

JEWIS IN CRACOVIAN MUNICIPAL COUNCIL IN THE POLISH SECOND REPUBLIC (1918-1939). SOME GENERAL REMARKS

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Abstract: Article describes participation of Jewish councilors in Kraków city council and identifies political milieus where they came from. The interwar is divided in three sub-periods that were characterized by different conditions for municipal political participation. These changes influenced the composition of Jewish councilors: their political belonging and even their cooperative strategies.

My article consists of three parts.¹ First of all I would like to explain why I chose this topic. Then I explain what the situation was like in municipal council in Kraków. Finally, I will try to answer the question how influential were Jewish councilors.

1. If I talk about my project and say that I'm working about the Jewish participation in municipal self-governments in the Polish big cities in the interwar era,² I am often greeted with astonishment. Really? Were there (some) Jews in Polish municipal councils? Were their activities significant at all? And in YIVO/NY I got even an additional question from one of the young scholars: What are you doing here, in this Jewish institution, with this kind of topic?

If we consider, that Jews represented more than 30% of Warsaw inhabitants, and over 20% in Kraków, that they got their representatives in the municipal self-governments in these municipalities and that these representatives were rather numerous, these questions could be seen as very symptomatic.

First of all I thought I'm getting such questions because my project belonged to the research on so called "shared spaces". In this sense, municipalities and municipal councils could be understood as bodies, where both, Jews and non-Jews, met, act, argued and perhaps even cooperated with each other. The institution of municipal council could be seen as belonging to the utopian "neutral sphere" as the early Jacob Katz called some liberal associations.³ Nowadays the scholars are inclined to negate the existence of

¹ This text was written during my stay at YIVO/NY, where I enjoyed the Alicja and Aleksander Hertz memorial fellowship. I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of YIVO archives (Leo Greenberg, Rivka Schiller and Aurora Zinder). I'm very grateful also to Justin Sharon for his linguistic help.

² „Żydzi w samorządach miejskich Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej: Kraków, Poznań, Warszawa, 1918-1939”. Some results are already published: Kozińska-Witt 2008, 189-213; 2011, 207-235; 2012, 162-190.

³ Katz 2000, 214-220 and comments to his theory by Bernard Dov Cooperman 2000, 237-252.

such neutral spaces, therefore shared places belonged to so called “forgotten or buried memories.”⁴ The world and the municipalities in it are perceived as divided in separated Jewish and non-Jewish spaces with some hybrids moving between.

Then in YIVO I understood that this explanation is probably too short. During my first week here the elevator was broken therefore I could not get any staff from the archives. I was sitting in the very cold reading room and reading books I always wanted to but haven’t had for some reason. Among them was one written by David Biale: “Power and powerlessness in Jewish history.”⁵ Among other problems Biale analyses “the belief that the historical condition of the Diaspora Jews is political powerlessness”, because corporative, Jews, were understood as a non-political body par excellence.⁶ Biale mentioned another connected belief, namely of the Jews as “king’s people”, who were dependent on – and protected by – only the monarchs.⁷ This dependency was described by Yosef Haim Yerushalmi as “royal alliances” that built the significant connection between Jews and the monarchs or their later substitute: the state administration.⁸

This myth, historical narrative or “invented history” about the powerlessness of the Diaspora Jews could be seen as a reason for creating the perception which generally excludes Jews from governing process and deprived them of any influence in municipal politics. In this way Jewish activities in municipalities could be minimalized or even totally overlooked.

These introductory remarks could perhaps explain in some way the existing lack of research. Not much has changed after 1988, when Lucjan Dobroszycki wrote: “Jewish election and the work of Jewish deputies of the state, municipal, and self-governing elective bodies in the Second Polish Republic undoubtedly compromise one of the most intrinsically important chapters in Polish Jewish history. Yet there is no comprehensive study of the various kinds of elections in which Jews took part, both as citizens and as members of a distinct ethnic group, in the years 1919-1939.”⁹ There is still indeed little research done in general about concrete self-governments and particular regarding Jewish activities there: we have some articles about some municipalities, like Warsaw, Częstochowa, Lublin, Łódź, Kraków, Poznań and even Koziennice.¹⁰ We have already some monographs about Bund, Zionists and Orthodox, where Jewish activities in the municipalities are general mentioned.¹¹

In the case of Kraków there exist some elder memoir literature; I mean the testimonies by Kalman Stein or by Izaak Schwarzbart,¹² both Craciovian Zionist politicians. Un-

⁴ The term by Jürgen Hanning.

⁵ Biale 1986. I would like to thank Michael Miller for suggesting me this reading.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5 and 34-37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 54-57.

⁸ Yerushalmi 1995, 10-11, 44-45.

⁹ Lucjan Dobroszycki, Preface in: Robert Moses Shapiro: *The Polish kehile elections of 1936. A revolution re-examined*, Working papers Yeshiva University, NY 1988 [without pagination].

¹⁰ Wachowska 1991, 154-172; Wynot 1991, 291-311; Zaporowski 1995, 237-244; Szwed 1998, 197-212; Urynowicz 2003; Mizgalska 2010, 131-153, Brzoza 2011, 213-239. In *Sefer ha shanah/yorbuch* 3 (1970) edited by Arieh Tartakower were published the articles written by former Jewish councillors about Jewish participation in the municipal councils of Warsaw, Łódź, Lwów and Kraków. See also Kozińska-Witt – Silber 2011, 115-306, here Łódź, Warsaw, Lemberg, Przemyśl and Rzeszów.

¹¹ Bacon 1992, 39-59; 1996; Pickhan 2001, 352-372.

¹² Schwarzbart 1958; Stein 1979, 318-326.

fortunately both concentrated on the last municipal election only. There is some research done and some first drafts published by Łukasz Sroka and Czesław Brzoza, both authors published in the Cracovian issue of “Polin” two years ago.¹³ In contrast to the lack of research about the municipal level, the activities of Jewish deputies in Polish parliament are already analyzed by Szymon Rudnicki and Janusz Fałowski,¹⁴ therefore the deficit concerning municipalities is already noticeable and the municipalities are getting their turn on the spotlight. Personally I was impressed and influenced by research done by Till van Rahden about municipal council in Breslau and Jewish politicians there: his book is translated into English under the title: “Jews and other Breslauer.”¹⁵

To summarize: There is noticeable research deficit. And on the other side there is a strong mythologized perception about Jewish political powerlessness. This perception could probably explain the lack of a research interest for the political activities of Jews carried on the municipal level.

I would like to take up this research deficit as a challenge. In this article I will concentrate on the representation issue and on dynamics in municipal council: whom did the Jewish councilors represent and how did they operate in the municipal self-government.

2. First of all I would like to define my subject. I understand the municipal council here as an arena constructed by paragraphs of administrative law where the representatives of some different urban milieus were meeting. An arena is a place for presenting different interests, clashing conflicts and negotiating solutions. The arena participants stay in contact with their milieu outside of municipal council. Arena also has some similarities to the stage, because of its visibility. That means for example, that what happened in municipal council was commented upon in the local press. And indeed the Cracovian press between the wars published long and detailed reports from municipal council meetings and commented them due to its political affiliation.

For a place where my arena was functioning I choose Cracow, a pre-industrial town, without strong social conflicts, also somewhat “boring” for social historians. Antony Polonsky writes in his: “History of Jews in Poland and Russia”, I quote: “The city was also conservative and largely pre-industrial, and the fact that two societies – Polish and Jewish were largely separate, may, paradoxically, have eased their coexistence”.¹⁶ To be precise – there were some anti-Jewish riots as everywhere, for example in the first years after the First World War and in the thirties. But general the anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism did not play a great role in the historical constructions of Kraków. I should underline in this place that I’m speaking here about an idealized version of the city. The city is constructed until now more as a place of Jewish-Polish symbiosis. Therefore we are dealing not only with the myth about Jewish powerlessness but, beyond that, with the myth of Polish-Jewish symbiosis in Kraków. The question to be asked is, could both these myths have coexisted peacefully side by side or are they perhaps contradictory and antagonistic to each other?

Important to my project is that Kraków was a Galician town. During the partitions, while Poland did not exist and its former territory was divided between Prussia, Russia

¹³ Sroka 2008, 113-133; Brzoza 2011, 213-239.

¹⁴ Rudnicki 2004; Fałowski 2006.

¹⁵ Van Rahden 2000.

¹⁶ Polonsky 2011, 3: 140.

and Austria, it belonged to the last empire, to Habsburg Monarchy as a province called Galicia.¹⁷ This is rather crucial for my topic, not only because of the so called Galician autonomy, that gave for this part of monarchy the possibility to use Polish as official language, but because of the political liberal tradition and administrative institutions developed there. One of such institutions rooted in imperial liberal tradition was the Galician self-government and particular the Cracovian municipal council. In this way the development in Cracovian self-government in imperial times of Habsburg was a completely Central European one: it is much more similar to those in Breslau or Poznań in Germany, than to Warsaw that belonged to another imperial tradition.

What was the liberal municipal council like? How did it function?

During the imperial period, it meant that in the second half of 19 c. until First World War, city councilors were elected on the basis of tax and education census. Therefore they belonged to the wealthiest and best educated urbanities. Only ca. 7% city inhabitants could elect their representatives, it meant 93% of inhabitants were excluded from process of self-governing.¹⁸

The municipal councilors, these so called “municipal fathers” who dominated the council were liberal minded. The representatives of other classes, particularly the merchants and artisans were marginalized even if their influence was growing constantly. Jewish representatives consisted ca. 20% of the councilors in council and built a part of the ruling majority.¹⁹ I’m regarding as “Jewish” these representatives, who perceived themselves as Jews.

As the non-Jewish councilors the Jews in the council belonged to the wealthiest and to secular educated, it means acculturated Jews. The acculturated built a group there that was called “assimilationist party.”²⁰ Today we will call them integrationists. As Ezra Mendelsohn pointed out the main issue in their program was the integrative strategy:²¹ they worked for cooperation with the non-Jewish majority in municipal councils but that does not mean that they did not represent the interest of Cracovian Jews or that they ceased to feel Jewish. Their aims were probably similar to those described by Benjamin Nathans in case of liberal Jewish lawyers in imperial Russia: they engaged themselves for improving the status of Jewish inhabitants in legally existing institutions and in accordance to accepted procedures.²²

On the other side the non-Jewish party was interested in cooperation with this Jewish group because in this way they could attain the majority in the council. Socially, both groups, the Jewish and the non-Jewish, represented very similar if not even identical

¹⁷ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Galicia_and_Lodomeria (access 17 Dec. 2013).

¹⁸ Małecki 1994, 227; Adamczyk 1997, 54.

¹⁹ Sroka 2008, 35 and 127.

²⁰ Segal 1938, 184.

²¹ Mendelsohn 1993, 16.

²² Nathans 2003, 20-34; cf. Karady 2004, 220.

milieus. Since beginning of 20th c. the vice-president of Kraków was always Jewish.²³ It was the highest function occupied by a Jew in Cracovian municipality as it was some years later in Lemberg, or Lwów too. To have a Jewish mayor deputy seems to become a Galician habit, because many municipalities did.²⁴

The anti-Semitism was not very popular in the Cracovian council. It does not mean that the anti-Semitism was not present on municipal arena. It was articulated there mainly by Christian democrats, who built the municipal opposition. But they were not powerful nor even influential.

Therefore the Cracovian municipal administration could be seen as a sphere of inclusion for rich and educated Jews in imperial period.

Why do I describe the Galician municipal Council in such length and detail? I can incorporate question with the second one: What was specific about the Cracovian municipality in the Second Republic?

The description was so long, because the liberal inclusive council still operated in the Second Republic. Its structure there was unusual because of a very fast and forced institutional modernization in the new Polish state. Therefore Cracovian municipal council became a liberal relict in a democratized institutional landscape.

Formerly Galicia was a region, where the new Polish administration prolonged the imperial period by freezing the status quo.²⁵ After the First World War the Polish Ministry of Interior did not allow to modernize the pre-war municipal election order or even to elect the new council on the basis of the old one. Therefore the outdated census based municipal council remained on duty until begin of 30thies. There were only some representatives of modern political milieus who were co-opted to the operating council in 1919. Among them was the first representative of Jewish Socialist later Bund, dr Henryk Schreiber, who became the first speaker of the modern Jewish politics in this institution.²⁶

The situation began to change first in 30thies as the belated result of the takeover by Józef Piłsudski. The outdated liberal council was finally dissolved in 1931.²⁷ The newly nominated one consisted on Piłsudski followers only, who were members of his *sanacja* movement that created the so called “governmental party” – BBWR [Partisan Block for Cooperation with the Government].²⁸

Two years later in 1933, the first democratic election took place. The majority of the council again consisted of *sanacja* members.²⁹

The following second and last democratic election in December 1938 took place after the death of Piłsudski and during the process of dissolution and new consolidation of political camps.

Therefore with some exaggeration one could differentiate between three periods in the history of the Cracovian municipal council in the interwar period: the first frozen liberal, the second authoritarian-democratic and the third purely democratic.

²³ Sroka 2008, 130-131. The first one was engineer Józef Sare (1850-1929), on Sare see: Brzoza – Stepan 2006, 92-95.

²⁴ Orla-Bukowska 1994, 103; see also Małecki 2002, 53-60.

²⁵ Adamczyk 1997, 63-65.

²⁶ Brzoza 2011, 216.

²⁷ Adamczyk 1997, 75-77.

²⁸ On *sanacja* see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanacja> (access 17 Dec. 2013).

²⁹ Adamczyk 1997, 82-86.

What did the democratization mean for the Jewish councilors? What about the use of Anti-Semitism in democratized municipal politics?

First of all Jews remain included in municipal administration after 1931. The main reason for this “new” inclusion was their support for the sanacja. The thesis of Yosef Yerushalmi about royal alliances seems to work for this period, as proper alliances and the will to cooperate with the government were crucial for minority participation in the municipal self-government.

Jewish councilors in the council belonged after 1933 to two “modern” milieus.³⁰ The first larger group consisted of so called “governmental Jews” who were direct members of BBWR (9). This group was built also by some representatives of orthodoxy (3) that was possible due to an agreement between orthodoxy and sanacja in 1930.

The second smaller group consisted on Zionists of a special Cracovian kind (4: besides the general Zionists one additional deputy represented Mizrahi). What was special about them? They belonged to the “Galicianer” among the Zionists, were more co-operative and tried to co-operate with government or with other administrative instances, even if the other segments of the Zionist movement, I mean the Congress-Polish or “Russian” one, did not see any possibility of a working relationship.³¹ This seems to be the strategy that differentiated both regional Zionist branches.

In the opposition to sanacja were socialist and nationalists. In the group of oppositional socialist was one deputy of Bund.

In Cracovian council both Jewish groupings, “governmental” (among them orthodox) and Zionist, supported sanacja; they built a local coalition and cooperation with the camp. Their support provided the basis for participation in a ruling majority again. It meant that the Jewish councilors could keep their good position in the council not only in liberal times, as in other municipalities, for example Breslau. They kept their position in authoritarian and even slightly democratized times, which was unusual because the democratization affected the general Jewish representation in negative ways. But due to democratic election orders the Jewish liberal representatives were now replaced by members of modern political milieus: by Zionist or even more by sanacja Jews.

During this sanacja period of municipal council the anti-Semitism became more visible in the meetings; it was articulated mostly by only two councilors who were rather active: one a National and the second one a Christian democrat. Besides traditional anti-Jewish resentments about privileging Jews in municipal sphere, they tried to banish the vice-president position, which they called “Jewish-vice-presidentship.” In 1935 this post was finally retired due to financial shortage, and the anti-Jewish fraction claimed the victory for themselves.³² On the other side they used anti-Jewish arguments critiquing the sanacja and government in an indirect way.

Nevertheless until 1938 the Cracovian municipal council remained generally an inclusive sphere for some politically active Jews. But on the other hand the municipal

³⁰ Brzoza 2011, 222, 227.

³¹ Rudnicki 2004, 311, 324-325, 331. On differences between Galicianer and Polish Zionist see Mendelsohn 1981.

³² “Kraków nie będzie miał Żyda w Prezydium miasta”, *Głos Narodu* 148 (1935), 2.

sphere generally lost its importance due to authoritarianism, etatist tendencies and interventionism.³³

In the thirties the opposition, among others National Democracy, tried to gain support in the broad society and mobilized the people mostly using anti-Semitic slogans. The press, also Cracovian, was full of it, boycotts and pogroms become more common. In Cracow the anti-Semitic right tried to instrumentalise the strikes which were organized by socialists in 1936 through explaining them with the narratives about Jewish capitalism and communist influence.³⁴ I'm very sorry to underline that it was the local Catholic Church and its patriarch, Archbishop Adam Sapieha, who used this kind of arguments without naming Jews but addressing them as "untrustful foreigners". His line of argument met this one of late sanacja: he called for an economic struggle but without physical harm, as the governmental camp did also.³⁵

The last municipal election in 1938 took place indeed in a very different atmosphere. The political sphere in general became more fragmented: after Piłsudski's death sanacja degenerated and fell apart into three competitive pieces. The sanacja opposition, both nationalists and socialist, won power "on the streets" and got political influence in their localities. One piece of sanacja tried "to fashion the program of the Government-circles in keeping with the slogans of the nationalistic opposition [...] in order to deprive the Nationalist Camp of its anti-Semitic monopoly" as the chief of the main Zionist daily, *Nasz Przegląd*, Jacob Apenszlak, put it.³⁶

I would like to underline this fact, which I believe was crucial for local Cracovian political development in self-government. Not only did the street became anti-Semitic, the official governmental administration started to use anti-Semitism too. In this way it was no longer possible for Jewish councilors to cooperate with the governmental party, with whom they built a municipal stable ruling coalition in the past.

The political situation and the atmosphere in the society were very carefully observed. Against the general disinterest and ignorance of today, the Polish Jews and even international Jewish audience, particularly Jewish Telegraph Agency,³⁷ seemed extraordinary interested in the outcome of self-government election in Poland in 1938. It could be explained with the political situation: an emigration that reached its end and with the development in Nazi Germany and other countries in Central Europe. In this context "the Polish case" won on importance and the question arose whether Poland could offer a future for its Jews and how could Jews themselves contribute to for instance as participants in municipal politics. The Jewish press commented on every election development.

So the *The Daily News Bulletin* of Jewish Telegraph Agency, wrote in an article in October 1938:

³³ Klimek 2006, 55.

³⁴ "Kozioł ofiarny – Żyd", *Naprzód* 137 (1936), 3; Marszałkowski 2006, 340-341.

³⁵ Modras 2004, 344-345; Brzoza 2011, 228.

³⁶ "[...] akcja »OZONU«, usiłująca dostroić program rządzących kół »sanacyjnych« do haseł opozycyjnego obozu »Narodowego«, aby mu odebrać monopol na... antysemityzm": J. Apenszlak, *Żydzi a Polska* (msp), in: YIVO Archives, RG 732 Jakov Apenszlak, Box 9, Folio 113, 4.

³⁷ On Jewish Telegraph Agency see: Dohrn 2009, 219-241.

Preparations for the municipal elections in Warsaw, Lodz, Kraków and Poznan commenced today. The Warsaw elections are fixed for Dec. 12. Since municipal elections have a more democratic basis than parliamentary balloting, all parties, both Polish and Jewish, will participate.

The National Democrats, National Radicals and Falangists (Fascists) have published election Manifestos competing in violence of anti-Semitic utterance. The Government's Camp for National Unity has not published its program yet, but it is expected to contain in some anti-Semitic proposals, as does its parliamentary program.³⁸

Due to the Jewish and Polish press reports anti-Semitism became the central issue in this municipal election. It was the main strategy for political mobilization and consolidation. The participants were identified as anti-Semites or as anti-anti-Semites.

Again a quote from *Daily News Bulletin* from 20.12.1938: "Endeks win in Poznan".

Official returns of the municipal elections in Poznan revealed today that the anti-Semitic endeks (National-Democrats) won a substantial majority in the city council, capturing more than 50 of the 75 seats. The Poznan returns reversed the results of the elections in Warsaw and Lodz, where the radical anti-Semites were defeated. In Warsaw, the endeks captured only 11 of 100 seats in the city council, as against 27 for the Polish socialists and 19 for Jewish parties. In Lodz, the endeks won 20 seats compared to 17 for the Jewish parties (reported as 13 yesterday) and 35 for the Polish Socialists. Fifteen Jews won seats in the Cracow Council.³⁹

Due to election results the new municipal council in Cracow divided into two equally powerful fractions: one national and catholic that included a governmental party and the second leftist and Jewish.⁴⁰ The "Jewish fraction" in the council was organized mainly by Zionists who however built only a small group in the fraction. The slight majority there consisted mostly of representatives from other milieus like Orthodox, Bund or so called neo-assimilationists or combatants, who cooperated with the governmental party in the past.⁴¹

The municipal arena became simultaneously a space for both: for inclusion and for exclusion. The council of this kind was incapable of deciding anything.

Conclusion

The story of Cracovian municipal council could be told as the story of increasing anti-Semitism in this arena. In the liberal period the anti-Semitism was not very important there, although anti-Semitic arguments were always present but not omnipresent. The main municipal actors were simply not interested in using anti-Semitism. In the thirties the situation was slowly changing, and then the anti-Semitism became increasingly important. Finally in 1938 it became crucial as a consolidation and mobilization strategy.

³⁸ *Anti-Semitic manifestos mark opening of election drive in Polish cities*, in: JTA of 26.10.1938 YIVO Archives 116, Box 257, Folder 2.20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Adamczyk 1997, 84-86.

⁴¹ Brzoza 2011, 238.

But on the other hand this same story could be told as a story about an increasing anti-anti-Semitism in the municipal arena. In liberal and sanacjan times the majority of deputies did not use anti-Semitic rhetoric. The anti-anti-Semitic camp in the democratized municipality was mobilized again in 1936. As I have already mentioned strikes were organized in this year in Kraków; governmental forces suppressed them bloodily.

Municipal councilors protested against cruelty in the municipal arena where a long and rather controversial discussion took place. While the nationalists and in some cases sanacjan tried to blame local Jews for working conditions in factories and for organizing strikes, the socialist and Jewish deputies came together in protest. It was the beginning of the future differentiating process in the municipal arena that became very visible in 1938: on the one side governmental party [OZON] and endecja, on the other the left and “the Jews”, both antagonistic counterparties without any center as a mediating presence.

What is remarkable in the Cracovian municipal case is that the opponents of anti-Semitism seemed not to be here single “solists”, as Robert Blobaum calls the Polish intellectualist opponents to anti-Semitism in the interwar era in contrast to the much more numerous anti-Semites, whom Blobaum calls “a choir.”⁴² The opponents to anti-Semitism built in Cracovian city council indeed amounted to a fraction or a choir. As I already mentioned, the press reports suggest that such “choirs” may exist in other municipalities, too.

The anti-Semitism during this period was strong in Kraków; it shaped here popular “cultural code” as in other localities. However it seems not to be the main star-ideology in Cracovian self-government, where it was constantly weakened by the opposite ideology. The anti-Semitism and opposition to it operated more as a challenge and response. The dynamics in Cracovian municipal council could be seen as an argument for the thesis, that not only anti-Semitism, but also even an opposition to it, both belong entangled in Polish political traditions.

And now the last question: Were the Jews in Cracovian municipal council powerless or powerful? Concerning their minority status as the city inhabitants Jews got an impressive amount representatives in the council. Due to intelligent alliance politics managed by Jewish councilors they could reach a good position in the council, too. Therefore the myth about Jewish powerlessness did not fit with the empiric findings about a Jewish representation in this municipality.

But were the Jewish councilors powerful enough to influence the communal politics, for example, the subsidy politics on behalf of the Jewish community and its institutions? Did any Polish-Jewish symbiosis exist regarding municipal finances? But, this is a completely different story and could be a topic for another article.

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⁴² Blobaum 2005, 8.

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