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## Displaced and forgotten. The phenomenon of anti-Semitism among architects in Warsaw in the second half of the 1930s

*Der Artikel befasst sich mit der Situation von polnischen Architekten jüdischer Herkunft in den späten 1930er Jahren an der Technischen Universität Warschau, im Verband der polnischen Architekten SARP und auf dem Arbeitsmarkt. Neben physischer Gewalt sahen sich Architekten jüdischer Herkunft auch mit der Ausgrenzung in ihrer eigenen Gemeinschaft konfrontiert. Der Artikel beschreibt verschiedene Formen der Diskriminierung, Haltung der Architekten gegenüber dem Antisemitismus und Wahrnehmung dieser Zeit nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg durch die Architekten selbst.*

*The article deals with the situation of Polish architects of Jewish origin in the late 1930s at the Warsaw University of Technology, in the Association of Polish Architects SARP and on the job market. In addition to physical violence, architects of Jewish origin faced exclusion in their own community. And the article describes various forms of discrimination, examples of architects' attitudes toward anti-Semitism and the perception of the architectural community during this period after World War II.*

### A letter

In the private papers of Warsaw University of Technology professor Lech Niemojewski, I came across a letter written to him by Piotr Biegański, an assistant at the Department of Architecture. Biegański, who was replacing Niemojewski during his stay on a scholarship in Rome, wrote the following words to him on November 4, 1938:

Dear Professor (...) Everything is prospering perfectly in the Institute. Lectures are taking place calmly (...) Jews were asking twice if they could come and listen to lectures while standing. I explained that the matter has not changed, and that these are still lectures by the Professor, and that I have not been authorized to change the decision, although I am now giving the lectures by deputy. I did not, of course, get into further debate, even though I am completely of the opinion of the Professor.<sup>1</sup>

Since July 1937, universities in Poland were allowed to introduce a so-called “bench ghetto”, in which Jewish students could take their seats only in designated parts of the room and, as Natalia Judzińska has proved, the Warsaw University of Technology (Politechnika Warszawska, or PW) was the first one to adopt this rule on October 2 the

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<sup>1</sup> Private Papers of Lech Niemojewski, Archive of the Polish Academy of Sciences, III-67/108, p. 12. All quotations from Polish are translated by the author. Special thanks to: Konrad Matyjaszek, Klaudia Obrębska, Małgorzata Omilanowska-Kiljańczyk, and Katarzyna Uchowicz for archival and bibliographical hints, Paul Brykczynski, Aleksandra Paradowska, Joanna Popiołek and Annika Wienert for other comments as well as Alexandra Klei for the editorial supervision.

same year. The "lectures ... taking place calmly" is a reference to the anti-Semitic brawls that took place in the past several months. The agreement to introduce a bench ghetto was a fulfillment of the demands of far-right students and was intended to allow lectures to take place at the expense of the rights of Jewish students. Standing in lectures was a widespread form of protest against this regulation.<sup>2</sup> From the above letter, it can be inferred that the lecturer had forbidden Jews from standing in lectures, as he considered sitting in designated benches a condition for attending classes.

In Polish architectural historiography, Niemojewski and Biegański are known as prominent representatives of the Polish architectural community associated with the Warsaw University of Technology. Lech Niemojewski took over the Chair of the History of Modern Architecture and Art at the Warsaw University of Technology in 1928 and became famous before the war as the author of the interior design of the cruise ships *Batory* and *Piłsudski*, important propaganda projects referred to as "floating embassies of Polish culture"<sup>3</sup>, and in 1937 he served as a commissioner of the Polish pavilion at the World Exhibition in Paris. After the war, Niemojewski headed the Department of Art History and Medieval Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology until his politically motivated dismissal in 1952.<sup>4</sup> During the war, Piotr Biegański continued his academic career begun at the Technical University, defended his doctorate, and from 1947 worked as a municipal conservationist of Warsaw's monuments.

Anti-Semitism in the architectural community of the late 1930s does not fit into the narrative of the interwar period as a time of modernization of the country, of ambitious realized and planned architectural concepts, and its memory has been erased by the events of World War II and the postwar reconstruction. Histories of anti-Semitic exclusions, perpetrators, and their victims in the architectural community are, with small exceptions<sup>5</sup>, at most only mentioned briefly, and the specifics of the period are usually summed up as "growing anti-Semitic atmosphere" and are not part of mainstream architectural historiography.

The purpose of this article is to show anti-Semitism not as a side note of the 1930s, but as an inherent element of the reality of the architectural community, which ultimately affected the work of architects of both Jewish and non-Jewish origin. It decided who could graduate, have a successful career, get commissions and positions and who could not, which had a direct impact on the shape of the architecture of Polish cities, as well as the places to which Polish Jews emigrated.<sup>6</sup> In the article I will outline the main practices of exclusion of architects of Jewish origin in the late 1930s. I will also analyze some of the narratives about these events by the architectural community itself after the war. I hope that this research, in addition to Dariusz Konstantynow's pioneering article and the

<sup>2</sup> Judzińska, Natalia: Po lewej stronie sali. Getto ławkowe w międzywojennym Wilnie, Warsaw 2023, pp. 300–304, 349.

<sup>3</sup> Cymer, Anna: Polski design na morzu, online at: <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/polski-design-na-morzu> [06/01/2023].

<sup>4</sup> [Zachwatowicz, Jan]: Rys historyczny Wydziału Architektury, in: Zachwatowicz, Jan (ed.) *Warszawska Szkoła Architektury 1915–1965. 50-lecie Wydziału Architektury Politechniki Warszawskiej*, Warsaw 1967, pp. 25–56, here p. 48; Piprek, Mieczysław: Lech Niemojewski, in: Barucki, Tadeusz (ed.): *Fragmety Stuletniej Historii*, Warsaw 2000, pp. 219–220, here p. 220.

<sup>5</sup> Rytel, Grzegorz: *Lucjan Korngold. Warszawa – Sao Paulo 1897–1963*, Warsaw 2014, pp. 84–85.

<sup>6</sup> Omilanowska, Małgorzata: *Przystanek Palestyna. Działalność architektów Żydów wykształconych w środowisku warszawskim*, in: Świątkowska, Bogna (ed.): *Adrichalim. Architekci: leksykon pochodzących z Polski architektów działających w Palestynie i Izraelu w XX wieku*, Warsaw 2016, pp. 7–48.

project currently conducted at the Wrocław University of Technology<sup>7</sup>, will contribute to a new perspective on Polish architectural historiography not only as a straightforward story about outstanding individuals and their accomplishments, but also as the product of conflicts and exclusions.

## Excluded

The practices of professional exclusion of Poles of Jewish origin do not apply only to the architectural community. The presence of “salon anti-Semitism”, which consisted not of physical violence, but of varied forms of restricting access to education and obstructing the professional activities of people of Jewish origin in various professional groups such as doctors and lawyers, has only recently become a topic of public debate.<sup>8</sup> The continued forgetting and surprised discovery of the existence of anti-Semitism in contemporary Poland by the Polish elite has been aptly described by Jan Tomasz Gross as “the total surprise of the Polish intelligentsia”, in this case with anti-Semitism being part of its own history as a social group, which was taken up by Anna Zawadzka, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Konrad Matyjaszek in 2018.<sup>9</sup>

The ongoing discussion around the commemoration of the University of Warsaw's bench ghetto, which led to the unveiling of a commemorative plaque on the UW campus in Krakowskie Przedmieście on May 22, 2023 and a conference<sup>10</sup> dedicated to this form of discrimination, highlight the extent to which anti-Semitism has been forgotten and suppressed among the elite, the academic world and the intelligentsia. An intensive study of the scale of university anti-Semitism has been undertaken only by the University of Poznań, which set up a research commission that in 2021 published a 700-page report “Displaced Histories. Anti-Semitism at the University of Poznań, 1919-1939.”<sup>11</sup>

Anti-Semitism in the Warsaw architectural community developed in two centers crucial to this professional group: at the PW, a place of education of future architects and research on architecture, and at the Society of Architects of the Republic of Poland (SARP). The phenomena involving the PW and SARP were not disconnected from the political and economic realities of the time. After the death in 1935 of Józef Piłsudski, who promoted a multinational vision of the Polish state, the last roadblocks holding anti-Semitic tendencies in check at the political level were removed. Another important factor was the deepening economic crisis, which increased competition in the job market, as

<sup>7</sup> Konstantynow, Dariusz: Żydzi i architektura z perspektywy polskiego nacjonalizmu lat 30. XX wieku, in: *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 232 (2009), pp. 411–425. There is an ongoing project: *Architekci wobec tzw. „paragrafu aryjskiego”, 1934–1939* conducted by Agnieszka Tomaszewicz and Joanna Majczyk at Wrocław University of Science and Technology.

<sup>8</sup> One of the starting points to this debate was a book by Marcin Zaremba: *Dom z dwiema wieżami*, Kraków 2018, in which he describes anti-Semitic discrimination against his family members in legal and medical circles.

<sup>9</sup> Zawadzka, Anna; Tokarska-Bakir, Joanna; Matyjaszek, Konrad: The total astonishment of the Polish intelligentsia, *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 7 (2018), pp. 1–7. The authors use this quote from: Gross, Jan Tomasz: *Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie. Historia moralnej zapaści*, Warsaw 2008, p. 215. English version: *Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An essay in historical interpretation*, 2007 (without this quote).

<sup>10</sup> *Getto ławkowe. Struktury wykluczenia na uczelniach międzywojennej Polski w kontekście środkowoeuropejskim*, Wydział Historii UW, współpraca merytoryczna Wydział Sławistyki, November 22–23, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Michalski, Maciej; Podemski, Krzysztof (eds.): *Wyparte historie. Antysemityzm na Uniwersytecie Poznańskim w latach 1919–1939*, Poznań 2022; The already mentioned groundbreaking book by Natalia Judzińska on the bench ghetto at the Vilnius University with a deep analysis of the history of this practice was published in 2023 after the peer reviews of this paper. Judzińska, *Po lewej stronie*, 2023.

well as making it more difficult for students to finance their studies.<sup>12</sup> According to this narrative, Poles, discriminated during partition times, could not compete with Jews, who had lived in urban areas for generations and had a better start in professional life. Yet the dangerous infiltration of anti-Semitism into the center of politics and society occurred much earlier, during the events that led to the assassination of President Gabriel Narutowicz in 1922. Paul Brykczynski, in a publication analyzing the anti-Semitic background and consequences of the assassination of Poland's first president, states:

The most profound impact of the December events, however, was not on the National Democrats but on the center and on the left of the political spectrum. The violence directed against Narutowicz appears to have convinced many Polish politicians that it was more expedient to appease the antisemites than to challenge them." (...) "[centrist politicians] decided that defending the political rights of the Jews and other minorities was not a battle worth fighting."<sup>13</sup>

Around that time the future architect Helena Syrkus, then still Eliasberg, began publishing under the pseudonym Niemirowska. She also Polonized her parents' names while enrolled in the university, and married Szymon Syrkus, who had also changed his name from Szyja to Szymon, in a Catholic church. However, all these efforts did not prevent the architect Jan Poliński<sup>14</sup> from calling the Syrkus couple's modernist villa in Konstancin a "Jewry box"<sup>15</sup> in 1939.

### **Politechnika Antisemitica?**<sup>16</sup>

The history of anti-Semitism at the Warsaw University of Technology began shortly after the university opened. In 1918, Jewish students complained about the inability to establish or belong to a student association, which was the primary platform for applying to the university authorities for grants, scholarships and the like. The Stowarzyszenie Bratnia Pomoc (Fraternal Aid Association) excluded people of other nationalities in its charter, and the Mutual Aid of Jewish Students, which had been established, was dissolved by the rector because no PW staff member wanted to become a curator of the association.<sup>17</sup>

The PW, like other universities, became the arena of student protests against tuition fees in the 1930s, often with anti-Semitic overtones, and their intensification took place in

<sup>12</sup> Żyndul, Jolanta: II Rzeczpospolita, in: Sienkiewicz, Witold (ed.), *Dzieje Żydów polskich*, Warsaw 2019, pp. 247–323, here 286.

<sup>13</sup> Brykczynski, Paul: *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland*, Wisconsin 2016, p. 161.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Poliński (1907–1977) member of the nationwide SARP Board 1938–1939, which excluded Jews as members. <https://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/a/biografia/jan-polinski>; [https://www.archimemory.pl/pokaz/jan\\_polinski,40443](https://www.archimemory.pl/pokaz/jan_polinski,40443) [06/01/2023].

<sup>15</sup> Poliński, Jan: *Oblicze architektoniczne miast... polskich*, in: *Prosto z mostu 14/15* (1939), p. 22. Quoted after: Konstantynow, Żydzi, 2009, p. 424.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz, Regina (ed.): *Alma Mater Antisemitica. Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939*, Vienna 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Do wiadomości Ogółu, Walne Zebranie Członków Stowarzyszenia "Wzajemna Pomoc Studentów Żydów Politechniki Warszawskiej", zwołane w gmachu Politechniki dnia 23 marca 1918 roku, z powodu rozwiązania Stowarzyszenia przez J. M. Pana Rektora [...], druk ulotny, Warsaw 1918, online at: <https://kpbc.umk.pl/dlibra/publication/218589/edition/217481> [06/01/2023].

1936-1937. Their organizers were student associations some of whose members belonged to the National Radical Camp (ONR), an ultra-right organization formed in 1934, one of whose main demands was the exclusion of Jews from public life. The ONR inaugurated its activities initially in the building of the PW, and its members agitated intensively among architecture students as well. Demands for *numerus clausus*, i.e. equalizing the proportion of Jewish students to the percentage of Jews in the state, were soon replaced by demands for *numerus nullus*.<sup>18</sup> Their actions were not limited to verbal expression of these demands. The university chronicle from 1937 shows the character of the incidents and, at the same time, the helplessness of the university authorities:

In January, a so-called 'day without Jews' was organized, which, however, due to the immediate reaction of the academic authorities, took place relatively peacefully at the university, but several Jews were beaten. (...) at the meeting (...) there were serious incidents, one of the students was seriously injured in the eye, several others were severely beaten; the victims accused the security guards of the Fraternal Aid, but their investigation, as well as the investigation at the university, did not find the perpetrators. Iron crowbars were found in the hall where the meeting was held. After the meeting, a fierce electoral struggle began; fierce anti-Semitic slogans were put forward, and incidents where Jewish students were beaten began to occur almost daily.<sup>19</sup>

The omnipresent violence at the PW forced university authorities to cancel all classes from March 14 to April 5, 1937.<sup>20</sup> In order to calm the atmosphere, the rectors of Poland's major universities formulated a proclamation "To the Polish academic youth", in which they wrote that: "the youth is dealing with issues which are extremely serious and difficult, especially the Jewish question. They reach very far into the foundations of Polish national and economic life (...) Acts of violence and vandalism, such as recently occurred in Warsaw, cannot be repeated. Fighting for ideals cannot go hand in hand with paving over those ideals."<sup>21</sup>

Physical violence and riots in or around the PW were, of course, what had the greatest impact on the functioning of the entire university, but discrimination also took other forms. In addition to the Fraternal Aid, Jewish students were also excluded from membership in the Union of Architecture Students. At the so-called "Young Architecture Ball" held on February 1, 1937 under the patronage of Rector Józef Zawadzki and Architecture Faculty Dean Zygmunt Kamiński, one of the rooms referred to as the "Hall of Racism" was decorated with caricatures of Jews.<sup>22</sup>

As late as March 1937, Minister of Education Wojciech Świątosławski tried to bring peace to universities by disbanding all student fraternities, but in July he allowed the rectors to introduce a bench ghetto, thus meeting the demands of the extreme right. The

<sup>18</sup> Trębacz, Zofia: Ghetto Benches at Polish Universities. Ideology and Practice, 113–135, in Fritz, Alma, 2016, p. 117.

<sup>19</sup> Kronika. Politechnika Warszawska, Vol. 1, 1935/1936 i 1936/1937, Sprawozdanie z działalności Politechniki Warszawskiej za rok akademicki 1936/1937 według referatu jego magnificencji rektora profesora dr Józefa Zawadzkiego na walnym zebraniu profesorów dn. 13 października 1937 r., Warsaw 1938, pp. 29–40, here p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Kalendarium. 150 lat Politechniki w Warszawie, Warszaw 1976, p. 31, online at: <https://bcpw.bg.pw.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/540/edition/757?language=en> [06/01/2023].

<sup>21</sup> Do polskiej młodzieży akademickiej, podpisano przez rektorów uczelni wyższych w Polsce, Politechnika Warszawska 1935/1936 1936/1937 1 (1938). Warsaw, pp. 41–42.

<sup>22</sup> Konstantynow, Żydzi, 2009, p. 412.

rector of the PW responsible for the introduction of the bench ghetto was at the time Józef Zawadzki, the father of the famous Tadeusz Zawadzki, nicknamed "Zośka" the hero of the wartime resistance publication "Kamienie na szaniec", who originated from the intelligentsia with patriotic traditions.<sup>23</sup> At the Faculty of Architecture at the PW, white lines drawn in chalk appeared on the benches, marking off the left side of the rooms for the Jewish students.<sup>24</sup> Anti-Semitism officially became a part of everyday academic life sanctioned by university authorities.

Demands to limit the number of Jewish students as incompatible with Poland's 1919 minority treaty guaranteeing civil rights to national minorities were never legally sanctioned,<sup>25</sup> but the repertoire of official and unofficial persecution led to a drastic reduction in the number of Jewish architecture students. In the 1934/1935 academic year, 11.9% of students studying at the Warsaw University of Technology were of Jewish origin and 14.8% of those studying architecture.<sup>26</sup> Among the 700 students admitted to the first year of study in the 1938/1939 academic year, there were only 30 of Jewish origin.<sup>27</sup> More and more Jews decided to study abroad; for example, at the Bauhaus.<sup>28</sup> Plenty of them migrated to Mandatory Palestine, where almost 20% of the architects working between 1918-1948 were of Polish origin; in Tel Aviv, at least five of them had studied at the Warsaw University of Technology.<sup>29</sup>

The prospects for those who decided to study and later look for a job were not very promising in the late 1930s, as can be read in a satire of an informational meeting for high school graduates who are considering choosing a university. "He [a representative of the PW] is an optimist. Insiders say that his optimism is rooted in the fact that in 5 years of studying at the Warsaw University of Technology, the ONR's only knocked out 2 of his teeth (...) And as for the beating? Sometimes you can go to the PW 6 times in a row and not get beaten once. Those gathered look at the speaker in disbelief (...). For, reading the press, it seemed to them that they daily and permanently beat anyone whose nose betrays some tendency to break their line." Then someone in the audience tells a joke about looking for a job after graduating from the PW. There are 250 vacant engineering positions, 300 people apply, including 200 Jews. Not a single Jew was accepted, and the remaining positions were left vacant.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Janicka, Elżbieta: *Festung Warschau*, Warsaw 2011, p. 229.

<sup>24</sup> Jachowicz, Ryszard: *Szkolny kolega*, in: *Żyli wśród nas – wspomnienia Polaków i Żydów nadesłane na Konkurs Pamięci Polsko-Żydowskiej o Nagrodę Imienia Dawida Ben Guriona zorganizowany w Płońsku, Płońsk 2001*, p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> Tomaszewski, Jerzy (ed.): *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie do 1950 r.*, Warsaw 1993, p. 186.

<sup>26</sup> Mundsztuk, Ludwik: *Studia akademickie w świetle cyfr*, in: *Filary. Pismo żydowskiej młodzieży demokratycznej* 1 (1939), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Rozenman, A.: *Demokracja w Polsce wobec sytuacji na wyższych uczelniach*, in: *Filary. Pismo żydowskiej młodzieży demokratycznej* (po konfiskacie nakład drugi) 3 (1939) p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Störtkuhl, Beate/Makala, Rafał: *Netzwerke der Moderne in (Ost-)Mitteleuropa – eine Einführung*, in: *Störtkuhl/Makala, Nicht nur Bauhaus. Netzwerke der Moderne in Mitteleuropa*, Oldenbourg 2020, pp. 8–36, here: 13.

<sup>29</sup> Tanikowski, Artur: *In Tel Aviv, Warsaw, and Gdynia. Interwar Jewish Architects from the Polish Lands between Zionism and Assimilation*, in: *Brämer, Andreas/Keßler, Kathrin/Knuffinke, Ulrich/Przystawik, Mirko (eds.): Jewish Architects – Jewish Architecture?* Petersberg 2021, pp. 101–110, here: 105.

<sup>30</sup> Freidenreich, Izaak Arie: *Co potem?*, in: *Filary. Pismo żydowskiej młodzieży demokratycznej* 1 (1937), p. 8.

## The SARP and the 'Aryan paragraph'

Until 1937, the Warsaw Branch of the SARP was headed by the avant-garde architect Bohdan Lachert, then still employed at the Warsaw University of Technology. In March 1937, the Warsaw SARP issued an open letter condemning the violence at the university, which had become “a stage of barbaric anti-Semitic incidents.” It criticized the authorities of the Warsaw University, who, according to the SARP, did not utilize all the preventive measures available to them and, with their neutral attitude toward the incidents, encouraged them.<sup>31</sup> Also at the time, under the direction of Romuald Miller, the nationwide board of the SARP, which included leftist architects such as Szymon Syrkus and Roman Piotrowski, wrote a statement that focused on the educational losses caused, according to the board, by the inappropriate tactic of combating violence at the university by canceling classes.

The architectural community split into two hostile camps, and tensions within the organization escalated at the meeting of the Warsaw Branch of the SARP on May 5, 1937, at which events at the Warsaw University of Technology were to be discussed. An aggressive protest by ONR members led to all professors of the PW leaving the meeting amidst yelling and insults. Architects of Jewish origin and those creating in the spirit of modernism revolving in socialist circles were verbally attacked. Most of the slogans, in addition to having anti-Semitic overtones, were also anti-communist in nature, which came together under the common notion of 'Judeo-Communism'.<sup>32</sup> At the same meeting, Bohdan Lachert lost his position as head of the Warsaw Branch, and the new board included Piotr Biegański. The first decisions of the new board were to reverse the decisions of the predecessors. A letter was sent withdrawing the charges against the PW authorities. The new board re-established cooperation with the ONR-controlled Union of Architecture Students, with whom contacts had been broken off by the previous board.<sup>33</sup> During the May 25 meeting, an 'Aryan paragraph' was also proposed for a vote at the SARP's national General Delegate Assembly.<sup>34</sup>

The exchange in leadership and thus the change in political course also took place in the national meeting of the SARP on May 30, 1937. The main board announced its resignation, but still tried to explain its critical letter to the authorities of the PW, emphasizing that it was not its purpose to accuse the members of the PW and SARP of anything, but only to “substantively address an issue that, in the opinion of the main board, effects an insult to Polish culture.”<sup>35</sup>

Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, an influential architect and conservationist, became the head of the SARP and the new board also included Władysław Pieńkowski,<sup>36</sup> the future architect of the famous Dominican Church in Służew in Warsaw. Pieńkowski was one of

<sup>31</sup> Oddział w Warszawie, in: Komunikat SARP 3 (1937), p. 8–9, here p. 9; Konstantynow, Żydzi, 2009, p. 411.

<sup>32</sup> Konstantynow, Żydzi, 2009, p. 413.

<sup>33</sup> Komunikat SARP 6–7 (1937) pp. 28–29.

<sup>34</sup> Komunikat SARP 6–7 (1937) p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Komunikat SARP 5 (1937), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Komunikat SARP 6–7 (1937), p. 32.

the main agitators for the introduction of the Aryan paragraph. As quoted by the SARP newsletter, Pieńkowski claimed:

The culture of every nation is its property (...) in Poland the harmful influence of foreign culture is becoming more and more evident (...). We should strive to close ourselves off from Jewish influence. For Jewish ethics and psyche are alien to us. It puts the Jewish question not as a political issue, but as a duty to the Nation and the State, just as it is a matter of defending the national borders.<sup>37</sup>

On the initiative of the Poznań and Warsaw SARP branches, a motion was passed to vote on the introduction of the Aryan paragraph at the next General Meeting of Delegates.<sup>38</sup>

On June 28-29, 1938, paragraph 12a was enacted: “Persons of Jewish nationality may not be ordinary or extraordinary members of the SARP, while persons of Jewish origin may be registered as members of the SARP on the basis of a positive evaluation from the Qualification Committee.” In case of doubt for people who were members of the SARP before June 28, 1937, the commission could require a baptismal certificate from before November 11, 1918. In the case of new candidates for membership, the architect's parents could not be Jewish from birth. It was also agreed that only SARP members could participate in state architectural competitions.<sup>39</sup> After the new SARP statute went into effect on June 25, 1939, 59 people were removed from the list of members in the Warsaw Branch on July 1.<sup>40</sup>

## The anti-Semitic narrative

The anti-Semitic narrative against architects of Jewish origin was based on stylistic and economic arguments. Polish architects waged a battle for the supposed “true face of Polish architecture”<sup>41</sup> and it should be noted here that there was no consensus among the architects in the 1930s about the style of national architecture. Modernism, as in the case of Gdynia (rejected by conservative architects favoring the historical forms) could also be a bearer of Polishness for the others.<sup>42</sup> The common denominator in those discussions was that Polish architecture could only be created by Poles.

Economic arguments were also part of the regular anti-Semitic repertoire. Architects of Jewish origin were accused of taking away jobs, particularly egregious during the economic crisis, and were accused of being guided in their work by a lust for profit and exploiting Polish workers.<sup>43</sup> A particularly perfidious accusation was the alleged seizure of the residential architecture segment, while this focus on private commissions, usually

<sup>37</sup> Komunikat SARP 6–7 (1937), p. 13. Supporters of the an Aryan paragraph: Juliusz Żórawski, Bohdan Guerquin, Antoni Forkiewicz, Witold Eysymont, Stanisław Murczyński, Eugeniusz Piotrowski, Jan Poliński, Stanisław Murczyński, Stanisław Jankowski, Kazimierz Tołoczko, Jerzy Szeptycki (among others). Konstantynów, Żydzi, 2009, pp. 415–421.

<sup>38</sup> Documented protests against the Aryan paragraph: Roman Piotrowski, Józef Zacharzewski, Roman Chrystowski. Komunikat SARP 6–7 (1937), p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Konstantynów, Żydzi, 2009, pp. 415–416.

<sup>40</sup> Piotrowski, Roman: Lata trzydzieste w Stowarzyszeniu Architektów Polskich, in: Barucki, Wspomnienia, 2000, pp. 67–72, p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Poliński, Jan: Walka o polską architekturę, in: Komunikat SARP 7 (1939), pp. 5–6, here 6.

<sup>42</sup> Piątek, Grzegorz: Gdynia obiecana. Miasto, modernizm, modernizacja 1920–1939, Warsaw 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Konstantynów, Żydzi, 2009, pp. 417–420.



rental tenements, was the result of an inability to participate in state competitions<sup>44</sup> or to obtain state jobs. A remarkable contribution to this narrative was made by Stanisław Jankowski with his concept of a “Polish professional community”, which would bring together all classes and professional groups involved in the construction process in the SARP, which should support each other within the overarching goal of the “Polonization of the building sector”<sup>45</sup>.

## Opposition and career prospects

The ideological transformations in the SARP did not take place with the unanimous approval of its members, but resistance was increasingly diminishing. Architects with leftist views stood in solidarity with architects of Jewish origin, but they also became victims of attacks directed against the purported Judeo-Communism. Bohdan Lachert's contract at the Warsaw University of Technology was not renewed after the conflict at the SARP and also because he rejected bench ghettos in his classes.<sup>46</sup> Many of those excluded from the SARP gathered in the Democratic Club, a leftist organization founded in 1937 that brought together opponents of the fascization of Poland. A Discussion Circle of Young Architects was formed at the club, which organized lectures and published a bulletin. Marian Spychalski, head of the General Planning Department of the City of Warsaw in 1935-1939, supported young leftist architects and regularly invited them to his home to discuss urban planning themes.<sup>47</sup> Spychalski recalled that he tried to hire Julian Hochfeld, a member of the Polish Socialist Party, as an urban planner-economist, to which the City Board did not agree. Spychalski suspected that the reason was “programmatic growing anti-Semitism (...) in public institutions.”<sup>48</sup>

In the Department of Polish Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture of the PW there was only one Jewish employee, but his employment situation was unclear. Despite the omnipresent anti-Semitism, the institute run by Oskar Sosnowski still offered the study of Jewish art alongside various thematic research sections.<sup>49</sup> This study was led by Szymon Zajczyk, an art historian who, according to Rafał Żebrowski, never received a degree as a result of his background.<sup>50</sup> It is also unclear whether Zajczyk was formally employed at the university, as he is not listed in the PW's list of auxiliary staff.<sup>51</sup> Zachwatowicz writes about him as “the work leader” and lists Oskar Sosnowski as the head, who simultaneously headed the entire institute.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> In 1920s it was still possible; for instance, Maksymilian Goldberg took part in various competitions together with Hipolit Rutkowski. Jarosław Trybuś: *Warszawa niezaistniała. Niezrealizowane projekty urbanistyczne i architektoniczne Warszawy dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*. Warsaw 2012, pp. 175–176, 179, 182.

<sup>45</sup> Jankowski, Stanisław: *Polska wspólnota zawodowa*, in: *Komunikat SARP 11 (1938)*, pp. 12–13, here 12.

<sup>46</sup> Chomątowska, Beata: *Lachert i Szanajca. Architekci Awangardy*, Wołowiec 2014, p. 213; *Uchowicz, Działalność*, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Skalmimowski, Andrzej: *Sigalin. Towarzysz Odbudowy*, Wołowiec 2018, pp. 70–71.

<sup>48</sup> Spychalski, Marian: *Warszawa architekta. Wspomnienia pierwszego powojennego prezydenta stolicy*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 80–81.

<sup>49</sup> Piechotkowie, Maria i Kazimierz: *Wspomnienia architektów*, Warsaw 2021, p. 88.

<sup>50</sup> Żebrowski, Rafał: *Zajczyk, Szymon*, in: *Polski Słownik Judaistyczny (PSJ)* [https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/psj/article/18330/zajczyk\\_szymon](https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/psj/article/18330/zajczyk_szymon) [06/01/2023].

<sup>51</sup> Zachwatowicz, *Warszawska* 1967, p. 268.

<sup>52</sup> Zachwatowicz, Jan: *Katedry historii architektury*, in: *Zachwatowicz, Warszawska*, 1967, pp. 157–174, here p. 162.

Still, the position of Jewish architects differed from the situation of architects in Nazi Germany, who could not practice their profession after the Reichskulturkammer had been founded. In pre-war Poland, not all architects were affiliated with the SARP, and their exclusion did not equate to a ban on work. However, conditions for their professional activities were also becoming increasingly difficult. Many worked in Polish-Jewish companies, which, however, could not withstand the pervasive anti-Semitism. This was the case, for example, with Maksymilian Goldberg's partnership with Hipolit Rutkowski, who resigned in 1934.<sup>53</sup> With time, the circle of clients narrowed to private investors of Jewish origin.<sup>54</sup>

### Anti-Semitism from a post-war perspective

Many architects of Jewish origin were murdered during the war, and 90% of Polish Jews who survived spent the wartime in the Soviet Union. Some were politically active there, but already before the war socialist circles were the only space for them to have a career. After the war, they were able to hold high positions in the new state structures for the first time. The new political situation in Poland is reflected in the text of the SARP's statement, published after the pogroms directed against the remaining Jewish population in Poland in 1945. The General Board, again under the direction of Romuald Miller, referred to the events of the 1930s.

The SARP vigorously condemned the anti-Semitic excesses at universities demanding their liquidation, punishing the provocateurs, and calling on rectors, deans and professors to cease their tacit support of the bludgers. (...) the action started by the national-radical youth and their educator-professors was continued by the Nazis for more than five years of occupation.<sup>55</sup>

Such a direct statement of the co-responsibility of the academic staff underlining the connection of these actions with the policies of the Germans, was a strong political statement, combined with an announcement of the fight against "the remnants of Hitlerism and domestic fascism."<sup>56</sup>

A different point of view is taken by the anonymous author of the text in a publication for the 50th anniversary of the Faculty of Architecture (according to Helena Syrkus, it was Jan Zachwatowicz).<sup>57</sup> In the subsection "Difficult Years", he mentions the economic crisis and financial problems of the students and the "brutal, heinous assaults on Jewish students." Interestingly, in his opinion, external factors are responsible for this situation. "Fascist militias are overtaking student organizations," and the bench ghetto ordered by the rector was, according to the author, "introduced by violence." At the same time, there

<sup>53</sup> Uchowicz, Katarzyna: Działalność Bohdana Lacherta (1900–1987) jako architekta i teoretyka architektury (unpublished doctoral dissertation supervised by Andrzej Szczerski, defended February 23, 2021 at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow), p. 284.

<sup>54</sup> Manuscript of Klaudia Obrębska's article „Nie zdążył się wyrazić” – problematyka twórczości architektonicznej Henryka Oderfelda, Henryka Bluma, Ludwika Paradysta i Ludwika Krakowskiego. Prolegomena do badań, submitted to the journal *Wiadomości konserwatorskie* 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Stowarzyszenie Architektów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Zarząd Główny w Warszawie. Oświadczenie stowarzyszenia w sprawie antysemityzmu, 1945, Archive SARP, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Stowarzyszenie, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Syrkus, Helena: Ku idei osiedla społecznego 1925–1975, Warsaw 1976, p. 201.

is an “overthrow of the democratic authorities of the SARP and subjugation by ONR elements.” He sees his own environment as follows: “Part of the youth maintains a passive attitude, but part – conscious and progressive – fights fascism”, here he mentions some of the participators by name. Perpetrators among colleagues are absent.<sup>58</sup>

Even Roman Piotrowski, a member of the leftist SARP Executive Board that was overthrown in 1937, chose not to criticize his own colleagues. As he pointed out that he was a participator and a director of these events, his recollections may therefore be biased. He tried to justify the attitude of his colleagues, explaining it by a certain “coupling” between the activities of architects and political changes, as well as a romantic vision of a nation of bourgeois intelligentsia dating back to the period of the partitions of Poland and a reaction to the economic crisis. He summed up the attitude of some colleagues as “conservatism, short-sightedness and political blindness.”<sup>59</sup>

After the war, Piotrowski headed the Bureau for the Reconstruction of the Capital together with Józef Sigalin, who had begun studying architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology before the war and was harassed at the university because of his Jewish origin. According to an account by the architect Włodzimierz Wapiński, who studied with Sigalin, at one lecture a group of ONR men tried to force Sigalin and other listeners into seats designated for Jews and Sigalin shouted: “I feel Polish (...) it's insulting that I can't take my seat where I want!”<sup>60</sup> Sigalin never referred to these events, and even stood up with Piotrowski for Stanisław Jankowski (the aforementioned author of the concept of the “Polish national community”), who was wanted for arrest in connection with his activities in the Home Army.

Many architects seem to have completely pushed the events of the late 1930s out of their memories. Symptomatic of this phenomenon are the memoirs of Kazimierz and Maria Piechotka, two of the most prominent experts on the wooden architecture of Jewish synagogues, published in 2021, who in their extensive description of their lives as architecture students in the 1930s do not mention any anti-Semitic incidents at the university. Moreover, Maria Piechotka describes an unsuccessful outing to a young architecture ball with a group of friends in the second half of the 1930s as follows: “Perhaps it was the lack of suitable company that influenced my failure to get into the mood of the party. I withdrew unnoticed after going around all the rooms and returned home (...).”<sup>61</sup>

The evasion of the topic of anti-Semitism by witnesses to history has also resulted in many researchers not including this aspect in their work to this day. Małgorzata Rozbicka, in an article published in 2022 under the title “Union of Architecture Students as an animator of student social life”<sup>62</sup>, omits the fact that the Union was masterminded by the ONR and that Jewish students did not have access to it. Also absent from the text is

<sup>58</sup> Zachwatowicz, Zarys, 1967, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> Skalimowski, Sigalin, 2018, p. 184.

<sup>60</sup> Skalimowski, Sigalin, 2018, p. 68.

<sup>61</sup> Piechotkowie, Wspomnienia, 2021, p. 52.

<sup>62</sup> Rozbicka, Małgorzata: Związek Słuchaczy Architektury jako animator studenckiego życia towarzyskiego – czyli o Balach [Młodej] Architektury, a także Czarnych Kawach, dancingach i tzw. fuksówkach organizowanych na Wydziale Architektury Politechniki Warszawskiej w latach 1917–1948, in: Studia do Dziejów Architektury i Urbanistyki w Polsce 5 (2022), pp. 5–43.

any mention of the fact that the young architecture balls were used to spread anti-Semitic propaganda.

### Attitudes of architects

The role of individual architects in excluding Jews and the post-war perspective on this history has not yet been thoroughly investigated. In addition to open anti-Semites, there were also those tacitly acquiescing while holding prominent positions at the Warsaw University of Technology or the SARP, who for various reasons did not react to the situation or even took advantage of it, such as taking over vacant positions.

An interesting case is that of Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, who back in 1909 entered a competition to design a synagogue in Kharkiv. Although he did not win the competition, as Michał Wiśniewski stated, he transferred some of the ideas of space organization to the design of the cathedral in Katowice, while competing in the competition there.<sup>63</sup> The transformation of Szyszko-Bohusz's attitude may be symptomatic for career-oriented architects who gradually became saturated with the anti-Semitic atmosphere. Judging from the derisive nickname given to him by the community, "Everything Bohusz", which referred to the plethora of his contracts and functions<sup>64</sup>, it was primarily the prestige of the position, with a simultaneous passive attitude towards anti-Semitic discourse, that lay behind his decision to assume the leadership of the SARP in 1938-1939. A similar motivation, albeit from a much less privileged position as a young academic, probably guided Piotr Biegański, who joined the new SARP board and wrote admiringly about architecture built in the service of ideology in fascist Italy.<sup>65</sup>

Lech Niemojewski, as late as 1926, together with Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca, prepared a project for the St. Roch's Church competition in Białystok and a project for low-cost housing for an exhibition in Lviv. Ten years later, Niemojewski and Lachert found themselves on opposite sides of the ideological barricade. In Niemojewski's case, it can be argued that the decision to exclude Jewish students from lectures was dictated by an opportunistic choice of the easiest way to bring order at the expense of Jewish students.

Niemojewski gave an interview in the early 1950s to Anna Kubiak of the Jewish Historical Institute, who was collecting information about architects of Jewish descent who died during the war. Niemojewski described in superlatives his three-year collaboration with Maksymilian Goldberg during the occupation: "He independently studied Polish arch[itecture] and acquired a deep erudition. He had a phenomenal memory and wrote works in the ghetto without documents."<sup>66</sup> On the Sigalin brothers, he said they were "diligent students", and Jerzy Gelbart was, "one of the most talented architects. He was an artist. Ambitious." whereas Lucjan Korngold "approached architecture from the side of business. A typical 'purist'." Forcing Jewish students onto the bench ghetto while acknowledging their diligence, admiring the architectural talent of

<sup>63</sup> Wiśniewski, Michał: *Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz*, Kraków 2013, p. 101.

<sup>64</sup> Jędruch, Dorota: In *Modernist Costume. Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz between Academism and Modernity*, in: *Reaction to Modernism of Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz*, Kraków 2013, p. 43, 53.

<sup>65</sup> Biegański, Piotr: *Architektura Włoch Mussoliniego*, in: *Architektura i Budownictwo 10 (1937)*, pp. 367-377.

<sup>66</sup> Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, *Spuścizna Anny (Chany) Kubiak*, S/350/1.

some architects, and criticizing others in an anti-Semitic manner is a paradox that is difficult to understand today.

After analyzing the events of the 1930s and outlining the attitudes of architects, a number of questions arise that I hope will provide a starting point for further research. What impact did the split in the architectural community in the 1930s have on power relations after 1945? Did the pre-war conflicts have a continuation in the post-war period? What influence did practices of systemic discrimination and exclusion have on the architecture in the countries where Polish architects of Jewish origin migrated to and on the architecture in Poland?<sup>67</sup> Who gained a place in Polish architectural history, and who did not have a chance to appear in it? And, in the words of the authors of the special issue of the journal *kritische berichte*, dedicated to racism in architecture, “What impact do our consciously and unconsciously established canons have on the perpetuation of injustice?”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Jacobson, Michael: Pionierzy, budowniczości, wizjonerzy, in: Świątkowska, Bogna (ed.): *Architekci: leksykon pochodzących z Polski architektów działających w Palestynie i Izraelu w XX wieku*, Warsaw 2016, pp. 11–15, here: p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Heß, Regine/Fuhrmeister, Christian/Platzer, Monika: Aus dem „Toten Winkel“ zum Mainstream? Eine Bestandsaufnahme. Editorial in: *kritische berichte* 3 (2021), *Rassismus in der Architektur / Racism in Architecture*, pp. 2–6, here: p. 2.