The Jews of Nowy Targ in the Inter-War Period

Czesław Brzoza

For several centuries, a Jewish community existed in the town of Nowy Targ, and during the inter-war period Jews constituted the only national minority of considerable size there. In the 1920s, the local newspaper suggested that the town had a semi-Jewish character, especially in and around the market square on Saturdays. In 1910, there were 1,370 Jews there, constituting 15 per cent of the total population. During World War I, both the Jewish and the non-Jewish populations of Nowy Targ decreased. The first census in independent Poland, conducted on 30 September 1921, noted that 1,342 Jews lived in the town at that time, constituting 16.6 per cent of the total population. Only 782, or barely 60 per cent of the Jewish population, stated that their nationality was Jewish. Even so, to conclude from this that Nowy Targ’s Jews were becoming increasingly Polonized would be unwarranted. In reality, assimilation was not widespread and the fact that so many claimed Polish nationality was due, as the Zionist press noted, either to misunderstanding or to pressure from the census commissioners.

There are no detailed data concerning the size of the Jewish community in Nowy Targ for the years after 1921; the information supplied from time to time by the town council is imprecise. It was not until September 1939 that a list of all inhabitants, with data on nationality, was prepared, at the command of Nazi authorities. According to this list, there were 2,441 Jews in Nowy Targ, which meant that they constituted 20.4 per cent of the town’s population at that time. Jews’ influence on the commercial and professional life of the town was much greater than this figure would suggest, however. Their dominance could best be seen in the professions, in crafts, and especially in trade. In 1938, twelve out of nineteen lawyers, five out of nine doctors, and four out of five bakers in the town were Jewish. About 35 per cent of the craft workshops and 50 per cent of the shops were run by Jews.¹

The Jewish community regulated its own affairs. In the early inter-war period, religious life was directed by Hirsch Meislich, who did not enjoy great popularity. After his departure, the post was occupied by Berisch Strach, whose piety and righteous character won him wide support. After Strach’s death on 5 April 1930, Eliasz Weiss succeeded to the position of rabbi. The synagogues, the most important of which was located on Szeroka Street, were naturally the centre of religious life. The community’s cemetery on Strzelecka Street was enlarged when it became clear in the early 1930s that it would soon run out of space. A ceremony held on 17 September 1933 marked the opening of the new section.²

The kehillah, which was an elected body, was the highest non-rabbinic authority in the Jewish community. The Nowy Targ kehillah had authority over the Jewish communities of Zakopane, Czarny Dunajec, Jabłońka, and several other neighbouring villages and small towns. Its primary responsibility was to enable Jews to fulfil their religious duties, which in practise meant that it founded and maintained prayer houses (betei midrash) and cemeteries, supervised the religious education of children, and ensured the supply of kosher meat. In addition, the kehillah was responsible for the management of the community’s joint property and its foundations and workhouses, as well as for supporting charity organizations. These tasks were taken up by the various committees: religious, social welfare, educational, legal, cemetery, and financial-economic. Kehilah members presided over the committees, but outside persons were

¹ Przewodnik gospodarczy województw, kieleckiego, krakowskiego i śląskiego (Warsaw, 1938).
² ‘Od naszych korespondentów’, Nowy Dziennik, 15 Oct. 1933; Gazeta Podhalańska, 20 Apr. 1930.
admitted as well in order ‘to interest wider groups of society in the Jewish community’s activities’.3

Thus the kehilah fulfilled its religious and economic functions supported by an annual budget that was approved by the local Polish administration (the starostwo). Occasionally the authorities made budgetary deletions when funds were designated for use in efforts that went beyond the kehilah’s powers or were outside the interests of the Nowy Targ community. Funds were acquired from indirect taxes and various fees—for example, for ritual slaughter, cemetery plots, tombstones, the registration of children, and so on. We have little data on the size of the annual budget beyond knowing that in 1938 the total budget was 53,000 zlotys. These funds were used to meet local needs, such as providing aid to poorer members of the community and subsidies for various economic and charitable societies, but were also used to support other important organizations and causes. In 1930, for example, 410 Polish zlotys were contributed to the local Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO) for its children’s shelter, and 400 zlotys were designated for the Gemilut Hasadim Society, which was formed to support Jewish trade and crafts through interest-free loans. Some subsidies, such as funds designated to support emigration to Palestinian and Jewish education in other parts of the country, had an influence beyond Nowy Targ.4 Certain projects required fairly large outlays. For example, Salomea Stern (née Fischgrund), who died on 3 August 1928, left $2,000 for the purchase or construction of a building that was to become a Jewish public school. As the gift was not sufficient, an additional $3,500 from the community’s funds was added and a house was purchased on Szeroka Street next to the synagogue. The WIZO shelter and the Orthodox heder of the Talmud Torah Society were located there.5

The kehilah board elected during the Austrian occupation remained in charge in the immediate aftermath of World War I. Zionists, who did not have representation on this governing body, were severely critical of it. Their primary accusation was that the board was idle and displayed too little concern for the interests of the Jewish community. A number of people who were not linked with the Zionists added their voices to this criticism. At the beginning of 1919 this opposition group forced the board to promise new elections soon;6 in fact, however, elections did not take place until 1922. Moreover, the election regulations, which were based on the tax census, were hardly democratic. Barely 400 people (men only) enjoyed full active or passive voting rights. The kehilah board in office at that time consisted of twelve members. As before, Ignacy Hammerschlag was voted in as president, Ignacy Leib and Abraham Langar as his deputies, and Dr Samuel Stammler as secretary.7 The majority had ties to the Orthodox Jewish community, though Zionists such as Dr Bernard Kohn were found among the board members.

In 1928 new regulations concerning the status of the Jewish religious communities were introduced, as was a voting law that abolished the principle of tax requirements and called for democratic elections. Yet voting rights remained restricted: women were not allowed to vote and relatively high age requirements were set (30 years for active voting rights and 25 years for passive voting). In Nowy Targ these restrictions were particularly limiting for the Zionists, who were supported largely by women and the younger generation.

4 Nowy Dziennik, 17 Dec. 1933; 6 Nov. 1931; and 10 Apr. 1931.
7 The following were also members of the governing body: Markus Gunsberg, Jozef Papierz, Dr Bernard Kohn, and Dr Zachariasz Goldner. See ‘Władze judowskiej gminy wyznaniowej w Nowym Targu’, WAPKr, UwKr–32.
The first election to the Nowy Targ kehilah based on the new voting law was held on 8 January 1931. A total of 866 persons were entitled to vote. Ten lists, or twice the number of available seats, were run in the elections in Nowy Targ, Zakopane, and Czarny Dunajec. In reality, the competition was less than fierce because in the end three voting blocks were formed: the kehilah block (lists 1 and 12); the National block, which included Zionists from Nowy Targ (list 6) and Zakopane (list 2), and the society Yad harutsim (list 4); and the Orthodox block, made up of the remaining five lists. Attendance was high; 707 people, or 81.5 per cent of the eligible voters, took part in the election. The results were as follows:

**RESULTS OF THE ELECTION TO THE KEHILAH ON 8 JANUARY 1931**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List No.</th>
<th>Main Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ignacy Hammerschlag</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Dr Józef Wieselman</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Joel Langer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Ruben Ernst</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Izaak Aron Langer</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Salomon Stamler</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Aron Gerstner</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Izrael Jeret</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Chaim Izaak Degen</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Julian Fischer</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The elections demonstrated that Zionists had gained ground but that the conservatives elected from the kehilah and the Orthodox lists still held the majority. On 26 February 1931, Ignacy Hammerschlag was elected president despite Salomon Stamler’s protest on behalf of the National Club.

Representatives of the Jewish community’s governing body took part in major events in the life of the town, such as national holidays or the welcoming of important guests. They usually offered prayers on national holidays, and occasionally gave sermons. Moreover, the Jewish population had permanent representation on the town council. Until the end of World War I, only two members of the Jewish community sat on that council, but this changed after the first post-war elections in 1922. Most of the Jewish voters found themselves in the second voting group and won six seats for their candidates. After additional elections of 1927, the number of Jewish councillors rose to eight. Following the May coup d’état, Jews usually ran in the elections from the lists of the Sanacja regime; as a result of this alliance they won seven seats in 1929. Cooperation with the regime was beneficial to both sides as it assured the victory of the Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem (Independent Block for Cooperation with the Government; BBWR) in all voting groups. The situation became more complicated after the democratic voting law was introduced. When the town was divided into voting districts, Jews found that they could not win more than one seat without forming alliances. They therefore formed an alliance with the BBWR, and four Jewish candidates found themselves on the list of the Blok Współpracy Gospodarczej (Block of Economic Cooperation). They were Ignacy Hammerschlag, an Orthodox candidate, and the Zionists Henryk Fischgrund, Izrael Hammerschlag, and Dr Herman Kolber, who ran as independent democrats. Due to the solidarity of the Jewish voters, they all won despite the fact that their nomination to the lists was criticized as ‘defying the most primitive principles of democracy’ by a Zionist daily. All of the Jewish
councillors then joined the Klub Mieszczaniski (Burghers’ Club of the BBWR). In the elections of February 1939, however, the Sanacja was promoting economic antisemitism, which made further cooperation of this kind impossible. Jews ran in this last election before the war with their own lists, winning 4,034 votes and three seats. The Jewish councillors formed separate Zionist and Orthodox clubs. Representatives of the Jewish community sat on every committee except that of agriculture, and there was a Jewish representative in the municipal government from 1929 through 1939.

The level of political activity among Jews following independence was not high; religious divisions between the Orthodox and the Progressives were of greater significance than the political divisions. The vast majority of Jews in Nowy Targ were Orthodox. Zionists became politically active only toward the end of the nineteenth century, and their efforts were directed at transforming the Jewish community from a religious into a national one. These endeavours yielded significant results: the subsidies paid on behalf of Keren Kayemet L’Israel (Jewish National Fund) increased from 1,819 crowns in 1917 to 3,624 in 1918 and to 5,918 in 1919.\(^8\) The fund was to be used only for the purchase of land in Palestine. In 1920, money was collected also for the Keren Heyesod (Foundation Fund), which financed the development of economic institutions in Palestine.

The Zionists’ agenda included a demand that Jews be granted national and cultural autonomy as well as the right to regulate education within the community. They also pushed for the development of the Hebrew language and culture. In almost all matters, Zionists stressed the conflict between Polish and Jewish communal interests, and this often led to clashes with the authorities. In the 1919 parliamentary elections, the Zionists introduced the slogan ‘Jews elect a Jew’. They ran with separate lists everywhere in Poland, including the Podhale region. Although they had no chance of winning a seat there through independent action, they sought to demonstrate their presence, increase the number of their followers, and popularize their ideology. During the electoral campaign, both Zionist candidates (Maurycy Freundlich, an engineer from Kraków, and Dr Szymon Pcanower, an attorney from Czarny Dunajec) held public meetings in Nowy Targ.\(^9\) As expected, the Zionists did not win, but they claimed that the 1,068 votes cast for the Jewish list was evidence that support for the Zionist movement in the region was considerable.

The Zionists tried to expand their sphere of influence through cultural and economic organizations as well. The local committee, headed by Józef Folkman, organized the Komitet Pomocy Żydów Polskich (Committee for Aid to Polish Jews) in 1919 for the purpose of distributing financial assistance from America to the neediest members of the community. In the same year, the Konsum Żydowski (Jewish Co-op) was opened to distribute wholesale goods that were difficult to obtain. The Czytelnia Żydowska (Jewish Reading Room), which had closed at the outbreak of the war, was reopened, and lectures devoted to general problems, current political events, the economy, and Jewish matters were held there weekly beginning in the fall of 1919. Opposition parties often used the quarters of the reading room for their meetings.

These activities had tangible results. Zionists won a seat on the kehilah’s managing board for the first time in 1922, and also had five representatives on the city council.\(^10\) As in 1919, they ran in the parliamentary elections with their own list. Dr Ozjasz Thon of Kraków, one of the

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\(^8\) Nowy Dziennik, 29 Feb. 1920.
\(^10\) Dr Bernard Kohn, Juliusz Wienstein, Henryk Fischgrund, Izrael Hammerschlag, and Maks Handler won mandates. See ‘Samorząd w Nowym Targu’ WAPKr, UWKr–91/1.
most eminent Zionist activists in Poland, was placed first on the list in all districts of Western Galicia. However, the list won only 1,073 votes—a miniscule increase over the results of the previous election.

In 1918 the activity of the Nowy Targ Zionists was directed by the merchant Józef Folkman, as well as by the attorney Dr Salomon Stamler and Dr Henryk Mindelgrun. From the mid-1920s on, a thirteen-person board led by Folkman (as president), the attorney Dr Jakub Stiller (deputy president), Stamler, the attorney Dr Fryc Mendler, the merchant Salomon Grunspan (secretary) and the merchant Herman Springer (treasurer) directed the work of the local committee.11

Despite its considerable activity and the large number of votes it won in elections, the Zionist organization in Nowy Targ was not large compared to others in the city. According to figures from the late 1920s, only about fifty people confirmed their affiliation with the party by paying the party tax.

After the May coup d’état, the Zionists’ influence continued to increase. In January 1928, Gur-Aryeh Terlo, a delegate from the headquarters of Keren Heyesod in Jerusalem, visited the city. He described his visit as follows: ‘The Jewry of Nowy Targ, having strong national feelings this year as in past years, fulfilled its duty towards Palestine, with Mr J. Folkman (President of Keren Heyesod), Dr S. Stamler, Dr H. Mindelgrun, and R. Ernst having helped the effort with their activities.’12 Zionists in other cities of Lesser Poland also took note of the activity of the Nowy Targ centre: Stamler was elected to the party board at the tenth regional conference of the Zionist organization of Western Galicia and Silesia.13

The increased efforts of conservative elements grouped around Agudat Yisrael led to the polarization of political forces within the Jewish community, as the 1928 parliamentary elections clearly demonstrated. Orthodox Jews from Nowy Targ backed the pro-government list, and the number of votes cast in Lesser Poland for the Zionist candidates of the Żydowskie (National-Jewish Union) decreased. Zionists won only 406 votes in Nowy Targ and 736 in the powiat (district), or almost 400 fewer than in 1922.

Various methods were used to cope with these new problems. One method sought to consolidate party activity in the Podhale region. On 9 March 1930, following the eleventh Zionist regional conference, a meeting was called of delegates from Zakopane, Czarny Dunajec, Krościenko, Rabka, Mszana Dolna, Szczawnica, Myslenice, and Maków. About 250 people participated in the meeting in Nowy Targ. Participants were briefed on the resolutions of the conference, and Dr Pilzner and Dr Stiller, members of the Kraków headquarters, presented papers on the situation of Zionism among Jewish youth. Dr Stamler gave a lengthy speech on organizational needs in the Podhale and Sącz regions. As a result of the meeting, a regional committee was established in Nowy Targ, and a group of supervisors was appointed for those settlements in which the national movement was developing slowly. The delegates resolved that the movement’s highest priorities were to collect funds for Keren Kayemet L’Israel and Keren Heyesod and to work among young people. The regional committee formed a youth section to coordinate youth activities.14 This interest in the young generation was the result of the

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13 Dr Henryk Mindelgrun, Jozef Folkman, and Naftali Rand also took part in the conference. Two years later S. Stamler and J. Folkman were elected to the Party Committee.
temporary opposition of the organization Hashomer Hatza’ir (Young Scouts) on issues related to Palestine. In the end, plans for organizing the Nowy Targ region were never realized.

For the purposes of disseminating information, Zionists organized lectures on topics of interest to the entire community. Local Zionists organized a meeting on 12 January 1930 in the Jewish Reading Room at which Dr Finkenstein from Warsaw presented a paper entitled ‘Palestine on the Verge of New Development’. About 300 people attended. The meeting passed a resolution to back immigration to Palestine and to collect money for land purchase on behalf of Keren Kayemet. On 29 March 1930, Zionists organized a memorial service for those killed in the Israeli–Arab struggles in Palestine, and the departure of the first three inhabitants of Nowy Targ to Palestine received wide coverage in the press. The celebrations devoted to the memory of Theodore Herzl on the twenty-sixth anniversary of his death were similar in character. A celebratory meeting with readings, musical performances, and the ‘live scenes’ that were popular at that time took place in the Jewish Reading Room on 6 July 1930. Four days later, the local committee and the board of the kehilah organized a large meeting with speakers in the main synagogue. One of the last events of this type was a meeting held on 2 November 1930 to protest British restrictions on immigration to Palestine.

It may have seemed that the Zionists were regaining their initial position, but events preceding the parliamentary elections proved that in domestic matters they could not count on the backing of the entire Jewish community. Moreover, conflict between Zionists and conservative groups clearly increased. During several pre-election meetings, Zionists tried to drum up support for their list by arguing that voting for another list would be ‘a crime against the Jewish community’. However, their arguments met stiff opposition from their rivals, especially from I. Hamerschlag, the head of the kehilah and president of the Merchants’ Society. He maintained that ‘voting for list number 14 [the Zionist list] in this district . . . could bring about negative results.’ As the head of the religious community, he asked the rabbi to deliver a sermon backing list number 1. In the end, the merchants and craftsmen passed resolutions to back the BBWR, as did the board of the kehilah on 15 November 1930. Orthodox Jews had taken the same position on 13 November 1930. It is possible that this lack of support for the Zionists was the result of pressure from the administrative authorities. According to the Jewish press, a representative of the local administration (starostwo) was planning to state during one of the meetings that ‘voting for list number fourteen is an act that the government will view as a challenge’. The elections demonstrated that the Zionists could count only on their most loyal followers. Only 180 votes were cast for their list in the city and just 385 in the whole district: these were the lowest numbers since 1919. As a result, Folkman resigned from the board of the Merchants’ Society, and Stamler gave up his position as vice president of Yad harutsim.

Whatever the reason for their defeat in the elections, it became obvious that the Zionists had lost support. The task of the new members of the local committee who were elected at the end of October 1931 to ‘enliven work’ was to stop this decline in popularity. Although no major

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15 The emigrants’ travel and other costs were paid for by the kehilah, the Towarzystwo Zaliczkowe, the Jad Harucim Society, Hanovar Haivri ‘Akiba’, and WIZO.
changes took place, several young people were brought in. Folkman remained president, and Stiller and Mindelgrun remained as his deputies. The dentist Salamon Elbaum became secretary and his wife Cyla Elbaum was treasurer. Other board members included Bernard Fischer, O. Hammerschlag, M. Kolber, M. Lowenberg, Dr. S. Stammers, M. Stamler, Irena Vorzimmer, and Nusi Wulkan.18

Yet the expected ‘enlivening’ never happened. Soon after the members were organized, Stammers and Elbaum left the city for extended periods. At the same time, new weaknesses in the party became apparent. The members of the Jewish Spółdzielnia Handlowa dla Kupców i Rękodzielników (trade cooperative for merchants and craftsmen) joined with the BBWR and attacked Jakub Singer, the director of the Spółdzielnia. Singer was accused of backing only the Zionists and of alienating members with other political affiliations.19 Under strong pressure, he resigned.

At the beginning of 1932, even the Zionist press admitted that all was not well. It took an outside factor to bring about consolidation: Hitler’s accession to power and the resultant wave of anti-Jewish repressions in Germany provoked protests from the Jews of Poland, and the Zionists were the first to act. At their initiative, a protest meeting was organized on 27 March 1933, and Jews of all political affiliations participated. Shops were closed for the duration of the meeting. The resolutions proclaimed a ‘strong protest against the persecution of the Jewish population in Germany and the barbaric regulations applied by the present German rulers’. They directed condolences to the German Jews and appealed to the civilized world to stop further persecution of Germany’s Jewish population. At the same time, the meeting recognized the Polish government for its energetic and proper defence of Polish Jews living in Germany and asked it to continue this action.20 The local committee organized another public anti-Nazi meeting on 1 November 1933. Among the speakers were Stammers and Abraham Spitz, president of Mizrahi. At the initiative of the Zionists, and mainly with the participation of the Akiva youth movement, a common Jewish anti-Nazi front was born.

The principal directions of Zionist activity did not change in the years that followed. After July 1933, Dr Samuel Stammers led the Zionists, followed in two years’ time by Dr Jakub Stiller.21 In 1937, Dr Henryk Mindelgrun became president. Plans for establishing a regional committee were finally realized under his leadership. Representatives from the local organizations in Zakopane, Czarny Dunajec, Jabłońska, Krościenko, Szczawnica, Rabka, Jordanów, Maków, and Mszana Dolna formed the committee. Its president, Dr H. Mindelgrun, made frequent visits to local centres, stimulating activity there and establishing new branches (for example in Szczawnica and Jabłońska). The payments made on behalf of the Keren Kayemet testify to the strength of the various centres. In the second half of the 1930s, payments (in zlotys) from the Nowy Targ region were as follows:

|---------------|---------|---------|---------|

18 ‘List z Nowego Targu’, Nowy Dziennik, 6 Nov. 1931.
20 ‘Sprawozdanie sytuacyjne wojewody krakowskiego za marzec 1933’, WAPKr, VWKr–279, p. 118.
21 The following persons constituted the local committee elected on 3 July 1933: Dr S. Stammers, president and head of the Palestinian and Youth Departments; Dr Jakub Stiller, deputy president; Dr Aron Stammers, treasurer; Dr H. Midelgrun, head of the Keren Kayemet L’Israel department; and Cyla Elebaum, Gizela Frey, Adolf Gutfreund, Markus Lowenberg, Cyla Markowna and, Henryk Schwiger as members. See ‘Od naszych korespondentow’, Nowy Dziennik, 2 Aug. 1933.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Keren Kayemet L’Israel</th>
<th>Keren Heyesod</th>
<th>Party Tax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jabłońska</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>76.30</td>
<td>24.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordanów</td>
<td>169.80</td>
<td>160.67</td>
<td>283.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krościenko</td>
<td>83.90</td>
<td>128.82</td>
<td>69.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maków Podhalanski</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>190.74</td>
<td>162.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mszana Dolna</td>
<td>57.30</td>
<td>97.97</td>
<td>62.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowy Targ</td>
<td>1345.15</td>
<td>1610.67</td>
<td>1877.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabka</td>
<td>680.28</td>
<td>434.69</td>
<td>150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szczawnica</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>175.00</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zakopane</td>
<td>1596.52</td>
<td>2259.35</td>
<td>1375.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These figures demonstrate that efforts to enliven support for the Zionists were successful only in Nowy Targ. This becomes even more clear when we recall that only in Nowy Targ, Zakopane, and Czarny Dunajec did people contribute to the Podwaliny Fund which was to strengthen Zionist political activity. Even with these contributions the funds continued to diminish.\(^{22}\)

Several independent women’s and youth organizations had ties to the Zionists. WIZO, which was formed in 1920 in London, aimed to organize women. Within a few years the organization began to take root in smaller communities as well as in the larger ones. At a general women’s meeting in Nowy Targ on 26 December 1928, two members of the Kraków headquarters gave lectures: Dr Henryka Fromwicz-Stillerowa spoke about WIZO’s activities and Nella Rostowa spoke on ‘The Jewish woman in present times’. The meeting ended with elections to the local branch; those elected were Tillingerowa (president), Hammerschlagowa and Schindlerowa (deputies), Fischgrundowa (treasurer), and Cecylia Sitterowa (secretary).\(^{23}\)

‘Young WIZO’ for girls was organized soon afterward. The organization sponsored lectures and briefings on women’s issues, as well as more general discussions on Zionism and matters related to Palestine. WIZO members took an active part in promoting Keren Kayemet and collecting funds.\(^{24}\) But it was the operation of the Jewish day-nursery established at the end of 1919, that required the greatest energy. Just after WIZO was organized, it took charge of that project; all of the employees joined the new organization. Raising the funds needed to operate the nursery required constant effort. Most of the money came from parents’ fees, but some members, such as the Syrop and Wanzelberg families, made additional contributions. The kehilah’s managing board provided financial assistance each year,

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\(^{22}\) The total income from collections in Nowy Targ at that time was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Keren Kayemet L’Israel</th>
<th>Keren Heyesod</th>
<th>Party Tax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1934–5</td>
<td>1,345.15</td>
<td>1,526.60</td>
<td>120.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935–6</td>
<td>1,610.67</td>
<td>1,029.00</td>
<td>77.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937–8</td>
<td>1,877.26</td>
<td>1,043.60</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{23}\) ‘Wiadomosci z prowincji’, *Nowy Dziennik*, 11 Jan. 1929. Its members did not change over several years. Among the more active members were Mala Susskind, Leontyna Goldner, and Irena Vorzimmer.

\(^{24}\) The members of the reformed local committee of Keren Kayemet L’Israel in 1934 were Dr H. Mindelgrun, president; Tillingerowa, deputy president; Feldschreiberowna, secretary; and Staunerowa, treasurer. ‘Z Nowego Targu’, *Nowy Dziennik*, 22 Oct. 1934.
and WIZO raised the remainder of funds by organizing balls and parties.\textsuperscript{25} WIZO’s activity declined in the first half of the 1930s, but was re-energized under the leadership of Leontyna Goldner, who was elected president in November 1935. At that time, WIZO had 120 members and its own offices.\textsuperscript{26}

One of the most active youth organizations in this period was the Agudat Hanoar Haivri ‘Akiva’, which also had close ties with the Zionists. The Nowy Targ branch was organized in early 1930 and grew rapidly. Ninety boys and girls belonged in 1934, and two years later the number has risen to 120. Education, and especially the teaching of Jewish history, culture, and literature, was one of the principal aims of Akiva. Among other activities, the society organized classes in Hebrew at the local *kehilah*—despite the decided opposition of Orthodox Jews.\textsuperscript{27}

Akiva participated in all activities initiated by the Zionists. As noted above, the society took an active part in the Anti-Nazi Front organized in 1933 to combat economic links with Germany. Those who sold German goods were subject to sanctions, including social and economic boycotts, and their shops were marked with swastikas. Members of Akiva also participated in many fund drives, but were especially active in those on behalf of Keren Kayemet. In 1934–35 they collected 411 zloty for the National Fund, or more than one quarter of the total sum collected in the town. The Herzlia organization for older Zionist youth, which had thirty members by the end of the 1930s, undertook similar activities.

Other organizations connected to the national movement were Hashomer Hatzair, the Hehaluts (Pioneer Movement), which prepared candidates for future immigration to Palestine, and the Podhale branch of the students’ society Hashahar-Przedświt. The debating society Freiheit was founded in the summer of 1933 with about thirty members and had its own office on Długa Street.

Local sports clubs likewise had connections to the Zionist movement. Sports had been centred in the existing Hagibor club, but at the end of 1931, as a result of internal conflicts, some members resigned and formed a new club by the name of Makabi. The new club attracted the majority of the youth, but Zionists were among the members of both clubs. The rivalry grew less healthy as time went on, as the groups fought each other ‘not only by means of fair sports methods but were ready even to give up their Zionism for their club’s interests’. The rivalry at times took drastic forms; for example, on 18 January 1935, the sports editor for the Kraków *Nowy Dziennik*, Dr Henryk Leser, came to Nowy Targ to present a paper on ‘the role of sports in the Jewish emancipation movement’. Members of both clubs turned up at the meeting and quarrels soon broke out, ending in a brawl. A representative of the local authorities called the police, who removed the fighting parties.

Usually, the rivalry took the form of general sport events organized in Podhale by Polish clubs. The Makabi teams were generally superior; among their activities, they constructed the world’s first ski-jump training structure for Jews. The club’s shelter on Kowaniec Mountain became the base for Makabi’s annual training camps in Poland.\textsuperscript{28}

Orthodox Jews were the Zionists’ main rivals. The political organization Agudas Yisroel

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\textsuperscript{25} For example, expenses for 1930–31 reached 4,368.48 zlotys. They were covered by donations from members (319.50 zlotys), parents’ fees (2,401.50 zlotys), subsidies from the *kehilah* (410 zlotys). The remainder came from collections. ‘List z Nowego Targu’, *Nowy Dziennik*, 6 Nov. 1931. In the Nowy Targ archives we find numerous applications by WIZO to the city authorities requesting permission to organize fund-raising events.

\textsuperscript{26} ‘Od naszych korespondentów’, *Nowy Dziennik*, 10 Oct. 1935 and 30 Nov. 1935.

\textsuperscript{27} ‘Z Nowego Targu’, *Nowy Dziennik*, 20 Feb. 1934; ‘Kronika nowotarska’ *Nowy Dziennik*, 6 Mar. 1936.

\textsuperscript{28} ‘Spłonęło schronisko Makkabi krakowskiej’, *Nowy Dziennik*, 8 Dec. 1934. The note suggests that the fire was the result of arson. The damage from the fire was estimated at 10,000 zlotys.
became active in Nowy Targ only in the inter-war period. On 19 May 1922, local authorities registered Shlome Emunei Israel, a name used by Agudas Yisroel in Małopolska at that time. Ten years later, the party claimed 110 members, or twice as many as the Zionist organization. The merchant Chaim Degen, who had been tied to the Zionist Orthodox party Mizrahi and represented it in that year’s municipal elections, was elected president of the managing board. Majer Natan, also a merchant, was his deputy. The merchant Aleksander Remnitz was the party’s secretary and the tailor Jozef Feldschreiber its treasurer. Its board members were Ozjasz Kissen, Julian Langen, Leib Rand, and Szymon Englender (all merchants).²⁹

Agudah’s primary aim was to defend the religious rights of Jews and to promote the principles of Judaism. Religious standards took priority in all political and social activities. This stance followed from the conviction that over the centuries, Jews had managed to retain their identity only through religious observance. Agudah therefore fought against new ideas that they felt weakened Jewish tradition. They even opposed modern dress for women—sometimes brutally. Followers regarded the Hebrew language as suitable only for religious ritual and considered the Zionists’ attempts to modify that language for everyday use a sacrilege. Their very strict interpretation of religious commandments often led to unexpected results. For example, in the summer of 1933 the deputy head of the kehilah, Izaak Langer, ordered all the trees around the synagogue cut down since ‘according to religion in his opinion no trees are to stand beside the synagogue’. This action provoked general resentment and the case ended in court.³⁰

As long as they enjoyed cultural and religious freedom, Orthodox Jews accepted the need to remain loyal to state authorities. After the May coup d’état, they backed the Sanacja regime and, despite the harsh treatment they received, remained loyal to them until the end.

Agudah was not an active organization except during major political affairs such as parliamentary of municipal council elections, and especially during the elections of the kehilah’s managing board. Their candidates usually stood in opposition to the Zionists. For example, during the commemorations for Theodor Herzl in 1934, ‘contrary to tradition the mohel and cantor Leser Weiss refused to lead the prayers, explaining that the Orthodox Jews threatened to boycott him should he “dare” say Kaddish and El Male Rahamin for the soul of the deceased Theodor Herzl’. The head of the kehilah, himself an Orthodox Jew, warned Weiss that if he ever did such things he would lose his job as mohel and cantor. The Orthodox group tried the same methods a year later, but this time both cantors (Weiss and Kalb) refused to meet their demands.³¹

The local religious school (heder) developed under Agudah’s sponsorship, with Pinkas Buchshanów serving as its head beginning in 1921. In the first year, twenty children enrolled and classes met in a private apartment on Kolejowa Street. By the end of the 1920s, the heder occupied two rooms in a house on Szeroka Street, and was run by the Orthodox Talmud Torah.³²

The Orthodox Zionist Party Mizrahi was established in the town in 1925 with forty members and aimed to build bridges between the conservative and the national movements. In 1927, the board of the local branch consisted of the following members, all of whom were

merchants: Abram Spitz as president, Leib Feldschreiber as his deputy, Marek Akiba as secretary, Leib Birnstein as treasurer, and Jozef Langer, Chaim Rand, Mojzesz Weinfeld, Hani Guttermich, and Chaim Degen as members. Despite the word *Orthodox* in its name, Mizrahi belonged to the Zionist camp (forming its conservative right wing). Mizrahi took the position that cultural and national developments must take place in accordance with the principles of Jewish religion and traditions. Like the Zionists, they backed the idea of building a nation in Palestine and regarded the Hebrew language as a national one.

The goal of the Mizrahi branch in Nowy Targ was to win over the heretofore indifferent groups of Orthodox Jews to the Zionist cause. Their efforts provoked an immediate counterattack in which Agudah (if we believe the Zionist authorities) denounced Mizrahi members as stubborn Bolsheviks and enemies of the state. In any case, this move yielded no results. At least in Nowy Targ, attempts to bring together the Orthodox and Zionist ideas were fruitless; shortly afterward, the importance of the party as well as the number of its members diminished. Many of its members—even those among the most active—joined one of the two rival groups. Within several years Mizrahi’s membership numbered only twenty-five. A small youth organization, Hashomer Hadati, was also linked with Mizrahi. Its primary activity was to organize lectures in the Jewish Reading Room. The second half of the 1930s saw the majority of Mizrahi’s youth join the Torah Vaavadah, which had about thirty members and was very active in cultural affairs.

A number of cultural, economic, and ex-servicemen’s societies were linked to political parties and organizations. One of these was the Jewish Reading Room, mentioned above, which had its own quarters and a collection of about 1,500 volumes. Another was the Stowarzyszenie ku Wsparciu Uczniów Szkół Średnich (Society for the Support of High School Students), which had been in operation before the war and was reactivated in March 1931.

Economic societies were also important for the Jewish community. Jewish merchants formed the Stowarzyszenie Kupców (Merchants’ Society), which initially also accepted Poles. However, after the Nowy Targ branch of the Krakowska Kongregacja Kupiecka (Kraków Commercial Congregation) was opened, it became a religious organization. Jewish craftsmen organized a society called Yad harutsim, which had eighty members in 1930. This society, headed by Rubin Robert Ernst and Dr Stamler, gave free professional and tax guidance to its members and organized medical assistance.

The interest-free load fund Gemilut Hasadim provided financial support for the development of Jewish economic life and was especially helpful in the years of the great economic crisis, when it saved numerous small merchants and craftsmen from bankruptcy. In 1930 alone, the fund granted seventy-three loans for a total sum of 12,710 zlotys. In subsequent years the size of individual loans diminished but the fund made efforts to increase the number of people to be helped. In the years 1931–33, eighty persons were granted loans totalling 12,180 zlotys. The fund paid for its activities with savings amounting to 6,695 zlotys in 1930 and 8,791.3 zlotys in 1933, as well as with savings from membership and subscription fees and donations and grants supplied by the *kehilah* authorities (200–400 zlotys yearly) and the Towarzystwo Żaliczkowe (Loan Society). Beginning in 1932, state authorities would occasionally offer subsidies. Gemilut Hasadim was also backed financially by the American

33 ‘Wykaz organizacji politycznych w powiecie nowotarskim’, WAPKr, VWKr–55a.
34 ‘Haniebne metody denuncjacyjne “Agudy”’, Nowy Dziennik, 28 Nov. 1925.
36 ‘List z Nowego Targu’, Nowy Dziennik, 10 May 1931.
Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint). For many years, the loan fund was directed by Ignacy Hammerschlag who, the Zionists insisted, tried to make use of this post to broaden his political influence.\(^37\) In 1933, Hammerschlag was accused of tying a loan to votes in the kehilah elections.

The second financial institution, Towarzystwo Zaliczkowe, had a broader character. Upon its founding in 1923, the majority of its members were Polish. However, Jews held the controlling number of shares and therefore had a majority in the governing bodies. The main aim of the society was to grant its members credit ‘at a decent interest rate’ in order to encourage the development of trade and industrial activity. Among the founders and most active members were Izrael Hammerschlag (president), Jozef Langer, Dr Bernard Kohn, Joachim Verberall, Dr Herman Kolber, and Dr Chaim Wasserberger. After 1933, only Jews held positions in its administration.\(^38\)

The co-operative organization Samopomoc, organized on 6 July 1919, also remained outside party divisions. Most active in the post-war years, and especially during the period of high inflation, its purpose was to supply members with basic needs such as food and household equipment. Its first board members were Ignacy Hammerschlag, Szymon Englander, and Joachim Silberring. After the 1921 elections, they were replaced by Ozajasz Kiesen, Murkus Gunsberg, Jakub Schiff, and Max Mendler. The co-op functioned until 1935, though its activities were severely reduced in its last years.\(^39\)

Jewish veterans’ interests were represented by Koło Związków Żydowskich Inwalidów, Wdów i Sierot Wojennych (a branch of the Union of Jewish War Victims, Widows, and Orphans), under the leadership of Aron Gerstner,\(^40\) and the Podhalański Oddział Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski (Podhale Branch of the Union of Jewish Fighters for Polish Independence). The latter was founded in April 1934 with Izrael Hammerschlag as president.\(^41\) Just after its formation, the Nowy Targ branch claimed forty-two members, but outside events put a stop to its growth: as a result of rivalry and quarrels that marked the 1935 electoral campaign, Dr Stamler and a group of his supporters resigned from its membership.

Jews and Poles, though living in the same town, on the same streets, and even sometimes in the same houses, lived in two separate worlds with different political and cultural aspirations. The Jewish community distinguished itself not just by its different religious practices, but also by its manner of dress and language. Social contacts were virtually non-existent and knowledge of Jewish traditions and customs among the Poles was poor. The Poles saw the Jews’ use of Yiddish, which was often taken for German, as evidence of Jewish sympathy for the states that had partitioned Poland. There are many examples of how misunderstandings arose as a result of each group’s ignorance about the religious and cultural customs of the other. In one instance, several Jews came upon a Catholic mass being held in a market square to commemorate the

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37 Other members of the board were Henryk Fischrund, Abraham Spitz, Markus Gunsberg, Benjamin Dorf, Salomon Singer, Emanual Singer, Izrael Hammerschlag, Abraham Kopito, Abraham Stamler, Jozef Ehrlich, Dr Salomon Stamler, Herman Frey, Ozjasz Kiesen, and Samuel Keller (Nowy Dziennik, 2 Aug. 1933).
38 ‘Akta Towarzystwa Zaliczkowego’, WAPKr, IPHKr–223.
40 We have no detailed information on the branch’s activity. We only know that the board elected on 15 June 1933 consisted also of Maurycy Papier, deputy president; Pepa Feber, secretary; Wolf Rosenberg, treasurer; and Dr Jakub Schachtel, Chiel Wolf, Chaim Korngut, Jozef Ascher, Gruspan, Hilel Naftali Asentowicz, Jakub Bronner, and Jozef Teller (Nowy Dziennik, 6 July 1933).
41 The following were also members of the board: Adolf Guttfreund, Dr Stefan Hertz, Ozjasz Midelgrun, Maks Pastor, Maurycy Papier, and Dr S. Stamler.
anniversary of a Warsaw battle, and did not remove their hats. This was perceived as an intentional attempt to offend Polish religious and patriotic feelings. The local press made a note of the ‘Jewish provocation’, though the editors should have known that religious Jews would not face God with bare heads.

The period directly following Poland’s achievement of independence was the most conflict-ridden. Poles regarded Jews as a religious group only and demanded that they declare their Polish nationality. They perceived the Jews’ proclamation of neutrality in the Polish–Ukrainian conflict (1918–19) as one more piece of evidence showing that Jews opposed Polish national aspirations and, further, that they were failing to fulfill their basic duties toward the Polish state while at the same time demanding privileges for themselves. This conflict was still on the minds of the Polish public several years later, when Jews were referred to as ‘our neutral ones’. In 1918 and early 1919, when Poles were drunk with independence and all signs of Austrian rule were being removed, Poles resented Jewish merchants’ use of Germanized names of towns. The local press wrote: ‘It is time to break with anything German! Whoever sees the name Neumarket here should be reminded in a rather unpleasant way that we live in Nowy Targ.’

The Polish public responded badly when the Paris Peace Conference forced Poland to accept the so-called ‘little’ Versailles Treaty on national minorities, which granted minorities—and in particular Jews—the right to their own customs, culture, and language. The action provoked a heated discussion and a repetition of all the standard accusations ever brought against Jews. According to one article, ‘the Jewish attitude toward the Polish idea and toward Poles themselves was always hostile. This was so when Poland was under foreign rule as well as during the time of the formation of the Polish state. In all matters they backed our enemies, either Germans or Ukrainians. They profited from the black market. And last but not least, it is the Jews almost exclusively who control the Bolshevik movement, which is hostile to us and to civilization in general.’

The treaty itself was described as an ‘unheard of attempt on the sovereignty of the Polish state’ and as an effort to create ‘a Jewish state within the Polish state’. One section of the treaty provoked particular ire because of two requirements: the first eased the use of minority languages in state offices, and the second prohibited the use of pressure to force Jews to undertake any activity that would violate the Sabbath. The fact that the treaty would increase the differences between the two groups also caused anger.

Nevertheless, despite frequent critical statements and occasional threats, there were no major Polish–Jewish conflicts in the town in the inter-war period. No attempts were made to limit the rights of the Jewish population. Only in late 1935 and early 1936 did the Zionist press report on primary school teachers who pressured Jewish children to attend school on Saturdays as well as weekdays. The report also noted that Jewish pupils received lower grades undeservedly.

42 ‘Znowu Neumarket!’, Gazeta Podhalańska, 2 Feb. 1919.
43 ‘Mniejszości narodowe w traktacie pokojowym’, Gazeta Podhalańska, 10 Aug. 1919. Jews were also accused of propagating false information to the world by presenting Poland as a state characterized by injustice, pogroms, and persecutions while tendentiously omitting any mention of pogroms in other countries—especially Ukraine, Russia, and Romania. Journals across the entire political spectrum repeated this accusation.
44 In Feb. 1936 the Freiheit organization received a letter marked with a skull and containing the following theat: ‘If the Jews do not move out of this building, it will be burned and when the greatest number Jews have gathered, a poisonous bomb and a can of gasoline will be thrown through the window.’ Nowy Dziennik, 12 Feb. 1936.
45 Nowy Dziennik, 10 Jan. 1936 and 12 Feb. 1936. The same paper also denied the information in part.
In Galicia a wave of anti-Jewish incidents, including assaults on individuals and even on whole communities, accompanied the return of independence. The economic situation gave rise to these incidents, but antisemitic propaganda was also a cause. There were no such incidents in Nowy Targ and Podhale despite the fact that slogans calling for Poles to force Jews out of economic life were popular there as well. A letter to the editors of the Gazeta Podhalańska called the anti-Jewish excesses sad and hurtful, but added: ‘Thank God, some of the mountain people (gazdowie) understand their personal dependence on Jews differently. They plan to send their children to school earlier so that they can learn proper arithmetic and learn to write well. . . . We should be self-sufficient and take care of our matters in the new Poland that is now being built so that we will be able to cope with all our affairs ourselves and not look to Jews for help.’

It seems that slogans calling for economic boycott brought little result. Gazeta Podhalańska stated: ‘All calls to organize are in vain if we do not create the needed background—especially shops where people can purchase goods without employing a Jew—and if people do not come to believe that they can live without the Jew. . . .’

The situation changed little in subsequent years. The very intensive and boisterous propaganda of the nationalist groups in Nowy Targ was ineffective, largely because nationalists themselves purchased goods from Jews (for which they were often reproached by the public). The Gazeta Podhalańska received a letter from one of its readers containing the following statement:

Concerning Jewry and the words of the author of the article ‘It’s time to teach those who work for Jews at Poles’ expense a lesson’, do not these words apply to the author himself? After all, I’ve heard it said of one of Nowy Targ’s leading antisemites that he went to purchase socks from a Jew and was greeted ironically with the words, ‘Dear Sir, why don’t you go to a shop run by a Catholic?’ The antisemite was stupefied and muttered ‘Well, I don’t feel like walking the few yards further.’ Was it not the author of the pamphlet who was the ‘hero’ of this tale? . . . We have Catholic drug stores, shops, bakeries etc., but the Nowy Targ antisemites are careful to avoid them and to shop with the Jews.

In the late 1930s, the economic struggle against the Jewish population was backed by the government. However, local authorities never allowed drastic methods to be applied. The city government rejected the demand of the Nowy Targ Stronnictwo Narodowe (National Party) to separate Polish and Jewish stalls during fairs and markets—in other words to create a ‘stall ghetto’. The national groups’ efforts to prevent people from shopping in Jewish shops failed due to the actions of the police. In July 1938, the municipal court in Nowy Targ sentenced a member of the Stronnictwo Narodowe to a month’s imprisonment for picketing Jewish shops. An identical verdict was passed by the municipal court in Krościenko in a similar case against another member of the same party.

In characterizing the relations between Poles and Jews, we should stress that over the

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46 Gazeta Podhalańska, 12 Jan. 1919. Readers were also informed that the sole Jewish merchant in Harklowa had left the village as a result of the boycott of his shop. The author asked, ‘Is this not a better way of getting rid of strangers than curses and pogroms, which give us a bad reputation abroad?’ (24 Nov. 1918). Several months later Gazeta Podhalańska (11 May 1919) printed another reader’s letter calling for an economic boycott: ‘Let us work, popularize, and found farmers’ circles, reading houses, and all types of educational organizations. Let us not support Jewish enterprise and trade and let us put forth the slogan ‘Swoj dla swego.’

47 Gazeta Podhalańska, 7 Jan. 1932.


entire period discussed, there were elements of cooperation as well as of economic rivalry. This was especially true in matters concerning the town or the state. Thus, we come across Jewish names in, for example, the Komitet Obrony Państwa (Committee for Defence of the State) in 1920; in the Komitet Pożyczki Narodowej (National Loan Committee) in 1933; and in the Komitet Pomocy Bezrobotnym (Committee for Assistance to the Unemployed). Jews were also active in social organizations of a wider character such as Żydowskie Koło Ligi Obrony Przeciwlotniczej i Przeciwgazowej (The Jewish Circle of the Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Gas Defence League), which began to operate in 1934. Jews participated in monetary collections for the Śląsk plebiscite and the National Fund (Skarb Narodowy) in 1919–20.

The possibility for mutual understanding between the two groups increased with the appearance of a common enemy. Despite Polish annoyance over the fact that Jews kept their distance from the Polish language and culture, one could hear voices calling for joint action against German persecutions of Jews in Germany and Poland. As early as 1933, the Nowy Targ press wrote: ‘Since Germans fight against the Jews, and next in economic terms against Poland, we should answer unquestionably with a boycott of their merchandise. We could even proclaim the merchant who imports German goods an enemy. Should we have no goods of a certain type in Poland we can always easily import them from Czechoslovakia, France, etc. It is here that merchants can best support the state. On the other hand, customers absolutely should boycott shops that stock German goods.’\(^{50}\)

Several years later, when the Fundusz Obrony Narodowej (National Defence Fund) was created, both individual Jews and Jewish organizations donated to it. The greatest contribution (100 crowns in gold) was offered by a Jew, Dr Zachariasz Goldner.

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\(^{50}\) ‘Precz z towarami z Niemiec’, *Gazeta Podhalańska*, 23 Apr. 1933.