

The Warsaw Rising, 1944: Perception and Reality¹

Last fall CNN decided to make a documentary on the Warsaw Rising of 1944.² The producers and journalists involved with the project initially knew very little.³ To remedy that, first, they were given a short bibliography in English.⁴ Next, they were shown a few hours of original documentary footage and several albums of still photography from the Rising. Further, the CNN team was supplied with a list of witnesses and participants. Last but not least, the producers became familiar with the music from the Rising. In short, after

¹ This paper, which I would like to dedicate to Dr. Maria Michejda, was written for the 62nd Annual Meeting of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, June 4-5, 2004, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, and, in particular for the panel “The Warsaw Uprising, 1944: A 60th Anniversary Perspective.” The original title of the paper was “The Warsaw Uprising, 1944: Perception and reality.” However, as Norman Davies has perceptively observed, “The Warsaw Uprising” not only is a direct translation from the German (*Aufstand*) but also has been for decades associated, in the West in general and in the US in particular, with the Jewish rebellion in the ghetto of Warsaw against the Nazis in 1943. To stress the uniqueness of the Varsovian insurrection of 1944 and to establish it as a separate historical phenomenon in Western consciousness, we shall henceforth refer to it as “the Warsaw Rising”. See Norman Davies to Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, 6 June 2004.

² The project was initially conceived and piloted by Dr. Maria Michejda and Ewa Sobotowska under the umbrella of Lady Blanka Rosenstiel’s American Institute of Polish Culture in Miami, Florida. After a few months, however, Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested the Warsaw Rising story to CNN’s David Ensor, who convinced his supervisors about the feasibility of the project. The documentary is scheduled to air on June 6, 2004, at 8:00pm (prime time). The program is scheduled to appear on the 60th Anniversary of D-Day, the Allied landing in Normandy. The producers aim to juxtapose their account of the Polish tragedy with the programming on other TV and cable stations that will predictably celebrate the triumphant advance of the Western Allies in France. The producers have warned us half-jokingly that neither the scholars nor the witnesses nor the participants of the Rising will like the documentary because it is intended for foreign-mass audiences of cable TV, and, thus, the authors of the documentary had to simplify the story to conform with the dominant cultural paradigm. Meanwhile, the American Institute of Polish Culture continues to sponsor independently the Warsaw Rising film project directed by Eugene Starky.

³ Except for David Ensor, who lived in Poland in the early 1980s and keeps returning there periodically.

⁴ This included, first and foremost, J.K. Zawodny’s indispensable monograph for professionals, and, second, Norman Davies’s recent *tour de force* for non-Poles. See J.K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour: The Story of the Warsaw Uprising, 1944* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978); Norman Davies, *Rising ’44: The Battle for Warsaw* (New York: Viking, 2004). However, CNN ordered the UK edition of the work which became available over half a year earlier. Subsequently, CNN interviewed at least four scholars for the project: Zbigniew Brzezinski (CSIS), Norman Davies (Oxford), David Kennedy (Stanford University), and Marek Jan Chodakiewicz (The Institute of World Politics, Washington, DC, www.iwp.edu). MJCh also consulted *pro bono* for the project from its inception.

immersing themselves in the material, they probably learned more about this historical event than the average Pole.

The questions that the CNN interviewers subsequently posed to the witnesses and scholars reflected a desire for an unequivocal moral judgment. Was the Rising a story of betrayal? they asked. Was it heroism? Was it realism? Was it folly? Plainly, the CNN team became embroiled in the debate about the Rising that has gripped Poland's elite and some foreign scholars and pundits for sixty years. That debate has been framed largely in terms of seeking to pin the responsibility for the calamity that befell Warsaw and its people. Yet, moral judgment is heavily influenced not only by the tragedy of Warsaw itself, but also, to a much greater extent, by the fact that Poland lost the Second World War: for nearly half a century it remained a Soviet colony with its people periodically rising up for freedom and independence. For the most part, both the apologists for the Rising and its critics consciously and subconsciously, covertly and overtly, sought to chisel their arguments to reflect either their approval or disapproval of the post-war *status quo*.⁵

Moral judgment was often thus employed to undo or maintain the Yalta Agreement of 1945, rather than to understand the Rising of 1944 for its own sake. Moral rhetoric was also deployed to address pre-war political differences between Poland's major orientations, the Piłsudskites and the Nationalists in particular. Both groups naturally were opposed to "Yalta" but both competed for moral and political leadership of the émigré community, and, to a much lesser extent, of the Poles in the home country. Meanwhile, the Communists dialectically plagiarized much of the Nationalist

⁵ One has to remember that only as far as the Communists and their Western sympathizers were concerned was the "anti-Rising" approach tantamount to the approval of the Yalta order. However, the Communists and their allies drew freely on all non-Communist criticism of the Rising to strengthen their case.

criticism of the Piłsudskite role in the rising in an ultimately vain search for legitimacy for their rule over Poland.⁶

In short, because of the Cold War and its legacy, Communist censorship and the lack of academic freedom in particular, our understanding of the Rising is colored by a variety of perceptions, rather than realities.⁷ Perhaps now the time has finally come to reassess the events and refocus the debate on the Rising. First, we shall restate briefly what is agreed upon. Second, we shall consider hitherto unknown facts which bear directly upon our understanding of the events. Third, we shall identify the uses and abuses of the legacy of the Rising which influenced our perceptions of it. Lastly, we shall suggest how reality may have differed from the current perception of these tragic events.

The Warsaw Rising (August 1, 1944 - October 3, 1944) was a seminal watershed in Poland's modern history. The Rising was the culmination of the Polish Underground Home Army's Operation Tempest (*Burza*). A rolling insurrection intended to liberate Poland during the Nazi retreat, it was launched to establish a free Polish administration and to prevent a Soviet takeover. Its culmination was the Warsaw Rising. It was an engagement arguably more fierce than even the battle of Stalingrad because it involved not only military forces but also civilian non-combatants. A major battle of the Second World War, the Rising resulted in the destruction of the Polish capital and the decimation of its traditional elite. 250,000 Christian Poles died in the process. Meanwhile, the

⁶ The Nationalists were the first, albeit not the only ones, to criticize the Rising. Conservatives and others thought similarly. The most prominent example of the non-Communist "anti-Rising" or "realist" school is Jan M. Ciechanowski, whose *Powstanie Warszawskie: Zarys podłoża dyplomatycznego i politycznego* was first published by Odnova in London in 1971, subsequently translated as *Warsaw Rising 1944* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), and recently re-issued by Cambridge University Press (2002). Ciechanowski's work was also put out in Poland by the Communists, in several editions, e.g., by Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in Warsaw in 1984.

⁷ Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Poland's Fragebogen: Collective Stereotypes, Individual Recollections," in *Poland's Transformation: A Work in Progress: Studies in Honor of Professor Kenneth W. Thompson*, ed. by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, John Radziłowski, and Dariusz Tołczyk (Charlottesville, VA: Leopolis Press, 2003), 223-67.

Red Army stood idly by a couple of miles away, watching with glee as Warsaw was consumed by Nazi fury. To add insult to injury, instead of helping the Poles, Stalin's troops busied themselves with arresting and either shooting or shipping off to the Gulag the officers and some of the rank-and-file of the Home Army. The rest were forcibly inducted into the Polish Communist army, a fighting force subordinated to the USSR but ostensibly controlled by the proxy Communist administration that Stalin had meanwhile imposed upon Poland.

The hostile attitude of the Soviets stemmed directly from their defeat by the Poles in the Polish-Soviet War of 1920. The so-called Katyn affair was an important watershed in the long history of hostility. In spring 1940 Stalin's NKVD shot about 22,000 Poles, mostly POW officers, at the Katyn Forest and elsewhere. When the crime was unearthed, literally, by the Nazis in spring 1943, and the Polish government-in-exile demanded an official investigation, Stalin refused to admit guilt and broke off diplomatic relations with the Poles. The Western Allies naturally sided with Stalin, who was a key member of the anti-Nazi coalition. The British and American idea of finding a compromise was to goad the Poles into agreeing to Stalin's terms. That involved not only embracing the official Soviet propaganda lie about the alleged Nazi guilt for the Katyn massacre, but also the active acquiescence in Stalin's intended annexation of Poland's Eastern Borderlands and, ultimately, to the colonization and Communization of the rump Polish state. For all intents and purposes, the United States and the United Kingdom washed their hands of the First Ally, as Norman Davies dubbed Poland.

Against this background, a Cold War persisted between the USSR and the free Poles in exile. Hence, when the Red Army approached Warsaw in the summer of 1944, there was

no coordination of action with the Polish Underground. Further, Polish-Soviet relations were exacerbated by the fact that since 1942 at least the Soviet and Polish Communist partisans fought an undeclared war against the Polish Underground in central and, especially, eastern Poland, the north-eastern Provinces of Nowogródek and Wilno in particular.⁸ Last but not least, Polish-Soviet or, more broadly, Polish-Russian relations had been hostile long before Hitler and Stalin jointly launched the Second World War against Poland.

In any event, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* – AK) and its High Command (*Komenda Główna*) – the body responsible for the decision to launch the ill-fated insurrection – was fully aware of all the above. In fact, the AK High Command members knew probably as much as their London superiors did as far as the international situation was concerned and certainly much more as far as the domestic developments. Nonetheless, the powers-that-be in the Polish Underground decided to take a chance. The decision was by no means uniform.

Generally, the political arm of the Polish Underground State was rather lukewarm, to say the least, toward the idea of the Rising. On the one hand, the Socialists supported an insurrection in principle but were rather cautious about the time and place, hoping the fighting in Warsaw would be kept to a minimum. On the other hand, the Nationalists opposed “insurrectionism” in principle but were open to staging an

⁸ See, for example, Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, ed., *Ejszyszki: Kulisy zajść w Ejszyszkach: Epilog stosunków polsko-żydowskich na Kresach, 1944-45: Wspomnienia-dokumenty-publicystyka*, 2 vols. (Warszawa: Fronda, 2002); Mark Paul, “Anti-Semitic Pogrom in Ejszyszki?: An Overview of Polish-Jewish Relations in Wartime Northeastern Poland,” in *The Story of Two Shtetls, Brańsk and Ejszyszki: An Overview of Polish-Jewish Relations in Northeastern Poland during World War II*, Part Two (Toronto and Chicago: The Polish Educational Foundation in North America, 1998), 9-172; Mark Paul, *A Tangled Web: Polish-Jewish Relations in Wartime Northeastern Poland and in the Postwar Period* (Toronto: PEFINA Press, 2004) forthcoming, Internet: http://www.kpk.org/english/toronto/tangledweb_1_of_3.pdf
http://www.kpk.org/english/toronto/tangledweb_2_of_3.pdf
http://www.kpk.org/english/toronto/tangledweb_3_of_3.pdf

armed demonstration preferably on the outskirts of the capital, if not completely beyond the city limits as the Nazis retreated.⁹

The military men of the AK High Command were themselves divided. They had hoped that the dream scenario of the First World War would repeat itself in 1944: With the Nazi army checking the Soviets deep in the bowels of the USSR, Germany would collapse under the blows of the Western Allies and the demoralized German troops would be easily disarmed by the Poles. That was not to be. In late July 1944 the AK High Command faced the following scenarios: First, the Nazis would turn Warsaw into a fortress, deporting its population and destroying the city. Second, the Soviets would enter Warsaw and establish a Polish Communist administration in Poland's capital. Both eventualities spelled the annihilation of the political and military center of the Polish Underground State.

The AK decided to gamble against both occupiers. Faced with imminent Soviet occupation, the AK launched its Rising to capture the city before the arrival of the Red Army. Hence, this was both an anti-Nazi and an anti-Soviet insurrection. Some on the AK High Command hoped that even if the Rising were to fail, its launching would demonstrate to the Allies and the rest of the world the Polish will to fight and sacrifice for freedom. Also, a few Piłsudskite commanders may have even believed, in congruence with the Polish romantic tradition,

⁹ Because of the Soviet advance, the Nationalists scraped their insurrectionary plans through most of Poland and ordered their troops to return to the underground, forbidding them to reveal themselves to the Red Army. However, because the National Military Organization (NOW) and most of the National Armed Forces (NSZ) had been subordinated to the Home Army, the Nationalist units fought alongside the AK in the "Tempest" throughout Poland. And so did the National Radical part of the National Armed Forces on occasion. Nonetheless, the Nationalists opposed the "Tempest" and, especially, its "W-Hour" option in Warsaw. Instead, the Nationalists, and the National Armed Forces in particular, championed an attack on eastern Germany to eject the German population from that land and to claim it for Poland. See Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* (London: Odnova, 1982); Leszek Żebrowski, ed., *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne: Dokumenty, struktury, personalia*, 3 vols. (Warszawa: Burchard Edition, 1994-1996); Mariusz Bechta and Leszek Żebrowski, eds., *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne na Podlasiu*, 3 vols. (Siedlce and Biała Podlaska: Związek Żołnierzy NSZ and Rekonkwista, 1997-2003); and Lucyna Kulińska, *Narodowcy: Z dziejów obozu narodowego w Polsce w latach 1944-1947* (Warszawa and Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1999).

that a significant price in blood must be paid to create a grand legend that would sustain the nation in captivity for the next generation or so.

That much most of us can agree on. Or, at least, most of us have heard many of the aforementioned facts and interpretations deriving from them. However, there are still “blank spots” (*białe plamy*) regarding the Rising. The most vexing one, arguably, is our limited knowledge about Stalin’s decision making regarding the Poles and the insurrection in Warsaw.¹⁰ Next, no satisfactory scholarly monograph exists on women insurgents, an infuriating lacuna. Neither do we have anything comprehensive on the role of the “*fremdvölkische*” Nazi auxiliaries, mostly Soviet citizens. This is a serious omission considering that these troops comprised, by some estimates, “nearly 50 percent of the German-led forces” in the Rising.¹¹ Likewise, practically nothing has been written on Polish collaborators fighting on the Nazi side, nor on the activities of Polish underground secret operatives who, by design or accident, like Jan Moor Jankowski, found themselves stuck on the German side.¹² The story of children

¹⁰ For a tantalizing but inadequate glimpse into the matter see Tomasz Strzembosz and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Z archiwów sowieckich*, vol. 4: *Stalin a Powstanie Warszawskie* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1994).

¹¹ See Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Der Warschauer Aufstand, 1944* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2001), 4. This is a rather pedestrian work with a limited scholarly value. The author based himself mainly on the data available in the 1980s and failed to consider much of what has been published since 1989. The chief strength of the monograph is that it was published in German, thus popularizing a topic that has largely receded into obscurity in Germany. See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, “The Uprising Retold,” *Neue Politische Literatur* vol. 47, no. 2 (2002): 344-46, and an expanded version as “Der Warschauer Aufstand,” *The Sarmatian Review* [Houston], vol. XXII, no. 2 (April 2002): 875-80.

¹² Jan Moor Jankowski’s father was killed by the Germans in late 1942 in his hometown of Częstochowa. The son fled to Warsaw, where he first joined the radical-right Sword and Plow (*Miecz i Plug*) and later the Home Army. Arrested several times, he was incarcerated at KZ Warschau and at Pawiak. He managed to escape. Aside from his official underground tasks, Moor Jankowski assisted a few of his Jewish friends, in particular Anetka Kon and her mother Marusia Rajkis-Kon. Meanwhile, the underground issued him with a false identity and Moor Jankowski traveled around as an officer in the Todt Organization. In November 1943 he crossed the front line at Zhitomir, but was forced to flee to the German side after the NKVD unsuccessfully attempted to arrest him. In the spring of 1944, upon his return to Warsaw, he was dispatched to Berlin by the underground, where he continued impersonating a Todt organization officer. Soon after, he was captured by the Gestapo but escaped once again. He found himself on the German side in the Rising. He was evacuated with the rest of the non-essential German personnel and later succeeded in fleeing to Switzerland, where, after the war, he finished medical school. After a distinguished career at the University of Geneva and Cambridge University, Jan Moor Jankowski moved to the US to work at NYU’s School of Medicine. He is a recipient of Israel’s Trumpeldor

during and after the Rising has been largely neglected, although there is plenty material to mine, including, for instance, the adventures of the indomitable Rafał Gan-Ganowicz.¹³

Probably the time will come when a new generation of academics turns its attention to the tantalizing question of love and sex during the Rising or the allegedly ubiquitous homoerotic elements in the insurgent photography. Now however that approach would not only be premature and frivolous but also plainly unscholarly. After all, Western intellectuals first researched thoroughly the basic facts of, say, the American Civil War, before they turned to its reinterpretation as well as to a consideration of some of its more unusual aspects.

No comprehensive fact-finding was able to take place in Poland in regards to the Warsaw Rising until after 1989. Communist censorship and lack of academic freedom effectively prevented open discussion. And later, they limited its scope. At the moment, to apply the sledge hammer of queer theory and deconstruction to the Rising would be tantamount to bringing back the steamroller of Marxist propaganda to bear on the topic. Thus, the chief objective before a historian is to establish basic facts, not the sexy ones.

I have researched and written about three “blank spots,” three areas where the basic facts were missing: the Jewish population; the Polish Right; and the Communists. These are not only largely unknown topics, but also are deemed “controversial.”¹⁴ I tackled these issues separately and

Medal (decorated by Prime Minister Golda Meir) and America’s only member of the French Academy of Medicine. See “Jeden z MiP: Jan Moor Jankowski,” *Glaukopis*, 3 (2004) (forthcoming).

¹³ See Rafał Gan-Ganowicz, *Kondotierzy* (London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, 1989); Anita Gargas, “Dzika postać antykomunisty,” *Gazeta Polska*, 11 December 2002.

¹⁴ The very act of venturing onto this historical minefield is considered suicidal by many scholars, some of whom have nonetheless formed strong opinions about them usually tainted by an obvious liberal or leftist bias. Although generally lacking much concrete knowledge about the National Armed Forces, the Jewish population, and the Communist during the Warsaw Rising, one can always find a few pundits ready to opine on those topics.

comprehensively.¹⁵ In the process, I obtained some new information concerning these matters. Since then further inroads have been made by a few promising young scholars, particularly into the mysterious world of the far right.¹⁶

The following preliminary observations can now be made on the three topics. The Polish right wingers were a major force in the Rising.¹⁷ For its duration, all right-wing groups subordinated itself to the Home Army. The AK fielded thus around 40,000 fighters in and around Warsaw, including at least half who originated in rightist organizations. The insurgent units organized by the National Party (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*) and other right-wing groups, including the National Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*), the National Radical Movement (*Ruch Narodowo-Radykalny*),¹⁸ and the Underground Army of the Sword and Plow (*Armia*

¹⁵ See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne: „Ząb” przeciw dwu wrogom* (Warszawa: Fronda, 1999); Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, Piotr Gontarczyk, and Leszek Żebrowski, eds., *Tajne oblicze AL-GL i PPR: Dokumenty* (Warszawa: Burchard Edition, 1997-1999); Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy, 1918-1955: Współistnienie, Zagłada, Komunizm* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2000); Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, “The National Armed Forces: A Glimpse at the Grass-Roots,” *Nihil Novi: The Bulletin of the Kosciuszko Chair in Polish Studies* vol. 2 (Fall 2002): 31-38, posted at <http://www.iwp.edu/faculty/facultyID.32/profile.asp>.

¹⁶ Admittedly, only one monograph concentrates on the Warsaw Rising. See Sebastian Bojemski, *Poszli w skier powodzi: Narodowe Siły Zbrojne w Powstaniu Warszawskim* (Warszawa and Charlottesville, VA: Wydawnictwo Społeczno-historyczne Glaukopis, 2002). I would like to thank once again Mr. Witold Sulimirski of the Kościuszko Foundation and Professor Jan Moor Jankowski for sponsoring Sebastian’s research and writing in the US which made the completion of his monograph possible. Other works concern Warsaw partly or even only peripherally. See Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński, *W walce o Wielką Polskę: Propaganda zaplecza politycznego Narodowych Sił Zbrojnych (1939-1945)* (Biała Podlaska and Warszawa: Rekonkwista and Rachocki i s-ka, 2000); Aneta Wojcieszekiewicz, “Miecz i Pług: Ideologia i działalność, 1939-1945,” *Glaukopis: Pismo społeczno-historyczne*, no. 3 (2004) (forthcoming), which is based upon her master’s thesis defended at the University of Warsaw in 1998; and Mariusz Bechta, *Radykalizm dla tradycji: Z dziejów międzywojennego ruchu narodowego na Podlasiu* (Warszawa: Glaukopis, 2004) (forthcoming).

¹⁷ A satisfactory monograph on the nationalist movement is still lacking. Krzysztof Komorowski, *Polityka i walka: Konspiracja zbrojna ruchu narodowego, 1939-1945* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2000) is an uneven recent work by an ex-Communist military historian. For critical reviews see Leszek Żebrowski, “Monografia ruchu narodowego 1939-1945, czyli Krzysztofa Komorowskiego droga przez mękę,” *Mars: Komisja Główna b. Sztabu Genralnego* [Warszawa-London] no. 13 (2002): 164-188; Lucyna Kulińska, “O narodowcach raz jeszcze,” posted at <http://www.mailbox.olsztyn.pl/users/mail0070/nsz/nhtm/nsha22-e.htm>.

¹⁸ In fact, the RNR surreptitiously came to dominate a motley crew of underground groups with little, if any, pre-war ties to its ideology, actions, or personnel. See Kazimierz Malinowski, *Tajna Armia Polska, Znak, Konfederacja Zbrojna: Zarys genezy, organizacji i działalności* (Warszawa: Pax, 1986); Kazimierz Krajewski, *Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe, 1942-1944* (Warszawa: Pax, 1992); Zofia Kobyłańska, *Konfederacja Narodu w Warszawie* (Warszawa: Pax, 1999).

Podziemna “Miecz i Pług”) appear to have constituted a plurality in the Polish underground on the eve of the Rising.¹⁹

To illustrate, I shall limit myself to the National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne – NSZ*). In September 1943 the NSZ reached over 70,000 members and in March 1944 an estimated 90,000 nationwide. In July 1944 the Warsaw garrison of the NSZ alone fielded about 6,800 soldiers, including a small minority of 2,000 radicals who did not subordinate themselves to the AK. During the Warsaw Rising, the number of the NSZ men and women fluctuated. Because the NSZ leadership was not informed of the Rising, most soldiers were caught off guard and failed to join their detachments. Instead, they fought in Home Army units and were considered Home Army soldiers. Only a minority managed to assemble as separate units, albeit subordinated to the Home Army. On August 9, 1944, their commander, Colonel Spirydion Koiszewski (“Topór”), reported to his Home Army superiors 2,316 men, including 340 officers of the NSZ in the city center alone. In the Old Town, the NSZ “Koło” Brigade had an estimated 1,200 men not subordinated to Colonel Koiszewski, who consequently failed to list them.²⁰ Thus, the NSZ deployed about 3,500 fighters, not counting several partisan units operating in close proximity of Warsaw

¹⁹ It can be estimated that nationwide, at its peak in mid-1944, the Home Army fielded up to 350,000 fighters. Many of them were right-wingers, Nationalists in particular. The AK in Western Poland was almost entirely a Nationalist affair. Elsewhere, in the Lublin and Kielce region for example, the Nationalists were overrepresented in the ranks of the AK. In other localities, such as Kraków, Lwów, and Wilno, the Nationalists dominated the middle rung cadres and, especially, the youth organizations. They were prominent in all urban centers, including Warsaw. After the NOW subordinated its 60,000 to the AK in 1942, it continued to attract Nationalist sympathizers into the ranks of its NOW-AK units, many of them in Warsaw. It can be estimated that the forces of the Polish right-wing in the Polish capitol in mid-1944 were as follows: NOW-AK – 10,000; NSZ-AK – 4,800; NSZ-ZJ (ONR) – 2,000; MiP – 1,500; KN – 1,000; other groups – 1,000. Thus, an estimated 20,300 men and women of the Polish Right were organized before the insurrection. However, most of them were not informed about the Rising and, consequently, failed to assemble in cohesive units for the fight. Thus, the majority of them participated in the insurrection as individuals in random AK detachments. See various sources cited in this essay.

²⁰ That included the future professor of history Stanisław Bóbr-Tylingo, a cadet officer in the Legia Akademicka of the NSZ-ZJ (ONR) in the Old Town.

to assist the insurgents (e.g., Battery “Kampinos” and the “Grey” Chojnowski Forest Company).

The National Armed Forces lost at least 1,079 killed in action during the Rising. The Home Army leadership commended the NSZ soldiers for their valor. For instance, according to a Home Army intelligence dispatch of September 9 (?), 1944, “as far as political groups are concerned, it is the members of the NSZ and the PPS [Polish Socialist Party] who distinguish themselves in these hard times.”²¹ The heroism of the PPS has long been recognized. The valor of the NSZ has been met with embarrassing silence largely because their ideology has been completely rejected in modern times, their anti-Jewish animus in particular. Hence, any positive remarks, no matter how solidly grounded in fact, about the Nationalists are treated, illogically, as an apology of anti-Semitism. By the same token, the fact that dozens of Jews fought in their ranks remains completely unknown.

Let us now consider yet another “blank spot”, the fate of the Jewish population during the Warsaw Rising. Much information about the Jews in the Polish capital still remains dispersed in various archives and numerous memoirs.²² Until quite recently scholars have been rather neglectful of the topic.²³ We still do not have a comprehensive monograph

²¹ Raport D, 9 (?) września 1944, Archiwum Wojskowego Instytutu Historycznego w Warszawie, Armia Krajowa, Komenda Okręgu Warszawskiego, Sztab – Oddział Wywiadowczy, Powstanie Warszawskie, quoted in Leszek Żebrowski, *Paszkwil Wyborczej (Michnik i Cichy o Powstaniu Warszawskim)* (Warszawa: Burchard Edition, 1995), 91.

²² See, for example, Yehuda Nir, *The Lost Childhood: A Memoir* (San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1989), 168-170; Benjamin Mandelkern, *Escape from the Nazis* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1988), 152-167; Chaim I. Goldsztejn, “Ze wspomnień Żyda, uczestnika Powstania Warszawskiego w 1944 r.,” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* no. 37 (January-March 1961): 89-97; Samuel Willenberg, *Surviving Treblinka* (London and Oxford: Basil Blackwell in Association with the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies, 1989), 173-203. For a few archival references see Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy*, 602 n. 143.

²³ For a pioneering work see Teresa Prekerowa, “Żydzi w powstaniu warszawskim,” *Powstanie warszawskie z perspektywy półwiecza: Studia i materiały z sesji naukowej na Zamku Królewskim w Warszawie, 14-15 czerwca 1994* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 1995), 84-94. For two superficial accounts that concentrate mainly on often unverified allegations of “Polish anti-Semitism” during the Rising see Reuben Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Poland: With a Historical Survey of the Jews as a Fighter and Soldier in the Diaspora* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 676-80; Shmuel Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland, 1942-1944* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1984), 275-291.

about the Jewish community during the Rising. Nonetheless, it is now estimated that as many as 20,000 Jews were in hiding in and around Warsaw on the eve of the insurrection.²⁴ Most were civilians during the Rising. A few of them fell victim to violence on the part of Poles.²⁵ It is now the scholarly consensus that probably some two score of Jewish civilians perished at the hands of a few rouge insurgents in a number of separate and unrelated incidents. Their motive seems to have been criminal, rather than political or racist.²⁶

Still, a number of controversial issues concerning Polish-Jewish relations during the Rising remain unexplored.²⁷ This includes the role and number of Jewish fighters.²⁸ We now

²⁴ A valuable work on the Jewish population before, during, and after the Warsaw Rising is Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Generally, Paulsson is rather reliable on the topics he researched personally; whenever he “feels” or “opines” on issues he is unfamiliar with, he lets his scholarship degenerate into a sadly ignorant and highly embarrassing leftist rant, which needlessly undermines the credibility of the rest of the monograph. See John Radziłowski’s in-depth review of this monograph in *Nihil Novi* no. 3 (Fall 2003): 29-35, also posted as “Unveiling a Secret City,” at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=252691081495762>.

²⁵ An inflammatory and poorly-researched article in a leftist newspaper, which repeats opinions current in the West, marred the 50th Anniversary of the Warsaw Rising. See Michał Cichy, “Czarne karty powstania,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 29-30 January 1994. These charges were rebutted in a journalistic (albeit much better researched) manner by Leszek Zebrowski, *Paszkwil Wyborczej (Michnik i Cichy o Powstaniu Warszawskim)* (Warsaw: Burchard Edition, 1995).

²⁶ The best scholarly treatment of the topic is Janusz Marszałec, *Ochrona porządku i bezpieczeństwa publicznego w Powstaniu Warszawskim* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 1999), 251-61.

²⁷ One of the most contentious issues is the treatment of Jews by the Home Army and other Polish insurgent outfits. There have even been allegations of delegating Jews to the most dangerous tasks (as if any task was not dangerous enough), or even of Jewish insurgents being shot at by their Christian comrades-in-arms. Various denials have been issued by Poles with the Jewish side persisting in its charges. However, neither has considered that at least in some instances the following, which happened to a Christian and an officer of the AK, may have been the case: “On at least three occasions, I was absolutely sure that insurgents from other AK units were shooting at me without provocation. In each instance mistaken identity had to be excluded. Possibly, toward the end of the battle for the Old Town, the insurgents were so exhausted, so stretched to the limits of endurance, that hostilities had to spill out in one way or another. Also, some soldiers had delusions in which anyone outside their own units appeared to be the enemy. Some experienced a constant sense of threat. These explanations seem reasonable today, but at the time, when I was shot at from a distance only 20-30 yards from our own positions, my anger was so intense that I barely restrained myself from returning the fire. In one instance I checked the barrel of the offender’s rifle – it was still warm. He had shot at me because I ‘was moving’.” See Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, 139. The psychological angle of sheer exhaustion and frustration which resulted in erratic and pathological behavior, including shooting at Jews or anyone else, definitely merits study.

²⁸ Edward Kossoy covers the topic in a much more professional manner than most of his colleagues, albeit the author tends to inflate the number of the Jewish insurgents by speculating that any anonymous AK soldier must have been most likely Jewish. However, most volunteers who joined the insurgents were Polish Christian Varsovians, hitherto either unaffiliated with the underground at all or unattached to the particular unit they joined and, hence, often anonymous to their colleagues who compiled membership rosters long after the war. See Edward Kossoy, “Żydzi w Powstaniu Warszawskim,” *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 147 (2004): 43-78. Earlier, the same author rather satisfactorily described what has recently emerged in the West as the single most famous action of the Rising: namely, the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp Gęsiówka. See Edward Kossoy, “Gęsiówka (KZ Warschau),” *Zeszyty Historyczne* Paris no. 110 (1994): 62-73.

know that there were two main groups of the Jewish underground, the Jewish Military Union (*Żydowski Związek Wojskowy/Wojskowa Organizacja Narodowa – Irgun Zvai Leumi*) and the Jewish Fighting Organization (*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*). The former was smaller but more professional and affiliated with the far right Zionist Revisionist movement. The latter was larger but rather amateurish and connected to the left-wing revolutionary Zionist and Marxist (albeit non-Communist, Bundist) Jewish underground. During the Rising, the *ŻZW* fighters did not fight as an entity. They were dispersed in various detachments, including the elite AK “Baszta” Battalion. But, nonetheless, quite a few could be found in the ranks of the Polish Nationalist units. In particular, they clustered in the Chrobry II NSZ-AK Group. That formation consisted heavily of the fighters drafted from the ONR’s proletarian “Crew” (*Załoga*) section and the Sword and Plow. Further, some Jewish inmates freed from KZ Warschau at Gęsia Street (the so-called “Gęsiówka”) volunteered for and were accepted, as a separate unit, into the NSZ “Koło” Brigade. This was only an apparent paradox. Both Polish and Jewish right-wing nationalists shared ideological affinities and often personal connections from pre-war times and the Nazi occupation.²⁹

As far as the leftist Jewish Fighting Organization is concerned, several things need to be cleared up. First, the *ŻOB* was officially subordinated to the Polish People’s Army (*Polska Armia Ludowa – PAL*). This was a non-Communist organization, albeit later during the Rising its leadership did

²⁹ It was probably not accidental that more than a few pre-war *Beitarim*, including Cael Perechodnik, who was rescued by “Polish anti-Semites” from the Holocaust, somehow found themselves in the ranks of the NSZ. See Feliks Pisarewski-Parry, *Orły i reszki* (Warsaw: Iskra, 1984), 61-65; Jerzy Lando, *Saved by My Face: A True Story of Courage and Escape in War-torn Poland* (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream, 2002), 184-208; Chaim Lazar Litai, *Muranowska 7: The Warsaw Ghetto Rising* (Tel Aviv: Massada-P.E.C. Press Ltd., 1977), 327; Rachel J.K. Grace, “Awake and Fight: The Jewish Military Union and the Warsaw Ghetto,” *Nihil Novi*, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 21-22; Bojemski, *Poszli w skier powodzi*, 204-214, 235-254, 307-308; Sebastian Bojemski, “Jewish Insurgents in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944,” *Nihil Novi*, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 23-24; and Sebastian Bojemski, letter to the editor, *The Sarmatian Review* no. 3 (September 2002): 913-15.

recognize the Communist proxy regime in Lublin. The leftist PAL should not be confused with Stalin's AL – the People's Army (*Armia Ludowa*). It seems that the Jewish insurgents in the ranks of the PAL in the City Center fought as individuals rather than a cohesive unit. However, the main unit of the ŻOB subordinated itself tactically to the AL in the Old Town only. This was because the Home Army was only willing to accept the Jewish fighters as individuals rather than as a cohesive unit.³⁰ Later, the ŻOB unit admittedly stuck with the Communists, after their desertion from the Old Town, in the northern suburb of Żoliborz as well.

The Communists – who are the third “blank spot” of our own inquiry – were without doubt the smallest political group to participate in the Rising.³¹ In fact, they were far less significant a force than even the Sword and Plow. According to Communist Party documents, at their peak in June 1944, the PPR/AL enrolled slightly over 6,000 members nationwide. In March and April 1944, there were only 91 fighters in the Warsaw underground cells. During the Rising their strength

³⁰ This is, once again, a contentious matter. The AK most likely recognized that the Jewish fighters lacked experienced officers and preferred to integrate the fighters into already existing units. Moreover, the pro-Communist leanings of people like Yitzhak Zuckerman, which he acknowledges openly in his memoirs (*A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], 523, 527, 533), were doubtless known to the Home Army, or at least strongly suspected, so caution was justified. According to Marysia Warman (née Bronisława or Bronka Feinmesser) of the ŻOB command, “When the Polish uprising broke out, Antek [Zuckerman] and Marek [Edelman] went to the higher officers in the Polish [Home] army and asked them to take us as a group, as the Jewish Fighting Organization. They refused. ‘Individually, please come, but not as a group; we won’t give you any commander.’ So they went to the *Armia Ludowa*, and they took us as a group. They gave us a commanding officer.” See Marysia Warman in *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust*, ed. by Brana Gurewitsch (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 288. Another close collaborator of Zuckerman, Simha Rothem (“Kazik”), recalls that “the AK disappeared, leaving us in doubt about whether to join them. Some of our members argued against cooperating with the AK because it was an extremely right-wing organization ... In the end Antek [Zuckerman] and I were assigned to negotiate with the command of the command staff of the AL [Armia Ludowa—People’s Army] in Starówka (the Old Town.)” See Simha Rotem (“Kazik”), *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter: The Past Within Me* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 120. Compare their accounts with the less reliable opinions expressed by Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance*, 674; and Anka Grupińska, “Czekając na wiatr,” *Rzeczpospolita: Plus-Minus*, 17-18 April 2004. Ainsztein claims that the AK commanders rejected Zuckerman telling him that “there was no room for his men in the Home Army.” Grupińska is equally misinformed.

³¹ This was a nationwide phenomenon Communist documents and two separate case studies show. See Mariusz Bechta, *Rewolucja, mit, bandytyzm: Komuniści na Podlasiu, 1939-1944* (Warszawa and Biała Podlaska: Rekonkwista and Rachocki i sk-a, 2000); and Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Between Nazis and Soviets: Occupation Politics in Poland, 1939-1947* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

increased. The Communists may have contributed as many as 400 insurgents to the struggle. For example, according to a dispatch of August 30, 1944, there were 35 Communist fighters and 122 support personnel in the Old Town alone. They were armed with 5 rifles, 2 submachine guns, two handguns, and 18 grenades. Most of their comrades (between 100 and 300 people, including civilians) had deserted two days prior by sewers to the northern suburb of Żoliborz. On October 1, 1944, the AL Chief of Staff reported that the AL had 278 fighters.³² On October 1, 1944, Colonel Antoni Chruściel (“Monter”) established however that “the AL Headquarters claimed to have commanded first 1,000 and then 700 persons. In fact their battle-readiness [*stan bojowy faktyczny*] is as follows: 1 platoon somewhat equipped with arms (more than 40 persons). Over 200 fled to Żoliborz. One-hundred and sixty and the aforementioned storm platoon made it to the city center.”³³ Although their strength was negligent, the Communists drafted plans to attack the Home Army and other “reactionary” organizations and turn the Rising into a pro-Soviet revolution.³⁴

To summarize, preliminary research on three “blank spots” necessitates important adjustments in our perceptions of the Warsaw Rising. The reality was that the Communists were a completely marginal entity, important only because of their Kremlin sponsor. On the other hand, the Polish Right, the Nationalists in particular, were a major force in the Warsaw Rising. Finally, the Manichean picture of the Polish-Jewish relations has to be replaced with a much more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Any comparisons of the

³² Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze*, 1: 62-95 (on their strength in Warsaw see pp. 75-76, 79); vol. 2: 242-55 (on their strength during the Rising see pp. 252-55).

³³ Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze*, 2: 254.

³⁴ Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze*, 2: 245-51.

conduct of the Poles to the Nazis are absolutely unwarranted. That also concerns the Polish Nationalists, their anti-Jewish theories notwithstanding. The anti-Semitism of some Poles becomes a factor, one among many, often overshadowed by criminal pathologies and other circumstances informing Polish-Jewish relations.

Why have the false perceptions lingered for so long? The lack of research is one answer. More broadly, it was also the uses and abuses of the Rising between 1944 and 1989 which prevented scholars from researching the topic properly. Many were simply both unprepared to pose and prevented from asking the hard questions. This was because the Varsovian insurrection quickly became a national symbol beyond reproach. Only the Communists buckled the trend.

It is true that the Rising ended in utter disaster and the total destruction of the city. But so did nearly all other Polish insurrections in the past two hundred fifty years. And they nonetheless found a prominent space in the national memory. Despite the tragedy of Warsaw in 1944, the symbolism of the enormity of its sacrifice sustained two generations of the Polish elite at home and abroad in their battle for Poland's freedom. Let me quote the opinion of just one of Poland's most valiant anti-Communists.³⁵ In a letter to his American friends, on January 22, 1978, Colonel Ryszard Kukliński wrote:

As you will recall, our first truly clandestine meeting took place just about five years ago in the vicinity of the Powstancow Warszawskich [*Powstańcy Warszawscy* – The Warsaw Insurgents] cemetery which honors those brave heroes of the Polish nation who sacrificed their lives for their beloved Poland during the Warsaw Rising. Little could they have known or even dreamed that their struggle for the

³⁵ See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Jednoosobowa konspiracja [A One Man Conspiracy]," *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 7 May 2004; and an expanded version posted at <http://www.mazowsze.k-raj.com.pl/108405420684371.shtml>.

ideals for which they gave their lives would be carried on by others in subsequent generations.³⁶

Obviously, Kukliński counted himself among the successors of the Warsaw insurgents. He was not alone.

Between 1944 and 1989, the continuity of the struggle for freedom often expressed symbolically as preserving the legacy of the Warsaw Rising figured prominently in the collective imagination of the anti-Communist Polish elite. Honor the dead and remember their sacrifice so we could all be free was the minimalist program embraced by most of them. Fight for freedom until the end was the by-word for a few. The next three generations of patriots consciously and subconsciously strove to fulfill the objective of the Rising.

In the mid-1940s the AK veterans assiduously searched the ruins for the bodies of their friends, even if most people were afraid to attend the funerals of their exhumed comrades-in-arms lest they be arrested by the secret police.³⁷ Many of them indeed were. Many were tortured. Some were killed, including such intrepid fighters as Witold Pilecki (“Roman”) and Jan Rodowicz (“Anoda”).³⁸ Although some of the victims opposed the Soviet occupation only passively, others resisted actively. That includes for instance Colonel Zygmunt Reliszko (“Kołodziejowski”) of the NSZ “Koło” Brigade, who

³⁶ Benjamin Weiser, *A Secret Life: The Polish Officer, His Covert Mission, and the Price He Paid to Save His Country* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 147.

³⁷ “I was afraid to attend funerals of my friends, lest the UB arrest me,” an insurgent confessed. This particular witness, Paweł Woś (“Zenon”), did not lack in courage. He fought against the Germans and Soviets in September 1939. Having escaped from the Soviet captivity, he joined the underground and became a soldier of the AK “Kiliński” Battalion. Along with his family (all of whom – his father, another brother, and two sisters, save for the mother – were members of the underground), he saved a dozen Jews, including the future Professor Israel Shahak, from the Warsaw Ghetto. Woś supplied AK guerrilla units in the Kielce area, surviving a bandit attack on a convoy he led by the Communists (whose leader after the war resurfaced as a secret police major in Warsaw). During the Warsaw Rising Woś was cut off from his unit and joined an auxiliary insurgent construction detachment in the Old Town. At the end of August 1944, he was taken prisoner by the Nazis and sent to KZ Flossenburg. Upon his liberation by the Americans, he crossed illegally into Soviet-occupied Poland twice. Subsequently, however, Woś ceased his underground activities. He eventually emigrated to the US. His recollection is forthcoming in *Glaukopis*, no. 2 (2004).

³⁸ See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, “The Dialectics of Pain: The Interrogation Methods of the Communist Secret Police in Poland, 1944-1955,” PIASA’s 61st Annual Conference, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, June 2003, forthcoming in *Glaukopis*, no. 2 (2004).

headed the Western Zone of the National Military Union, and Captain Henryk Paweł Kozłowski (“Kmita”) of the AK “Zośka” Battalion, who led a Freedom and Independence guerrilla unit.

In the late 1950s, the Communist secret policemen and their auxiliaries beat and harassed volunteers who tended to the graves of the insurgents. Practices like that persisted into the 1970s, albeit with markedly decreasing virulence.³⁹

Already in the 1960s it became customary to congregate at the military cemetery and, indeed, at various former insurgent strong points throughout Warsaw, the churches in particular, to commemorate each anniversary of the Rising. By 1980, each August 1, as a sign of mass defiance, tens of thousands of people assembled to clean the graves, lay flowers, light candles, listen to anti-Communist speeches, and sing “Oh, Lord, restore our free Fatherland to us” (*Ojczyznę wolną racz nam zwrócić Panie*) as well as various insurgent songs.

Similar observances were held regularly by Poles dispersed throughout the free world. Unimpeded, they congregated in places like Wellington, Cape Town, London, Chicago, Toronto, Buenos Aires, and Paris to remember the Warsaw Rising. Occasionally, the commemorations extended beyond the Polish diaspora. For example, in 1964, President L.B. Johnson hosted General Tadeusz Bór Komorowski, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, at the White House, to honor the struggle of his insurgents. Twenty years later, the head of the civilian resistance of the Polish Underground State Stefan Korboński and other prominent Polish-Americans, including AK veterans, were invited by President Ronald

³⁹ Following his participation in the Gdańsk riots of 1956, one of the first dissident activities of my father was to join the AK’s “Grey Ranks” leader Jan Rossman (“Wacek”) in tending to the insurgent graves at the Warsaw military cemetery. More than once the volunteers were beaten, harassed, and dispersed by the Communist militia auxiliaries or the secret police.

Reagan who decorated some of them with Freedom medals to recognize their valor during the Rising.

Thus, at home and abroad, the Poles commemorated the Rising. Even if some of them criticized the decision to launch the insurrection and the resulting destruction of Warsaw, practically all of these who observed the event were united uniformly in honoring the dead and in rejecting Yalta.

The palpable inspirational power of the Warsaw Rising was the principal reason why the Communists feared and loathed its legend. In the process, they resorted to all sorts of vile tricks to achieve their aim of legitimizing their power in Poland. None was more insidious than appropriating the legacy of the Jewish struggle against the Nazis.⁴⁰ The Communists claimed it as their own, including the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, and deployed it to befoul the memory of the Warsaw Rising of 1944. This was especially the case during the initial period of the Soviet occupation by proxy.⁴¹

The most common tactic was to accuse the insurgents of anti-Semitism. *Reductio ad Hitlerum* was employed to render the Polish independentist underground morally bankrupt before the Free World and the Polish society. For example, on April 19, 1946, at an official state function to commemorate the third anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Colonel Mieczysław Dąbrowski of the Communist army delivered a speech, stressing that “The [Nazi] air force, the SS, German tanks, Polish hooligans, Polish reactionaries, and, in fact, the Home Army: they all fought against the [Jewish] insurgents.”⁴²

⁴⁰ On the Jewish population during the initial period of the Soviet occupation by proxy see Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *After the Holocaust: Polish Jewish Conflict in the Wake of World War II* (New York and Boulder, CO: Columbia University Press and East European Monographs, 2003).

⁴¹ See Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy*, 501, 533-38.

⁴² “Przeciwko powstańcom walczyli: lotnictwo, SS i czołgi niemieckie, chuliganeria polska, reakcjonści polscy i faktycznie AK.” Quoted in Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert and Rafał E. Stolarski, eds., *“Bijące serce partii”*:

The periodization of the twists and turns of the Communist policy toward the Rising reflects the relentless but ultimately vain search for legitimacy by the plenipotentiaries of the Kremlin in Warsaw. First, between 1944 and 1949, the Soviet proxies in Poland tried to demean the insurrection and smear the insurgents with mendacity. Then, they endeavored to suppress the memory of it completely. After 1956, the Communists began to appropriate the Rising for themselves, portraying other participants as junior partners. They even started to organize official state commemorations of the insurrection. Although the Communist party propaganda persisted in condemning the leaders, it praised the rank and file of the Home Army. In time, the condemnation of the AK leadership was greatly toned down, while the regular insurgents were nearly lionized, in word if not in deed. During the last stage of their rule, in the 1980s the Communists were content to claim the mantle of the co-defenders of Poland, either equal or almost equal to the Home Army.

Following 1989, most Communists executed a dramatic about-face. On the one hand, they began insinuating themselves into patriotic commemorations of the Rising as junior participants. On the other hand, “Let us choose the future” (*Wybierzmy przyszłość*) became their motto. Afraid of the toxic legacy of the past, most of the Communists escaped into the future. They have denied any responsibility for anything, including their dastardly role during and after the Rising. They have denied their role in the falsification of its history and the persecution of its heroes.

It is against this political background and, more importantly, in light of new archival discoveries and fresh scholarly contributions that we should ask ourselves once again: Was the Rising a betrayal? Was it heroism? Was it

realism? Was it folly? Well, it was all of the above. Some Poles in the underground leadership naively hoped, along with the overwhelming majority of the people of Warsaw, that the West would help Poland. Once the battle was joined, no one was spared. Most insurgents fought longer than they should and could have. And the survivors and their progeny realistically estimated that the legacy of the Rising would become a national symbol denoting Poland's unquenchable appetite for freedom. Hence, betrayal, heroism, folly, and realism are encapsulated as one. That is what we should reflect upon as we consider the dead and their legacy, as the participants pass away, and as the passions the Rising once ignited flicker away.

Most importantly from a historian's point of view, we can claim with some confidence that now, finally, we are at last free to study the tragedy and triumph of Warsaw in all its complexity. Let us not be crippled by any censorship. All is fair game. May perceptions be replaced with reality.

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