – devoured by the development of events.”¹⁴⁴ This awkward expression aptly summarises the tragic fate of Shmul Zygielbojm.

* * *

Schwarzbart’s accusation that there was a deliberate effort to keep secret the dispatches from the battling ghetto, although not completely unfounded,¹⁴⁵ resulted partially from his lack of detailed knowledge about how the channels of communication with the homeland were organised. It was not unheard of that several days (or more) passed between the time a cable sent from Warsaw arrived in London and was decoded. Even dispatches from the delegate and the AK commander were often delayed. Korboński’s radio station (codename ‘Kazia’) was the most expeditious during the fighting in the ghetto, whereas the delegate’s radio station (codename ‘Lena’) was the least efficient. And all of the dispatches from the Bund and the ŻKN went through the latter. On the one hand, then, we can take this fact to be a tragic coincidence, especially since some of these messages had the status of “urgent.” On the other hand, however, it is not hard to determine that the messages to which the Warsaw underground had given priority would arrive in London in a flash.¹⁴⁶ Such priority was never given to information about the fate of the Jews. Participants in these events, as well some historians,¹⁴⁷ try to argue that the focus on the Katyn affair was the

¹⁴² He wrote in his diary half-heartedly that adoption of the resolution, that pointed to “the past mistakes that can also be useful as far as Jews are concerned [*na odcinku żydowskim*]” (ibidem, 8 May 1943, p. 145).

¹⁴³ AIPMS, A.5/79, Stenogram z 79 posiedzenia Rady Narodowej RP, 8 VI 1943 r., [The National Council in Exile, minutes of the 79th session of 8 June 1943], attendance list, p. 37.

¹⁴⁴ Adam Ciołkosz, “W 25 rocznicę zgonu Szmula Zygielbojma,” *Kultura* 1968, no. 6, p. 163.

¹⁴⁵ It seems that two cables have not been delivered either to him or to Zygielbojm” cmply a r he attitde of their s”that are hiotesto, że poniżej mowa o polskich; it is certainly true as far as the one that was sent on April 20 is concerned.

¹⁴⁶ For example, a dispatch informing, that Warsaw had been bombed by the Soviet air forces on May 13, arrived in London the next day (AIPMS, A.9.III.2a/15, Dispatches).

¹⁴⁷ Iranek-Osmecki, *Kto ratuje jedno życie...*, p. 268; Dariusz Stola reiterates it in *Nadzieja i Zagłada...*, p. 177. Adam Ciołkosz points out that the second half of April was the most diffi-

main reason for decreased interest in the struggle in the ghetto. However, an analysis of the minutes of the meetings held by the Council of Ministers and the National Council in April and May of 1943, as well as the content of (the then) newspapers, shows that this argument is not persuasive. There is no doubt that the issue of Polish-Soviet relations was crucial to Polish politics. Nevertheless, in the second half of April of 1943, when each day brought a deeper crisis in Polish-Soviet relations, the government, the National Council, and the press dealt with many other, often minor, issues. The cabinet met five times between April 21 (when Mikołajczyk informed about the fighting in Warsaw) and May 12. They did not address the Jewish issues even once during those meetings.

Zygielbojm's death had not changed anything – the subject of the ghetto did not appear on the agenda of the five subsequent meetings. What was involved was not simply a particular political strategy pursued by these bodies, but also the attitude of their members. The wall of their indifference (even in the case of those who were by no means linked to nationalism) must have been sturdy, if it did not crumble in the face of the first armed resistance on the Warsaw streets since September of 1939.

There seems to be no doubt that there were attempts to withhold information on the outbreak of fighting in Warsaw by the end of April. It could not have been a coincidence that *Dziennik Polski* and *Dziennik Żołnierza* had kept silent for so many days. The radio station 'Świt', however, broadcast news from the ghetto, and this topic attracted the exceptional attention of 'Polish London' in April and May. Also, the ministry of foreign affairs disclosed some information about the situation in Warsaw to the Jewish members of the National Council, though it was probably rather vague since they did not take any decisive action. The hesitancy to disseminate information on the events in the Warsaw ghetto was seemingly caused by the fear that it would divert attention from the Katyń affair. Taking into account that *The New York Times* correspondence met with no response, this fear was evidently unfounded. Even after the first publications in the Polish press, the Jewish struggle did not generate any widespread interest. The turning point came with Zygielbojm's suicide. Another question that should be emphasised here is that, unlike in the autumn of 1942,¹⁴⁸ 'Polish London' was the only source of information about the situation in Warsaw in the spring of 1943.

The fact that not even one cable had been sent to the occupied country asking to clarify information on the battle in the ghetto¹⁴⁹ confirms that there was a reserved attitude towards it. Of course, Sikorski's speech broadcast by the

cult time in Sikorski's entire wartime career, and the reason for the delay in issuing the appeal to Polish society (idem, *Broń dla getta*, p. 16).

¹⁴⁸ For more on this subject see Wojtek Rappak, "'Raport Karskiego' – kontrowersje i interpretacje," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 10 vol. 1 (2014): 96–130.

¹⁴⁹ The directive of the commander-in-chief that prohibited the AK from taking any military action was the exception. Only on June 16, was the cable sent to Korboński asking if the ghetto had been entirely liquidated, if there still were any labour camps, and what had happened to the

BBC on May 4 was of the utmost importance because of the fragment of it that contained the government's first statement on the aid to the Jews. In the Polish literature,¹⁵⁰ however, this excerpt of the speech has always been presented alone, taken out of its wider context. Moreover, researchers have overlooked the fact that the fighting Jews were treated as objects. The Commander-in-Chief addressed his words exclusively to his ethnic compatriots. They were the ones upon whom he showered praise, thanks and admiration. He did not treat the fighters from Muranowski Square, the Nalewki, Franciszkańska, and Miła Streets equally to Polish soldiers and conspirators. Still, one should bear in mind that Sikorski was in a delicate position, as the homeland criticised him for allegedly attaching too much importance to Jewish matters. Neither Stefan Rowecki nor Jan Stanisław Jankowski issued any statement addressed directly to the ghetto fighters.¹⁵¹

Of course, any ability of the Polish government to provide the ghetto with real assistance was very limited. Nevertheless, judging from today's perspective, there was a painful lack of any symbolic gesture of moral support for the fighters. There are no traces that the government attempted to make the Allies interested in the fate of the ghetto, or that it had taken any, even limited, diplomatic action. The death of Szmul Zygielbojm did not bring any change. Several months passed before political circles understood the significance of the battle in the Warsaw ghetto. At the end of July 1943, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, who had replaced Prime Minister Sikorski after his tragic death, ordered General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, a successor of the arrested 'Grot', to help those Jews who wanted to fight.¹⁵² The flow of information coming from the ŻKN, ŻOB, and the Bund had an impact beyond Jewish circles and increased an understanding of the importance of the dramatic struggle in the Warsaw ghetto, which, by 1943, had already achieved the name of an uprising.

Since that time, Polish politicians¹⁵³ and pundits have been facing the problem how to incorporate it into the story of the Polish-Jewish solidarity.

surviving Jews (HIA, Government service file, 1942–1944, Dokumenty Stanisława Mikołajczyka, 800/22/0/-/38, depesza podpisana Espe, klatka 252 [dispatch signed by Espe, image 252]).

¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, David Engel has commented on it.

¹⁵¹ The proclamation of the PPS-WRN, containing the "brotherly greeting" to the fighting "labourers and workers of the Jewish nationality" and assurance that their action "will pass into the legend of Fighting Poland to become the common good of the Polish people, on which the edifice of the resurrected Commonwealth will be erected".

¹⁵² Dispatch signed by Col. Protasewicz, 27 July 1943. (*AKD*, vol. 3, p. 51).

¹⁵³ Before the first anniversary of the ghetto uprising, Kazimierz Sosnkowski, convinced by Adam Ciołkosz, decorated Michał Klepfisz of the Bund with the Order of Virtuti Militari silver cross. At the request of Schwarzbard and Zygielbojm's successor, Emanuel Scherer, the entire National Council session of 20 March 1944 was devoted to the problem of helping the last surviving Jews in Poland. Ciołkosz, who presented the motion of the Jewish representatives said: "The defenders of the ghetto fought under the white and red banner, their fight was a stage of the struggle for the freedom of Poland, and Polish Christians were not idle in the face of this fight." (AIPMS, A.5/180, Stenogram ze 180 posiedzenia Rady Narodowej RP, 20 III 1944

Their successors, as well as generations of historians, wrestle with this to this day.

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The Letter of Szmul Zygielbojm to the President and the Prime Minister of the RP¹⁵⁴
11 May 1943.

President of the RP Władysław Raczkiewicz
President of the Council of Minister, General Władysław Sikorski

Mr President, Mr Prime Minister.

I take the liberty of addressing to you gentlemen, my last words, and through you, to the government and the people of Poland, to the governments and peoples of the Allied nations, to the conscience of the world.

The latest news from Poland makes it clear without any doubt that the Germans are at present murdering with utter cruelty the remnants of the Jews in Poland. The last act of a tragedy unparalleled in history is now taking place behind the walls of the ghettos.

The responsibility for the crime of exterminating the entire Jewish people in Poland falls primarily on the perpetrators, but indirectly it also weighs on the whole of humanity. The peoples and governments of the Allied nations have up till this day failed to rise to any concrete act to put an end to this crime. By passively looking on this murder of millions of defenseless and ill-treated women, men, and children, they have come to share in the guilt.

This I must state, that although the Polish government has in great measure contributed to stirring world opinion, it has not done so sufficiently, it has not risen to anything extraordinary to match the extent of the drama taking place in Poland.

Out of close to three and a half million Polish Jews and about seven hundred thousand Jews deported to Poland from other countries, in April of this year, according to the official report of the underground leadership of the Bund, about three hundred thousand were still alive. But the slaughter continues without interruption.

I cannot remain silent and I cannot remain alive while the remnants of the Jewish people in Poland, whose representative I am, are dying.

[The National Council in Exile, minutes of the 180th session of 20 March 1943], p. 10). The press published occasional articles ("W rocznicę powstania w ghetto Warszawy," *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza*, 20 April, 1944, p. 2). Several ministers together with the chairman of the National Council, the President's Chief of Staff and the representatives of military authorities attended the celebration organised by the Federation of Polish Jews in Great Britain ("Uczczenie rocznicy walk w ghetto," *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza*, 21 April 1944, p. 1).

¹⁵⁴ Cited from Iranek-Osmecki, pp. 215–217.

My comrades in the Warsaw ghetto died, up in arms, in a last heroic stand. It was not given to me to die like they did or to die with them. But I belong with them; I belong to their mass graves.

Through my death I wish to express the deepest protest against the inactivity with which the world looks on and allows the Jewish people to be exterminated. I know how little a human life counts [for], especially nowadays. But as I was unable to achieve it alive, perhaps through my death I shall contribute to shake the indifference of those who can and who should act, so as to save from inevitable annihilation even now, at just about the last moment, that handful of Polish Jews who are still alive.

I am laying down my life for it belongs to the Jewish people in Poland. I wish that the handful that still survives, out of the several million strong Polish Jewry, would, together with the Polish masses, strive for liberation, that it might breathe in Poland and in a world of freedom and of socialist justice for all its torments and inhuman suffering. And I believe that just such a Poland will rise and that just such a world will come to be.

I trust that you, Mr President, and you, Mr Prime Minister, will address what I have said above to all those for whom it is meant, and that the Polish government will begin forthwith to act through diplomatic channels and through propaganda in order to save from annihilation that remnant of Polish Jewry that is still alive.

Farewell to all those and to everything dear to me and which I loved.

Szumł Zygielbojm

Translated by *Elżbieta Olender-Dmowska*

Abstract

The text talks about the reaction of the Polish government in London to the outbreak of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto and Szumł Zygielbojm's suicide. The author analyses stenographic records of the sessions of the Polish government in exile, daily logs of the president's and PM's activity, stenographic records of the National Council sessions, correspondence sent by the government to Warsaw, the content of official declarations of the government, and the Polish press between April and June 1943. The author reconstructs the government's state of knowledge regarding the situation in Warsaw and presents the chronology of its popularisation. He also wonders what influence the-then political crisis (the German propaganda's revelation of the massacre of Polish officers in Katyn and Stalin's severance of diplomatic relations with the Polish government) had on the government's approach to the situation in the occupied country, particularly with regard to the fighting in the Warsaw ghetto.

Key words

Warsaw ghetto uprising, Polish government in exile in London, Szumł Zygielbojm, Polish-Jewish relations, Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB)