

## *Walka* – The Newspaper of the Israeli Communists

“Eretz Israel belongs to the Mapai party and the Poles” – this is how Israeli communists spoke to Mizrahi Jews in the early 1950s, prior to the arrival of the Gomułka Aliyah, painting the elites of Mapai as coming from a foreign, minority culture.<sup>1</sup> Shortly afterwards, a Polish Jew, Moshe Sneh, became leader of the Israeli communists. His activity in Poland as the leader of the General Zionists, his work as a journalist, and his participation in the September campaign of the Polish Army were political and military demonstrations that were highly appreciated in Israel. His command of the Haganah in Palestine allowed him to join the Israeli establishment. In 1954 Moshe Sneh joined Maki (the Communist Party of Israel). Although he was a communist,<sup>2</sup> he felt he was a leader of the same stature as, for example, Ben-Gurion. The acceptance of new *olim* in Maki and the feeling of cultural belonging they found there, beyond ideology, were the result of some Maki leaders having emerged from the community of Polish Jews. The ability to understand the experiences of Jews from the diaspora, especially those from Poland who had survived the Holocaust, meant a lot to the new *olim* and could play a role in them forming a connection with Maki’s community.<sup>3</sup> The Gomułka Aliyah presented a rare opportunity for Maki to expand its group of members, especially the Jewish sector; it could allow Maki to strengthen its Jewish grassroots communities with people from cultural and political spheres that were familiar to its leaders. At that time, it was thought that it would allow for the enlargement of the electoral base, to which – with the help of *Walka* [The Fight] – they wanted to stay connected.

1 Israel State Archives in Jerusalem (hereinafter: ISA), file 2161/16 (lamed), a report by the Israeli secret services from a communist meeting on 30 July 1949, 9 August 1949.

2 S. Langnas, “Dziwołagi” [Freaks], *Nowiny Izraelskie*, no. 37 (1954): 2; “Polscy Żydzi w Kneset: VI Blok komunistyczny” [Polish Jews in the Kneset: The 6th Communist Bloc], *Nowiny Izraelskie*, no. 149 (1953): 7.

3 Moshe Sneh (Mojżesz Kleinbaum) (1909–72) was born in Radzyń Podlaski, son of Szymon and Chawa, née Lichtensztein; Archive of the University of Warsaw (hereinafter: AUW), file 26.55, file of Mojżesz Kleinbaum; Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (hereinafter: AINR), file 1218/10161, personal records: Sneh Moshe, card 5; E. She’altiel, *Tamid be-meri: Moshe Sneh, biografyah 1909–1948* [Always in Resistance: A Biography of Moshe Sneh, 1909–1948] (Jerusalem, 2000), 15–19.

## 6.1 The Gomulka Aliyah and Maki

The first large wave of active communists to arrive in Israel after the war came with the Gomulka Aliyah. At that time, the structure of Maki was clearly divided along ethnic lines, with Jewish leaders and Arabs composing the general membership. Because of the leftist sympathies of the Gomulka Aliyah, the Israeli communists saw it as a rare opportunity to enlarge their electorate in the upcoming election in 1959. Maki's mobilization effort to gain support from this *aliyah* was greater than that of the other parties; none of the other political groups held as many conventions and meetings for Polish Jews as Maki did at that time.<sup>4</sup> The significance of the Gomulka Aliyah in Maki was also growing significantly due to ethnic reasons. Maki was divided into separate Arab and Jewish groups, scattered throughout various Arab towns. The decentralized structure and separation of these two ethnic groups led to intra-party rivalry between Arabs and Jews, which was further driven by inequality and class stratification between them.<sup>5</sup> Among the rank-and-file communists, the ruptures and differences that had previously existed beneath the surface exploded in moments of crisis for the party, leading to a division into separate sections and factions. Events in the party's history have shown that Marxism

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4 *Walka*, no. 4 (1959): 2, 3.

5 Maki was derived from the Communist Party of Palestine, which was founded in 1923. The Jewish side maintained its dominant position in the party's leadership, and only when it was accepted by the Comintern did it open up to the Arab community more broadly (the Comintern hoped for a stronger Arab influence within the party). Conflicts over national interests divided party members. In 1940 a separate structure was established, called "the Jewish section." The actual split occurred at the end of 1943, after the Arab group left the party and formed the National Liberation League in Palestine. The creation of Israel changed the situation in the communist party. Some Arab communists became refugees in neighboring Arab countries or settled in the West Bank, and the waves of new *olim* coming to Israel strengthened the Jewish side of the party. In 1948 the National Liberation League joined Maki, as did the Hebrew Communist Party (*Komunistim Ivriyim*), to form the Jewish-Arab Communist Party. The next stage of strengthening the Jewish side, important from the point of view of the new Polish *olim*, was Moshe Sneh's group leaving Mapam and joining Maki in 1954. E. Rekhess, "Jews and Arabs in the Israeli Communist Party," in *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, ed. M. J. Esman and I. Rabinovich (Ithaca, 1988), 123–26; C. Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East from the 1948 War of Independence to the Present*, updated by Shlomo Gazit, with an introduction by I. Herzog and M. Herzog (London, 2004); M. J. Cohen, *The Origins and Evolution of the Arab-Zionist Conflict* (Berkeley, 1987), 117–32; M. J. Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers, 1945–1948* (Princeton, 1982), 184–200; M. Rodinson, *Israel and the Arabs*, trans. M. Perl and B. Pearce (New York, 1982), 7–36.

did not stifle the Jewish-Arab conflict or manage to keep both groups free of nationalistic prejudices.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, in the first years after the creation of the Jewish state, the Israeli communists primarily used the Arab sector's internal resources. Jewish leaders were in charge of the party while the party's grass-roots masses were recruited from the Arab population. The party's leaders, not wanting only the Arab sector to grow, showed great determination to gain the political support of new Jewish *olim*, especially those coming from the Soviet bloc.<sup>7</sup>

Before 1956 the waves of Jews coming from Poland to Israel were usually Zionist in character. Most Israeli political parties absorbed new immigrants by making contact with them through their organizations, delegates, and youth movements operating in the diaspora. The Zionist character of the *aliyot* meant that they willingly opened themselves up to the Hebrew-speaking majority and were interested primarily in political parties with a strong national ethos, most often with leaders who were members of the government. The situation was very different for Maki, whose potential members had belonged to the communist movement in their countries of origin and had decided to assimilate, which weakened and often completely negated their Jewish roots; in most cases, they had not considered immigrating to Israel. The *aliyah* of Polish communists in the mid-1950s was caused by anti-Semitic events and the failure of the path towards assimilation that they had taken. Therefore, the attempts made by the Israeli communists to attract new Polish *olim* was first met with reluctance, rejection, and pejorative comments:

The party's goal is, as asserted in the "congress" speeches, "to awaken the *olim* from a state of apathy, torpor, helplessness, and powerlessness – to fight, to act." A beautiful, glorious statement. There only remains the question of what language will be used to utter this magical spell that is meant to awaken from lethargy the "sleeping princess" – the masses of *olim*. For slogans formulated in a stiff, Russian-sounding language

6 Rekhess, "Jews and Arabs in the Israeli Communist Party," 121.

7 ISA, file 2175/2 (lamed), a report by the Israeli internal security service, 24 July 1950, 30 July 1950, and 3 July 1950; ISA, file 2175/2 (lamed), a report by the Israeli internal security service, receipt date of the letter is 24 March 1950; ISA, file 2161/16 (lamed), a report by the Israeli secret services from communist meetings on 30 July 1950 and 9 August 1949; ISA, file 2161/16 (lamed), a report by the Israeli secret services, 4 September 1949; ISA, file 2175/2 (lamed), a report by the Israeli internal security service, 12 and 24 March 1950.

no longer resonate with us – the *olim* from Poland. If they suited us, we wouldn't have escaped from them by land and sea, to a completely different part of the world. ... These exceptionally unsuccessful formulations in the field of communist demagogy were, after all, available to us in abundance there, and perhaps even in a superior, more intelligent version.<sup>8</sup>

Maki was joined by activists hardened by work in the communist movement and shaped in the prewar Communist Party of Poland,<sup>9</sup> faithful to Marxist ideology. Maki also gained followers because it supported anti-fascist movements. Many Polish Jews were also sympathetic to communism and Moscow due to memories of the Holocaust and the USSR's participation in liberating them from fascist occupation. Polish Jews who joined the Israeli communists declared: "We, a nation of ghettos and death camps, a nation of victims of fascism and Nazism, a nation of victims of Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka, know who murdered us and who liberated us. [...] Hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens – victims of Nazism – realize that they survived thanks to the victory of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Army."<sup>10</sup> In light of the recent events of the Holocaust, the support for anti-fascist organizations seemed to be a manifestation of political realism, securing Jewish interests in a political center other than the West. In addition, Maki activists hoped that the maladjustment of the new *olim* and their longing for Polish culture, despite the risk of marginalization in Israel, would eventually push the *olim* in their direction.<sup>11</sup> There was therefore an urgent need to establish a newspaper in Polish in order to establish contact between the party and these new *olim*. And so *Walka* was created.

8 P. Dubiel, "Piosenka pana Mikunisa" [Mr. Mikunis's Song], *Po Prostu*, no. 6 (1959): 1; "Konferencja nowych olim z Polski" [A Conference of New *Olim* from Poland], *Walka*, no. 7 (1958): 12; "Konferencja nowych olim w Jerozolimie" [A Conference of New *Olim* in Jerusalem], *Walka*, no. 8 (1958): 12; "Akademia w Hajfie" [The Academy in Haifa], *Walka*, no. 8 (1958): 12; "Konferencje nowych olim z Polski w Tel-Awiewie i w Natenii" [Conferences of New *Olim* from Poland in Tel Aviv and Netanya], *Walka*, no. 10 (1958): 12; "Konferencje nowych olim z Polski w Tel-Awiewie i w Natenii" [Conferences of New *Olim* from Poland in Tel Aviv and Netanya], *Walka*, no. 10 (1958): 12.

9 The Communist Party of Poland (the Communist Workers' Party of Poland from 1919 onwards) was active from 1918 to 1925. It was a section of the Comintern and was dissolved by it in 1938.

10 "Słowo do olim z Polski" [A Message for the *Olim* from Poland], *Walka*, no. 10 (1965): 6.

11 M. Vilner, "Apel do nowych olim z Polski" [An Appeal to the New *Olim* from Poland], *Walka*, no. 11 (1958): 3, 10.

## 6.2 Walka

The first issue of *Walka* was published in January 1958. It was one of many foreign-language newspapers owned by Maki. The chronology and number of Maki's foreign-language publications can serve as a key to describing its ethnic character and the relative strength of members belonging to various groups, as well as the ethnoracial politics of the party. The ethnic identity and cultural diversity of the party can be discerned in the languages used, the strongest of which were initially Yiddish, Arabic, and Hebrew.<sup>12</sup> In the first years after the end of World War II, there was a strong presence of Romanian and Bulgarian press publications, corresponding to the number and organizational potential of Jews from these countries.<sup>13</sup> However, there were no publications in Polish due to the low number of communists coming to Israel from Poland; they were not mentioned as a significant group in Shabak's reports.<sup>14</sup> After the arrival of the Gomulka Aliyah, Adolf Berman, the editor of *Walka*, justified the need to publish it as follows: "For a long time, the need to create this necessary platform has been growing. After all, almost one third of the population of Israel is from Poland – 150,000 Polish Jews came to Israel after World War II. Now a progressive Polish-language newspaper is being requested by a large number of new *olim* who do not want to be forced to rely solely on reactionary press contending with progressive ideas and socialism."<sup>15</sup> Adolf Berman's speech urging for the creation of *Walka* was primarily propaganda; it did not indicate the actual reasons for the absence of Polish-language publications on the Israeli market until the mid-1950s. Most of the Jews who decided to come to Israel shortly after the end of World War II had strong connections to Jewish culture, so they were satisfied with the Yiddish press, which was very popular at that time. The meetings of Maki leaders with party members from outside the Arab

12 The strongest position was held by the Hebrew-language press with the newspaper *Kol ha-Am* [Voice of the People] and the monthly magazines *Kol ha-No'ar* [Voice of the Youth], *Zo ha-Derech* [This is the Way], and *Aloneich* [Your Magazine]. In addition to these, there were also weekly newspapers in Arabic: *Al-Ittihad* [Unity], *Al-Djadid* [New], and *Al-Ghad* [Tomorrow]. *Walka*, no. 4 (1958): 5.

13 In Hungarian, *Nepszewa* [The Voice of the People]; in French, *La Voix du peuple* [The Voice of the People]; in Greek, *Phoni Tou Laou* [The Voice of the People]; in Romanian, *Glasuj poporului* [The Voice of the People]; and in Bulgarian, *Narodea Glas* [The Voice of the People]. *Walka*, no. 4 (1958): 5.

14 Shabak, or Sherut ha-Bitachon ha-Klali, also known as Shin Bet, is the Israeli internal security service.

15 A. Berman, "Z obozem postępu" [With the Camp of Progress], *Walka*, no. 1 (1958): 1.

sector were largely conducted in Yiddish.<sup>16</sup> By using Yiddish, the communists demonstrated a strong connection with the Jewish nation and with a bygone world that had been lost in the Holocaust. This language was good for expressing the messages of the left-wing movement, the Jewish workers, and the proletariat, so Israeli communists, whose leaders were of Polish descent, could forget about publications in Polish and replace them with ones in Yiddish, which felt less out of place in Israeli public space. The creation of press publications in Polish was important because of its role in facilitating the adaptation of Polonized Jews from the Gomułka Aliyah.

The editor of *Walka* was Adolf Berman. He was an important figure in the politics of remembrance<sup>17</sup> who was esteemed as one of the ghetto heroes.

16 The Yad Tabenkin Archive – The Research and Documentation Center of the United Kibbutz Movement (hereinafter: YTA), brochure from a congress, unordered materials.

17 Adolf Berman (1906–79) was born in Warsaw, the son of Iser Lejb and Guta, née Bernikier. His father was a merchant who owned a shop with leather goods. His mother was a home-maker; she died of cancer in 1936. Adolf had four siblings – his brother Mieczysław died in Treblinka, and his sister Anna Berman-Wolek, according to Jakub Berman's account, died in Treblinka together with her husband and six-year-old daughter. Their father also died in Treblinka. His siblings who survived the war (both in the USSR) were his sister Irena Berman-Olecka and brother Jakub – one of the four most important people in the Polish People's Republic. Until the age of nine, Adolf studied at home, and in 1916 he entered Stefan Żuchowski's grammar school in Warsaw. In 1918 he transferred to the Kreczmar Gymnasium, where, after seven years of education, he obtained his diploma. On 12 October 1925, he applied for admission to the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Warsaw, where he studied psychology and philosophy, and in 1931 he obtained a doctorate in psychology. He taught at secondary schools and published academic articles on social psychology and education. He also worked in the Department of Psychoanalysis at the University of Warsaw under Professor Władysław Witwicki and Professor Tadeusz Kotarbiński. He became involved in the activities of the Jewish institutions in Warsaw connected to the Center for Orphans' Welfare (CENTOS). From 1925 onwards, he was a member of Left-wing Po'alei Tziyon, and took care of the organization's publications in Yiddish and Polish. During the war, he worked as the director of CENTOS. In the ghetto, he supported the resistance movement. He was one of the founders of the Anti-Fascist Bloc in March 1942 and the creator of its press publication *Der Ruf*. From 1946 to 1949, he was the chairman of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. His left-wing and even communist views were not a sufficient guarantee, and in 1949 he was deprived of his post due to his Zionist beliefs. At the same time, he chaired the Left-wing Po'alei Tziyon Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party, and then, after merging with the Right-wing Po'alei Tziyon Jewish Socialist Workers' Party, he chaired the Po'alei Tziyon United Jewish Workers' Party. In 1950 he immigrated to Israel and was elected to the Second Knesset. In 1954 he joined Maki and was elected a member of its Central Committee. He used pseudonyms at various times: Adam, Borowski, and Ludwik. A. Sobór-Świdorska, *Jakub Berman: Biografia komunisty* [Jakub Berman: A Biography of a Communist] (Warsaw, 2009), 22; AUW, file for Berman Abraham Adolf, biography, 12 September 1925; AUW, file 20.114, biography of Adolf Berman, 5 October 1933; AUW, certificate issued by Professor

He was the first Holocaust survivor to sit in the Knesset. Berman chaired the Israel-Poland Friendship League and the Organization of Anti-Nazi Fighters, and he was a member of the Second Knesset. His political path served as a legitimization of the voices of Polish Jews who had survived the Holocaust. He was not a *sabra* or a *chalutz*; he did not have any pioneering ethos in his biography. He presented and defended the cultural values of the diaspora, trying to find a place for them in the Israeli reality. Most importantly, his fighting in the Warsaw ghetto was well remembered in Israeli society. Among Polish Jews, memories of their experiences of persecution went beyond party divisions, so despite the marginalization of communists in Israel, Berman could cross the border between the communist party and the broader public.<sup>18</sup> A contact network between Berman and the leaders of Polish Jews in Israel was established around the politics of remembrance, as were connections based on their shared place of origin.<sup>19</sup> Due to this reputation, Berman was able to escape public isolation, which was admitted even by his harshest critics: “As for Berman, if one treats him as a political opponent, one must not forget that he was an active member of the underground movement in the Warsaw ghetto and outside it. And this is where even the fiercest of his enemies raise their hats to him.”<sup>20</sup> Moshe Sneh did not make reference to Poland very often; he rather avoided the subject. Poland did not have any special meaning for him, and his gaze went further, towards the primary center of communism – Moscow. This is why it was Adolf Berman who organized the Polish-speaking community of the Gomulka Aliyah. His poor knowledge of Hebrew naturally shifted him towards foreign-language circles: “Adolf Berman, the ‘little brother’ of the great ‘red Jakub’<sup>21</sup> is one of the ‘youngest’ in the Knesset. He came to Israel in 1950. [...] Adolf Berman has as much trouble with the Hebrew language as other *olim chadashim* [new immigrants – E. K.]. He reads his speeches in Hebrew but

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Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Łódź, 5 December 1949; AINR, file 1268/134, personal records: Berman Adolf, cards 1–2; M. Shore, *Nowoczesność jako źródło cierpień* [Modernity as a Source of Suffering], translated into Polish by M. Sutowski (Warsaw, 2012), 63; D. Harten, “‘Jardenia’ Warszawska: Wspomnienia o akademickich działaczach syjonistycznych” [“Jardenia” in Warsaw: Recollections of Academic Zionist Activists], *Nowiny Izraelskie*, no. 148 (1954): 4.

18 For example, communists’ access to areas under military rule was restricted; as a member of the Haganah, Moshe Sneh was granted permission the very first time, although other Maki members were often denied access. ISA, file 17004/7 (gimel, lamed), list of Maki’s members.

19 Diaspora Archive in Tel Aviv (hereinafter: DA), file for Adolf Berman, letter from Yitzhak Grünbaum to Adolf Berman, undated; see also DA, file for Adolf Berman, letter from Shmuel Eisenstadt to Adolf Berman, 15 April 1969; Prof. Eisenstadt, *Walka*, no. 10 (1958): 7.

20 “Polscy Żydzi w Kneset,” 7.

21 Jakub Berman, Deputy Prime Minister of Poland from 1954 to 1956.

writes them in the Latin alphabet.”<sup>22</sup> Adolf Berman came from Poland only a few years before the Gomulka Aliyah, which is why he was a natural candidate for the position of editor-in-chief of the Polish-language newspaper *Walka*.

Despite the initial reluctance of Polish Jews towards Maki, *Walka* gained the attention of readers from the Gomulka Aliyah. This was largely due to the difficulties the *olim* faced in adapting and the fact that *Walka* offered an incisive assessment of Israeli reality. With the constant influx of new citizens to Israel, ethnic, class, and racial differences naturally arose, as did antagonism and dissatisfaction. The problems of overcoming the difficulties of everyday life and the lack of work and housing pushed into oblivion the anti-Semitic events that had been the cause of their departures from Poland. However, questions returned: “They cannot in any way cope with the question that torments them – how did it happen that they left a socialist country and came to a capitalist country?”<sup>23</sup> Maki’s political power grew out of the general privation and feeling of being lost in their new home experienced by former communist activists from Poland; while longing for their country of origin, Maki became a comforting place for them to gather. This was apparent at meetings and congresses: “The great and impressive national congress of new *olim* from Poland struck all three parties of the government coalition like a hammer to the head. Over 1,000 new *olim* came from 55 cities, settlements, and villages, from all over the country, to the call of the Communist Party of Israel [Maki] – it gave a beautiful and worthy response to Israeli reactionaries and their ‘left-wing’ allies. [...] The reactionaries began to sound an alarm that the communists were gaining control of the *aliyah* from Poland.”<sup>24</sup> The communists tried to utilize the helplessness and powerlessness of the new *olim* by translating it into votes and real power. The communist party built its strength on them. Maki leaders held ideological meetings and conducted political discussions that allowed freshly arrived communists from Poland to identify with the worldview they were most familiar with,<sup>25</sup> especially in light of the everyday difficulties they faced while settling in their new home. “The *olim* came to this

22 “Polscy Żydzi w Kneset,” 7.

23 Vilner, “Apel do nowych olim z Polski,” 3; see also S. L[agnas], “Lekcja Nazaretu” [Nazareth’s Lesson], *Nowiny Izraelskie*, no. 45 (1954): 2.

24 “Nowi olim z Polski” [The New *Olim* from Poland], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 11.

25 ISA, file 2161/16 (lamed), a report by the Israeli internal security service on what was happening in the *olim* camps, 5 May 1949; J. Lipski, “Między olim” [Among the *Olim*], *Walka*, no. 2 (1958): 6; “Pozostaliśmy wierni wielkim ideom komunizmu”: Spotkanie nowych olim z Polski, sympatyków KPI w okręgu Tel Awiw-Jaffa” [We Have Remained Faithful to the Great Ideas of Communism: A Meeting of New *Olim* from Poland and the Communist Party of Israel’s Supporters in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa District], *Walka*, no. 4 (1958): 4.

meeting, they came in huge numbers – full of despair, searching for a way out of their terrible situation. Jobs with very little compensation and meager wages, survival on pennies, unfair distribution of state taxes, discrimination against people over 40, different pay for the same work.”<sup>26</sup>

They were drawn towards the Israeli communists by their ideological proximity. Due to its position on the Israeli political scene, Maki could not help them in their everyday difficulties. Maki was a legal party in Israel, gaining a small sphere of influence in the local government, the Knesset and Histadrut, but at the same time its anti-state propaganda limited the political space in which it could be accepted. Some *olim*, wishing to obtain state aid after their arrival – employment and housing – hid their involvement in communism or supported the Israeli communists discreetly. Israeli security forces were afraid of an increase in anti-state attitudes, and when Maki began publishing *Walka*, Shabak grew even more vigilant. A letter sent by Elkana Margalit from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Jewish Agency’s Propaganda Department, and then to Shabak, stated: “A communist daily newspaper, *Walka*, is being published. It has been said that it’s very popular among the new *olim*. I’ve already told you at our meetings that the Communist Party is spreading propaganda among the new *olim* from Poland. It seems that the matter is now very important and very urgent, so at our next meeting we need to discuss it.”<sup>27</sup> Correspondence between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Jewish Agency, and Mapai shows, on the one hand, the way Israel was organized – a “party state” – and the domination of Mapai and, on the other hand, Shabak’s reaction against the publication of *Walka*, which was to closely monitor it as they did other communists in Israel.

The *aliyah* in the second half of the 1950s triggered fierce rivalry between Israeli political parties for the new *olim* from Poland. Of course, the strongest competition was between Maki and the groups on the left side of the political spectrum that were the closest to it ideologically – Mapam, Ahdut HaAvoda, and the Bund.<sup>28</sup> It was in response to the communists’ Polish-language newspaper

26 B. Piotrowska [F. Mańska], “Słowa, słowa, słowa ...” [Words, Words, Words ...], *Od Nowa*, no. 11 (1959): 2.

27 Archive of the Labour Party in Beit Berl, file 2/949/1957/8 (9/49/57), letter from Moshe Kitron to Giora Yoseftal containing a report, 17 March 1958; Archive of the Labour Party in Beit Berl, file 2/949/1957/8 (9/49/57), letter from Elkana Margalit to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem (about Apelbaum), 3 January 1958 (together with a press publication on the topic of *Walka*).

28 According to statistics, five district conferences were held in 1958 (for the Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Netanya-Hadera, Herzliya, and Haifa districts), with the participation of only 400 new *olim* from Poland, from 37 cities and settlements. In addition to the conferences, over 100 meetings of new *olim* from Poland took place, in roughly 40 locations.

*Walka* that Mapai created *Kurier* and Mapam created *Od Nowa*.<sup>29</sup> The degree to which these parties were determined to gain the support of new *olim* from Poland reflects their concern over the fervor of the Israeli communists in their efforts to discredit their closest left-wing competitors. It seems that no other newspaper published as many attacks on political rivals as *Walka*. For example, in *Walka* you could find accusations that Mapam's newspaper *Od Nowa* did not "glorify the October Revolution"<sup>30</sup> and found itself in "the wilderness of anti-communism,"<sup>31</sup> that the Bund's newspaper *Po Prostu* had "descended to the position of renegades and traitors of the revolutionary workers' movement," and that the marriage of *Nowiny* and *Kurier* "gave birth to a monster," a newspaper that "fuels the anti-communist farce in order to poison large numbers of new *olim*."<sup>32</sup>

In competition with other Polish-language press publications, *Walka* was in a much worse position since it was forced underground and deprived of free and widespread distribution. People were forbidden from reading *Walka* in

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- "Konferencje nowych *olim*" [Conferences of New *Olim*], *Walka*, no. 1 (1959): 12; "Nowi *olim* z Polski" [The New *Olim* from Poland], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 11; J. Temkin, "Od Nowa' – po staremu ..." [Od Nowa – The Same Old Thing ...], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 6; J. Lipski, "O Bólu serca' M[arka] Gefena" [On M[arek] Gefen's "Heartache"], *Walka*, no. 10 (1958): 5; "Jak pismo *Od Nowa* 'uczciło' Rewolucję Październikową?" [How did *Od Nowa* "Honor" the October Revolution?], *Walka*, no. 12 (1958): 4.
- 29 "Od Nowa' – organ outsiderów" [*Od Nowa* – An Organ of Outsiders], *Walka*, no. 4 (1962): 2; "Refleksje powyborcze w Kiryat-Gat" [Post-Election Reflections in Kiryat-Gat], *Walka*, no. 9 (1959); "Nowi olim z Polski" [The New *Olim* from Poland], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 4; "Dwulicowość Mapam" [Mapam's Double Standards], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 11; M. Lam, "Mapamowska dwulicowość i obłuda na łamach 'Od Nowa'" [Mapam's Double Standards and Hypocrisy in *Od Nowa*], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 4; "Redakcji 'Od Nowa' – ku rozwadze" [The *Od Nowa* Editorial Team – Towards Prudence], *Walka*, no. 6 (1964): 2; "O postawie 'Od Nowa' – raz jeszcze" [*Od Nowa*'s Stance – Once Again], *Walka*, no. 7 (1964): 2; "Od Nowa' – na bezdrożach szowinizmu" [*Od Nowa* – In the Wilderness of Chauvinism], *Walka*, no. 11 (1964): 2; "Trucizna w 'Od Nowa'" [Poison in *Od Nowa*], *Walka*, no. 10 (1962): 2; "Od Nowa' i historia 3 listów" [*Od Nowa* and the Story of Three Letters], *Walka*, no. 3 (1961): 2; "Czym 'Od Nowa' karmi swoich czytelników?" [What Does *Od Nowa* Feed to Its Readers?], *Walka*, no. 3 (1961): 2; "Od Nowa' potępia strajk" [*Od Nowa* Condemns the Strike], *Walka*, no. 4 (1961): 2.
- 30 "Jak pismo 'Od Nowa' 'uczciło' Rewolucję Październikową?" [How Did *Od Nowa* "Honor" the October Revolution?], *Walka*, no. 12 (1958): 4; "Po Prostu' organ zależny [*Po Prostu* – A Dependent Press Organ], *Walka*, no. 12 (1958): 4; "Co wynikło z 'małżeństwa' 'Kurier – Nowiny'" [What Has Resulted from the "Marriage" of *Kurier and Nowiny*], *Walka*, no. 12 (1958): 4.
- 31 "Od Nowa' – na bezdrożach anty-komunizmu" [*Od Nowa* – In the Wilderness of Anti-Communism], *Walka*, no. 6 (1960): 2.
- 32 "Co wynikło z 'małżeństwa' 'Kurier – Nowiny,'" 4.

the *kibbutzim*: “In the *kibbutzim* there is political discrimination against those who think differently and an inquisition against Marxist-Leninists! [...] *Kol Ha-Am*, *Frei Israel*, and *Walka* are forbidden reading material in the *kibbutzim*, and these newspapers are not allowed in the libraries or reading rooms of Mapam’s *kibbutzim*.”<sup>33</sup> Members of the communist party acted on behalf of their group voluntarily and selflessly. They distributed the Hebrew-language newspaper *Kol Ha-Am* as part of their political duties early in the morning, before going to work. The distribution of *Walka* was also carried out on a voluntary basis.<sup>34</sup> It was not easy since, according to an account by one of its readers, “the Mapai militia attacked the communist press distributors and harassed communist activists.”<sup>35</sup>

Social ostracism limited the free reception of the newspaper, which was supported by voluntary contributions from party supporters. Before the elections, there were appeals for fundraising; financial campaigns were carried out, including a press fund, with the following appeal: “The Communist Party of Israel [Maki] is the only party in Israel that has no other means at its disposal than the support given to it by the members and supporters of the party, the working people.”<sup>36</sup> In contrast with the powerful propaganda machine of Mapai, which could tempt people with jobs and subject communists to intimidation and surveillance, Maki’s means were very modest. Communists appealed to the unemployed<sup>37</sup> and low-wage public sector workers to contribute to Maki’s election fund: “We appeal to all our readers: tax yourselves liberally for the Communist Party’s electoral fund! Provide the necessary funds for a momentous battle to defend the interests of the working class and the working people of Israel.”<sup>38</sup>

Unlike other Israeli parties, the press publication of the Israeli communists was extremely significant for their group; it was a daily ideological guide, especially for people living in difficult conditions and on the margins of society. The idea was to be well informed and to maintain close ranks and solidarity

33 Lipski, “O ‘Bólu serca’ M[arka] Gefena,” 5.

34 *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 8.

35 “Demokratyczne wybory w Kiryat Gat” [“Democratic Elections” in Kiryat Gat], *Walka*, no. 7 (1959): 5.

36 “Fundusz wyborczy KPI” [The Communist Party of Israel’s Election Fund], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 12; see also “Apel KC Komunistycznej Partii Izraela” [An Appeal from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Israel], *Walka*, no. 6 (1958): 3.

37 A. Berman, “Nowi olim z Polski w obliczu wyborów do Histadrutu” [The New Olim from Poland Faced with the Election to Histadrut], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 1.

38 “Fundusz wyborczy KPI” [The Communist Party of Israel’s Election Fund], *Walka*, no. 5 (1959): 12.

between party members. “I am sending you two lirot for the election fund and the fight – for our party. Don’t thank me for the money. Because nobody does anyone any favors. Every healthy-minded worker should fulfil his or her duty. If I earn some more money, I will send it, too. I didn’t know about the convention of new *olim* organized by the Communist Party of Israel [Maki] because I can’t get *Walka* in my village. Please send it to me,” one member declared.<sup>39</sup>

The underground political life of the Communist Party’s members forced them to support the sole daily platform for communication and connection between them – the press – with financial contributions. The Polish legation in Tel Aviv provided facilitation and support for the Polish Jews connected to the communist party. It took advantage of their longing for their country of origin and their attachment to their political past, and under the banner of promoting the country from which the new *olim* came, it built a network of contacts that could also be used by Maki. Its political branch was the Israel-Poland Friendship League.<sup>40</sup> It used the new *olim* to build local branches of the league, which also became meeting places for supporters of the Israeli communist party.<sup>41</sup> The new Polish *olim* were called upon to create organizational committees in all major centers, which would take the initiative to create local branches of the league.<sup>42</sup> In the first half of 1958, branches of the league existed only in Tel Aviv and Haifa, and in the period from 1 July to 31 December 1958, they were formed in Jerusalem, Kiryat Gat, Be’er Sheva, Kiryat Chaim, Givat Olga, Holon, Beit ha-Rusi, Rishon le-Tziyon, Ezra Bitzaron, and Netanya. Additional smaller groups – “circles” – were established that sympathized with Poland. Due to financial shortages, these were not formal structures within the league, but the league’s board of directors coordinated with them to organize talks, screen films, and lend out newspapers and books. People were attracted to the league by a feeling of “familiarity” – it conveyed a sense of the old country, with its ceremonies and academies.<sup>43</sup> Their opponents from Mapam

39 *Walka*, no. 8 (1959): 12.

40 “Apel do nowych olim” [An Appeal to the New *Olim*], *Walka*, no. 3 (1958): 5.

41 “Oddział Ligi w Kiryat Gat” [The Branch of the League in Kiryat Gat], *Walka*, no. 10 (1958): 12.

42 “Apel do nowych olim,” 5.

43 “Zebrania Ligi Przyjaźni Izrael – Polska” [Meetings of the Israel-Poland Friendship League], *Walka*, no. 7 (1958): 12; “Konferencja nowych olim w Jerozolimie” [A Conference of the New *Olim* in Jerusalem], *Walka*, no. 8 (1958): 12; “Akademia w Hajfie” [The Academy in Haifa], *Walka*, no. 8 (1958): 12; “Konferencje nowych olim z Polski w Tel-Awii i w Natenii” [Conferences of the New *Olim* from Poland in Tel Aviv and Netanya], *Walka*, no. 10 (1958): 12; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw (hereinafter: AMFA), folder 21, file 711, bundle 50, report from the period of 1 July to 31 December 1958 sent

characterized them as follows: “The same old *burnyje aptodismenty*<sup>44</sup> erupting, perhaps, from force of habit rather than real conviction, the same arranged, previously agreed-upon statements by ‘simple people,’ the same jargon, just translated into a superior language, but still tasteless, saturated with vitriol towards everything that is not connected to the party, and idolatrous admiration for everything that comes from the Kremlin.”<sup>45</sup>

Another motivation for the new *olim* to become involved with Israeli communists was their desire to maintain contact with the Polish legation and their hope for a return visa or even closer contact with their socialist homeland of Poland, to which they still felt attached. The activity of the Israel-Poland Friendship League, stimulated by the Gomulka Aliyah, seemed to be a good way to support the propaganda campaigns of the Polish People’s Republic’s legation in Tel Aviv.<sup>46</sup> *Walka* became a propaganda tool of this diplomatic post and was subsidized by it:<sup>47</sup> “The legation appreciates the postulates presented by the Israel-Poland Friendship League, which always conducts propaganda for Poland as actively as possible. Our help for the league will be in the form of more propaganda material of all kinds and a small financial injection from time to time, essential for conducting the planned campaigns.”<sup>48</sup> In addition to seeking funds to support the publication of a Polish-language newspaper, the Israeli communists demanded greater financial support from the Polish legation in Tel Aviv:

Due to the large number of immigrants from Poland arriving in Israel in the past two years, our party needs to carry out a special kind of propaganda and organizational work among these new members of the Israeli population. [...] The broad and intense activity developed

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from the legation of the Polish People’s Republic in Tel Aviv to the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 19 December 1958, cards 5–8.

44 Russian: propaganda slogans and clichés.

45 Piotrowska [Mańska], “Słowa, słowa, słowa ...,” 2.

46 AMFA, folder 21, file 711, bundle 50, report from the period of 1 July to 31 December 1958 sent from the legation of the Polish People’s Republic in Tel Aviv to the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 19 December 1958, cards 5–8.

47 AMFA, folder 21, file 724, bundle 51, letter from the legation of the Polish People’s Republic in Tel Aviv to the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 27 February 1959.

48 AMFA, folder 21, file 712, bundle 50, report from the period of 1 August 1959 to 1 March 1960 sent from the legation of the Polish People’s Republic in Tel Aviv to the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 19 December 1958, cards 5–8.

among immigrants by all the Zionist political parties publishing several newspapers in Polish, as well as the need to further develop our propaganda work, puts before us at least the task of transforming the Polish-language monthly newspaper *Walka* into a weekly. At the same time, we've decided to expand the field of cultural activity of the Israeli-Polish Friendship Society,<sup>49</sup> which is an important tool for our work among new immigrants. It is also extremely important in view of the fact that even those Polish immigrants who sympathize with our party are afraid of closer acquaintance with it because of political and economic terror. The Israeli-Polish Friendship Society could serve as a kind of substitute platform for their progressive activities. The transformation of *Walka* into a weekly publication will undoubtedly further increase the financial losses we face. What is more, the expansion of the cultural activity of the Israel-Poland Friendship Society is also conditioned to a large extent by the already very limited financial possibilities of this organization. Due to the importance of publishing *Walka* as a weekly, especially in connection with the upcoming elections to the Congress of Trade Unions and general elections to the Parliament and municipal authorities, and due to the importance of expanding the cultural activities of the Israel-Poland Friendship Society, we decided to ask you for some brotherly help for these purposes. In connection with the above, we ask you to grant us monthly aid of 1,000 Israeli lira for the weekly publication of *Walka* and 500 lira per month for the expansion of the cultural activities of the Israel-Poland Friendship Society.<sup>50</sup>

The letter was signed by Shmuel Mikunis.<sup>51</sup> The following response was sent: "In our opinion, the transformation of the monthly *Walka* into a weekly

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49 This name was used mistakenly in the letter. The society was connected with the ruling party. After 1953 Maki separated from the society and established its own organization, but the name of the former organization is still used in the text.

50 AMFA, folder 21, file 724, bundle 51, letter from Shmuel Mikunis (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Israel) to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, 21 December 1958; AMFA, folder 21, file 724, bundle 51, letter concerning subsidies for the league and *Walka*, 5 February 1959.

51 AMFA, folder 21, file 724, bundle 51, letter concerning subsidies for the league and *Walka*, 5 February 1959; see also AMFA, folder 21, file 724, bundle 51, letter from Shmuel Mikunis (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Israel) to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, 21 December 1958. Shmuel Mikunis (1903–82) was from Ukraine, from which he emigrated in 1921, and was a member of the First through Seventh Knessets (1951–74) in Israel. From 1939 onwards, he was a member of the Palestinian Communist Party, secretary of its Central Committee, and secretary of Maki (1947–74).

is not advisable, since frequent publication of this newspaper, with the existing difficulties in selecting material, could have a negative impact on the quality level of the publication. However, we are willing to grant an additional 200 IL [Israeli lirot] per month to increase the attractiveness of the monthly publication – better paper, more pages, more photos.”<sup>52</sup> In a letter to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Polish legation supported the request for a grant and admitted that due to the propaganda role played by “the league and its newspaper, the request for a grant should be positively considered.”<sup>53</sup> The request for financial support to be sent to the legation of the Polish People’s Republic in Tel Aviv was a rare opportunity for Israeli communists to obtain funds for publishing a newspaper. Apart from contributions from their members, they could not count on a system of subsidies, advertisements, or support from Israeli institutions. They often lived in very modest conditions themselves and conducted their publishing activities in similar conditions:

A very primitive printing house (in which there was only one linotype, just an old-style one, and an old printing machine). [...] As the printing room was quite high, a wooden gallery was built 1.5 meters from the ceiling, on which the “editorial office” was set up. To enter the “editorial office” directly from the printing room, very steep, wooden stairs were used. Editors had to run up and down these dangerous stairs dozens of times a day and night to deliver editorial materials for printing. Since there were no windows in the “editorial office,” which was divided into three cubbyholes by pieces of plywood, it is easy to imagine how hot and stuffy it was during summer days, and how cold the air was that blew from the concrete ceiling during winter. The noise of the machines in the printing room and the fumes rising from it tormented the editorial team and disturbed them in their work, which required calm and intense concentration. The working conditions were also hampered by the lack of a telephone.<sup>54</sup>

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52 AMFA, folder 21, file 724, bundle 51, a secret telegram from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw to the legation of the Polish People’s Republic deputy in Tel Aviv, 11 February 1959.

53 AMFA, folder 21, file 724, bundle 51, letter from the Polish legation in Tel Aviv to the Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 24 January 1959.

54 C. Breitstein, “Kol Ha-Am’ – ‘Głos Ludu” [*Kol Ha-Am – The Voice of the People*], *Walka*, no. 2 (1962): 3.

The shortage of financial resources and the almost underground character of this enterprise also limited the composition of the editorial team. Apart from the editor-in-chief, Adolf Berman, who was responsible for the entire newspaper, the communist community connected to *Walka* was made up of people who cooperated with the newspaper on an unofficial and volunteer basis, without any pay. In a letter to ZAiKS,<sup>55</sup> which demanded copyright fees for reprinted work, Berman explained that the newspaper was still struggling with financial problems precisely because it was connected with Maki. He pointed out that no author in Poland or Israel demanded from *Walka* a fee for reprinting materials because the editorial team had no funds to cover expenses beyond paper and ink.<sup>56</sup>

Due to the politics of memory, Ryszard Walewski (formerly Abram Abele Levi)<sup>57</sup> was an important member of the editorial team. In his period of activity in the Polish Workers' Party, he used the pseudonyms "Fakir" and "Dr. Ryszard-Szpitalny."<sup>58</sup> According to documents that have been left behind, he spent the

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55 The Union of Authors and Stage Composers, which manages copyrights.

56 YTA, letter from Adolf Berman to ZAiKS, 2 July 1967.

57 Certificate of change of surname and first name issued by the Mayor of the Capital City of Warsaw as Head of the General Administration, 11 Level, 14 July 1949, copy in the author's collection; AUW, file WHum/KEM 1829, 23.655, biography of Ryszard Walewski, 14 September 1933.

58 Ryszard Walewski (known as "Fakir" and "Dr. Ryszard-Szpitalny" during his involvement in the Polish Workers' Party) was born into a wealthy family in Kalisz on 17 August 1906. His father, Leon, owned a lace factory in Kalisz and several properties. In February 1925 Ryszard Walewski graduated from the junior high school for boys run by the Society for the Propagation of Education and Technical Knowledge among Jews in Łódź. After passing the extended matriculation exam in mathematics and sciences in May and June 1926, he chose to study at the University of Warsaw. He graduated in 1932 with a Master's Degree in history. He entered the Faculty of Medicine at the same university. After the outbreak of the war, when the Nazi authorities forbade Jews from studying at universities, he went to Lwów, where he completed his medical studies on 21 March 1940. After his return to Warsaw, he was taken to the ghetto. He took part in organizing its defense and undertook initiatives to join two military organizations: Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (The Jewish Combat Organization) and Żydowski Związek Wojskowy (The Jewish Military Union). He took an active part in the battles in the Warsaw ghetto. In 1942, during the liquidation of the ghetto in Otwock, the Nazis transported his mother and sister to Treblinka, where they both died. In July 1943, he made it to the Aryan side, hiding in sewers and abandoned houses. He left Poland for Israel in November 1957 with his wife Stefania, whom he had married while still in the Warsaw ghetto, and his son Krzysztof (whose name was changed to Avi in Israel). Ryszard lived with his family in Ramat Aviv, which was nicknamed "Gomułkowo" by the Polish *olim*. In early February 1958, the headquarters of Kupat Holim (the healthcare fund) assigned him to a medical clinic in Ramla, but he was soon transferred to a temporary job in Nahalat Yehuda and then Be'er Ya'akov.

afternoons writing and commemorating the events of the Warsaw ghetto. His correspondence shows that he did not agree with the policy of “forgetting” the victims of the Holocaust, and his particular objection was triggered by the decision to establish relations with Germany and the accompanying financial arrangements.

The April “vespers” came. Spring blossomed and there was the smell of orange groves. And there were the memories of past times. A decision was made to hold ceremonies once a year in honor of the victims of Nazism. This year it coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Third Reich and the opening of the embassy of the German Federal Republic in Tel Aviv. One could get dizzy from too much happiness. Everyone was glad in their own way. As happiness is an individual feeling, some were happy about the defeat of Nazism, others were happy about the fact that a new stream of money would flow from Germany into the country. [...] In these weeks of early spring, I usually return to the ghetto [...] and once again wander through the narrow streets of the northern district of Warsaw. And I look at the wall made of ordinary red bricks that separated us from the rest of the world – a world that broke away from us and remained indifferent for a few years, and silent [...]; everyone turned away from us, holy Jerusalem was silent, and the Vatican also said nothing. [...] On such April days, I live the ghetto life again. I talk to them. To those who did not survive the ghetto. And sometimes I hear their thoughts and my own memories.<sup>59</sup>

For Polish Jews, the community of Polish communists was extremely important in the sphere of remembrance. A letter came to Ryszard Walewski from the hospital, signed by one of his patients, Yitzhak Rimon:

I am lying in an invalid's bed in the hospital. I was pleasantly surprised when I read a beautiful and very interesting interview in *Maariv* on the 17th day of the month. [...] I read every word with a deep feeling of satisfaction. My wife, reading the same article, was also very proud that the Great Hero of Battles in the Warsaw ghetto is our doctor. My sick friends also read about it with admiration, and when I told them that Dr. Ryszard

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59 An excerpt of a letter from Ryszard Walewski to Basia Raiewski (in Bolivia), 7 June 1965, materials from the author's collection.

Walewski is our primary doctor, that we have the honor of having him among our acquaintances, they even looked at us with adoration.<sup>60</sup>

In Israel, the political silence around the events of the Holocaust and the personal experiences of its victims provoked and mobilized the firsthand witnesses to commemorate its victims. This is what Ryszard Walewski dedicated himself to in his journalistic work.

In *Walka*, you can also find articles by Ewa Śluczka-Kestin, who was a teacher from Warsaw and an inspector of Jewish schools in Lower Silesia. In Israel, her articles were also published in the Yiddish-language newspaper *Frei Israel*, where she was the editor of the literary section. J. Lipski, meanwhile, was mostly concerned with the fate of the new *olim*. Many articles were reprints of articles from Maki's Hebrew-language newspaper, *Kol Ha-Am*, written by Maki's leaders – Moshe Sneh, Adolf Berman, and Shmuel Mikunis – which were also published in other foreign-language communist newspapers. Maki was very attractive to the new *olim* because of their ideological values, and also because of the biographies of Maki's Polish leaders.

The presence of *Walka* on the market had a much greater influence than just the cultivation of opinions among Polish Jews, Maki's supporters. It provided significant content that the Israeli Zionist parties, especially those in the ruling coalition, avoided. Certainly *Walka* became a forum for those who, not liking Mapai, could publish articles that did not fit into the formula of the newspapers and magazines published by the parties forming the governing coalition. It was a platform for Polish Jews, free from bias, but it should be remembered that it printed the opinions mostly of disillusioned new *olim*, propaganda materials from the Polish legation in Tel Aviv, and reprints from *Kol Ha-Am*.

### 6.3 Controlled Adaptation of Communists

Choosing to align with the communist group in Israel meant choosing political isolation.<sup>61</sup> Identification with communism caused real everyday challenges in obtaining employment and often limited one's work options to the low-paid labor sector. It also caused problems in obtaining a flat; when one was available, most often it was in the sparsely populated regions of the country. The

60 Letter from Yitzhak Rimon to Ryszard Walewski, 19 March 1965, materials from the author's collection.

61 H. Kaufman, "List do towarzysza Olka z Warszawy" [Letter to Comrade Olek from Warsaw], *Walka*, no. 2 (1958): 6.

Israeli government took action aimed at excluding communists from public life and marginalizing them socially. The general atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and stigmatization that affected the members of Maki triggered a sense of rejection and made some of them feel that their immigration to Israel had been pointless. The difficulties they faced while settling in the new country obliterated their memories of the anti-Semitic events that had been the motivation to leave Poland, leading them to call their immigration to Israel a mistake or a moment of weakness during a period of political turmoil: “I do not deny that anti-Semitism existed and still exists in Poland, but it is not true that it was present in all workplaces.”<sup>62</sup> The reasons for leaving the country were either diminished or concealed.

The national issue was no longer clear to the new *olim*: “It’s very surprising to witness people’s silence – the same people who, in Poland, were able to justify their decision to go to Israel in an ardent and convincing manner but who now curse the psychosis of the government of that time, etc.”<sup>63</sup> It must be remembered that the evolution of the communist party occurred in parallel with the positions taken by the USSR on Jewish and Israeli issues. One year after the creation of Israel, relations with soviet Russia were so good that Israeli communists also felt stronger in internal affairs – the party’s interests were directly connected with Moscow’s politics. According to Yisra’el Barzilai: “Because ‘Lunik’ has reached the moon, people should vote for Maki [in the elections].”<sup>64</sup> But as time passed after the creation of the Jewish state, Israel’s relations with the USSR began to deteriorate, and Israeli communists started to be treated as agents of a foreign power. Becoming the propaganda mouthpiece of Moscow, Maki condemned itself to functioning in permanent conflict with mainstream Israeli politics, gaining the nickname “the fifth column.”<sup>65</sup>

The communists’ activity was the subject of constant surveillance by the Israeli security services, some of whom had even been recruited from former activists of the Polish United Workers’ Party among the new *olim*: “How painful it is that many of these brand-new Mapai propagandists who are now conducting an anti-communist campaign used to be members of the communist party in Poland,”<sup>66</sup> wrote a man named Chaim from Be’er Sheva. In connection with

62 “Odpowiedź p. Olkowi” [An Answer for Olek], *Walka*, no. 3 (1958): 8.

63 Piotrowska [Mańska], “Słowa, słowa, słowa ...,” 2.

64 I. Barzilai, “Któż, jeśli nie Wy, poda nam dłoń? Krajowy Zjazd Olim z Polski” [Who, If Not You, Will Extend a Hand to Us? The National Congress of *Olim* from Poland], *Od Nowa*, no. 39 (1959): 2.

65 L[angnas], “Lekcja Nazaretu,” 2.

66 “Nowi olim piszą: Bolesny problem” [The New *Olim* Are Writing: A Painful Problem], *Walka*, no. 12 (1958): 8.

the *aliyah* from states of the former communist bloc and the growing political power of the Israeli communists, Shabak also intensified its monitoring activities in these circles. Communists were identified before arriving in Israel and were put through the secret service's typical procedures. The surveillance intensified especially before elections:

Mapai and its allies did everything they could to intimidate people. [...] When, a few days before the election, news spread that the Communist Party of Israel's [Maki's] list had been approved by Histadrut's central leaders, Mapai and Mapam activists were furious and unleashed an angry campaign against the communists. The Mapai propagandists went from house to house and promised money and work – as long as people didn't vote for the communists. They threatened that they would know how everyone had voted.<sup>67</sup>

Pinchas Lavon demanded that an anti-communist purge be carried out within the Israeli administration and postulated more effective action by Shabak in this matter. Others also demanded that former members of the Polish United Workers' Party should be held accountable for their anti-Israel activities in their country of origin, and the establishment of a special committee for this purpose was proposed by Israeli anti-communist circles in the ruling elite. The editors of *Walka* commented on this idea:

I don't know where the organ in charge of this committee is, but we feel its involvement everywhere, while visiting various institutions. It would be possible to present many facts about how the employees of Histadrut examine the beliefs of new *olim*. Many among the new *olim* who have been out of work for a long time and do not receive adequate help are finally finding out that their political beliefs are the cause of this discrimination. It must be made clear that some new *olim* were deceived by Israel's legation in Poland. Before they left for Israel, they openly declared in the legation that they were members of the Polish United Workers' Party and asked how they would be treated in Israel. I myself received the answer that I could go to Israel confidently and join the Communist Party without hesitation, that [Shmuel] Mikunis and other communists are members of the Knesset, and so on. Maybe it was naive of me to take this

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67 “‘Demokratyczne wybory’ w Kiryat Gat” [“Democratic Elections” in Kiryat Gat], *Walka*, no. 7 (1959): 5.

answer seriously. It was only once I arrived in Israel that I became aware that the reality here is completely different. They prevent me from working and abuse me every step of the way. I've heard more than once: "Go to Moscow!" And I am not the only one.<sup>68</sup>

The system in place to assist new *olim* to adapt was not helpful to the communists who arrived in Israel. Protectionism, manifested in the culture requiring recommendations and sponsorship to obtain positions, was the driving force behind the process of establishing oneself in Israel. Israel's society, with its small population, was characterized by close ties, primarily with old acquaintances made prior to immigration or forged through experiences and active involvement in the same political party. Mapai was the strongest party, and for this reason some former members of the Polish United Workers' Party were eager to join it, distancing themselves from the communists, who were deprived of any influence in Israel, and thus ensuring for themselves a recommendation card, which was immediately associated in their minds with their former membership in the Polish United Workers' Party, was a symbol of social strength and support, and served in everyday life as a special pass to obtain benefits.<sup>69</sup>

We're still feeling very excited after the joyful meetings during which our fellow countrymen bent over backwards to showed us kindness. After that storm, we encountered the silence of indifference. We became "homeless." But the entire apparatus of protectionism was put in place, and the recommendation cards started to be distributed. [...] As soon as the slightest possibility of employing ten people appeared on Be'er Sheva's horizon, 30 people were sent there. One day I came back from the Labour Office, very happy to have obtained a work card. [...] When I arrived, I was not the first or the only one. 29 other men were waiting behind me. I didn't turn out to be among the lucky ones – those ten who had some kind of magical symbols on their cards that only the work manager understood.<sup>70</sup>

The strength of a card depended on the party, as well as on the position of the leader or activist who had issued it. You had to belong to, or at least identify

68 "Nowi olim piszą," 8.

69 ISA, file 2175/2 (lamed), a report by the Israeli internal security service on a meeting with new olim, 24 July 1950.

70 E. Słucka-Kestin, "Tylko pierwsze 70 lat" [Only the First 70 Years], *Walka*, no. 11 (1958): 9, 10.

with, a political group in order to have its support. Maki was considered to be an anti-state party, while adherence to communism was considered to be a service to another world power – a person admitting to such an allegiance was often ostracized and forced into public isolation. The “card” issued by Maki only “made things easier” for the Israeli intelligence service.<sup>71</sup> Pinning the “communist” label on someone was “tantamount to crossing out the existence of this person.”<sup>72</sup> Communists remained on the blacklist and were treated as so-called “uncertain elements.” Those who managed to get hired in a factory were followed and carefully observed.<sup>73</sup> The fact that many of the new *olim* were members of the communist party significantly slowed down their adaptation – it meant isolation.<sup>74</sup> Maki could not offer them any help because it had no material means, and it even demanded from its members and supporters contributions for the benefit of the party.<sup>75</sup> Under these conditions, the slogans that had been used to describe the capitalist world, which until recently had been fed to them by their socialist regime, returned:<sup>76</sup> “It is a fact that by leaving the Polish People’s Republic for capitalist Israel, we have lost more than just material wealth. In Israel, we have lost our sense of value and our faith in our own strength.”<sup>77</sup>

Under these conditions, in the eyes of the new *olim*, a normalized, regulated, socialist system with weak but stable living conditions had been established in Poland, especially as it concerned people bearing the heavy baggage of political and professional experience that could not be translated into successful adaptation – that is, obtaining work – in Israel. Moreover, the Israeli communist party was a party of elderly people; it was much more difficult to attract young people who had been swept away by the collective Zionist ethos and the challenges of building the state. Military service and involvement in the defense of the state activated young people and inspired Zionist values in them. Because of their age, among other things, communists could not find a comfortable place for themselves in a *kibbutz*. Recruitment for *kibbutzim* was very selective; they did not accept older people – that is, those over 40 years of

71 “Kfar Saba’ – ‘Rejon rozwojowy” [“Kfar Saba” – “A Developing Region”], *Walka*, no. 4 (1959): 10; “Głos ma Ber Szewa” [Be’er Sheva Has a Voice], *Walka*, no. 2 (1959): 8.

72 “Listy do redakcji” [Letters to the Editor], *Walka*, no. 2 (1959): 8.

73 ISA, file 2175/2 (lamed) (2/10 [bet/mem/bet]), report by the Israeli Police, 24 March 1950.

74 *Walka*, no. 4 (1959): 2, 3.

75 “Apel KC Komunistycznej Partii Izraela” [Appeal from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Israel], *Walka*, no. 6 (1958): 3.

76 F. Toruńczyk and F. Ben, “Żydzi polscy w nowej ojczyźnie” [Polish Jews in Their New Homeland], *Kultura* 11, no. 133 (1958): 84–92.

77 “Odpowiedź p. Olkowi,” 8; Kaufman, “List do towarzysza Olka,” 6.

age.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, they attracted people from the Zionist avant-garde linked to the Russian culture of the first founders, clearly leaning to the left and focused on the national interest.<sup>79</sup> Communists spoke a completely different, non-Zionist political language. For communists who had opted for internationalism, a *kibbutz* seemed too narrow and limited. Through anti-government and anti-state actions, the communists destroyed cohesion and unity, which is why they were pushed out of the *kibbutz* communities.<sup>80</sup> The different values of the two groups – Zionists and communists – within a small community created tension, and often there were confrontations, quarrels and even full-on fights. Communists at official congresses gave testimony of harassment, discrimination, and persecution, including physical violence against them. The communists from Poland soon found out that “a *kibbutz* is not a happy socialist island in the capitalist sea.”<sup>81</sup>

Among the Gomulka Aliyah were a great many Polonized Jews, whose assimilation to Polish culture caused problems in relation to national identification, and some of whom were married to non-Jews and thus part of mixed families. Those *olim* who had assimilated in Poland noted with indignation the interference of religious communities in their personal lives:

Recently, a man named Kalman Wyszegrodzki has been giving hideous speeches in the synagogue in which he attacks the *olim* from Poland for not being good Jews, for having brought “goy” wives with them and, of course, for being communists ... However, he defends the newly arrived Romanian Jews because they are “god-fearing” and did not bring any “goy” wives with them. As for the Jews from Africa and Asia, there is nothing to say about them at all because they are wild people.<sup>82</sup>

For communists who had chosen assimilation in Poland, the religious law regulating the daily life of Israeli citizens must have seemed foreign. It is worth recalling a scene from a certain school, described in an article published in *Walka* by the mother of a boy suspected of being a “goy”:

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78 Lipski, “Między olim,” 6; Lipski, “Nowi olim a rzeczywistość izraelska” [New *Olim* and Israeli Reality], *Walka*, no. 1 (1958): 4.

79 S. Maron, *The Kibbutz as an Alternate Way* (Yad Tabenkin, 1973), 2–5.

80 ISA, file 36661/2/1 (mem/het/haf), a report by the Israeli internal security service, 13 March 1950.

81 Maron, *Kibbutz as an Alternate Way*, 11.

82 “Olim z Keisaria protestują” [*Olim* from Caesarea Are Protesting], *Walka*, no. 3 (1959): 8.

In Israel, he was suspected of being a “goy” at school, and he started to be bullied. The teachers themselves were the instigators of this harassment! As a result of these rumors, they started to check whether he was a “goy” in the manner that had been practiced by Nazi thugs on the streets of Polish cities! I would like to stress that this was last week, in the twentieth century, in a country that is considered democratic. Who carried out this “inspection”? A teacher – a grown woman with a ten-year-old boy! Apart from the social and political aspects, what does this kind of behavior demonstrate?<sup>83</sup>

With the growing power of the rabbinate and religious communities, the communists provided a certain functional space, the liberalism that the new *olim* had been expecting and an escape from nationalism.<sup>84</sup>

Polish communists in Israel felt degraded. Some were well-educated people, intellectuals who had followed the communist current in the countries of the Soviet bloc, but in Israel they found themselves on the social and political margins. Participation in the Israeli communist movement was an attempt to maintain their former political sympathies. Despite anti-Semitic events, some of the new Polish *olim* still maintained the “correct” course dictated by Moscow. Certainly, in the case of this group, apart from the political aspects, the longing for their country of origin also contributed to their criticism of Israel.<sup>85</sup>

#### 6.4 Israeli Communists and the International Communist Movement

Disapproval of the Israeli government’s foreign policy and Moshe Sneh’s belief in the soviet bloc were largely anti–Ben-Gurion in nature. Ben-Gurion’s departure from the prime minister’s office in 1963 weakened Sneh’s need to maintain a clear distance from the government’s leadership, especially since he was on good terms with Ben-Gurion’s successor, Levi Eshkol, a pragmatic politician with whom Sneh had served in the army. The politics of the countries belonging to the Soviet bloc, which allowed for greater independence during the rivalry between Moscow and Beijing from 1961 to 1963, also triggered a desire among the Israeli communists to forge their own path. This was especially true because the interests of the Soviet Union were linked to the Arab world, and thus it was becoming harder to justify supporting them in Israeli politics.

83 “Nazistowskie metody” [Nazi Methods], *Walka*, no. 4 (1958): 4.

84 “Bolesny problem” [A Painful Problem], *Walka*, no. 9 (1958): 6.

85 Toruńczyk and Ben, “Żydzi polscy w nowej ojczyźnie,” 92.

Moshe Sneh realized that the USSR would not be a coordinator of peace in the Middle East, and certainly not one that would view Arab and Jewish issues equally. Although the Jews and Arabs in Maki placed less emphasis on ethnic issues, at least at the level of rhetoric, and accepted common ground for the sake of integration, these differences emerged from time to time. In light of the fairly unambiguous pro-Arab politics of the USSR, communist Jewish leaders found it increasingly difficult to maintain political ties with Arab party members, and it became increasingly plausible and natural for Sneh, a former commandant of the Haganah, to return to nationalistic Jewish policies.<sup>86</sup> Before the Maki convention on 4–7 August 1965, it was clear that it would be difficult to protect the party from division.<sup>87</sup> The Jewish communists' sensitivity to national issues was growing, and they wanted Israel to be recognized by the Arabs.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, Sneh pushed the issue of the creation of a Palestinian state aside in Maki's program, claiming that if Arab countries truly supported its creation, it would depend solely on the Arab neighbors. At the conference, the division became a reality, and the party split into two sections – “aleph” and “bet.” From that moment onwards, Sneh's return to Zionism began, and it was also the beginning of the end of Maki. There was a further dispute over the rights to the newspaper, as well as over which group would be called Maki. This happened just before an election, so both sides felt it was crucial to keep the name. Meir Vilner demanded a judicial settlement but eventually gave up, and the group in Histadrut tipped the balance by joining Sneh and Mikunis's group, thus winning the right to use the name. The communists who were connected to Vilner adopted the name Rakach (Reshima Komunistit Chadashah).<sup>89</sup>

The rivalry between these groups was also manifest in their seeking recognition from the international communist community. A race began, which had its finish line in Moscow. The Kremlin did not conceal its dissatisfaction with the division of the Israeli communist community, for two basic reasons. First, this division exposed the fact that ethnic issues proved to be stronger than class ties, internationalism, or ideological cohesion. Second, Moscow feared

86 ISA, file 3553/21 (chet, tzadi), a report by Shabak titled “Co się dzieje w Maki od 1 VII – 1 IX 1965” [What Has Been Happening in Maki from 1 July to 1 September 1965], 6 September 1965.

87 “Jedność KPI zachowana!” [The Communist Party of Israel's Unity Has Been Maintained], *Walka*, no. 7 (1965): 1.

88 “Jedność KPI zachowana!” 1; S. Mikunis, “Zjazd przełomowy” [A Decisive Congress], *Walka*, nos. 8–9 (1965): 1.

89 ISA, file 3553/21 (tzadi, chet), a report titled “Co się dzieje w Maki od 1 września do 1 grudnia 1965” [What Has Been Happening in Maki from 1 September to 1 December 1965], 7 December 1965.

that Rakach could do business with China. The USSR wanted to avoid losing influence in the Middle East.<sup>90</sup> Both Sneh's and Vilner's groups wanted to have allies in communist countries; both intensively sought meetings with the ambassadors of Central and Eastern European countries and competed in distributing propaganda materials. The two groups also competed for influence in the organizations to which they both belonged. For example, after the election, conflicts arose in the Israel-Poland Friendship League, but there were enough Maki members in it, Polish Jews, to retain full control.<sup>91</sup> After the split, Maki had the sympathy of Jewish public opinion behind it; even if the majority of Israeli society did not vote for it, they expressed satisfaction with its return to Jewry and Zionism. But the party's leaders deliberately did not want to exhibit nationalistic messages in order not to lose contact with the Arab sector, especially during the elections, when they counted on keeping at least part of the Arab electorate connected to Maki.

Rakach had a similar problem. This party's attitude to the Arab-Jewish conflict placed them far from mainstream Jewish society, and they definitely needed to aim their program at the Arabs. After splitting from Rakach, Maki made changes to its press publications. The frequency of the Hebrew-language publication *Kol Ha-Am*, the strongest newspaper of the Israeli communist community, was significantly reduced. In December 1969, it went from daily to weekly editions. With this change, circulation declined seven percent. Adding to this problem, the predominance of the Jewish content in this newspaper limited its reception among Arab party members.<sup>92</sup> Yet the party depended on the Arab electorate for votes and it was necessary to reach it through the press. Maki liquidated those press publications that had been in favor of Vilner's faction, which became Rakach. This was the fate of the Romanian and Bulgarian newspapers. These groups had been highly visible and active in Maki before the division, and the liquidation of their newspapers left them disillusioned with Maki, starting a trend of people leaving Maki for Rakach and other

90 "Spotkanie delegacji KPI i KPZR w Moskwie" [A Meeting of Delegations from the Communist Party of Israel and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow], *Walka*, no. 12 (1965): 1; "O jednolity front między KPI a Mapam" [A United Front between the Communist Party of Israel and Mapam], *Walka*, no. 12 (1965): 2; "Zaproszenie do Moskwy" [An Invitation to Moscow], *Od Nowa*, no. 16 (1963): 2; "Spotkanie delegacji KPI i KPZR w Moskwie," 1.

91 ISA, file 3553/21 (tzadi, chet), a report titled "Co się dzieje w Maki od 1 września do 1 grudnia 1965" [What Has Been Happening in Maki from 1 September to 1 December 1965], 7 December 1965.

92 "Nowy Komitet Centralny KPI" [The New Central Committee of the Communist Party of Israel], *Walka*, nos. 8–9 (1965): 1.

parties.<sup>93</sup> In 1965, the first elections to Histadrut and the Knesset after the division of the party revealed deep differences precisely in the context of ethnic issues. Looking closely at the elections to Histadrut, one can see that the two parties together gained 0.7 percent more votes than in the previous elections. However, the distribution of votes in the various sectors of both parties proved that Israeli communism had a nationalistic aspect.

In the election, about 80 percent of Jewish communists voted for Maki and 20 percent voted for Rakach, while only 2.7 percent of Arab communists voted for Maki and 97.3 percent voted for Rakah. These numbers reveal that Rakach still had some substantial support from the community of Jewish communists, while the Arab community had almost wholly abandoned Maki.<sup>94</sup> It is worth noting one more tendency revealed in the elections – Maki received 204 votes in the *kibbutzim*, which shows that in this sensitive Zionist segment of Israeli society, the return to “one’s own” was acknowledged and well received. Before the division in the party, in the elections to the Fifth Knesset, Maki won a total of five seats, whereas in this election for the Sixth Knesset, Rakach won three seats, and Maki won only one, gradually disappearing from the political scene. Rakach gained 20 percent of the votes among the total Arab population and 0.2 percent among the total Jewish population.<sup>95</sup> Although Rakach tried to explain its advantage over Maki by designating itself as the only true communist party, in reality its superior results can be explained by the growing Arab electorate, which Maki could not reach with its clear image as a Jewish party.<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, a Jewish communist party did not have much chance of expanding its electorate among the Jewish population – on the left side of the political scene it had limited space in which to expand and had many competitors.<sup>97</sup> With its ethnic label, Maki did not differ much from the former

93 ISA, file 3553/21 (tzadi, chet), a report titled “Co się dzieje w Maki od 1 września do 1 grudnia 1965” [What Has Been Happening in Maki from 1 September to 1 December 1965], 7 December 1965; YTA, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

94 “Rozbijacka grupa Wilnera-Tubi – od porażki do porażki” [Vilner-Tubi’s Destructive Group: From One Defeat to Another], *Walka*, nos. 8–9 (1965): 2.

95 “Grupa Wilner-Tubi otrzymała 0,2 proc. Głosów wśród ludności żydowskiej” [The Vilner-Tubi Group Received 0.2 Percent of Votes Among the Jewish Population], *Walka*, no. 12 (1965): 2.

96 “Grupa Wilner-Tubi,” 2; M. Sneh, “Ocena wyborów do Knesetu” [An Assessment of the Knesset Elections], *Walka*, no. 12 (1965): 2.

97 “*Trybuna Ludu* o XV Zjeździe KPI” [*Trybuna Ludu* at the 15th Congress of the Communist Party of Israel], *Walka*, nos. 8–9 (1965): 2; “Słowo do olim z Polski,” 1; “Masowe spotkanie krajowe olim z Polski” [A Mass National Meeting of *Olim* from Poland], *Walka*, no. 10 (1965): 2, 6.

Mapam community. In the new situation it was difficult for it to find a political identity for itself and thus a firm position on the Israeli political scene.<sup>98</sup> Rakach, on the other hand, by combining a Jewish minority in party leadership with a broad Arab base, was able to maintain the supranational character of the party.<sup>99</sup>

After the party's split, Moshe Sneh tried to link Maki to Moscow, but eventually their interests began to diverge significantly. The USSR wanted to build its position in the region through the Arab population and states. Just before the Six-Day War, Moshe Sneh, former commandant of the Haganah, understood that the Kremlin's politics were certainly not going to lead them to back Israel's interests in the Middle East, its independence, or its security. For a large number of Jewish Maki members, the Six-Day War ultimately destroyed any remaining faith in communism and the USSR's neutral and peaceful policies in the Middle East. After the Six-Day War, Moshe Sneh distanced himself from communist and internationalist ideas, returning to Jewish national interests. "Maki is inextricably linked to the Jewish nation. If it breaks away from it and from its tradition, it will cease to exist," he said.<sup>100</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed by the leaders of the communist movement in Poland who immigrated to Israel after the events of March 1968. "When, after 1967, Moshe Sneh met David Sfar<sup>101</sup> at a traditional Shabbat dinner, they felt they were finally home – it was a natural, spontaneous reconciliation, and the bridge leading to it was the sense of belonging to the Jewish nation," Efraim Sneh recollected.<sup>102</sup> It was Jewry, not Zionism nor communism, that turned out to be the most important thing for them – loyalty to the nation and to other Jews, and the deepest loyalty to those who had been murdered in the Holocaust.<sup>103</sup>

98 Rekhess, "Jews and Arabs in the Israeli Communist Party," 130–31.

99 Rekhess, "Jews and Arabs in the Israeli Communist Party," 128–38; ISA, file 3553/21 (tzadi, chet), a report titled "Co się dzieje w Maki od 1 września do 1 grudnia 1965" [What Has Been Happening in Maki from 1 September to 1 December 1965], 7 December 1965.

100 "Biuletyn Związku Długoletnich Działaczy Rewolucyjnego Ruchu Robotniczego" [Bulletin of the Union of Longstanding Workers' Movement Activists], 30 March 1972, 1.

101 A Yiddish-language writer. In Poland, he served as the vice-president of the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists. He was a member of the Central Committee of Jews and supported the communist government in Poland. In 1969 due to anti-Semitic events, he left Poland for Israel.

102 Interview with Ephraim Sneh, 20 June 2010, materials in the author's collection.

103 Interview with Ephraim Sneh, 20 June 2010, materials in the author's collection.

## 6.5 March Epilogue: *Biuletyn Związku Długoletnich Działaczy Rewolucyjnego Ruchu Robotniczego*

Maki had always been a marginal party in Israeli politics, but by the time of the 1969 election, the party had become almost completely irrelevant. Ideological issues were perhaps the only incentive that still drew supporters to Maki at that time. Many Jews who immigrated to Israel from Poland after 1967, alienated from Jewish culture and in a completely unfamiliar political environment, clung to their memories and experiences of working in the communist movement – even after the events in Poland in March 1968 that were, on the one hand, both anti-Israel anti-Semitic, and, on the other, pro-Soviet but not pro-Arab. In the political declarations of the new Polish *olim*, the subject of the state resonated clearly. Political leaflets addressed to Jewish communists from Poland stated, “Maki needs our support in its fight against the anti-Israeli and false declarations of Rakach.”<sup>104</sup> Most of the communists who had arrived in the March Aliyah belittled Rakach, denying its legitimacy as a party of international communism and characterizing its activities as mere jingoism and defense of Arab interests.<sup>105</sup> These *olim* were well-educated people and experienced communist activists – “*vatikim* of communism,” as Raul Teitelbaum called them.<sup>106</sup> For Maki, which experienced political failure after the Six-Day War and was marked by traces of Soviet politics, the acceptance of these new activists was a last attempt to defend its political existence.

A small group of communists from Poland came to Israel after 1969 and founded the Union of Longstanding Activists of the Revolutionary Workers’ Movement in Maki. As one of its activists wrote, the union, apart from its formal registration, was not very politically active. Its main activity was limited to publishing a bulletin in May 1969 with a title identical to the name of the union.<sup>107</sup> The aim of the union was to attract new *olim* to Maki and keep

104 YTA, files of the Union of Longstanding Activists of the Workers’ Movement (hereinafter: ULAWM), electoral documents. The text comes from a leaflet: “Do Towarzyszy i sympatyków! Do wszystkich olim z Polski!” [To Comrades and Supporters! To All *Olim* from Poland!], *Biuletyn Związku Długoletnich Działaczy Rewolucyjnego Ruchu Robotniczego* [Bulletin of the Union of Longstanding Activists of the Workers’ Movement].

105 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

106 Interview with Raul Teitelbaum, December 2013, materials in the author’s collection.

107 There are two different names for this union mentioned in documents: Związek Długoletnich Działaczy Ruchu Robotniczego (Union of Longstanding Activists of the Workers’ Movement) and Związek Długoletnich Działaczy Rewolucyjnego Ruchu Robotniczego (Union of Longstanding Activists of the Revolutionary Workers’ Movement). It was likewise with the bulletin it published: on the masthead you can

them loyal to it during the elections for Histadrut, and then for the Knesset in 1969. Since the Arab electorate had forsaken Maki, one of the few avenues for the party to enlarge its ranks was by attracting communists from among the new *olim*, who, despite their disappointments and experiences, still remained faithful to left-wing ideas, often laboriously and painstakingly separating the disappointed hopes they had placed in the Polish United Workers' Party from communist ideology. The creation of this press publication was an attempt to politically organize the March 1968 immigrants all over again: "Without *Biuletyn*, we are nothing," wrote one of its founders.<sup>108</sup>

*Biuletyn* was not a typical Polish-language press publication, similar to the recently published *Walka* or the Polish-language newspapers and magazines that have been previously analyzed in this book. Due to the recency of the March 1968 immigrants' settlement in Israel, many were still ideologically associated with the Polish United Workers' Party, and the union's *Biuletyn* tried to reach these former comrades through a publication more reminiscent of Polish émigré community newspapers than Israeli foreign-language newspapers. Unlike *Walka*, *Biuletyn* did not deal with the problems of the new *olim* and was not connected to challenges posed by immigrating to Israel. Its goal was not to support the adaptation process; its content was centered around nonnationalistic ideas. It had the features of an émigré press publication, in which experiences from the period of activity in the communist movement in Poland were described. Its content brought to mind the sense of an editorial team "in exile," which was befitting for how the new *olim* actually felt.<sup>109</sup> The intention of the editors of *Biuletyn* was to stay connected with former comrades, colleagues, and well-experienced communists scattered all over Israel and beyond.

Our readers are searching for new ways to reeducate the workers' movement, and *Biuletyn* wholeheartedly supports this reeducation, for it has no other means. [...] In our opinion, *Biuletyn* is the bridge between the old communists and the party that fills the vacuum after our complete break from the degraded and anti-Semitic Polish United Workers' Party. We would also like our *Biuletyn* to become in the future a press organ

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find both *Biuletyn Związku Długoletnich Działaczy Rewolucyjnego Ruchu Robotniczego* [Bulletin of the Union of Longstanding Activists of the Workers' Movement] and *Biuletyn Związku Długoletnich Działaczy Rewolucyjnego Ruchu Robotniczego* [Bulletin of the Union of Longstanding Activists of the Revolutionary Workers' Movement].

108 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, 10 November 1969.

109 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Piątkowski to the editors of *Biuletyn*, 2 December 1969.

connecting all the communists currently banished from Poland, scattered all over the world, with our political and social center in Israel. We believe that time will heal all wounds and that the comrades will understand that Maki has nothing to do with the powerful politics of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its satellites, and they will no longer identify it with the degraded Polish United Workers' Party.<sup>110</sup>

*Biuletyn* was mainly subscription-based. Its distribution followed in the footsteps of the scattered March Aliyah.<sup>111</sup> It was intended for former “comrades” who had left Poland during the March Aliyah and had gone to Scandinavian countries, Western Europe, the United States, and Canada.<sup>112</sup> Correspondence coming from outside Israel shows that it was popular among the communist émigré community in Munich, for example. “It is passed from hand to hand. It is read by people with different views, even those who do not agree with us politically. But it is enough that they are Jews,” Leon Rajski reported.<sup>113</sup>

Polish émigré communities were interested in *Biuletyn*, and Jerzy Giedroyc, who was particularly interested in the fates of former communists and who had been searching for contact with them in Israel for a long time, asked for it to be sent to him.<sup>114</sup> In this case, the cooperation amounted to an exchange of publications – Giedroyc sent *Kultura*, and the union reciprocated by sending *Biuletyn*.<sup>115</sup> It was also sent to the domestic market – to communists living in villages and settlements all over Israel. The government authorities in Warsaw were also interested *Biuletyn*. Adam Kornecki, a former security service officer, wrote:

From a firsthand source in Poland I know that various leaders of the Polish People's Republic read *Biuletyn* carefully and that instructions

110 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, 10 November 1969.

111 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Jerzy Giedroyc with a request to send him *Biuletyn*, 1 June 1970; letter from the editors of *Biuletyn* to Jerzy Giedroyc, 14 July 1970.

112 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Rajski to Jakub Szleński, 1 September 1971; YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Jakub Szleński to the editors of *Biuletyn*, 11 May 1971; YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Jakub Vilner to the editors of *Biuletyn*, 5 July (year illegible); YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from the president of the Association of Polish Combatants in Italy to the editors of *Biuletyn*, 7 February 1970.

113 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter sent from Metz by Karol Meler to Leon Rajski and made available to the editors of *Biuletyn*, 11 August 1969.

114 J. Giedroyc, *Autobiografia na cztery ręce* [An Autobiography for Four Hands], ed. K. Pomian (Warsaw, 2006), 149.

115 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Jerzy Giedroyc to the editors of *Biuletyn*, 1 June 1970.

were sent along the border control line to intercept *Biuletyn* if it appeared anywhere. What were they most afraid of? Not of highlighting the position of Maki or any other faction of the workers' movement in Israel – they were most afraid of how they would be judged by people who had been connected with the revolutionary movement in Poland for decades and these people's familiarity with the way present-day Poland was being ruled, not from the formal side, but from inside. As soon as *Biuletyn* came to Poland, Gierek<sup>116</sup> received it on his desk in the morning with the things that were the most interesting for the Polish United Workers' Party highlighted in red pencil. People in Poland want to know not what the press writes about Gałek and Werblan<sup>117</sup> because they know that the press lies brazenly and that, depending on the need, creates new biographies. Nobody in Poland [illegible – E. K.] knows that this fancy-pants, Jew-eating Werblan was an agent of Luna Brystygier;<sup>118</sup> I saw his file myself. ... These scoundrels should be beaten in the most sensitive place – this is what Gierek's team is most afraid of! Of course, the topic of the Israeli workers' movement is an important one, and we should devote a lot of time to it, because it isn't an isolated issue in the international movement. However, the matter I raised at the outset will not be taken care of for us by anyone, because nobody knows about it. We need *Biuletyn* to be quoted by the international press – then the shitheads [from] the Polish People's Republic will understand something more – that the expulsion of the “kikes” from Poland was not a trivial matter, and that something has to be paid for it. Addressing these matters in *Biuletyn*, within a wider scope than before, will create a base for you that nobody has ever had before.<sup>119</sup>

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116 Edward Gierek was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party.

117 Andrzej Werblan (born 30 October 1924) was a historian, Polish communist activist, member of the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic, Deputy Speaker of the Sejm, and member of the State Council. In March 1968 he often spoke publicly about the harmful influence of Jews on the Polish communist movement.

118 Julia Brystiger (variously spelled Brystygier, Brystyger, Bristiger, Brüstiger, Briestiger), née Prajs, also known by the pseudonyms “Luna” and “Krwawa Luna” (1902–75), was a communist activist, member of the Union of Polish Patriots, and member of the National Council. From December 1944 onwards, she worked in the Ministry of Public Security. In 1945 she became the acting director, and then the director of Department V of the Ministry of Public Security. She was famous for her sadistic torture of prisoners, especially young ones. She left the ministry on 16 November 1956.

119 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Adam Kornecki to the editors of *Biuletyn*, 16 July 1975.

The editors of *Biuletyn* made an attempt to attract people who had become disillusioned by communism and to formulate a further political plan of action, including attracting to Maki those who, after leaving Poland, decided to break away from it.<sup>120</sup> In a letter to the editors of *Biuletyn*, Felicja Rosset from Bat Yam wrote:

When I left the party, I did not change my worldview, and I still consider myself a communist by conviction. I left the ranks of the Polish United Workers' Party only because this party, like many other communist parties (and workers' parties by name), has strayed far from communist principles and slogans in its practical activity. Personally, I think that many of those who have left the party (and perhaps even the vast majority) still consider themselves communists – but let them speak for themselves on this subject. I take the liberty of explaining this fundamental difference between communists and party members.<sup>121</sup>

The following appeal was made to Polish communists in the last *aliyah*: “We express our gratitude to you and recognition that despite your tragic moral experiences, and the injustice and humiliation you’ve suffered, you’ve given wholehearted support to Maki. [...] At the same time, we protest and express contempt for those who, for their personal ends and benefits, identify Maki with the Polish United Workers' Party, which has become degraded and devoid of ideology.”<sup>122</sup> Distancing themselves from the Polish United Workers' Party was also a protective screen for the biographies of some people, a defense against the complete failure of their involvement in communism, sometimes for their whole lives. In this way, Maki had a chance to gain their votes. For example, in Kiryat Sharet (a settlement of new *olim* in Holon), out of 120 people from Poland entitled to vote, 80 voted for Maki, which positively surprised even the party's activists.<sup>123</sup>

The campaign for the 1969 Knesset election revived the Maki community and also put the new *olim* in the spotlight – they became a sought-after group

120 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969; YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Rajska to Felicja Rosset, 19 February 1971.

121 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Felicja Rosset to the editors of *Biuletyn Związku Długoletnich Działaczy Rewolucyjnego Ruchu Robotniczego*, undated.

122 YTA, files of the ULAWM, leaflet titled “Do Towarzyszy i sympatyków! Do wszystkich olim z Polski!” [To Comrades and Supporters! To All *Olim* from Poland!].

123 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

whose votes had to be competed for. After the election, with Maki's political pulse weakening, the sense of the new immigrants' political usefulness was replaced by a sense of emptiness and uselessness.

After the elections we return to our everyday concerns, normal activities, and peaceful reflections. None of us can break away from the past, nor can we recover from everything that has happened and what is still happening in the socialist camp. Nobody has experienced the tragedy that befell the workers' movement after the recent anti-Semitic events in Poland as deeply as we have. We would like to stress that most of us, after our arrival in Israel, wholeheartedly supported Maki's efforts in its struggle for a different face of socialism, but none of us wants any longer the type of system that was created there (even without anti-Semitism).<sup>124</sup>

In the unstable international and domestic situation of the time, in the wake of the Six-Day War and the USSR's shift from protecting Israel to backing its aggressors, Maki was sliding into political irrelevance at the same time as support for soviet concepts was collapsing. "The 16,000 votes Maki received [in the 1969 election – E. K.] after such a huge amount of effort had been put into propaganda and organization proves that we are continuing to revolve within a small group of people who are 'devotees,'"<sup>125</sup> wrote a Polish Jew named Leon Winiawski. After the Six-Day War, the party was politically bankrupt and devoid of vitality, and it sufficed for many to shift closer to the center and vote for a left-wing party with Zionist capital and coast on the wave of euphoria together with the Hebrew-speaking majority. After the election, Maki was apathetic, and the new *olim* – disappointed with the previous Polish path to communism – wanted to remain nonpartisan while attempting to reestablish their lives in the new conditions. In a letter to his friend Idel Korman, Leon Winiawski wrote about his communist community from Poland:

We don't need to write to you about what kind of mood prevails among our comrades exiled from the country, or about the trials and tribulations involving passports, customs, political affiliations, etc. that they've gone through. [...] Among the comrades who are staying in *ulpanim* and are cut off from us, there is a pessimistic mood, and for now they do not want

124 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

125 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

to hear about us. [Jakub] Wasserszturm is currently in an *ulpan*, and he is completely devastated. Artur Fiszer, who has recently arrived in Israel, is in the *ulpan* in Ashdod and is also avoiding us. We are sure, however, that when the crisis has passed in their country and they have gotten over the shock, the ice will be broken, and they will join us. Former activists from the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland – [Józef] Goldkorn, [Ignacy] Felhendler, [Aleksander] Wolfowicz [Wulfowicz], [David] Sfar – have not been involved in our work so far, although we assume they voted for Maki. Felhendler's daughter was even the leader of Maki's election commission. Goldkorn works for *Letzte Nayes* and, truth be told, he avoids us and, at the slightest opportunity, demonstrates his apolitical attitude. In general, journalists who, right until the last moment of their life in Poland, were standing firmly on "the center line" have now suddenly fallen to the other extreme and praise everything that happens here, even though many things are bad.<sup>126</sup>

The all-encompassing apathy of the Jewish communists in Maki had a fundamental source: their activity had fallen apart when faced with the ethnic issue, had burned out, and had shifted towards the political center. It had certainly shifted more towards Israel, and thus further away from Moscow. It can be assumed that the communists from the last *aliyah*, banished for nationalistic reasons, yearned for social acceptance. Some people, just discovering their origins for the first time or returning to Jewishness, wanted a clear ethnic and state identity.<sup>127</sup> An examination of Maki's situation on the Israeli political scene shows that those who voted for Maki in the 1969 elections did not have a sense of permanent identification with it. Political life in the party was dwindling. The group of new *olim* – experienced communists who had been disappointed and banished by anti-Semitism from the communist "paradise" – was not able to reinvigorate it. Maki was losing the power to play any pragmatic role in Israeli politics and was disappearing into the shadows. Although it tried to sustain its political style and tout the party's unity during the elections, the

126 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

127 After leaving Poland, a former security service officer named Adam Kornecki wrote from Frankfurt to Leon Rajski: "As you can see, I read and write in Yiddish. I receive Jewish newspapers from America, Israel, and France, as well as books. But no matter how often I read the books I want to read, go to the films I want to watch, go to the meetings I want to attend, and say whatever I want, no one kicks me out of the party for it or takes away my job. I feel like I've won the lottery." YTA, letter from Adam Kornecki to Leon Rajski, 1 December 1972.

morale was not high among either its new or its more established members. “We think it would be useful for many of Maki’s comrades who are stuck in dogmatism and revalorized clichés and find it difficult to see many of the issues we have encountered directly and experienced on our own – as they were in reality. Comrades [Moshe] Sneh, [Avraham] Lantzman, [Kaspi] Mira, [Berl] Balti, and many others – they see, as we do, that you can’t travel far on an old horse,” wrote Leon Winiawski in a letter to Idel Korman.<sup>128</sup>

Maki lacked an electorate and had lost faith in ideology. Its political path had disappeared, and the new *olim* were not able to change this; the inertia of this sense of defeat was so great that they did not even care about those members among the new *olim* who wanted to play an active role within the party: “Although nobody bothers us, it’s not enough to exist and be active,” complained Leon Winiawski, seeking organizational and financial support from Maki for *Biuletyn*.<sup>129</sup> Before the election, Maki allocated 1,000 lirot for the publication of *Biuletyn*, without committing to further payments. It was so weak that it was unable to bear even small expenses:<sup>130</sup> “We are so financially strained that we are never sure if we will manage to publish the next issue of *Biuletyn*.”<sup>131</sup> *Biuletyn* had exhausted the formula of printing party members’ memoirs, and the new *olim* lacked a clear plan for the future – their vision and philosophy of action were replaced by slogans expressing strength and unity. Interest in the topic of “the Polish road to communism” had waned. Readers of *Biuletyn* sent letters asking to be removed from the list of subscribers.<sup>132</sup> The preserved copies of *Biuletyn* show that the newspaper was published, with some breaks, for a few more years and then ceased in the mid-1970s.

In Israel it was not easy to be a communist or even a Marxist: the prevailing Zionist ideology contained religious elements (Zion, Jerusalem, Eretz Israel) and, for a long time, was associated with the philanthropy of the wealthy (it existed in symbiosis with capitalism). It also caused conflicts with the Arabs, who could not be members of the Israeli Zionist parties until the 1950s. This is why Mapam could not be communist, but Maki could be anti-Zionist and Arab-Jewish. Communist propaganda often led to boycotts of Israel; unlike

128 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

129 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

130 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Winiawski to Idel Korman, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1969.

131 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Leon Rajski to Jakub Szełński, 1 September 1971.

132 YTA, files of the ULAWM, letter from Marian Borensztein to the editors of *Biuletyn*, 18 November 1968.

Zionist groups, communists aggressively criticized the government apparatus and state institutions and mobilized the Jewish emigration movement in the opposite direction – out from Israel.<sup>133</sup> For many Jews, communism became a new religion in which they could find a minimum of humanism (in the battle against social disadvantage), a bit of Judaism (messianism without God), or quite simply a utopia.

## 6.6 The Israeli Epilogue of *Po Prostu* and the Bund

On 19 November 1958, the first issue of *Po Prostu: Pismo Myśli Socjalistycznej w Izraelu* [Quite Frankly: A Journal of Socialist Thought in Israel] was printed. Unlike other Polish-language press publications, the header expressly identified this paper as “a dependent press organ.”<sup>134</sup> The newspaper was financially connected with the Israeli Bund.<sup>135</sup> Its agenda was associated with the liberal group of *olim* who arrived after 1956, who were seeking community in socialism. They decided to name their newspaper after a preexisting one with a powerful-sounding title: *Po Prostu*.<sup>136</sup>

A small group of Bund activists existed in Israel from the 1920s onwards,<sup>137</sup> but the organization wasn't formally established until 1951. Due to its

133 Archive of the Knesset in Jerusalem, minutes from a meeting of the Knesset, 27 February 1952.

134 *Po Prostu: Pismo Myśli Socjalistycznej w Izraelu* (hereinafter: *Po Prostu*) no. 1 (1958): 1.

135 For more on the Bund, see *Bund: 100 lat historii 1897–1997* [The Bund: 100 Years of History, 1897–1997], ed. F. Tych and J. Hensel (Warsaw, 2000).

136 *Po Prostu* [Quite Frankly] was a social and literary magazine published in Warsaw by the Polish Youth Association, which became a symbol of the political thaw in Poland in the years 1955 and 1956.

137 Bencl Calewicz, who immigrated from Białystok to Eretz Israel in 1922, was surrounded by small groups of Bundists in Israel. He settled in Tel Aviv with his wife, Itke. Using his experience from the period when he had been active in Białystok, he established the Union of Bakers in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. On the basis of this organization, he conducted many strikes in defense of closed bakeries and shortening the work day to eight hours. His house on Basel Street was a common meeting place for Bundists and many literary people. Another address in Tel Aviv frequented by Bundists was the house of Avram and Geni Rinkewicz, who emigrated from Włocławek in 1932. During World War II, many Bundists came to Palestine with General Anders's Army. This is how Jerzy Glikzman, brother of the Bund leader Viktor Alter, arrived in Palestine. Another important figure for the later fate of the Bund in Israel was Oscar Artuski, who joined the Bund in Poland in 1935 and was then active in the Israeli Bund. After the war ended, many Bundists left Israel and returned to the diaspora. The activity of the Bundists in Israel was focused on mutual aid, and they were also very active in the sphere of culture. In February 1951, the first plenary meeting of the party's founders took place and it was decided to give an organized form

antiestablishment character (anti-Zionist, promoting Yiddish), it did not find favorable conditions for development in Israel. The Bund's basic problem was an unsolvable paradox – how to reconcile the fight against Zionism in the diaspora with later life and activity in Israel.<sup>138</sup> In 1955, at a world conference in Montreal, the Bund recognized the existence of Israel as something positive for Jewish people.<sup>139</sup> The Bundists did not want to oppose the existence of Israel per se, but they did want to serve as an opposition force – “loyal opposition,” as they described themselves. But there were also some members who believed that if the Bund gave up its critical stance against Zionist hegemony, the main axis of their politics in the diaspora, it would lose the reason for its existence and the essence of its identity. Such a position was particularly inconvenient for Israeli Bundists, who asked, “To act against Jewish workers in Israel, against the socialist governments of other countries, against even the Bundists in Israel – why?”<sup>140</sup> It was difficult for Israeli Bundists to defend life in the diaspora after the Holocaust, and even harder to turn anti-Zionist ideology into electoral capital – to support the need for the state's existence while simultaneously criticizing its underlying Zionism.<sup>141</sup> The biggest difference between the Bund's agenda and Zionism was that the Zionists sought to focus Jewish life exclusively in Israel, while the Bund wanted a Jewish presence “here and there” – both in the diaspora and in Israel.<sup>142</sup> The Zionists fought against the Jews' choice to live in the *galut*, and the Bundists fought for survival anywhere after World War II, including Israel.<sup>143</sup> The Bund could not rid itself of the Israel complex because the very fact of the state's existence demonstrated the failure of this party's ideology. Therefore, it directed its activity towards defending the rights of workers in Israel, including Arab workers, and fighting discrimination. Criticism of Israel and its government, as the Bundists stated,

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to their activity. The Israeli Bundists wanted to take part in the struggle for Bundist and Yiddish culture and to influence political life. D. Slucki, *The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History* (New Brunswick, 2012), 192–95; D. Blatman, “The National Ideology of the Bund in the Test of Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, 1933–1947,” in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. J. Jacobs, with an introduction by F. Tych (New York, 2001), 197–210; D. Engel, *The Bund after the Holocaust: Between Renewal and Self-Liquidation*, in Jacobs, *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe*, 213–24; J. D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892–1914* (London, 2004), 3–7.

138 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 174.

139 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 173.

140 Quoted after Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 185.

141 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 174.

142 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 189.

143 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*.

stemmed from concern for it – for its prosperity and resilience:<sup>144</sup> “The state should have a more solid foundation, it should be happier, freer, and more socialist.”<sup>145</sup> At the same time, the leaders of this group were aware of the limited political space within which to operate in these conditions – an anti-Zionist organization could not play an important role in Israel. The goals of the Bund placed it on the periphery of activity, outside the political mainstream, even in opposition to it, which led to the marginalization of the party.<sup>146</sup>

Encouraged by a steady, albeit small, increase in interest in the Bund during the 1950s, it decided to play a more active role in the political life of Israel. After the 1955 elections, when many Bundists felt that none of the Israeli parties was expressing their interests, the Bund decided to take part in another election campaign in 1959. The party’s leaders realized that it would be difficult for them to translate their ideology into the politics of a Zionist state, so they did not expect to obtain the required one percent of the votes that would allow them to sit in the Knesset, but they hoped to build a Bund platform, or at least to strengthen and mark their party’s presence on the Israeli political map. The Bund’s electoral platform included four important objectives: freedom and equality of all citizens (emphasizing equal rights for the Arab community and a secular state without the dominance of religion in public space), a change in the relationship between the state and the Jewish diaspora, a synthesis of the diaspora’s cultural heritage in Israel (including a proper place for the Yiddish language), and peaceful coexistence with the neighboring Arab states.<sup>147</sup>

The Bund’s propaganda, critical of the state, sought an audience outside its movement, mainly among disappointed new Israeli citizens. In 1957 the Bund had over 1,000 members. Two years later, in the Knesset elections, it received 1,300 votes. Shortly afterwards, the Bund’s press publication *Lebens Fragen* had about 2,000 readers, which means that it was also attracting readers outside the Bund community (most of whom were probably also Bundists living abroad).<sup>148</sup> Undoubtedly, the left-wing Gomulka Aliyah might also have increased support for this party. As an antiestablishment group, the Bund gave Jewish immigrants a space to express dissatisfaction and disappointment, and looked favorably on those who wanted to return to the diaspora and affirm their ties with Jewish life there. The Gomulka Aliyah was left-wing in character, and in the first years after they arrived these *olim* were so disappointed with

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144 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 196.

145 Quoted after Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 189, 197.

146 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 189, 197.

147 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 189, 197.

148 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 189, 197.

life in Israel that they embraced an anti-Zionist party, the Bund, at least up through the elections to the Knesset in 1959. In any case, for the first time since the creation of the state, there was an opportunity for the Bundists to take seats in the Knesset with the support of the new *olim* from countries of the Soviet bloc, including Poland.

The person responsible for the launching of *Po Prostu* in Israel was Szumski, also known as Stammer or Gabriel Cichocki (in another document, his real name is given as Ryszard Cichocki). Before he left Poland in 1957, he had supposedly been a member of the Socialist Youth Union, which may explain his attempts to establish a similar organization in Israel and his launch of *Po Prostu*. At the end of 1958, he appeared in the Bund's administration office, introducing himself as a representative of the newly established socialist youth organization, determined to fight for the introduction of true socialism in Israel. At that time, the Israeli Bund was led by a former member of the Communist Party of Poland who had become a Bundist, Eihenbach, also known as Artur Artuski, who intended to run for the Knesset in the upcoming election. The general secretary of the Bund, Mordechaj Kuśnier, was also from Poland and had immigrated in 1957. Both Artuski and Kuśnier, just before the 1959 Knesset election, were pleased that there were young people in the ranks of the Bund, giving it a young and progressive image. Artuski therefore agreed to financially support the socialist youth organization and even agreed to print their materials free of charge in the Bund's printing house. Another one of Szumski's successes with the Bund was to convince its leaders to edit a youth magazine in Polish – *Po Prostu* – which was meant to be directly connected with the Union of Socialist Youth. The leaders of the Bund not only supported the idea of publishing a new Polish-language newspaper but also made space available at their headquarters at 48 Kalischer Street in Tel Aviv. The editorial office was headed by the children's book writer Jerzy Herman (the name of the editor-in-chief printed in the masthead, Witold Wolkosz, was Jerzy Herman's pseudonym), who was born in Kraków on 12 July 1932.<sup>149</sup> He survived the war in Hungary (1942–45), and from there he returned to Kraków. He was a journalist and columnist; in Poland he worked in the political editorial office of Polish Radio in Kraków, and from 1955 to 1956 in the Katowice branch of *Sztandar Młodych* [Banner of the Youth]. He also collaborated with the magazine *Współczesność* [Contemporary Times]. He immigrated to Israel in 1957. He did not take an active part in youth organizations in Poland.<sup>150</sup> In

149 AINR, file 01237/394/J, Herman Jerzy, copy of a note titled "Kosa," Tel Aviv, 4 May 1959.

150 AINR, file 01237/394/J, Herman Jerzy, report, 19 October 1960.

his exit questionnaire he stated that he made a living by writing fairy tales and epigrams for the press – he was unemployed because of an illness.<sup>151</sup> Despite his deep disappointment with Israel, he applied three times for an exit visa to travel there: in 1942 in Hungary and in 1950 in Poland – both denied – and finally successfully on 12 March 1957 in Poland.<sup>152</sup>

*Po Prostu*, a symbol of the political thaw in Poland, had the power to attract readers' attention. *Po Prostu* "guaranteed interest":<sup>153</sup> "Going through the drabness of my daily student routine, running along the streets of Jerusalem, rushing from a lecture to the laboratory – something pinned me to the sidewalk next to a newsstand; this 'something' was like a stab in the heart, like a painful memory of something that no longer existed. ... Could it be that *Po Prostu*, published in Warsaw, had managed to escape its cage, fly hundreds of kilometers, and settle in a multilingual newsstand on Jerusalem Street to snag the attention – with its familiar green masthead – of people who remember ...?"<sup>154</sup> As the Polish secret services reported, the look of this newspaper had been chosen at Szumski's request; the masthead of the Polish newspaper *Po Prostu* was copied, and the introductory article of the first issue referred to the spiritual legacy and strong ideological bond between the team of the liquidated Polish *Po Prostu* and the socialist youth organization in Israel – the publisher of this magazine. Szumski was supposedly inspired by the Polish *Po Prostu*, with which – as he often emphasized – he had collaborated before leaving Poland.<sup>155</sup> This association was exploited in order to lure readers.

For many immigrants of the Gomułka Aliyah, the resonance of this newspaper triggered a strong reaction in the Polish-speaking community, which can most simply be explained by the appropriation, together with the name, of a symbol that was a significant force behind the political transformations that had taken place in Poland in October 1956, in which some of the *olim* had taken part. Some groups, though, were focused on trying to discredit the newspaper and exclude it from the market.<sup>156</sup> It also caused quite a stir in governmental

151 AINR, file 01237/394/J, Herman Jerzy, passport questionnaire, 23 January 1957.

152 AINR, file 01237/394/J, Herman Jerzy, note, 6 August 1960.

153 "Po Prostu' strach" [Fear, *Po Prostu*], *Po Prostu* 15 III, no. 5 (1959): 4, 7: "The authors of these new attacks on our magazine are not very creative in their search for titles of their works and their tedious use of the phrase 'quite frankly.'"

154 "I do nas piszą studenci" [And Students Are Writing to Us], *Po Prostu*, no. 1 (1959): 5.

155 AINR, file 01237/394/J, Herman Jerzy.

156 "W mieszkaniu powieszzonego nie mówi się o sznurku – Niewolnicy masochizmu czy niewolnicy banków? – odpowiedzi panom Klugmanowi i Hartenowi" [In the Home of a Hanged Man Nobody Mentions Rope – Slaves of Masochism or Slaves of Banks? Some Answers to Mr. Klugman and Mr. Harten], *Po Prostu*, no. 1 (1959): 4.

circles, especially at the Polish legation in Tel Aviv. The author of a memo who, according to the text, was an informant from the narrow circle of the newspaper's editorial staff and the Bund, tried to reassure the Polish secret services: "I wrote clearly that the newspaper's name was merely symbolic and had no connection with the *Po Prostu* that was published in Poland. [...] There is no doubt that we could use an 'October' or any other month to purify the atmosphere of our democracy."<sup>157</sup> But the connections between the Israeli and Polish newspapers titled *Po Prostu* ended there. In response to readers' questions, the editors explained their choice in the following way:

On the overcrowded Israeli journalistic market, there is one more newspaper, which has a title that carries associations with a place full of memories from only two years ago. Long queues of people have formed in front of newsstands, snapping up the last copies, distributing the confiscated articles from hand to hand. However, we have not chosen this title in order to continue the existence of the former Polish *Po Prostu* – after all, we are not a Polish émigré newspaper. For us, this name is a symbol of a brave, uncompromising newspaper, which, we dare say, does not yet exist in Israel. We have also chosen it because, in addition to freedom of expression, the mindset in the country in which we have come to live is too similar to everything we fought against in our former homeland: bureaucracy that surpasses everything we have seen so far in this area, trade unions that effectively defend workers against the struggle for their own interests, contempt for human beings and homebred Stalinists – reversed racism and putting national considerations above social ones. Who are we, and what do we want to oppose all this with? Our newspaper is published by the Union of Young Socialists, which was founded recently. An important point is that there are many different types of socialism in the world [...]. So, what is our socialism like? We believe that the workers' parties existing in the country have linked their agendas with Zionism. Whatever our attitude towards Zionism is, we believe that the very fact of linking socialism to nationalism, represented by Zionism, narrows its scope and pushes it into one of history's dead-ends. It forces the workers' parties to vacillate and make compromises that do not suit us.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>157</sup> AINR, file 01237/394/J, Herman Jerzy, copy of a note titled "Kosa," Tel Aviv, 4 May 1959 (a letter sent by one of the editors of *Po Prostu*), the author of this letter writes, "The magazine that I edit ...".

<sup>158</sup> "Dlaczego właśnie 'Po Prostu'?" [Why *Po Prostu*?], *Po Prostu*, 19 XI, no. 1 (1958): 1.

The aims formulated by the editors echoed the political agenda of the Bund in the 1959 elections.<sup>159</sup> The six issues of the newspaper are not enough to say to what extent *Po Prostu* supported the Israeli Bund; the only certain thing is its financial connection to the party. Close contact between the newspaper and the Bund ensured financial resources for its publication – loans and aid for the editorial team – and the party hoped that with the arrival of a wave of left-wing people from Poland it would be able to enter the Knesset.<sup>160</sup> The content of the newspaper was mostly addressed to people who wished to return to their home country.

Is it any wonder that those who hadn't seen Israel with their own eyes and hadn't known if they would be able to acclimatize exercised this right – and even made their departure conditional on it many times? [...] Today, people shudder during sleepless nights and wonder if their old hearts will withstand another *khamsin* [a hot, dry, gusty desert wind blowing on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea – E. K.]. Those who left first embarked upon a reconnaissance mission, leaving behind in Poland mothers, wives, and children, not infrequently Polish, and today they see that bringing them here would have been a crime due to the impossibility of providing for them.<sup>161</sup>

The title of the quoted article makes reference to the book *Pasażerowie martwej wizy* [Passengers of the Dead Visa] by Stefan Arski.<sup>162</sup> It was a satire of Polish emigration, ridiculing, among other things, the “dead visas” issued by the Polish government in London. Referencing this book, the article stated, “Today I'm holding a dead visa issued by the homeland of Mr. Arski and its legal, not grotesque, government-in-exile.”<sup>163</sup>

The article “Pasażerowie martwej wizy” [Passengers of the Dead Visa] was also a response to an article by Janina Markiewicz in *Nowiny*, which stated that the Gomulka Aliyah “arrived with the facial expressions of insulted aunts, with a negative attitude towards everything, convinced they were doing someone a favor simply by coming here, certain that nothing good could be expected from the devious scabs who had outwitted them and thwarted them from settling in one of the countries flowing with milk and honey.”<sup>164</sup> Their Polish citizenship

159 “Dlaczego właśnie ‘Po Prostu’?”, 1.

160 “‘Po Prostu’ organ zależny [*Po Prostu* – A Dependent Press Organ], *Walka*, no. 12 (1958): 4.

161 “Pasażerowie martwej wizy” [Passengers of the Dead Visa], *Po Prostu*, 19 XI, no. 1 (1958): 1.

162 Stefan Arski, *Pasażerowie martwej wizy* [Passengers of the Dead Visa] (Warsaw, 1953).

163 Arski, *Pasażerowie martwej wizy*.

164 “Pasażerowie martwej wizy” [Passengers of the Dead Visa], *Po Prostu*, no. 1 (1959): 1.

had expired – or in fact had been taken away by the communist government in Warsaw – which closed off all means of returning to Poland. This was a serious problem for those who did not want to adapt to their new homeland.<sup>165</sup> Israeli political parties tried to help them settle. Communists, who supported a return to a “proper” system and were interested in attracting new people to join them, offered political work on the spot. And the Israeli newspaper *Po Prostu* was intended for those who did not want to belong to any of these political worlds – they defended themselves against Israeli communists but did not identify themselves either with Zionism or with Israeli reality. They formed a community of Polish citizens of Jewish origin who were ready to return to their country of origin. It was a newspaper aimed at people with a sense of transience, those who had decided to line up for a visa at the Polish consulate immediately after arriving in Israel. Although the New Year’s greetings given to readers by the editors of *Po Prostu* in 1959 included the words “we wish you a quick settlement in the country,” the other contents of the newspaper did not encourage this.<sup>166</sup>

The group of new immigrants who quickly changed their intent upon arrival in Israel from the “right to return” to a “temporary stay” was large. The community of journalists who worked for *Po Prostu* estimated that among the 30,000 people who had arrived by 1958, about 8,000 wanted to return to Poland.<sup>167</sup> At that time it seemed like significant capital for the newspaper, while it was also a serious signal to the Israeli secret services to weaken the anti-state publishing initiatives – the communist newspaper *Walka* and the Bund’s *Po Prostu*.<sup>168</sup> A leading hero of the community connected to *Po Prostu*, who was also denied the right to return to Poland, was Marek Hłasko.<sup>169</sup> It was his work that was supposed to be the editors’ main asset in gaining Polish readers. Marek Hłasko was a friend of the editorial team, especially Jerzy Herman. They lived together at the Hess Hotel in Tel Aviv, where they felt quite at home among the intelligentsia from Poland who had been assigned temporary rooms by the Jewish Agency. Hłasko became a symbol of people living outside the system – readers of the Israeli *Po Prostu* were outside of it too. He was an ideal “hero” for Jews of Polish origin – “without a visa” – stateless citizens in Israel. He also became

165 “Po Prostu’ organ zależny,” 4.

166 *Po Prostu*, no. 1 (1959): 1.

167 “Pasażerowie martwej wizy” [Passengers of the Dead Visa], *Po Prostu*, 19 XI, no. 1 (1958): 1.

168 “Pasażerowie martwej wizy” [Passengers of the Dead Visa], *Po Prostu*, 19 XI, no. 1 (1958): 1.

169 He published a short story titled “Śliczna dziewczyna” [A Lovely Girl] in *Po Prostu*, 19 XI, no. 1 (1958): 4; AINR, file 1585/7768, citizenship oversight of the Ministry of the Interior in 1970, correspondence.

an ideological hero in the fight against the system, a nonconformist – as such, Zionists did not like him, and he displeased the communists.<sup>170</sup>

On the one hand, the community of people connected to *Po Prostu* were aware of their Jewish origins and were closely connected to Jewish culture and the diasporic past, which seemed helpful in the process of adaptation. On the other hand, however, they did not accept the new image of the Jew, in which an important element was supposed to be the ethos of the land, connected with Eretz Israel and Hebraism – “the new Jewish nation.” *Po Prostu* wished to become the voice of progressive and secular communities who were familiar with Jewish culture but were not interested in joining religious groups or being part of religious life in Israel. The editorial team was in favor of supporting the heritage of the diaspora, the memory of the Holocaust and the ghetto uprising, and the history of the socialist movement.

The Israeli *Po Prostu* was particularly inconvenient for the legation of the Polish People’s Republic in Tel Aviv. Even though the title *Po Prostu* had only symbolic meaning, in people’s minds it was associated with the underground movement (Radio Free Europe). Political power was imparted to it, even though the community itself was, in reality, completely helpless.<sup>171</sup> The legation considered officially asking the Israeli government to shut down the newspaper, but it was impossible due to freedom of the press.<sup>172</sup> It can be assumed that the unfavorable opinion of *Po Prostu* expressed in *Nowiny-Kurier* was a response to the requests of the Israeli government to maintain good relations with the legation. Another way of discrediting the newspaper was to try to eliminate it from newsstands by “sending out people who walked around to the newsagents, telling them not to sell our newspaper because it is a communist newspaper.”<sup>173</sup> The editors tried to defend themselves against this by encouraging readers to contact them directly or even demand that the newspaper be sold at every newsstand, “because the newsagents are yielding to pressure and hiding our newspaper. If you, the reader, are refused the sale of

170 “Wszystko o Marku Hłasce” [Everything about Marek Hłasko], *Po Prostu*, 19 XI, no. 1 (1958): 5.

171 AMFA, folder 21, file 711, bundle 50, report for the period from 1 July to 31 December 1958 sent from the legation of the Polish People’s Republic in Tel Aviv to the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 19 December, 1958, card 12; AMFA, folder 21, file 712, bundle 50, report from the legation of the Polish People’s Republic in Tel Aviv sent to the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw for the period from 1 January to 31 July 1959, 6 August 1959; AINR, file 01649/175/J microfilm, Gefen Maurycy, cards 71, 73, 74.

172 AINR, file 01649/175/J microfilm, Gefen Maurycy, cards 71, 73, 74.

173 “W mieszkaniu powieszono nie mówi się o sznurku,” 4.

*Po Prostu*, please send a few words to our editorial office, giving the address of the newsstand so that we won't accept returns from it."<sup>174</sup> *Po Prostu* was meant to be a biweekly publication. From the very beginning it appeared irregularly, which readers were informed of in the first issues. They were published with a delay, since there were problems with acquiring paper.<sup>175</sup> Before the publication of the first issue, distribution problems also arose. When establishing the newspaper, Szumski stated that it would be distributed by the Union of Socialist Youth. After the first issue was printed, it turned out that the "youth union," which was thriving in Israeli conditions, was not interested in this kind of occupation, even for a percentage of its sales.

The newspaper could not offer any special political advantage to the Bund, either. In the 1959 election, the group received only 1,322 votes. The Bund made accusations of election tampering and that the votes for this party had not been counted or had been invalidated. Larger Israeli political parties exploited the weakness of Jews from Eastern Europe by offering much more than the Bund could in the sphere of sought-after goods, especially housing and jobs. The Bund was too marginalized and too antiestablishment to have enough influence to encourage people to associate with it.<sup>176</sup> When the Gomulka Aliyah arrived, the Israeli Bundists still hoped they would become a mass movement, but a dozen or so years later they understood that their sphere was limited solely to people who had very close ties to Bund politics and culture. Only six issues of the Israeli *Po Prostu* newspaper were published. However, its editors fought for its existence for two fundamental reasons: to support the Bund, its patron party, and, above all, because of the newspaper's title. The Israeli *Po Prostu* ultimately had only symbolic significance; its resonance on the Israeli political scene, owing to its title, was much more profound than its real value.

174 *Po Prostu*, no. 2 (1959): 1.

175 *Po Prostu*, no. 2 (1959): 1.

176 Slucki, *International Jewish Labor Bund*, 200–201.