

Dr. Joseph Smith
Editor,
History

Dear Dr. Smith,

I was surprised to see Joanna Michlic and Antony Polonsky's letter run in the January 2008 issue of History, in reply to Peter Stachura's review of Marek Jan Chodakiewicz's book *Massacre in Jedwabne, July 10, 1941*. The length of the letter is grossly disproportionate to the size of Dr. Stachura's review as well as to the merits of its own content which seriously distorts the source on which it supposedly relies to discredit Chodakiewicz's book.

Conveniently, the authors of the letter do not mention the findings of the investigation carried out by Poland's Institute of National Remembrance which are cited by historian Pawel Machewicz in the study they invoke, *Wokól Jedwabnego* (vol. 1, p. 17). According to the report of Radoslaw Ignatiew, the chief prosecutor, the number of victims was around 350, which is entirely consistent with Dr. Chodakiewicz's count. The authors of the letter also misrepresent what historian Marcin Urynowicz wrote in *Wokól Jedwabnego*. He did not state, as Drs. Michlic and Polonsky contend, that the number of victims "was probably close to 1,000," but rather that it was "significantly less" than that (p. 104), without actually adding up the many hundreds of the town's 1,000 prewar Jewish residents who had left as a result of voluntary migration, deportation, the military draft, and flight for safety. Furthermore both the Soviet census and the list of victims prepared by Jewish townspeople are, as Chodakiewicz points out, consistent with his tally and a far cry from the 1,600 that Jan T. Gross still stubbornly clings to, against all evidence.

Drs. Michlic and Polonsky consistently ignore findings in *Wokól Jedwabnego* which point to the significant involvement of local Jews in the persecution of Poles during the Soviet occupation and describe the extent of German participation in the Jedwabne murders and the number of local participants. According to historian Jan Milewski, Jewish policemen came to arrest Poles slated for deportation and took them to the railway station Lomza where they were loaded onto wagons headed for the Gulag (p. 80.) Historian Edmund Dmitrów cites Michel (Mendel) Mielnicki (at p. 330-31), who describes how his father became an informer for the Soviets: "It was my understanding that he served as advisor to the NKVD about who among the local Poles was to be sent to Siberia, or otherwise dealt with." In the words of Mielnicki's father, "They deserve to go to Siberia. They are not good for the Jewish people."

Machewicz states that one cannot simply dismiss the accounts of Germans using force and threats against the Polish residents, nor those that say the Germans played an active role in beating and tormenting the Jews, as such conduct would have been consistent with what happened in most other places (p. 50-51). Indeed, the earliest Jewish reports identify Germans as the perpetrators and say that they machine-gunned Jews who attempted to escape from the burning barn in Jedwabne. (See Michael Maik, *Deliverance: The Diary of Michael Maik: A True Story* (Kedumim, Israel: Keterpress Enterprises, 2004), p. 38-39; Harold Zissman, *The Warriors: My Life As a Jewish Soviet Partisan* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), p. 42. Both these books cite wartime testimonies of Jews who fled from Jedwabne.) Machewicz points out that the vast majority of Polish onlookers did not kill or harm the Jews (p.57). Radoslaw Ignatiew, the chief prosecutor, identified only some 40 Polish who took some part in the events, including members of the "town council" appointed by the Germans to do their bidding (p.56). The notion, advanced by Andrzej Rzeplinski, that the

onlookers were accessories under Polish law is so far-fetched that neither the prosecutor nor any other historian considered it worthy of mention. Equally puzzling is Rzeplinski's failure to appreciate that in jurisdictions governed by the rule of law confessions beaten out of suspects are not admissible in evidence because they are inherently unreliable. Drs. Michlic and Polonsky seem to believe that abusing the suspects played no particular role in their questioning: "It was not employed here to force them to conform to a preconceived line of investigation." Hmm. Gratuitous beating to fill some sadistic need.

One is really at a loss to explain why Drs. Michlic and Polonsky would have compromised themselves to this extent in order to press an agenda that patently has little, if anything, to do with furthering the scholarship in this area.

Sincerely,
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