Polish–Jewish relations during the years of the Second Polish Republic cannot be viewed exclusively against a background of national, religious, and cultural differences, but were also conditioned by diverse economic, social, and political factors. Antagonisms that so clearly surfaced in the second half of the 1930s welled up mostly due to the levels of material prosperity of both nationalities, as each struggled to achieve and maintain their sources of income. In Poland, a country underprivileged in terms of economic development, the battle for jobs and sources of income was the single most important concern, especially in regions that lacked industry and had poorly developed agriculture. Tensions were apparent mainly in small towns that had lost their municipal rights after the January uprising and had practically no hope of getting them back. The population was made up of two nationalities, Poles and Jews, with roughly the same levels of income and who in effect lived on the verge of poverty. The two groups, however, were engaged in different occupations. For Poles, the main sources of income came from cultivating small landholdings; Jews earned their livings in trade and cottage industries.

The antagonism arising from this state of affairs was ruthlessly fomented by right-wing groups from the nationalist democratic camp. In their clashes with Jews, they initially employed primitive forms of propaganda, drawing inspiration from Nazi Germany. The use of such propaganda intensified throughout the economic crisis of the 1930s. This, in turn, bred a general anti-Jewish attitude of the part of the Polish population. The factors behind the rise and course of such conflicts can be studied using as examples incidents in the Opoczno district, one of the poorest areas in Kielce province.

According to the 1921 census, the Opoczno district had a population of 122,571, of whom 10,043 were Jews (8.2%). Opoczno itself was the only town in the district with municipal rights; Jews formed 46.7 per cent of its total population of 7,224. The majority of the area’s Jews were dispersed among small towns in this district, in places such as Odrzywół, Drzewica, Żarnów, and Przysucha, where they worked in crafts and trades.

Table 1

Population, according to religious affiliation in the larger centres of the Opoczno district, 1921.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Total number of residents</th>
<th>Roman Catholic</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>Public Services</th>
<th>Socially Disadvantaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opoczno</td>
<td>7224</td>
<td>3805</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>3376</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Białaczów</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>1124</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drzewica</td>
<td>1662</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>1017</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gielniów</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klówów</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odrzywół</td>
<td>1336</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Przysucha</td>
<td>3238</td>
<td>1084</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>2153</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skrzynno</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Żarnów</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The vast majority of the district’s population lived in villages (94.1%) and worked in agriculture (82.2%). Only a small percentage of the residents made their living from industry and craft (9.5%), particularly in the clothing, food, wood, metal, and building industries. Just 3.8 per cent of the entire population made their living by trade and 1.3 per cent from public services and related jobs in administration, education, and health care. A similar percentage lacked paying jobs; the social status of that latter group is difficult to pinpoint: 3.2% of the district’s residents were in this category and were the most socially disadvantaged group, with no prospects for improvement.1

Agricultural workers belonged to a highly varied social class. Apart from a small group of landed proprietors who owned 33.4 per cent of the land, thousands of families subsisted by tilling tiny holdings with very poor soil. This low quality of soil, consisting mainly of rubble and sand, led to the proverb, ‘You sow a bushel, you harvest a stack and the stack will give you a bushel’, which served as a metaphor for poverty and backwardness. This poverty, made worse by mass illiteracy, had a negative influence on the political and social attitudes of the population. This gloomy legacy in the wake of the Russian invasion resulted in high levels of illiteracy, and the Polish government tried urgently to smooth out the cultural differences between individual regions and social groups. It is estimated that in the Opoczno district as great a number as 59.5 per cent of the total population over the age of seven could not read. And it was this group that was at risk of being influenced by political currents that promoted populist slogans and the movement to nationalise industry, trade, and crafts. The forces promoting nationalisation hoped that the government would provide the Polish population with greater access to sources of income and means of supporting large families. Detailed calculations of the sociological and occupational composition of the residents of small towns of Kielce province (fewer than 20,000 residents) carried out by R. Renz indicate that the majority did not employ workers, implying that people were living a barely sustainable existence.2
In 1935, only 415 artisan shops possessing a Category 8 industrial certificate were registered throughout the whole of the Opoczno district. These were located mainly in Opoczno and in settlements with a claim to being towns. The situation was with the distribution of trading posts. The largest trading centre, Opoczno, was the capital of the district. On the eve of the Second World War, 132 retail trading posts were registered there, but only 4 were co-operatives; the rest were privately owned. A large number of people made a living from hawking or mobile peddling as middle men, mainly during the weekly markets in Opoczno, Przysucha, Drzewica, Odrzywół, and Żarnów. Private trade was almost completely taken over by Jews; Jews also were dominant in brokering goods and in money-exchange transactions between town and village residents.

Social and political relations grew progressively more strained with the considerable shrinking of the internal market due to the economic crisis and the pressures of enormous numbers of workers from the country who moved to the towns; on a national scale these numbers were estimated to be as great as 5 million. Tensions rose also due to high unemployment levels, particularly in small towns. Jews were blamed for this state of affairs, as they often owned workshops and businesses. People forgot or did not want to know that significant numbers of Jews also lived on the edge of poverty and that each new co-operative store or establishment threatened their very existence. W. Pobog-Malinowski writes that at that time, ‘The Jewish proletariat, huddled in terrible poverty in these small towns, had already passed from the stage of the most extreme cases of poverty found in any Polish or Bielorussian village to that of bare wretched existence at the edge of starvation.’ At least one-third of the Jewish population lived under the threat of losing even the most basic means of their miserable existence.

Taking advantage of the mood of dissatisfaction in the rural districts, the National Front in its struggle for "the hearts and minds" of the people and its goal to take over the government, fomented an anti-Jewish campaign and found a receptive audience among that part of Polish society whose material existence was under threat, even though that strata of society did not necessarily share the nationalist ideology. Primitive slogans inspired by the National Democrats proclaimed Jewish appropriation of the country’s sources of income. Jews’ alleged enrichment from the abuse of Polish rights stimulated the imagination of a largely illiterate peasant population and turned them into perpetrators of anti-Jewish incidents in the Opoczno district. It was in this district that such disturbances first flared up and gradually came to threaten not just public order, but national security and the achievement of internal political goals that the government had set for itself as well. Subsequently, these incidents degenerated into civil war. At the same time, the events confirm that the hitherto concealed antipathy toward Jews was being exploited for political purposes.

In the second half of the 1930s, the National Front in the Opoczno district had wide influence that had spread during earlier activities by the Great Poland Camp. According to government sources, at the beginning of 1936 the National Front in the Radom region (consisting of the Radom, Opoczno, Konce, Opatów, Ilze, and Kozięcice districts) had 8,010 members in a total number of 254 outposts. The Opoczno district had 84 outposts and 3,570 members, amounting to nearly 45 per cent of the total. Ossa parish alone, which exercised administrative control over Odrzywół, had 444 National Front members; Odrzywół itself had 144. Moreover, the National Democrats had influence over seventeen sections of the Fire Department, the Educational Society of the Opoczno District, the Circle of Polish Women,
the ‘Ufnosc’ (Reliance) Association of Christian Workers, the Polish Mothers of School Children, the ‘Sokol’ (Falcon) Athletic Society, Circles of Rural Housewives, the Union of Women Social Workers, the Catholic Association of Male and Female Youth, and some circles of the Union of Rural Youth. The Front also had considerable influence in both municipal and rural local governments. For example, in the 1938 district council elections, the National Front won 925 out of the 3,412 seats, or 27.1 per cent of the total. The largest number of seats were won in the Topolice district council with 136, Ossa with 88, and Rusinów and Goździków, 77 each.5

The intensive propaganda campaign of this party, particularly in small towns and rural areas, was bound to result in shocking events that were condemned by most Poles, who wanted nothing to do with them. The party distributed a great number of anti-Jewish and nonsensical leaflets not just among its own members but among the population at large. One example, distributed in the Opoczno district, proclaimed slogans such as ‘Poland for Poles’, ‘Remember, don’t buy from Jews’, ‘In Poland, bread and work, first and foremost for the Poles’, and ‘Remember, buy only from Poles’.

This concerted anti-Jewish propaganda led to incidents. As early as 1934 in the areas under discussion, some Jewish traders abandoned their places at markets and church fairs. Similar incidents, which were harbingers of future anti-Jewish incidents leading to dramatic consequences, were recorded around the Przytyk settlement in the Radom district. It was there that in March 1935, in the village of Kaszewska Wola, that members and nationalist sympathisers broke all the windows in Mordka Borenstein’s apartment, wounding the tenant. A few days later, another National Front member attacked and beat up his Borenstein’s wife.6 In both cases, the perpetrators were found, punished, and held under temporary arrest, but attacks against Jews did not cease. On 9 March 1936 in Przytyk, two Jews lost their lives during a pogrom; five were seriously and twenty-one slightly injured.7 In late November 1935, events with tragic consequences and wide political repercussions occurred in Odrzywół in the Opoczno district. Records of their chronological sequence and extent are preserved in documents in the Kielce State Archive, in the set under the title Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939. Only those that faithfully recount the sequence of these events and their atmosphere are cited here. Other documents that do not provide crucial additional data or that repeat information already given have been excluded. Notifications, recorded telephone messages, reports by local administrative and police authorities or persons sent to the place of the incidents by the provincial authorities or the provincial state police headquarters are also quoted. Copies or original documents were sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw. Fragments of reports from trial proceedings of defendants are also given.

Speeches made by the defence counselors of the accused characterise the attitude of the National Front members to Jews very precisely. Subsequently, the trial turned into an arena for the popularisation of the nationalist anti-Jewish programme, and was an attempt to promulgate primitive antisemitism. Some documents that are quoted are kept in the parish chronicle of the Roman Catholic Church in Odrzywół; these show the background and course of the events. These documents were not transcribed until 1941, and they present some insignificant differences in descriptions of the events as related in the documents. Another factor that must be emphasised is that those who participated in the anti-Jewish activities took advantage of the population’s general attachment to religion. Accordingly,
they accuse Jews of the alleged murder of the local parish priest and the imprisonment of the Sandomierz diocese bishop who happened to be paying a pastoral visit to Odrzywół.

There does not seem to be any information about murders of Jews in these documents. J. Zyndul quotes the Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy as saying that as a result of a beating on 27 November, one Jew died from his injuries. We do find confirmation of this tragedy in other sources. From these documents it appears that during these incidents, twelve Roman Catholics died and twenty-five people were injured. Fearing repressions and arrest, many people with less serious injuries did not report to hospital. Hence, it is difficult to establish the exact number of people injured, both Poles and Jews.

The number of arrests and prosecutions did not stop the wave of anti-Jewish demonstrations that took place in the Opoczno district and in the entire Kielce province during the years that followed. According to government background sources, even some priests active in the National Front were among those supporting the boycott of Jewish trade. Such cases were recorded in Skrzymna and Klów. In Skrzymna, a fifty-strong Nationalist group attacked local Jews on 26 March 1936; several victims sustained serious injuries.

In addition to economic boycotts and pogroms, frequent forms of attacks against Jews included throwing petards or explosive materials and objects soaked in malodorous fluids into Jewish apartments, prayer houses, and synagogues; beating up Jews going to market; damaging houses; breaking windows; and terrorising Jewish traders and their Polish customers or those Poles who maintained contacts with them. The numbers of such incidents recorded by the police in 1936 testify to the scale of such occurrences. According to these reports, 277 cases of anti-Jewish incidents occurred in Kielce province. Damage to houses and the breaking of windows were among the most common forms of attack. There were 232 such incidents in that year, causing the shattering of 603 windows. The statistics do not indicate the full scale of the phenomenon, as such information was only registered when victims submitted police reports. Many known instances of beatings, conflicts, boycotts, window breaking, and other damage to property were not reported. For example, in January 1936 in Truskolasy (Częstochowa province), religious provocation led to some tragic anti-Jewish incidents, and Jews were blamed for the desecration of a church. Furthermore, local National Front activists took advantage of the arrival of peasants from neighbouring villages at the market, provoking incidents that resulted in a large number of Jews being beaten up and at least two hundred windows broken in homes and the synagogue. Earlier statistics do not cite this information. An investigation carried out in Truskolasy revealed that the organisers of this provocation were National Front activists and not Jews.

But no one really needed any real excuse for attacking Jews. Even in the absence of reasons, provocations were created. Sometimes young people and even children would throw stones at passing Jews.

This dark and gloomy picture of Polish–Jewish relations does not, obviously, apply to the whole of Polish society, but only to the small part who had succumbed to nationalist propaganda and the phobia of economic threat. There also exist a number of recorded examples of condemnation of these incidents and contempt expressed against their organisers, of help being offered to victims, and of warnings given to Jews about dangers coming their way. We have found many examples of such attitudes and behaviour in archival materials. For example, Abram Kirszenbaum, a resident of Soltyków, near Radom, was warned by a Pole whom he had never met or heard of before, that the nationalists were preparing incidents against local Jews. When Kirszenbaum tried to offer the man a financial
reward, the Pole would not accept any money, but said that for their honesty, the Kirszenbaum family would enjoy the goodwill of the town’s people.\footnote{13} The documents describing the Odrzywół incidents, quoted below, illustrate not only the problem of Polish-Jewish relations but also, and perhaps first and foremost, the sources of the tensions pervading society at the time of the Second Republic.

\section*{SELECTION OF SOURCES}

\noindent No. 1

Kielce, 21 November 1935
A Recorded Telephone Message from W. Lutomski, Head of the Social and Political Department of the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw
\textit{Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919-1939, call no. 3533 b, card 121.}

This is to inform you that on the afternoon of 20 November of this year, which was a market day in the Odrzywół settlement, Opoczno district, members of the National Front from different areas staged a boycott of Jewish traders, shouting ‘don't buy from Jews’. They then overturned and scattered four trading stalls and one cart loaded with glass and assaulted one of the Jews. While the police tried to deal with the incident, the crowd prevented them from catching the perpetrators.

The people taking part in the incident went home and everything returned to normal. As the main trouble-makers came from Ossa village, the chief of the Odrzywół police station and six policemen went to Ossa to find and arrest the guilty persons. The police succeeded in arresting only two ringleaders as, in the meantime, the residents had sounded a fire alarm and approximately eighty persons armed with crow bars and stones attacked the police, trying to free the arrested people, and shots started being fired from the crowd. In order to restrain the mob, the police fired warning shots into the air and when this had no effect and the mob continued to surge forward, it was forced to retreat and the two persons under arrest managed to escape. Four policemen were slightly injured after being struck by stones.

Today, the district subprefect and the provincial deputy chief of the state police, Deputy Inspector Stano, have visited the scene in order to investigate the situation and to issue necessary instructions.

\noindent No. 2

Kielce, 21 November 1935.
A Recorded Telephone Message by W. Lutomski, Head of the Social and Political Department of the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw
\textit{Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 197.}
Further to my telephone message earlier today concerning the Odrzywół and Ossa incidents, I would like to inform you that the subprefect of Opoczno confirmed that during his visit to Ossa, residents of that settlement and of the neighbouring villages of Walerianów and Brudziewice have been in a state of extreme unrest and that they are being subjected to a high level of incitement to offer active opposition to the organs of the state police should the police start arresting people.

The subprefect’s attempts to persuade the perpetrators of the Odrzywół incidents to give themselves up and to deposit statements have come to nothing. As a result, the prosecutor from the district court in Radom has arrived and has issued a warrant demanding that they report to him without delay.

Should these warrants not be obeyed, it might become necessary for the organs of the state police to intervene.

The state police station in Odrzywół has been reinforced.

At the same time I would like to inform you that, as today is market day in Opoczno and in the Przysucha settlement, the police stations in these locations have also been reinforced and all the necessary preventative measures have been put in place.

Kielce, 23 November 1935.
Letter of Zenon Rosolowicz, Police Officer from the Provincial Headquarters of the State Police in Kielce to the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office concerning the Anti-Jewish Incidents in Odrzywół

Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 209.

Further to my radio telegram No 809 (telephone message No p.3/785/35)* dated 21.11.35, I would like to inform you that on 20.11.35 while the market was in progress in the Odrzywół settlement, Opoczno district, groups of people belonging to the National Front from Odrzywół and surrounding areas exhorted others not to buy from Jews, overturning Jewish stalls and a cart carrying kitchen utensils and then they proceeded to demolish two glass cases containing bread. They also went into Jewish shops demanding them to hand over various objects which they took away without paying for them and beat up those Jews who asked to be paid.

The Jewish victims turned for help to the police and, as a result, Władysław Pajak, (the chief inspector of the state police station) and three other police officers attempted to identify the most violent elements among the nationalists, but encountered strong resistance. The chief inspector of the police station, who did not have enough state policemen to back him up, had to give up his attempts at identifying the perpetrators and informed the subprefecture and district chief in Opoczno of it. As a consequence and following received instructions, chief inspector Pajak together with seven other police officers went to the village of Ossa, in the same district, at midnight of the same day in order to bring in the leaders of the incident to the police station. This resulted in the arrest of Piotr Wrzosek and Adam Bartos. During all this, approximately eighty local residents attempted to free the men
under arrest. In this situation the police gave up the struggle and began to withdraw from the village while holding the arrested men, but by then some peasants who had arrived were using abusive language and were firing at them from rifles and handguns and throwing stones at the same time.

In view of the very violent nature of this mob and in self-defence, the police fired shots into the air, which caused the mob to retreat, after which the police refrained from any further action. Taking advantage of the confusion, the arrested men managed to escape.

I should like to add that the following three policemen sustained slight injuries: 1) Constable Franciszek Bielecki, 2) Senior Constable Dygas, and 3) Constable Bronisław Szuladowicz, and not four as had been reported earlier.

Finally, I would like to point out that after contacting the administrative and prosecuting authorities, the chief of the police station has been asked to carry out an investigation of the incidents in Odrzywół and Ossa and to collect incriminating materials, to find other perpetrators of the incident, so that such materials may be used by the judicial authorities to summon the suspects to appear in court personally. If they fail to do so, the court could issue a warrant for their arrest.

At the same time, I would like to inform you that on 21.11 of this year, Radom assigned a twenty-five-man strong police squad to Odrzywół, with twenty of the men having already left for their post at 5 PM on the same day and the remaining five waiting until 22.11.35. It was deemed necessary to assign this squad because of anticipated anti-Jewish incidents on market days in Opoczno and Przysucha.

* The recorded telephone message is not in the document.

Kielce, 28 November 1935
A Recorded Telephone Message by W. Lutomski, Head of the Social and Political Department of the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw

I would like to inform you that because today is market day in Opoczno and the Przysucha settlement in the Opoczno district, the National Front has threatened anti-Jewish excesses. Staff manning the State Police station in Opoczno has been increased to eighteen, under the direction of a police officer, and in the Przysucha settlement to seven, as a preventative measure.

In Opoczno, where today market day coincided with a meeting of the National Front Youth Organisation, no disturbances occurred and the market passed without incident thanks to the preventative measures instituted by the police.

But in the Przysucha settlement, where approximately 2,000 people had gathered in the market place, at 2.15 PM the crowd that had been incited by a certain Przeor from Nieznamierowice, attacked Jewish stands, exclaiming: ‘Beat and raid the Jews.’ Despite decisive action on the part of the police present, the mob managed to destroy twelve textile
and clothing stands, etc., and clothing allegedly worth 200 zlotys were stolen from one Jewish trader. During this incident five Jewish traders were beaten with sticks and stones and sustained slight injuries. The mob also broke approximately two hundred windows in Jewish homes and three policemen were handled roughly during the incident.

At the present time the police are in the process of placing the perpetrators under arrest.

As a consequence of the above events and the incidents in Odrzywół and Ossa, I have ordered the police force in the Opoczno district to be reinforced. In addition, the provincial chief of the state police has been sent there to supervise an operation intended to neutralise the elements who provoked the above incidents.

No. 5

Opoczno, 28 November 1935
A Recorded Telephone Message by Czeslaw Brzostynski, Subprefect of Opoczno to the Voivode of Kielce
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 553.

I would like to inform you that on 27.11 of this year, anti-Jewish excesses occurred during market day in Odrzywół. About two hundred National Front members went around Odrzywół closing Jewish shops, not allowing any shoppers in and beating up four Jews.

No. 6

Odrzywół, 29 November 1935
A Recorded Telephone Message by Inspector Grabowski, Provincial Chief of the State Police, to the Voivode of Kielce
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 580.

This morning at 9:50 AM, the state police squad under the command of police officer Henrych was attacked along the Odrzywół-Klwów road by a large group of peasants carrying firearms consisting mainly of revolvers. They received a warning from the police that if they did not stop and disperse, the police would shoot. This was followed by the police being stoned and the mob shouting ‘Hurrah, let’s get the guns away from the police!’ They then attacked the police squad which was guarding the bridge crossing at that time. The police fired a warning salvo and when they saw that this had no effect it fired a volley in the direction of the attackers. Facing extreme danger, they used a machine gun. This resulted in the killing of four of attackers and the injuring of fourteen others. One of the injured died later. Three persons were arrested. Despite the operation described above, peasants continue to regroup with clear violent intent.
No. 7

Police Outpost, 29 November 1935
A Recorded Telephone Message by Inspector Grabowski, Provincial Chief of the State Police to the Voivode of Kielce
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 1220.

This morning at 11 AM, the police were attacked again by a crowd of peasants armed with sticks and stones. Despite a warning salvo the crowd did not stop, so the police fired a volley in the direction of the attackers. Two person were wounded and were led away to the rear of the crowd.

This crowd continues to be in a very aggressive mood.
Communications with Klwów have been damaged by the crowd. They erected barricades on the Radom road; these have since been dismantled by the police.

No. 8

Police Outpost, 29 November 1935.
A Recorded Telephone Message by Inspector Grabowski, Provincial Chief of the State Police to the Voivode of Kielce.
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 1219

Today at 1 PM, while carrying out operations between Odrzywół and the village of Wysokin, the emergency squad under the command of Officer Jozef Chominski was surrounded and attacked with stones and wheels. Following a warning salvo, which produced no effect, the police fired shots in the direction of the attackers. As a result, one person in the crowd was killed and three were wounded; then the crowd retreated. Due to the lateness of this notification, I wish to report that the emergency squad returned to Odrzywół at 2:40 PM.

No. 9

Kielce, 29 November 1935
Official Note Written by M. Kaminski, Deputy Head of the Social and Political Department of the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 1219.

Inspector Grabowski, the provincial police chief, has asked for a speedy arrival of police reserves from Warsaw by telephone on several occasions; he phoned again around 2 PM asking when the reserves would be arriving, as the situation is now so serious that he will only be able to hold his position in Odrzywół until 4 PM at the latest.
On the telephone he pointed out that it was now crucial to send in the army (Dr. Dziadosz, the subprefect, was present during the last telephone conversation).

No. 10

Police Outpost, 30 November 1935
Report by W. Lutomski, Head of the Social and Political Department of the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office, to the Voivode
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 611.

The following is my latest report:

The night passed without incident. There were no disturbances. The Odrzywół–Poświętne, Ossa–Poświętne, Odrzywół–Kłewó, Odrzywół–Nowe Miasto, and Odrzywół–Drzewica roads were patrolled all night without any incidents. No gatherings were reported.

I have given the following orders: The 75-strong squad and two officers and the armoured car were to go to the area of Kamienna Wola, Ossa and Brudzewice in order to carry out searches and make arrests.

The same task has been assigned to 1) a 45-strong squad and one officer to Kłewó and Borowa Wola; 2) A 40-strong squad and one officer to Kłonna, Żardki and Drzewica; 3) A 40-strong squad and one officer to Nieznamierowice, Galki and Rusinów; 4) An 85-strong squad will remain in Odrzywół with the simultaneous task of carrying out similar operations as those described above in Wysokin.

After having carried out the above tasks, these squads must also reinforce the police outposts in Kłewó, Poświętne, and Drzewica. Twenty-five men in each location will make it possible for the outposts already in place there to carry out their duties in a normal and effective way. For the present, the sixty-strong cavalry detachment and two officers are to remain resting in Grójec.

At the same time I would like to report that due to further deaths among the severely injured, the number of deceased now stands at nine.

No. 11

Kielce, 30 November 1935
Confidential Letter from the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office to the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Further to the telephone messages dated 21.11. 35, concerning the issue under consideration,* the Provincial Administrative Office would like to report that the anti-Jewish incidents in the Odrzywół settlement, Opoczno district, took the following course:

On 20 November 1935 while the market was in progress in the Odrzywół settlement, in the Ossa parish, members of the National Front from the surrounding areas staged a
boycott of Jewish traders which took the form of a group of men walking around the market stalls belonging to both local and outside Jewish trades, exhorting others not to buy from Jews, and tipping over the stalls and a cart carrying kitchen utensils. Then they burst into a Jewish grocer’s demanding two torch batteries which they took away without paying for them. Others demanded cigarettes and tobacco and also left without paying. When the shop owner asked to be paid, he was hit with a stone.

Then the National Front members burst into an ironmonger’s, where they attempted to steal money from a table drawer. When the owner tried to prevent them from doing so, he was struck in the face.

While the leaders of this incident were restrained by the police, the crowd started fighting and managed to release the arrested individuals.

At the present time the victims are unable to state the exact value of their losses.

When the commanding officer of the Odrzywół outpost along with six other policemen went to the village of Ossa, several kilometres from Odrzywół, in order to bring the leaders of this incident back to Odrzywół for interrogation, he encountered resistance organised by the village residents who had been warned of his coming by the sounding of a fire siren. All this happened around midnight. When the crowd began shooting at the police, the latter withdrew, taking with them two leaders of the Odrzywół incident. When the police and the arrested individuals were moving toward the road, approximately eighty Ossa residents attacked the police, throwing stones and firing at them. During the confusion that followed, the arrested men made their escape. As the police continued to be attacked, they fired one salvo into the air, causing the crowd to halt.

The provincial administrative office would also like to point out that the crowd was ready to attack the police, as it has been ascertained that many Ossa residents had gone to bed fully dressed with their shoes on, making it possible for them to be ready immediately after the alarm was sounded. The following policemen were struck by stones: Senior Constable Dygas, Constable Szufladowicz, and Constable Bielecki.

These incidents were probably organised by two well-known National Front activists, Tadeusz Rakowski and Jan Jurek, who were seen in the Ossa parish after the flag consecration ceremony on 17 November of this year in Studianna and who had returned to Opoczno on the morning of 21 November.

The deputy prosecutor of the district court in Radom arrived in Ossa on 21 November and has sent warrants to the perpetrators of the incidents, requiring them to report to him. This has produced no response.

In order to prevent the arrest of the perpetrators of the anti-Jewish incidents in Odrzywół, members of the National Front from several surrounding places arrived in Ossa supported by residents of that village, armed with sticks, pitchforks, batons, scythes, and certainly firearms. They came from 1) Brudzewice, roughly eighty people; 2) from the Ossa settlement, approximately seventy; 3) from Wysokin, about 10 persons; 4) from Klonna in the Klów parish, some thirty people; 5) from Nieznamerowice, approximately twenty; and 6) from the village of Galki, about 40 persons. The residents of Galki, numbering approximately 100, were in a state of readiness. What is more, a horse messenger was sent to Nowe Miasto in the Rawka province to establish contact with Dr. Gutkiewicz, a National Front activist, so he could warn his members about the incident in Ossa and ask them to be in a state of readiness and expect to be called upon to offer help to the Ossa residents. It was also ascertained that other messengers were appointed between Ossa and neighbouring
villages in the Klów parish, Rusinów, Studzianna and Drzewica in the Opoczno district, and the Gora parish in the Rawka district, who were maintaining contacts between all these places since the day of the incident, using bicycles and horses.

On November 23, three police inspectors sent from Skarzysk, Radom, and Kielce made their way to Ossa to investigate. However, when they arrived there they were stopped by the local residents and taken to see the head of the hamlet where their identification was checked and they were threatened with beatings by the National Front members, were they to appear in Ossa.

Finally the Provincial Administrative Office would like to inform you that Inspector Stano, Deputy Commander of the Provincial State Police Force in Kielce has visited the scene of the incident and Opoczno.

Comprehensive reports describing details of the anti-Jewish incidents in Odrzywół on 27.11.35 will be provided by the Provincial Administrative Office.*

* See documents no 1, 2, 4 and 5.

No. 12

Kłów, 30 November 1935
Letters from the State Police Outpost in Klów to the Provincial Headquarters of the State Police in Opoczno.
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919-1939, call no. 3533 a, card 743-744.

In connection with the anti-Jewish incident incited by the National Front during market day in Odrzywół on 20 November 1935 and the arrest of the leaders of this incident Piotr Wrzosek and Bartos from the village of Ossa, members of the National Front from Gałki, Wola Galecka and Nieznamierowice including Jan Kobyłka, Stanisław Piecyk, Jan Szklarczyk, Józef Kietlinski—as leaders, Józef Bykowski, Franciszek Bykowski, Franciszek Wlazło, Franciszek Kucharski, Andrzej Witkowski, Jan Modrzecki, Czeslaw Kietlinski, Stefan Bykowski, Jan Papis, and Antoni Szklarczyk [Sic—translator]. All those named above are members of the National Front. After having been warned by a special messenger that the police were intending to arrest the leaders of the anti-Jewish incidents, which involved overturning stalls and beating up their Jewish owners, etc., they went to the village of Ossa and took part in anti-police actions and rescued the prisoners Piotr Wrzosek and Antoni Bartos. The following witnesses saw the above-mentioned persons heading toward Ossa and on the morning of November 21 saw them returning from Ossa: Jan Szklarczyk, Jan Michalski, Kajetan Kietlinski from Gałki, Jan Rybak from Nieznamierowice, Franciszek Budzisz, Franciszek Nanielski, Jan Kucharczyk, Jan Baluski, Kazimierz Kucharczyk, Józef Kucharczyk, Franciszek Zaras, and Jan Lesniak from Nieznamierowice. The persons named above are members of the National Front. The witnesses are Jan Rybak, Antoni Piekarski from Nieznamierowice, and Jan Jarek from Drazna. . . .

I wish to report that on 25 November 1935 at about 10 AM, Józef Kietlinski, Jan Szklarczyk, Jan Papis, and Andrzej Witkowski from the village of Gałki in Rusinów
province incited approximately forty residents of that village. Then the members of the National Front and everyone else went to the Jew, Jankel Lewkowicz’s home in Galki and forced him to leave the village immediately, threatening to beat him up. Lewkowicz asked to be allowed to stay a few days longer and promised to move out. The leaders told him that the deadline was 29 November 1935 and threatened that if he overstayed this deadline, they would throw his things out into the road and beat him up. Fearing that they would carry out these threats, Lewkowicz moved to Odrzywół on 28 November 1935. The incident that involved forcing Lewkowicz to move out of his home in the village of Galki is closely connected with the anti-Jewish incidents in Odrzywół and Ossa against the background of anti-Jewish activity by the nationalist camp. I name the following witnesses to the above incident: Jankel Lewkowicz, now residing in Odrzywół; Jan Sledz, head of the Rusinów parish; and Piotr Marendowski, a resident of Rusinów.

* This report has not been found.

[Translator's note: I have translated the above document in its original form with some of its carelessly written sentences reproduced. It does not always make sense].

No. 13

Warsaw, 30 November 1935
Anti-Jewish Incidents in Opoczno
Source: The newspaper Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy 1935, no. 187

On November 27 and 28 during market days in Odrzywół, Opoczno, and Przysucha of Opoczno province, members of the National Front attempted to foment anti-Jewish riots, inciting the local rural population to attack Jewish shops and stalls.

Thanks to the energetic and decisive action taken by the police, it was possible to prevent disturbances in Opoczno, but in Odrzywół several Jews were beaten up and in Przysucha a dozen or so stalls were destroyed, several Jewish traders were manhandled, and windows were broken in Jewish homes.

On the morning of 29 November 1935, a police squad heading to Odrzywół to reinforce the police and prevent a repetition of the incidents was attacked by an incited mob recruited from neighbouring villages on the Opoczno–Klwów road.

Despite being challenged and told to disperse, and despite the firing of a salvo into the air, the crowd attacked the police and shots were also fired from the crowd. The police were forced to use their weapons. The crowd then dispersed immediately, leaving behind four dead and several injured by police bullets. Shots also came from the rear of the attacking crowd. Several of the main instigators were arrested.

At the present time all is calm in the Opoczno district.

Officials from the prosecutor’s office and security authorities arrived at the scene and an intensive investigation is under way.

No. 14

Kielce, 2 December 1935
A Recorded Telephone Message by W. Lutomski, Head of the Social and Political Department of the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw

Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 640.

Following my phone call earlier today, I would like to report that this morning the funeral of the six persons killed in Klwów and the two killed in Odrzywół took place in Klwów.

Both funerals passed entirely peacefully. At the same time I would like to report that I have now ordered final demobilisation of the police squads.

The Żyrardów school squad, the mounted squad, and the armoured car from Warsaw have received orders to return to their bases.

At the present time, apart from the 62-strong state police staff plus one officer normally assigned to the district, 70 state police staff (uniformed, 11 policemen and 2 investigating officers) remain in the area. The investigation intending to hand over the perpetrators to the judicial authorities is being conducted under the personal supervision of the head of the investigation service, Deputy Inspector Wertz.

At the same time I wish to report that I am now leaving Odrzywół.

No. 15

Kielce, 3 December 1935

Confidential Letter from the Kielce Voivode to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw


With reference to the last paragraph dated 30.11.35,* concerning the Odrzywół incidents, the Provincial Administrative Office would like the report as follows:

On 27 November of this year, between 12 and 1:30 PM during market hours, a meeting of approximately 150 members took place in the premises belonging to Łukasz Jozwicki.

During this meeting, Tadeusz Rakowski from Opoczno made a speech in which he first informed the members that residents of the village of Ossa are well organised and are ready to sacrifice their lives in defending ‘our’ jobs, and that this ought to set an example for all the other villages, because ‘we’ are not interested in unreliable people but only in those who would not be afraid to lay down their lives defending our idea. Let us not be afraid of boycotting the Jews, because, despite the fact that we are being boycotted without being beaten up, they are stabbing our people in the back as happened in Warsaw, Lwów, and Wilno, where Jews have killed several members of the National Front. He then continued to say that on 1 December of this year a National Front conference will be held in Drzewica, where two flags will be consecrated and two hundred of the most outstanding members will be decorated. Then he asked for the largest possible attendance at this ceremony in order to show that the National Front is strong and well-organised. Rakowski warned everyone not to make any trouble during the Drzewica conference and added that if anyone tries to interfere in the organisation of this conference, he shall be removed by force.
At the same time, the provincial administrative office would like to report that National Front members from the Odrzywół area were saying that the police did the right thing by doing nothing about the National Front closing shops on 27.11.35, for otherwise they [the party members] would have been ready to attack and disarm them as by now they are no longer afraid of anyone.

When the meeting finished at around 13:30 PM, the National Front members formed several groups of thirty to fifty men and started walking around the market, forcing Jewish shops to close, forcibly removing the customers. Then a group of about sixty National Front members headed for the water mill that belongs to Kuczynski from Odrzywół and proceeded to tear off the sluice gates, letting the water out of the pool in order to disable the mill. During these incidents four Jews were beaten up, two from Nowe Miasto, one from Opoczno, and one from Klów.

The latter, one Hersztajn from Klów, was going home in his cart when nationalists caught up with him just beyond the village and gave him a severe beating and then turned over his cart.

While the Jewish shops were being closed, some teenagers burst into Abraham Wajntraub’s shop in Odrzywół, and three packets of tobacco valued at 1.80 zlotys were stolen. Then one of the nationalists came up to the Jew Borycki while he was closing his shop and demanded that the latter give him back the 2 zlotys he had borrowed from him which Borycki did immediately as he was afraid of being beaten up, even though he had never borrowed any money from this person. During these incidents, three windows were also broken in the Cygierbajs’s home. Thirty-three of the apprehended perpetrators of these incidents were National Front members.

The Provincial Administrative Office would like to add that approximately 3,000 people shouting ‘beat the Jews’ were present at the market during these incidents.

* See document no. 11.

No. 16

Kielce, 3 December 1935
Confidential Letter from the Kielce Voivode Sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 557–558

With reference to our earlier reports, the provincial administrative office would like to give an account of events that occurred following the incidents in Odrzywół, Opoczno district that took place on 20 November of this year. Members of the National Front from Ossa village of the same district borrowed six carbine rifles and four revolvers from National Front members in Ludana, Rawka district, to resist the police should they try to arrest the perpetrators of the Odrzywół incident.

The same members also warned that in case of need, i.e., should the police attack them, workers from the Dziewulski and Lange factory would come to their aid.

Next, they decided to come to the Odrzywół market on 27 November to stand in front of Jewish shops to prevent customers from going in, and beating up those who would
disobey. They also decided to incite outside traders to refuse to pay their market fees in Odrzywół and they harassed the people trying to collect such payments.

National Front members in Ossa declared that they are not afraid of the police, except perhaps if army reinforcements were to be sent in, but this did not seem likely as, allegedly, General Rydz Smigly had refused such a request for help by telephone.

Specifically, the named members are directing their intimidating statements to police constable Szufladowicz at the state police outpost in Odrzywół, threatening to cut off his ears.

On 25 November, a National Front meeting, which was attended by approximately ninety people including Motel Jan, Franciszek Trelka, and Jan Pastwa, the leading local National Front activists, was held in the schoolroom in the village of Przystalwice Duże in the Rusinów parish. Discussions at this meeting centred on the matter of a trip to Drzewica on 1 December to attend a flag consecration ceremony, and it was decided that all National Front members were obliged to take part in it.

On 25 November, about forty members of the National Front group in Galki in Rusinów parish were led by Jozef Borkowski and went into a Jewish shop belonging to Jankel Lewkowicz to demand his instant removal from the village. They gave him a deadline of 29 November; if he didn’t comply, they threatened to beat him up and throw his things outside.

On the same day in the village of Nieznamerowice in the parish of Rusinów, local National Front members also gave a Jewish family living there a deadline of 29 November to move out of the village and to close their shop.

The National Front posts in the village of Klonna, Klwów parish and the villages Galki, Wola Galecka, Rusinów, and Nieznamierowice ordered National Front flags from the Artisans School in Mariowka in the Opoczno district.

National Front members from Klwów parish were planning to take the head of the parish as well as the administrative secretary of the parish along with them to Drzewica on 1 December.

National Front members from the village of Ossa emphasise the fact that the 1863 uprising ended in their village and was the right place for the new uprising to begin. (This refers to the 1863 hanging of several insurgents who are buried near the village of Ossa.)

Some members of the National Front say publicly that they already possess a certain number of firearms and that, allegedly, they are expecting to get more from Toruń as well as some bayonets from the Kobylanski factory in Drzewica.

No. 17

Opoczno, 4 December 1935
Recorded Letter from the Opoczno Subprefect to the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 692.

There was no market day in Odrzywół. The people obeyed the ban and did not come to Odrzywół. All is quiet in the district. Residents of villages involved in the revolutionary incidents, but ones which remain outside the influence of the National Front, say that there
was a violent collapse of discipline following the mass meeting in Nowe Miasto and Studzianna. In addition to the official speeches, the bewildered populace was given totally misleading information that was fed to them by the deceitful pack of agitators who told them that the National Front had support in the army, the highest government bodies, and the state police.

The fact that the Radom authorities had made official statements before the meeting described above, did succeed in cooling things down somewhat.

No. 18

Kielce, undated
Report by A. Gugala, Commissioner of the State Police in Kielce regarding the Matter of the Anti-Jewish Incidents in Odrzywół.


Having been instructed on 30 November 1935 by Mr. Schaffer, Deputy Prosecutor of the District Court in Radom, to carry out an investigation related to the matter of the incidents of 19 [sic] and 27 November 1935, in Odrzywół, Opoczno district, I have come to the following conclusions:

Until August 1935, the regional outposts in Odrzywół, Drzewica, and Klwów, which include the Ossa, Drzewica, Klwów, and Rusinów parishes of the Opoczno district, were, from every point of view, considered to be some of the most peaceful. After that date some expressions of dissatisfaction began to be heard from the authorities in charge, but these tended to be limited to individual complaints. From August on, the National Front began to increase its membership and ten new groups were created in the area of the parishes mentioned above, which included 545 active members.

Tadeusz Rakowski, a resident of Opoczno who was a student and instructor sent by the General Council of the National Front in Warsaw, was a man holding radical nationalist views; he was in charge of organising the National Front groups. He took over this function from Waldyslaw Pacholczyk, who was sent to Bereza Katuska in August 1935.*

His assistants in this new function were Dr. Stanislaw Gutkiewicz, a resident of Nowe Miasto in Rawka province; Wincenty Zak, a resident of the Budzewice settlement in Ossa parish; and Marian Suskiewicz, a resident of Drzewica village and parish who, under his instructions, recruited members to the new groups. In order to increase membership, the above persons put pressure on the group leaders, demanding intensive efforts to recruit more members. The leaders, in turn, used threats and harassment to force non-partisan people to join the National Front. They were not interested in the quality, but simply in the quantity of members, so even those with a bad reputation or suspected of being thieves and thugs were accepted.

Rakowski himself would appear at the opening of new groups and would tell stories about how the present government is very shaky and is bound to collapse any day; that the National Front, which already has more than 200,000 members, would take over; that General Rydz Smigly has joined the National Front;** that members of the government are fighting among themselves and that some ministers are tendering their resignations as they
can see no way of doing anything against the evil created by former followers of Piłsudski's government, which has brought about the crisis and the fact that now the peasant has to pay enormous taxes and live in poverty; that the elections to the Sejm have shown how few support the present government, and these consist mainly of Jews because the Jews were practically the only ones to have voted in the deputies to the present Sejm. It was continuously pointed out that a nationalist government would improve the peasants’ living standards and lower their taxes, and that salt, iron, shoe leather, and rail travel would become cheaper, etc. ‘Take Hitler as an example’, Rakowski told them, ‘he started out with only seven supporters and now he is in power in Germany and has thrown out the Jews and does not care about foreign opinion. You must not be afraid of the police and stand your ground, organise, and people will respect you. The police will not fire at you because they are not allowed to do so.’

Every meeting included a discussion about the Jewish boycott with exhortations to boycott Jews and fight them everywhere and at every opportunity in order to drive them away. ‘There are four million Jews living in Poland’—said Rakowski—‘and when we drive them out, four million Poles will find work and there will be no more unemployment in this country. Followers of Piłsudski’s government make the peasant and the worker suffer and tenderly look after the Jews’ welfare, but a nationalist government will drive out the Jews and is not going to take notice of anyone else.’

Rakowski’s urging resulted in the group leaders having to keep harassing those people who did not want to join the National Front, in order to speed up the process of assuming power by the National Front; they managed to recruit large numbers of members in this way. There were even cases where a whole village (Myslakowice near the Poświętne outpost) joined the National Front group.

By early November of this year, antisemitism had become rampant and one could hear complaints about the Jewish boycott not being conducted intensively enough. The group leaders and some of the members began to give a lot of thought as to how they could intensify the fight against the Jews. They were also wondering if arrests were likely to follow as a result of the anti-Jewish incidents, but on the basis of Rakowski’s pronouncements they felt secure that the police had no right to use firearms against people. Now that such large numbers of peasants belonged to the Front, the leaders felt that they would be able to handle the police. Moreover, if worse came to the worst, they would get help from the nationalists from the Radom, Rawka, and Łódź districts. Some even thought that it might be a good idea to fell some trees to block the roads and to cut telephone wires in order to prevent the arrival of police reinforcements. According to intelligence reports, Wincenty Zak and Rakowski knew about this plan, but it has not been possible to establish if they approved of it. As early as 5 November 1935, rumours about the plan to fell trees were circulating around the Odrzywół area.

On 20 November 1935, National Front members in Odrzywół and the surrounding area began the Jewish boycott. It took the form of a group of people coming up to a stall with one of them giving several others a push in its direction. The whole group of peasants would then overturn the stall, as if by accident. At this stage they were viewed as hooligans. That same night, Władysław Pająk, commander of the police outpost in Odrzywół, and six policemen arrived in Ossa village and arrested Piotr Wrzosek and Adam Bartos, who were suspected of having organised the anti-Jewish excesses in Odrzywół. Members of the Ossa National Front group raised the alarm, which resulted in all the village residents surrounding
them to prevent the police from taking away their ‘nationalists’. The villagers began attacking the police squad and shots were fired from the crowd. As the arrested men lay down on the road and refused to get up and the crowd kept on attacking, the police squad withdrew and fired several rifle shots in the direction of the advancing crowd.

Antoni Gruszecki and Jozef Chrobak posted guards at both ends of the village, whose task was to warn everyone if the police were approaching (witnesses: Stanisław Pekala, Jozef Baryzel, and Ludwik Kmieciak).

As no police arrived in Ossa either the next day or the day after, members of the Front now felt reassured and became convinced that Rakowski and the others were correct in telling them that the police and the authorities were now forced to take account of the National Front.

On 27 November 1935 at noon, members of the Odrzywół group of the National Front met with members from other groups, with Tadeusz Rakowski in charge. A total of 150 members attended the meeting.

For the benefit of the others, Rakowski started by saying that residents of Ossa village are dependable and well-organised and ready to give up their lives to defend the work of the Front, and others would do well to follow their example. Rakowski then continued to say that the Front had no use for indecisive people and that what it needed was people who were not afraid and who would gladly lay down their lives in defending its goals. He declared, ‘Let us not be afraid to boycott the Jews as they are stabbing us in the back as it happened in Lwów, Wilno, and Warsaw where the Jews killed a number of students who were members of the National Front.’

In this speech Rakowski commended the attitude shown by the Ossa group on 20 November, including the anti-Jewish incidents in Odrzywół on that day. He encouraged his audience to resist the police and to pursue an active boycott of Jewish traders.

After the meeting ended, Rakowski spent about half an hour in a confidential conference with the leaders. Just after their meeting broke up, anti-Jewish excesses started in Odrzywół during which Jozef Chrobak, the leader of the Ossa National Front group, stole three packets of tobacco from Abram Wajntraub’s shop; Antoni Gruszecki, the secretary of the same group, forced Jankel Borecki to give him two zlotys; Szlama Hamersztajn, a resident of Klwów in the same parish, was beaten up; a cart laden with empty wooden boxes was tipped into the river; Moszek Kuczynski’s mill was put out of action; and several other Jews were beaten up and sustained minor injuries.

On 29 November 1935 around 5 AM, police cars could be seen approaching Odrzywół. Their arrival was interpreted in different ways, but it produced a high level of excitement and very soon all Odrzywół knew about it. Shortly afterwards a search was carried out at Mieczysław Ganski’s house, who was the treasurer of the Odrzywół group of the National Front, and also at his brother Jan Ganski’s house, who likewise was a member of the National Front. In three other homes, the owners were arrested and taken to the police station suspected of having organised the anti-Jewish excesses in Odrzywół on 27 November 1935. While the search was still going on, Waclaw Ganski, another brother of the two arrested ones, sent two peasants to Kamienna Wola, 2 km away from Odrzywół, and told them to inform the residents that the police had arrested their brothers and demanded assistance in helping the arrested men to get away. Next, he himself got on his bicycle and quickly made a round of Gluszyna, Klwów, Borowa Wola, and other nearby villages, raising the alarm and telling everyone that Jews were slaughtering the nationalists in Odrzywół
(according to witnesses Bronisław Jozwicki, Walenty Kucharski, Stanisław Stanczykowski, Jan Stachurski, and Michał Byk). Following the alarm raised by Ganski, group members proceeded to send out mounted messengers to neighbouring villages to pass on the same message, adding that the Jews had beaten up the bishop and had been coming from all the neighbouring towns. This caused panic in these villages, and everyone armed themselves with whatever they could find. A mob headed for Odrzywół to prevent the nationalists from being beaten up and to free the bishop. In turn, the more zealous nationalists were beating up those who did not want to go to Odrzywół. Soon gangs of peasants, armed with pitchforks, crowbars, sticks, and spades, were marching toward Odrzywół and some were also carrying firearms hidden under their clothes.

At 5:05 AM, the first group of peasants, who had run all the way from Kamienna Wola, came into Odrzywół. They were met by Ignacy Niemirski, who was carrying a revolver and shouted to them to advance as the police were not there. Walking at the head of this group, Niemirski came upon a police patrol under the command of police inspector Andrzej Cwiklinski, accompanied by three other policemen. Cwiklinski appealed to the crowd to disperse, and when this had no effect he either pushed or hit Niemirski with the butt of his rifle. Niemirski then grabbed hold of the rifle and Bonawentura Maciagowski, a resident of Kamienna Wola, hit Cwiklinski on the head and arm, causing him to fall to the ground. Then one of the policemen, Kucharski, in defending the police inspector, hit one of the attackers with the butt of his rifle and broke it. The two remaining policemen managed with difficulty to withdraw to the side and fired several times in the direction of the attackers. At this stage the attackers ran off. Two of them, Jozef Maciagowski and Jan Waszkiewicz, were wounded (according to witnesses Stanisław Szklarski, Wawrzyniec Jarzabek, Placydy Fornalczyk, and Władysław Czyzewski). The wounded men were taken to hospital in Radom.

At about 7 AM on 29 November 1935, throngs of peasants, numbering up to 3,000 persons, armed with pitchforks, sticks, and crowbars, began converging on Odrzywół and formed groups in the fields just outside the town, stopping in front of the police squads. At first the police succeeded in dispersing these gangs and pushed them further out into the fields, but by about 10 AM, they took on a more threatening stance, as their leaders incited and encouraged them to disarm the police. The onslaught of the peasant mob from the east end by the bridge where police officer Henrych was trying to block access to the village was particularly threatening and forceful. The police were being stoned and were called sons of bitches, louts, and Jew lovers. Single shots started being fired from the crowd. At this stage, the police started firing into the advancing crowd, resulting in the killing of four people and the injuring of seven near the east end close to the bridge (see no 6 on the plan), and one person was killed and one injured near the north end (see no 8 on the plan) at about 1 pm.****

After the police fired shots, the crowds began to disperse and to leave the area of Odrzywół. In the distance, groups of peasants could be seen, as if they were waiting for something. It turned out later that it was rumoured among the National Front members that peasants from the Radom, Rawka, and other districts were going to come to their aid. In order to thwart any attempts by police reinforcements to reach Odrzywół, and these were expected to arrive during the day of 30 November, two trees were cut down and placed across the road near telegraph pole no 111. Furthermore, telephone lines in the Radom district near the village of Wola Wrzeszczowska were cut.
The following peasant gang leaders were killed on November 29, 1935: 1) Ludwik Jaworski, chairman of the National Front group in Kludno village in the Klwów parish; 2) Piotr Szymanski, a resident of the same village; and 3) Jan Wiktorowicz, a resident of the village Wysokiny in the Ossa parish.

During the course of the investigation, the following persons were arrested and handed over to the investigating judge in Radom:

1) Piotr Bialek, a resident of the village of Żardki in the Drzewica parish, who had marched at the head of a peasant gang armed with a crowbar and had incited peasant gangs to attack the police (according to witnesses Eliasz Szpilczak and Jan Rzeznik).

2) Jan Wolasik, a resident of the village of Żardki in the Drzewica parish who, armed with a pitchfork, had incited the peasant gangs to attack the police, calling them Jew-lovers (according to witness Eliasz Szpilczak).

3) Bonawentura Maciagowski, a resident of the village of Kamienna Wola in the Ossa parish, who had hit police inspector Andrzej Cwiklinski from the state police station in Sosnowiec over the head and, along with others, had disarmed him (according to witnesses Jozef Jaworski, police inspector Andrzej Cwiklinski, Stanisław Machniewski, and Stanisław Szkłarski).

4) Waclaw Ganski, a resident of the Odrzywół settlement who was the first person to sound the alarm in the villages around Odrzywół, telling them that the Jews were beating up the nationalists and demanded their help (according to witnesses Jan Soczynski and Stanisław Stanczykowski).

5) Igancy Niemirski, a resident of the Odrzywół settlement who fired three shots from his revolver, aiming at the patrol led by police inspector Cwiklinski and taking the latter’s rifle away from him (according to witnesses Stanisław Szkłarski, Placydy Fornalczyk, Władysław Czyzewski, and Wawrzyniec Jarzabek).

6) Antoni Gruszecki, a resident of Ossa who on 29 November had led a peasant gang and incited it to attack the police and on 27 November 1935 was in charge of the anti-Jewish excesses in Odrzywół; he forced Jankel Borycki to give him 2 zlotys (according to witnesses Dominik Jadwiszczyk, Antoni Kołodziej, and Jan Mirowski).

7) Adam Bartos, a resident of Ossa who on 27 November 1935 took part in the anti-Jewish excesses in Odrzywół and on 29 November was inciting a peasant gang to attack the police, saying ‘Don’t be scared, the police won’t shoot: let us join together and advance or we are lost’ (according to witnesses Władysław Pajak, Jan Mirowski, and Franciszek Bartos).

8) Józef Chrobak, a resident of Ossa who on 27 November 1935 took part in the anti-Jewish excesses and stole three packets of tobacco from Abram Wajntraub and on 29 November was inciting residents of the village Ossa to go to Odrzywół in order to release some nationalists from police custody; he attacked the police at the head of a gang and incited them to launch an attack (according to witnesses Władysław Pajak, Jan Powazka, Józef Powazka, and Józef Kowalski).

9) Piotr Wrzosek, a resident of Ossa who on 27 November 1935 took part in the anti-Jewish excesses in Odrzywół (according to witness Władysław Pajak).

10) Wincenty Zak, resident of the Brudzewice settlement in the parish of Ossa who, on 29 November of this year, was sending residents of the Brudzewice settlement to disarm the police (according to witness Franciszek Blotnicki).
11) Stanisław Gruszecki, a resident of the village of Żardki in the Drzewica parish who, on 29 November of this year, had incited the crowd gathered near Odrzywół to attack and disarm the police (according to witness Eliasz Szpilczak).

12) Stanisław Klusek, a resident of the village of Sulgostów in the Klwów parish who, on November 29 of this year, forced Teodor Tkaczyk to go to a place near Odrzywół by threatening to beat him up and breaking his windows (according to witness Antoni Gniady and Teodor Tkaczyk).

13) Mikołaj Gala, a resident of the village of Głuszyn in the Klwów parish, who forced peasants to go to a site near Odrzywół by hitting them with a pitchfork.

Tadeusz Rakowski is to be considered the main perpetrator of the incidents in Odrzywół on 29 November 1935.

* Władysław Pacholczyk (1901–1944), a teacher and leader of the Obóz Wielkiej Polski in the Opoczno district, member of the General Council of the National Front (1931–1939), was imprisoned in Bereza Karuska in 1934 and in 1935–1936.

** This information about the numbers of members and General Edward Rydz-Smigly is false.

*** The number of Jews living in Poland at that time was approximately three million.

**** No plans were found.

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Opoczno, 5 December 1935
A Letter by Brzostynski, Subprefect of Opoczno, to the Kielce Provincial Social and Political Administrative Office

*Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 775.*

Following the incidents near Odrzywół, it has now become necessary to reinforce the state police outposts in areas that have been under the greatest threat—i.e., Odrzywół, Klwów, Drzewica, Poświętne, Opoczno, and Żarnów. Even though the state police outposts in Opoczno and Żarnów are not located in the area of the recent disturbances, because of the large weekly market that takes place there, the marked intensification of agitation by the National Front directed at Jews and the likelihood of excesses, the staffing of these outpost must be made appropriate for local requirements.

In view of the above, I would like to ask the provincial office to assign the necessary number of policemen on permanent duty to these outposts in order to raise their status to the level required by the current situation, i.e., three for Odrzywół, three for Klwów, three for Drzewica, two for Żarnów, one for Poświętne, and one for Opoczno which, taking account of the present situation, would give the following total staffing levels:

- Odrzywół Outpost 3 + 1 and 3 additional, total 7;
- Klwów Outpost 2 + 1 and 3 additional, total 6;
- Drzewica Outpost 2 + 1 and 3 additional, total 6;
- Poświętne Outpost 2 + 1 and 1 additional, total 4;
- Żarnów Outpost 2 + 1 and 2 additional, total 5;
- Opoczno Outpost 9 + 1 and 1 additional, total 11.
The reserves, consisting of seventy policemen who at this time are present in the area where the recent incidents have occurred, are planning to depart on Saturday, 7 December of this year. As new police forces are not going to be assigned immediately, and because conditions in the area of these outposts are still far from normal from the point of view of safety, I would like to ask that five of these policemen be temporarily left in the Odrzywół, Klwów, and Drzewica outposts until such time as the staffing numbers of the outposts described above can be brought up to the levels I have proposed.

Apart from all this, I would also like to ask for one temporary inspector from the investigation service to be assigned to the Odrzywół and Klwów outposts. Also, a permanent functionary of the investigation service should be assigned to the district state police headquarters in Opoczno.

No. 20

Kielce, 22 April 1936
A Confidential Letter from the Social and Political Department of the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw


Following recent reports, the provincial administrative office would like to inform you that the investigation by the public prosecutor of the incidents in Odrzywół, Opoczno province, that took place on 27, 28, and 29 November 1935 have now been completed and the indictment has been sent to the regional court in Radom, but the date of the trials has not yet been set.

The following people have been included in this indictment: 1) Jozef Chrobak from Ossa village and parish who has been charged according to art. 163 and 154 p. 1 of the Criminal Code, 2) Antoni Gruszecki from Ossa village, 3) Piotr Wrzosek from Ossa village, 4) Adam Bartos from Ossa village, 5) Stefan Ziembinski from Bieliny, Goździków parish, 6) Stanisław Gruszecki from Zarki village, Drzewica parish, 7) Jan Dziuba from Klonna, Klwów parish. They are all charged according to art. 163 of the Criminal Code; 8) Ignacy Niemirski from Odrzywół, charged according to art. 154 p. 1 and 240 in connection with art. 236 p. 1a of the Criminal Code; 9) Bonawentura Maciagowski from Kamienna Wola, Ossa parish, charged according to art. 240 in connection with art. 236 p. 1a of the Criminal Code; 10) Waclaw Ganski from Odrzywół; 11) Jan Spoczynski from Klonna; 12) Stefan Waszkiewicz from Odrzywół; 13) Wincenty Zak from Brudźewice, Ossa parish; 14) Jan Stachniak from Emiljanow, Ossa parish; 15) Jan Papis from Galki, Rusinów parish; 16) Stanisław Klusek from Sulgostow, Rusinów parish; 17) Mikołaj Gal from Brzeski village, Klwów parish; 18) Stanisław Piecyk from Grabowa village, Rusinów parish; 19) Jan Walasik from Zarki village; and 20) Piotr Bialek from Zarki village. They are charged according to art. 154 p. 1 of the Criminal Code.

Fifty-eight eyewitnesses have been called in the above case.

According to available information, the Radom National Front Organisation is trying to obtain counsels for the defence from Warsaw or Łódź.
Finally, the provincial administrative office would like to inform you that all the above named defendants are still free, albeit under police surveillance.

No. 21

Opoczno, 16 May 1936
Confidential Letter from J. Siekierzynski, the Opoczno Subprefect to the Kielce Provincial Administrative Office.
Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 1108.

I would like to inform you that on 13 May of this year Tadeusz Rakowski came to Odrzywół from Opoczno and was giving out membership cards to members at the National Front premises and was organising an active boycott of Jewish traders at the Odrzywół market taking place on that day.

He sent out a dozen or so peasants with orders to walk around the Jewish stalls and exhort the people not to buy from Jews. Next, he made a kind of cardboard billboard that stated ‘Don't buy from Jews’ on one side and ‘Poland for the Poles, all power to the nation, work for Polish people’ on the other. He instructed Władysław Laski, age 15, to go to the market and display this billboard. The latter carried it around and around the settlement, producing a high level of anxiety among Jewish traders.

In view of the risk of causing disorder and disturbances, the police confiscated the billboard.

A large number of Jewish traders came to Odrzywół on that day and the local people were happily buying their wares, a fact that attracted the attention of the National Front which decided to interfere by shouting: ‘Each to his own kind for his own things.’

Several cases of anti-Jewish incidents were also noted on that day and the guilty persons were apprehended and reports were prepared.

A rumour was circulating among National Front members that on 25 May of this year the National Front would take over the government in Poland. That is the reason why great numbers of National Front members were travelling to Częstochowa. About 150 members from the Ossa parish signed up to go.

On 18 May of this year, Chaja Szerman from Nowe Miasto on the Pilica river appeared at the state police station and reported that on the same day Józef Zolcinski from Głuska Wola, Potworów parish, Radom province had hit her with a whip. When she screamed, he insulted her, using foul language.

Luzer Checinski of Odrzywół reported that on 13 May of this year an unknown person slapped his face for unknown reasons. An investigation of this matter is under way.

On 13 May of this year Piotr Rzeznik from Zakościele, Drzewica parish came to the the state police station in Odrzywół and reported that he had just been buying some soap from a Jewish stall at the market. At that moment Maria Wieczorek came up to him, knocked the soap from his hand, and went away.

Henka Kestenberg, a door-to-door saleswoman from Odrzywół, reported at the same police station that while she was crossing Ceten village in the Ossa parish, she came across
Władysław Kopera, also a resident of this village, who pelted her with rotten eggs and shouted, ‘Come on lads, have a look at the lousy Jewess.’

The perpetrators of all these incidents have been reported with the aim of bringing them to justice.

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Opoczno, 7 June 1936
Letter from Police Officer Marian Bielicki, Chief of the State Police in Opoczno, to the Opoczno District Subprefect and the Provincial Headquarters of the State Police.

Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533 b, card 1005–1006

This is to inform you that during an itinerant session of the Radom District Court in Opoczno on 6 June of this year, the trial opened of the persons connected with the incidents near Odrzywół in November 1935.

The court was composed of the following persons:
1) Presiding Judge—Bolesław Lipski
2) Assistant Judges—Teodor Tomaszewski and Teodor Dedewicz;
3) Prosecuting Attorney—Deputy Prosecutor Bolesław Borkowski.
4) Counsel for the Defence: Solicitors Kowalski from Łódź, Blesinski from Warsaw, Morysinski from Opoczno, and articled clerk Niebudek from Borowski’s solicitor’s office in Warsaw.

The accused are being defended collectively by the defence counselors, except for articled clerk Niebudek, who lodged his power of attorney on behalf of the following defendants: Jozef Chrobak, Piotr Wrzosek, Wacław Ganski, and Antoni Gruszecki. The trial is expected to last several days and additional defence counselors are expected to arrive, including Solicitor Zdzitowiecki from Radom.

The following press reporters were present in the courtroom:
1) Tadeusz Rakowski of Opoczno—Gazeta Narodowa Częstochowska
2) Jan Białkowski of Konskie—Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy
3) Jan Jurek of Opoczno—Okrędnik
4) Władysław Pacholczyk of Opoczno—Goniec Warszawski
5) Mieczysław Wijata of Opoczno—Tygodnik Polityczny
6) Jerzy Brzeczkowski—Polish Telegraph Agency
7) Abram Golberg of Opoczno—Noje Folkscajtung

All the defendants were sitting in the dock except Szczepan Ziębicki, the vagrant. Because of this, counsel for the defence Kowalski asked for the trial to be adjourned; this was opposed by the prosecutor, however, who tabled a motion about excluding Ziębicki’s case. The prosecutor’s motion was accepted. In the meantime, defendant Ziębicki arrived in the courtroom, behaving as if he were insane. Then the counsel for the defence Kowalski tabled a motion to adjourn the trial and to submit Ziębicki to psychiatric observation; this too was opposed by the prosecutor, who tabled a motion suggesting that the defendant’s mental state be assessed during the proceedings. Shortly afterward, medical doctors Kazimierz Ekielski and Jakub Mietkiewicz arrived in the courtroom and declared, ‘What we have here
is a mentally subnormal individual whose mental development is equivalent to that of a seven-year-old child. The patient does not understand, in the strict sense of the word, the significance of his actions and cannot be held responsible for them. He is easily influenced by other people.’

Despite this medical report, the defence continued to demand an adjournment of the trial, which the prosecutor opposed and tabled a motion about dropping legal proceedings against the defendant Ziębicki. The court accepted the prosecutor’s motion and ordered the legal proceedings against the defendant Ziębicki to be discontinued and ordered him to leave the court room.

After the reading of the indictment, individual defendants began to make their statements, but none pleaded guilty. Many of the defendants’ statements declared that the incidents near Odrzywół on 29 November 1935 had been provoked by an alleged agent of a portrait-painting concern, who was inciting them to commit anti-Jewish and anti-police actions. And because Ziębicki actively participated in the incidents in the Odrzywół marketplace, both the defendants and the defence attempted to insinuate that the madman Ziębicki was probably acting as a result of being incited by ‘dark forces’.

The defence submitted a list of thirty-seven persons as eyewitnesses to be cross-examined, providing that the steward were allowed to bring them into the courtroom and these witnesses were now waiting in the corridor outside. Two witnesses, Moszek-Szymch Malc from Przytyk, who had gone to Palestine, and Jankiel-Lejbus Zajda, who is serving a prison sentence in connection with the incidents in Przytyk, would not appear. With reference to the latter, the court decided to leave open the possibility bringing him to the court and to make its final decision on this matter during the course of the subsequent trial.

Then the cross-examination of the witnesses began.

The witness Żeczykowski, official in charge of the provincial social and political Department in Kielce, described in general terms the methods used by the National Front in their activities and, in particular, in the Opoczno area. In connection with the testimony given by this witness, the defence asked him a number of questions and attempted to play down the significance of this testimony during the course of the discussion and to shift the responsibility for the incidents away from the National Front. The witness Żeczykowski’s replies were all objective and he spoke to the point; the defence did not manage to trip him up with their devious questions. The counsel for the defence Kowalski asked the witness if the actions of the police could be described as an attempt to pacify the situation during the Odrzywół incidents. The witness answered in the affirmative. The prosecutor asked the witness the same question and the witness explained that the situation in the Odrzywół area and in the entire Opoczno district was very tense and that was why the authorities decided to normalise the situation and to control the dangerous state of affairs. Then the defence questioned the witness about the number of police attending the incidents, about who was in charge, how many were killed and injured, etc., to which the witness replied that he was not in possession of all such details, as such information did not form part of his direct authority.

Finally the Jewish victims, whose stalls had been overturned and wares damaged, gave their testimony. Until this time none of the Jewish witnesses recognised any of the defendants as having been the perpetrators. The counsel for the defence Kowalski was asking the Jewish witnesses if they continued to go to Odrzywół with their stalls. The Jews replied that the boycott in Odrzywół was continuing, albeit without violence, and they no longer went there. At that point, the counsel for the defence Kowalski said ‘thank you’ to
each witness in turn. This produced the impression that Kowalski was thanking them not so much for their answer, but rather for having given up going to the market in Odrzywół.

The last witness on 6 June of this year was senior inspector Dominik Jadwiszczyk from the investigation department in Kielce, who described in great detail the information obtained during the confidential investigations that he carried out in the area of the disturbances starting on 23 November 1935. His investigations revealed that he himself had been circulating in the area, posing as the alleged portrait painter. Senior inspector Jadwiszczyk did a very good job of answering the many scheming questions put to him by the defence.

The trial was adjourned at 11:30 PM until 2:30 PM the following day, 7 June of this year.

Only eight witnesses have been cross-examined until now.

During his cross-examination, eyewitness Piotr Gajewski from Odrzywół started telling the court how the police were shooting at people who were trying to escape and ill-treating the wounded, etc. At first, the presiding judge said that these things had nothing to do with the defence case and should not be discussed at this trial. The counsel for the defence Kowalski objected to the presiding judge’s decision, referring to the joint decision taken earlier in this matter by the judicial body. Then the court retired for deliberation and accepted the defence motion that resulted in eyewitness Gajewski telling the court in great detail that while the incidents were in progress, the wounded had told him at the point of death how the police were shooting at the people running away and how they were ill-treating the wounded.

One can assume that during the rest of this trial, the defence will make much of this evidence about events occurring during the course of the November 29, 1935 incidents.

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Opoczno, 9 June 1936

A Transcript of the Court Judgement in the Case of the Odrzywół Incidents Sent to the Provincial Headquarters of the State Police by Police Officer Marian Bielicki, Chief of the State Police in Opoczno.

Source: Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3533, card 1008–1011.

Following on the report dated June 8 of the present year, No S. 3/a/221/35 in reference to the case under consideration, I would like to report that on the last day of the trial, i.e., 9 June of this year, the counsel for the public prosecution and the counsel for the defence summed up their arguments and the judgement was announced.

Deputy Prosecutor Borkowski summarised the origin of the incidents that occurred on 20, 27, and 29 November 1935, describing the role each of the defendants played, but renouncing the accusation in relationship to Stanisław Gruszecki. During his exposition he said the following:

The word pacification has come up and the defence has said that everything that happened on 29 November was unnecessary and could have been handled perfectly well by a simple investigation. If we take the Odrzywół incidents of 20 and 27
November and the incidents in Przysusze on 28 November of last year into consideration, we can see that these were not sporadic incidents. The appointed authorities had a right to intervene and stop the incidents. These authorities have an obligation to ensure the safety and peace of mind for all citizens, regardless of their nationality. The consignment of police forces was necessary, but not for pacification or to carry out a punitive expedition, as after the incident of the 20th, we had further ones on the 27th and 28th. There was no question of any pacification, any secondary aims or intrigue. What happened near Odrzywół? Even though some people lost their lives and others were wounded, this did not happen everywhere, and if there were some dead people lying under the bridge, there were none where police officer Szpilczak was in charge because the circumstances were different in each case. In Szpilczak’s area it was possible to control the situation; on the Klwów road, however, the police must have been subjected to violent attacks. The police force is like an army, and when it had to face several hundred armed individuals, it found itself in a situation where it was forced to use firearms. If a command have been given elsewhere, then shots would have been fired in other places as well.

Then counsel for the defence Morysinski from Opoczno said:
Fate has decreed that a Polish court is examining the case of anti-Jewish incidents in the historic old town of Esterki. Casimir the Great never thought that it would come to this and that, taking advantage of our Slavic hospitality, the former ghetto would take over the whole nation. Our ‘fellow citizens’ have taken the fruit and left us with nothing but the bare roots. Many home-bred statesmen are now pondering the Jewish question and they all agree that a solution must be found. The National Front is keen to solve this question and it represents a healthy social reaction and the National Front is supporting it for the simple reason that our peasant, who was being sheared for his wool by the Jews, behaved as meekly as a lamb. But when the wool ran out and they started to flay him, he said enough is enough. We either have to support this reaction, this national idea, or we would have to support the international which is preyed on by the Jews and this results in nations collapsing; just look what has happened in tsarist Russia. The Jews are doing well in the Diaspora, for if they were concentrated in one country they would devour one another and it could never happen that Blum, the Jew would become prime minister of France. As far as the incidents on the 29th are concerned, this repression was quite unnecessary. Inspector Pajak decides to drag people out of their houses in the middle of the night. He could easily have come during the day and then nothing would have happened. Since the time of Bereza, such practices have been driving the people of this parish mad. It is all due to the system. Can anybody believe that a police force in the twentieth century could behave like they did in Ganski’s home? Such methods might just be appropriate against the Arabs in Palestine.

In conclusion, this defence counsel appealed to the judges’ feelings by saying that on one side of the scale of justice we have a few Jewish stalls and some broken windows, but on the other, more than a dozen dead, scores wounded, and the spilling of innocent Polish blood. Let their graves, which by now must be swathed in blossoms, direct the judges toward a verdict which they are to give.

Counsel for the Defence Blesinski from Warsaw said:
The patriotic movement in Poland is growing and it is being persecuted by the system. A citizen ought to be able to feel close to the police, but the opposite is true because of their peculiar attitude. Only five Jewish market stalls have tipped over and arrests were quite unnecessary and the matter could have been dealt by way of penal-administrative proceedings. Jews in Poland enjoy special protection. If Polish stalls had been overturned, no one would have been arrested. There is a general fear of authority. Arrests in the middle of the night were unnecessary. The arrested individuals did not want to go as they were afraid and this is why they resisted, because they were afraid of the authorities. During the investigations, witnesses had their attestation imposed on them as the police were seeking out as many guilty people as possible in order to clear themselves. Nearly all the witnesses have withdrawn their statements and these had been done under oath. Do you imagine that peasants would ever consider committing common perjury—no, they must have deposited them under pressure and it is now that they are telling the truth. In conclusion this defence counsel attempted to denigrate the charges of each defendant in turn, calling various witnesses to give evidence.

Counsel for the Defence Jeziorski from Warsaw said:

These disturbances are a national sickness. The Jewish cancer has been festering within us for many centuries. Now the blood has begun to flow and we find ourselves at a stage which requires an effective cure. There would have been no deaths if the police force were any good and would be where it is needed and not where it is not. The internal enemy are the Jews who provoke incidents because of their provocations, arrogance, and knavery. If a Jew hits someone no one takes any notice, but a Pole is considered to be an anarchist. Jews murder innocent people. In Wilno it was Waclawski and in Lwów—Grodkowski and the list of their victims is now long. The Jews enjoy special privileges and the indigenous Polish population is being downgraded to a lower stratum of society. Only now a reaction is beginning to appear as people now find unacceptable the fact that the Jews have taken over 90 per cent of trade, 70 per cent of industry, and 50 per cent of the free professions, and we are all becoming pariahs. It is essential to save ourselves; every honest Pole must devote a lot of thought to this question. The scales have finally fallen from the eyes of the government authorities. In our present premier Składkowski’s own words, this is ‘an economic struggle, quite so’. The sick organism seems to be recovering by itself. Even though we have doctors, they unfortunately are unwilling to treat this disease. Is there enough reason for a punitive expedition to come into villages and murder people and for the police to pull people out of their beds in the middle of the night unnecessarily and in contravention of the constitution? Someone started the rumour that Jews are murdering Poles. They come to Odrzywół, see police uniforms, and are reassured by this and then they realise they have been deceived—as the witnesses have said, it was all ‘a con’. Nobody knows why the police started to shoot; the people were running away and the police was shooting at them and they fell as they were being shot in the back. The police are therefore firing at people who are running away as if they were rabbits; the police are murdering people. It was all a mistake and, based on art. 20 of the criminal code, the defendants are not responsible for the Odrzywół march. The police behaved as if they were in the wrong and this was tactless. If someone was punched on his crooked nose, it does not amount to a crime.
Members of the National Front did not sully their good name by stealing, but in carrying out an anti-Jewish action they were responding to a dire emergency and therefore I ask for a not guilty verdict for all these defendants. Nothing remains of the substance of the indictment, only spilled blood for which no one has been put in the dock, and who knows if they ever will be.

Counsel for the Defence Kowalski said:
The Jewish problem must be solved in our lifetime. We must liberate Poland from its fourth invader. The question of the survival of the indigenous population must be solved. The governments’ bodies and the police must understand that if no solution appears from above, it cannot be solved with a gun. It is the policemen who should be sitting in the dock, but we, the defence, are not authorised to file an indictment. The police are often forced to defend the Jews. What is needed now is to bring our organism back to health and not bullets. Every counsel defending nationalists is being tailed by a plainclothes man who observes and reports on what has been going on in court; however, the highest accuser, the prosecutor, is here. The guilty person is the one who ordered the police to carry out the pacification exercise, for it was a pacification, and even the witness Zeczykowski said so himself.

Counsel for the Defence Żdzitowiecki of Radom then proceeded to read from the last edition of Prosto z Mostu a list of all the places where anti-Jewish incidents had taken place:

These incidents occur as a reaction to the Jewish invasion that has taken over our lives and even our literature and culture. The people have decided that enough is enough. We do not find ourselves in the same position as our neighbour to the West where protective statutes have been introduced. The defendants are people who have applied the idea of clearing out the Jews from below. The administrative measures are bad and one cannot imagine what prompts the administration to fight Polish patriotism. If seven policemen came to Ossa in the middle of the night and dragged people out, the people thought that the Jews had sent the police. And why did a squad come to Odrzywół anyway? One could call this move mishandled, to say the least. What was the purpose of dragging the Podkowinski and the Ganski out in the middle of the night; why did the police come to Podkowinski’s house; and why did they break down the door in the Ganski house? These actions have been condemned by the higher administrative authorities and local government representatives have been transferred to other jobs or retired.

Then this defence counsel proceeded to question the legal validity of the indictment.

The speeches were concluded at about 2 PM. The court retired for deliberations, announcing that the verdict would be announced at 4 PM.

At 4:40 PM the verdict was read out, according to which the court ruled:

That by virtue of art. 360, 368, 369 and 584 of the Polish Criminal Code, costs proceedings 74, the following residents of Ossa village, Ossa parish, Opoczno district have been found guilty of having committed the acts they have been charged with: Józef Chrobak, Piotr Gruszecki, Adam Wrzosek, Adam Bartos, Bonawentura Maciagowski, Wacław Ganski, Stefan Waszkiewicz from Klonna village Klwów parish, Opoczno district; Jan Dziuba, from Borowa Wola village, Klwów parish; Jan Spoćinski, Jan Stachniak from Gałki village, Rusinów parish; Jan Papis from Sulgostow village Klwów parish; Stanisław Kluska from Zarki village, Drzewica parish; Jan Walasik and Piotr Bialek from Grabów village, Rusinów parish; Stanisław Piecyk. He sentenced them as follows:
1) Jozef Chrobak, Gruszecki, Adam Wrzosek, Adam Bartos for crimes described in subparagraph [?] of the indictment and, in addition, Chrobak and in subparagraph V of the indictment—by virtue of art. 163 and 154 of the Criminal Code to six months each for each crime and together under the provisions of art. 31 of the Criminal Code to a one-year prison sentence and 40 zlotys each in costs.

5) Dziuba for the crime described in subparagraph II of the indictment by virtue of art. 163 for six months in prison.

6) Ganski, Spocinski, Waszkiewicz, Stachniak, Papis, Kluska and Piecyk for the crime described in subparagraph V of the indictment and based on art. 154 of the Criminal Code for six months in prison.

13) Walasik and Bialek for the crime described in subparagraph VI of the indictment and based on art. 154 of the Criminal Code for six months in prison. The persons named in subparagraphs 5–14 have also been sentenced to pay costs of 20 zlotys each.

Based on art. 61 of the Criminal Code, the implementation of the sentences given to all the above defendants (1–14) has been suspended for three years in each case.

15) Niemirski is sentenced to one year in prison for the crime described in subparagraph [?] of the indictment and based on art. 154 of the Criminal Code and for the crime described in subparagraph IV of the indictment and based on art. 240 of the Criminal Code for eighteen months in prison, and based on art. 31 of the Criminal Code for these sentences to run concurrently for eighteen months in prison and Maciagowski for the crime described in subparagraph IV of the indictment and based on art. 240 of the Criminal Code to eighteen months in prison with the time spent on remand to be included in this sentence, under the provisions of art. 58 of the Criminal Code—for Niemirski from 7 December 1935 and for Maciagowski from 3 December 1936.

All the above defendants are also sentenced to pay the costs of the trial and court fees as follows: Chrobak, Gruszecki, Wrzosek and Bartos—40 zlotys each; Dziuba, Ganski, Spocinski, Waszkiewicz, Stachniak, Papis, Kluska, Piecyk, Walasik and Bialek—20 zlotys each; and Niemirski and Maciagowski—80 zlotys each.

By virtue of art. 360 of the Polish Criminal Code, the following have been found not guilty of the above named crimes: Stanislaw Gruszecki from Żardki village, Drzewica parish, Wincenty Zak from Brudzewice village, Ossa parish and Mikolaj Gala from Brzeski village, Klów parish. As for the factual proof exhibits, the clubs, sticks and axes are to be destroyed and the X-ray picture is to remain as part of the records.

I must also mention that I was able to observe that presiding judge Lipski appeared to be well acquainted with the local National Front activist Tadeusz Rakowski, who obviously had a close connection with the defendants and he greeted him and shook his hand in the court waiting room and they left the courtroom together walking into town. On the other hand, Judge Tomaszewski greeted some of the members of the National Front by raising his hand.

As of now, the defendants have not lodged an appeal.

No. 24

Odrzywół, 1941
A Description of the Anti-Jewish Incidents in Odrzywół, Written by Father Walerian Andrzejczak


The Struggle against Jewish Traders

The population of Odrzywół consists of agricultural workers, and because the land is not very fertile (consisting of sand and rubble) and due to the small size of the holdings of arable land, people are forced either to move to large towns or to turn to crafts. The enclosed list [not found] clearly demonstrates that the residents of this settlement mainly make their living from handicrafts and small market trading. In the past, i.e., before 29 November 1935, craftsmen used to give up their wares in exchange for raw materials for a very small payment to Jewish usurers. They, in turn, would sell them at the markets at a very high profit. These abominable trading practices have forced the population into taking self-defensive measures, which have suddenly awakened them from their sleep and encouraged them to nationalise trading. A Jewish boycott has started under the leadership of the National Front. This boycott has become increasingly stronger since the bloody incidents in November 1935. The event described took place a week before the tragic events.

The perpetrators of the ensuing incidents were National Front members from Ossa. Following complaints and accusations filed by Jews, instead of locating the perpetrator by preparing a record and filing an indictment in court, twelve Odrzywół policemen went to Ossa on the night of Wednesday/Thursday to arrest Chrobak, Gruszeccki, and Bartos. Alarmed by the arrival of the police and the possible reasons for their visit, the Ossa residents surrounded the police and by their threatening posture forced them to give up their plan and to withdraw from the village in great hurry and disarray. The news of this spontaneous act of resistance spread to neighbouring villages with lightning speed. This firebrand started a general conflagration and large crowds from neighbouring as well as farther-off villages began converging on the roads and along the ravines leading to Ossa, to show their ‘solidarity’ with the local residents.

The police were quick to inform the starost authorities about what had occurred and about the ensuing popular mood. Following this alarming report, Brzostynski, the Opoczno starost, arrived in Odrzywół the very next day, i.e., 27 November 1935. The starost immediately went to Ossa by car. He was followed in another car by police who had arrived from Radom in full regalia. The police stopped on the outskirts of the village where exasperated villagers would not let the police enter the village. The starost himself went into the village, where he read out the demands for the release of the perpetrators who had destroyed the Jewish market stalls in Odrzywół on 20 November 1935 in front of the gathered crowd.

The people categorically refused to give up the culprits.

Having failed in his mission, the starost went back to Opoczno and the police went back to Odrzywół and decided to wait. The starost’s subsequent visits over the following days also failed to get a hearing among the villagers. During all this time secret police agents were loitering around the local and neighbouring parishes posing as portrait sellers, company representatives, and so on. Day after day went by in a state of feverish tension. Finally market day, 27 November, arrived. Enthusiasts supporting trade nationalisation again got involved in excesses; they overturned several Jewish stalls and forced some shops to close. The police were watching these excesses from the windows of the police station and did not
react. But the secret police was carefully watching every movement in the market place. On the same day at 4 PM, Bishop Pawel Kubicki, the Sandomierz suffragan, arrived in Odrzywół to attend a deans’ conference.

Let us hear what the Bishop wrote in the canonical visitors’ book of the parish of Odrzywół:

On the evening of November 27, the Opoczno starost Czeslaw Brzostynski appeared at the Odrzywół rectory, accompanied by the chief of police of the same district. They appeared there because of the growth of the National Front movement that was making itself heard all over Poland with undertones of the struggle against the situation prevailing in industry and trade. The nationalist movement was amalgamated with the revival movement of the National Front; it appeared to have died down in recent years in Poland, but has come back to life at a lively pace in some of the parishes in this district.

In my opinion, any successful dealing with the movement will depend on pointing it in the right direction. A so-called ‘quashing’ of it will not benefit Poland in any way. When I say the right direction, I mean a proper normalisation of the Polish population that will always nourish autochthonous feelings toward the Jewish population, particularly where industry and trade are concerned.

During his visit with the bishop, the starost requested that he intervene in the present conflict and asked him to make the villagers give up the people implicated by circumstantial evidence connected with the knocking down of Jewish stalls. The bishop, who was well aware of the hostile attitude of the administrative authorities to any movement even lightly tainted with nationalism, refused the request and recommended that the Odrzywół deacon, Father St. Klimecki, should handle the affair. Having done so, he went to church to hear confessions. The following day, i.e., 28 November, the bishop left Odrzywół. During the night of 28–29 November, the police started going around Odrzywół and arresting National Front members. The following Odrzywół residents were arrested: Mieczyslaw Ganski, age 29, Jan Ganski, age 32, Stanislaw Jozwicki, age 35, and Stanislaw Orzechowski, age 33. Some resisted arrest. One policeman was disarmed and badly beaten. This resulted in the police asking for reinforcements. Soon afterward, additional police arrived from Opoczno, Konskie, Radom, Tomaszów, Warsaw, Ostrowiec, Kielce, Katowice, and other places. The Opoczno starost and a police inspector from Kielce arrived in Odrzywół on the same day. He immediately organised a first-aid station and a clinic in Piotr Gajewski’s house; an entire medical unit including a district doctor from Opoczno arrived. It was obvious from these orders and preparations that it would not be long before a tragedy was bound to happen. In a very tense atmosphere, with our minds, nerves, and souls in turmoil, we all waited for this affair to resolve itself. Suddenly we heard electrifying news spreading among the local population that the Jews, dressed as policemen, had murdered the parson Dąbrowski and that the bishop had been imprisoned. The uncritical mob listened to these rumours and there was a general uproar. Spontaneously, great crowds of people began surging towards Odrzywół. The police who were barracked in the fire engine house came out and faced the crowd approaching from Wysokin, but after a few moments when they saw great hordes of peasants approaching, they withdrew back to the fire engine house. Suddenly a shot was fired from one of the local authority buildings and a moment later chief of police Pajak emerged from the station. (One is justified in thinking that it was he who fired the shot. Or perhaps it was an arranged signal for the police to go into action.) As soon as the shot was heard, the police
emerged from the fire engine house and started moving forward in an extended battle line in the direction of Wysokin. At this moment the crowd stopped and began to retreat and run away. The police fired a salvo into the crowd. Our brothers’ blood began to flow and stained the sandy soil. Stanisław Wolski, age 23 and single, who completed his military service barely two months ago, was shot dead and remained hanging on the fence in Wysokin. The next one to be shot and seriously wounded was 20-year old Franciszek Grabarczyk, who died of his wounds two hours later. Franciszek Bars was also wounded. One hour later, crowds began approaching from Klwów. The police, armed with hand and machine guns, appeared to be waiting for them.

One of the machine guns had been set up near the Stanczykowski mill, a second one in the middle of the Klwów road, and a third next to the Edward Matyskiewicz buildings. When the first people in the crowd started crossing the Dziewiczka bridge, the police shot a salvo in their direction, but despite the shooting the crowd continued to surge forward. Then the police started firing machine guns. The crowd began to run away in disarray. Many tried to save their lives by jumping into the river; the water started turning red. After the crowd dispersed, the police stopped firing. The dead and wounded victims remained behind in the field. Among them were Kucharski, Ludwik Jaworski, Jozef Stasinski, Stanisław Opilowski, Chochol from Klwów, and Stanisław Wiktorowicz. A policeman caught Kucharski and brutally ripped his abdomen open with his bayonet. Kucharski was taken to the medical station but died soon afterwards. Looking at the blood flowing from his brothers’ wounds, the local pastor hurried as fast as he could to the police station to obtain permission to minister to the dying. Starost Brzostynski was standing in front of the police station next to the police inspector from Kielce. Seeing the approaching priest, they came out to meet him. At first the starost asked the priest to put on his surplice and stole to go to see the people who were gathered on the Kamienna Wola side of the village to show them that he was alive and that the bishop had left. The priest, who thought that his first duty was to bring the comforts of religion to the dying, was feeling very bitter against the people who had spilled the blood of these defenceless people, and so refused to do as the starost asked. The priest then demanded immediate permission to give spiritual succour to the murder victims. The authorities then allowed the priest to carry out his duties; however, he was to do so not in the field but in the medical unit. While the priest was dispensing comfort to the wounded, a group of people approached from the direction of the Lipowe mill. The police who held positions among the barns told the advancing crowd to go back or they would shoot. In response to this announcement, one of the crowd, a man named Jan Pilat, bared his chest and said: ‘Go ahead and shoot, if you are prepared to spill the blood of your brothers.’ Then the policeman fired and Pilat was mortally wounded. Seeing this, the rest of the crowd withdrew and ran off.

The crowds were beginning to disappear. On the roads one could see carts taking the wounded to hospitals in Radom and Opoczno. Sounds of motor car engines, sirens, and horse hooves could be heard along the roads. These were further reinforcements heading to Odrzywół in buses and armoured cars. A mounted police squad arrived from Warsaw. A state of emergency was announced in Odrzywół and the surrounding area. The residents were told to black out their windows and not to have any lights on. An aeroplane was circling above Odrzywół, dropping messages about the movements of the peasants.

Over the next few days, the entire mobilised police force was sent to Ossa and neighbouring villages in an attempt to break the resistance and carry out arrests. There were
no police scuffles reported either in Ossa or in any other villages because the people went into hiding in the local woods. Some National Front members were arrested and brought to Odrzywół, where they were interrogated by the investigating judge of the district court in Radom. Some were released. The state of emergency lasted one week. After that the police went their several ways. The ‘hero’ of the day was promoted and got a better job. The remaining policemen were transferred to other areas, and the Odrzywół state police station got an extra member of staff.

All food stocks in the shops were consumed by the police. Some of the police were living on credit. After the ‘feat of arms’ had been completed and the time came to settle the poor shopkeepers’ accounts, the starost refused to pay and was publicly scolded for this by the daughter of the owner of the Baranowska beer house in the middle of the market place.

In the meantime, a funeral of the victims of that bloody day took place. Great crowds of people accompanied the mortal remains to their graves. The administrative authorities banned any funeral orations. So only silent grief, sobs, and a mountain of sorrow for this bloody crime rose from these graves to heaven.

The Odrzywół incidents were loudly publicised all over Poland, so a large number of reporters came to the trial. Entire newspaper columns were devoted to reports of the trial witnesses. The defendants were sentenced as follows: Jozef Chrobak, Antoni Gruszecki, Piotr Wrzosek, and Adam Bartos were sentenced to one year in prison each. Dziuba received six months. Waclaw Ganski, Jan Spocinski, Stefan Waszkiewicz, Stachniak, Papis, Klusek and Piecyk were sentenced to six months in prison; Walaski and Bialek received six months. The court then decided to suspend all these sentences for three years.

Ignacy Niemirski was sentenced to eighteen months in prison. Bonawentura Maciagowski received the same punishment, but the time he spent on remand was taken into account. All the above were also sentenced to pay all costs. Stanisław Gruszecki, Capt. Wincenty Zak, and Mikolaj Gol were found not guilty.

The hearts and minds that had been stirred up beyond all measure gradually calmed down. The blood that had been spilt caused the boycott to intensify. The people became aware of new horizons and the new jobs these would offer, and felt a new power growing inside them. Everything was now directed towards nationalising trade.

Every week whole rows of new Polish stalls would appear at the markets (more than eighty). More than a dozen new Polish shops were opened. At the present time, trade and crafts form a major source of income for the Polish residents of Odrzywół.

NOTES

4 Kielce State Archive, Kielce County Subprefecture, call no. 335a, card 118.
5 Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 4010 bp.
6 Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3532 bp.


10 Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3264e, cards 837, 866.


12 Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3534(a), bp.

13 Kielce State Archive, Kielce Provincial Authorities 1919–1939, call no. 3534, bp.