"Them" and "Us"

In Reply to Professor Tomasz Strzembosz*

by

Israel Gutman

Professor Tomasz Strzembosz deigned to devote to my person an article of nearly six pages, enigmatically entitled "Inscribed in Professor Gutman's Diary."[1]

This entire effort was prompted by a short remark of mine concerning Strzembosz's extensive article, "*Przemilczana Kolaboracja*," written in connection with the terrible crime that had taken place in Jedwabne on July 10, 1941 and dealing with the so-called "covered-up collaboration."[2] The pertinent passage in Strzembosz's article amounts to a categorical and unequivocal assertion: "the Jewish population, especially youths and the town-dwelling poor, staged a mass welcome for the invading [Soviet] army…with weapons in hand."[3]

My rather reserved response to this generalization and unfounded charge was greeted with a double attack. Thus writes Professor Strzembosz in his article:

> I would like to ask the known researcher of Polish-Jewish relations, including the war period, whether it is true that in sixteen cities and small towns, in the areas of so-called western Belarus alone, Polish nationals of Jewish extraction took up arms in order to use them against Polish soldiers, policemen, refugees from central Poland, and the structure of the Polish state…[4]

At this point Professor Strzembosz lists a number of cities. Broadly speaking, these are small towns rather than cities, and Jedwabne does not appear

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[1] "Panu Prof. Gutmanowi do sztambucha," *Więź,* vol. 54, no. 6 (June 2001). See Strzembosz's article in this volume.

[2] "Przemilczana Kolaboracja," *Rzeczpospolita,* January 27, 2001. The article appeared in English as "Covered-up Collaboration," in William Brand, ed., *Thou Shalt Not Kill; Poles on Jedwabne* (Warsaw: Więź, 2001),

[3] Ibid., p. 168 (in the English publication).

[4] See Strzembosz's article in this volume.

among them. Professor Strzembosz then goes on to say: "If the honorable professor does not know about this, it attests only to his ignorance. It means that he has not followed Polish literature of the 1990s, has not read collections of documents based on Soviet materials translated into Polish."[5]

And again, "Just to refresh our memory," Professor Strzembosz lists books and publications–taking up a whole page–dealing with "Jewish and Jewish-Belorussian insurrections," books that he describes as "canonical." In short, there are many questions and much instruction designed to help me rid myself of my ignorance.

And now for my reply. You ask me, Professor Strzembosz, whether it is true that Jews took up arms against Polish authorities, citizens, refugees; again, in short, "against the structure of the Polish state." Forgive me, Professor Strzembosz, but one would expect that, in keeping with conventions and traditional Polish manners, which I think should apply somehow also to me, after asking a question one should wait for an answer, without preemptively branding me as an ignoramus.

Well, my answer is very brief: *no, it is not true*. Maybe even worse than that. Professor Strzembosz claims that Jews attacked, whereas Poles defended themselves. In a passage dealing with the 110th Regiment-Brigade, Strzembosz writes about suppression of "communist-subversive activities … There were many such activities … Lieutenant Colonel Dąmbrowski suppressed such 'insurrections' in Ostryna and Jeziory … Those caught with firearms on their person were not taken prisoner by the cavalrymen**.** They were shot right then and there."

Well, it seems that the Poles defended themselves quite ably.

The above quotation indicates that armed and randomly assembled remnants of Polish units quashed these "communist subversives" by shooting armed individuals they encountered en route; apparently they did so without any second thoughts or interrogations.

Who were those people? Enemies of Poland, plain and simple? Perhaps they were just looking for weapons with which to defend themselves and their families under conditions of total chaos and anarchy? These circumstances

[5] Ibid.

should be researched as meticulously as possible. In any event, we can be certain it was not they who destroyed the structure of the Polish state. The destruction was wrought by the brutal and inhuman enemy from the West, the same enemy with whom several years previously Polish policy had established almost friendly bonds of no small measure of trust and cooperation. In the East the false and treacherous totalitarianism ruthlessly exploited the deplorable situation in which Poland found itself.

Was it a mini-war, a "Polish-Soviet war" in Strzembosz's terminology, or desperate and heroic skirmishes of the retreating–sometimes in disorderly fashion–Polish forces? Or, perhaps, it was an armed confrontation between the "Jewish population," on the one hand, and Poles and the Polish state, on the other hand? This is an imaginary and absurd view that you have adopted, Professor Strzembosz; I still see it as "not meriting serious consideration." After all, Jews were also among the retreating Polish army units, since they were not only fellow citizens but soldiers as well. The proportion of Jews among refugees from central and western Poland was very high.

At this point I would like to digress and resort to my personal experience. Just like you, Professor Strzembosz, I was a scout before the war, a member of the Zionist youth movement Ha-Shomer Ha-Za'ir. Almost the entire elder membership of this organization in Warsaw set out eastward in September 1939 (I belonged to the younger activists who were left behind). This migration was motivated by an expectation that the Polish army would eventually consolidate the front in the east, in which case it would be possible to reinforce it. When the Soviet troops overran the eastern territories, thousands of members of Zionist organizations, the Bund, as well as *yeshivah* students, worked their way toward Lithuania because of opportunities there–which were partly exploited–of departure to Palestine and countries of the free world.

I dwell on this episode, because a number of people from the Catholic scout movement remained on friendly terms with our "movement"–as it was known among us. They remained faithful to this scout friendship also during the occupation, including Irena Adamowicz, Henryk (Heniek) Grabowski, and Aleksander Kamiński. Several of them took on the dangerous assignment of serving as couriers between the ghetto and the outside and cooperated with

the Jewish Combat Organization; their names form an integral part of the history of Jewish resistance. Another small – though immensely significant – group, which counted among its members Mordechai Anielewicz, Itzhak (Antek) Zukerman, Zivia Lubetkin, and Josef Kaplan, returned early from the eastern territories in order to establish underground organizations in Nazi-occupied areas. In the latest stage they helped form the Jewish Combat Organization and organized the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto.

What Professor Strzembosz has called "small-town Jewish masses" was actually made up of a mosaic of political and religious views. Attributing uniform characteristics and political attitudes to this ideologically divided collectivity is erroneous; it amounts to a basic misapprehension of reality. The analyses and interpretations to be found in Professor Strzembosz's articles are one-sided and laced with accounts and quotations designed to buttress his monochrome vision.

At the Hebrew University of Jerusalem we were taught that every event that involves two sides, especially when they are in a state of conflict, makes it imperative upon the researcher to familiarize himself with materials and relevant testimonies of both parties. Unfortunately, in Professor Strzembosz's account, everything is based on one side only, and everything is unequivocal.

In a section of his article, "Worse Than Ignorance," Professor Jan Tomasz Gross points out a flagrant and astonishing example of this tendency on the part of Professor Strzembosz. Gross reminds us that

> in the 1980's [Strzembosz] conducted a large number of interviews in Jedwabne and its environs. He succeeded in winning the trust of the residents who candidly related to him various events from the period of the occupation. Despite these conversations, despite decades of reading, archival investigations, reflection and study, it didn't occur to him that something worth recording had befallen the Jews. [6]

Gross points out parenthetically that Professor Strzembosz explains his ignorance by the fact that he does not "speciali[ze] in Polish-Jewish relations." However, on another occasion, especially in his debate with me, Strzembosz emerges as a strong-minded expert in Jewish realities and Jewish "revolt," an

[6] Jan Tomasz Gross, "A jednak sąsiedzi," *Rzeczpospolita*, April 10, 2001.

expert who makes his pronouncements with no consideration of readings, interviews, or research. Such statements, made without research, without verifying the claims of both sides, can at best lead to misleading half-truths, which also occasionally, result in slander.

On one occasion during his "diary" lesson, we find a sentence based on a Jewish source. Surprisingly, Tomasz Strzembosz contends that

> Jewish researchers also came to similar conclusions; the honorable professor should know their works best. Thus, for example, Tikva Fatal Knaani admitted that Jewish-Belorussian squads attacked Polish government centers, broke into the Grodno prison, and that in response the Poles organized a pogrom. He expressed satisfaction at the fact that the "pogromists" were later severely punished by the Soviets.

I must confess: I know Tikva Fatal Knaani[7] and her book about Grodno (*Grodno Is Not the Same*) published by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem in 2001, in Hebrew. She was my student, and I also served as her Ph.D. advisor; the book is based on her dissertation. I understand that you found merit in her book. However, one fundamental problem remains: What you, Professor Strzembosz, describe in your article does not appear in the book, or, rather, as we shall see, appears in a completely different version.

I admit to being an insatiable collector of books and other publications in the area of my interest. Although I am not an expert in Professor Strzembosz's field, I do own and have read several of the books he recommended, books he regards as "canonical"–a designation that I regard with some reservations. My reference library contains a great many original books, as well as translations into Hebrew and other languages on the subject of interest to us, in addition to a fair amount of material in the form of articles, testimonies, and documents. All this requires verification and specific evaluation. Can we reach a complete and exhaustive truth in this fashion? It is hard to offer a definitive answer to this question. In any event, what you, Professor Strzembosz, called "a covered-up collaboration" is not covered up here at all. It is in free

[7] However, there is a small error in this identification of a Hebrew source. Tikva Fatal Knaani is not a man, but a woman (Tikva is a common female name in Israel, which in Hebrew means hope). This can be easily ascertained since the jacket of the book in question bears the author's photograph.

circulation, but it seems to me that it has little to do with the collaboration of the "Jewish collectivity."

Professor Strzembosz was right to note that emissary Jan Karski, a person close and dear to us, wrote about collaboration of Jews with the Soviets in his report of early 1940, but he also added that not all Jews engaged in such collaboration. He also wrote that, regardless of such behavior, antisemitism was on the rise, that Nazi anti-Jewish agitation struck a chord among various strata of Polish society. In his opinion, this posed the danger of enemy propaganda infiltrating Polish society.

In view of this, we should consider the question of whether such influences did not express themselves in the widespread plague of handing Jews over to the Nazi murderers by certain Polish groups. While they did not represent all of Polish society, did they engage in some sort of "covered-up collaboration"?

The Jewish small-town (shtetl) population, which constituted a high percentage of the total Jewish population - often even a majority - in the eastern regions of the Second Polish Republic, displayed certain specific characteristics. Similar to other residents of these areas, they suffered unrelieved poverty, which meant a constant struggle to eke out a living. A large proportion of Jews, particularly of the older generation, were deeply religious, locked within the bounds of tradition. Changes in lifestyles filtered down very slowly into these groups, whereas social-political ferment did make some inroads among the younger generation. Polish and Jewish literature abounds with images of co-existence and mutual respect, as well as tendencies toward insularity in both collectivities, tendencies that stemmed from separate ways of life.

Toward the end of 1930's, the spread of anti-Jewish views and slogans by political centers of the Polish radical right was acutely felt in the areas in question. Violent attacks against the Jews, including the use of weapons, gained in intensity, as did clashes between groups of youths. This wave of hatred was intensified as a result of the prevalent economic conditions. Jews were predominant in trade, brokerage professions, and cottage industries. In an article published in the period under discussion, Jewish demographer and sociologist Menachem Linder (killed as a member of the underground circle

around Ringelblum in the Warsaw ghetto) stressed the drastic decline in Jewish commerce in the entire region. In Jedwabne, for example, 86 percent of all the stores in 1932 were owned by Jews; in 1937, this figure fell to 44 percent. These changes are also indicative of transformation of Polish-Jewish relations.

Difficult as they were, however, these realities could hardly be compared to the inhuman conditions that prevailed under the occupation. For the Poles, the German and Russian occupations were largely convergent; they entailed enslavement, national oppression, economic ruin, exile, forced labor, and mass murder. Jews suffered similarly to the Poles, but there were significant differences. In the Soviet occupation zone, Jews shared the fate of their fellow countrymen. With Nazism, however, radical measures directed specifically against the Jews, including discrimination, ghettoization and physical destruction, were introduced. In its final stage, this led to the “Final Solution of the Jewish question” and the Holocaust in Europe. Broadly speaking, Jews were aware of the fact that the fall of free Poland meant terrible misfortune for them, but in terms of the attitude to the Jews, the structure of the occupation regimes in various pre- and post-partition phases displayed marked differences. The Jewish relief, manifested with the introduction of Soviet rule in the areas of Poland that they inhabited, was natural and expected, for the alternative was Nazi slavery and destruction. This should not be construed as disloyalty toward the Poles and Poland, but viewed from the perspective of a tangle of differing interests in the emerging constellation of wartime conditions.

Another issue is the conduct of the numerically insignificant but clamorous section of the Communist Party where Jews were disproportionately highly represented. We should keep in mind, however, that Jewish communists amounted to a tiny fraction of the Jewish population, which never considered them an integral part of Jewish society.

Haphazardly gathered statements and witness accounts indicate that both Jews and Poles collaborated with the NKVD, although the scope of collaboration was fairly limited. As it turns out, adulatory letters to Stalin were written also, among others, by the Polish resident of Jedwabne, who later was

accused of taking an active part in the terrible murder of July 10, 1941. In a statement he wrote, he claims that Jewish communists handed over, above all, Jews described as “bourgeoisie and capitalists,” whereas Poles engaged in similar activity among their own. Jews and Poles were among those deported to the camps, where, ultimately, the remnants of Polish communists also ended up. This phenomenon and its various aspects call for a thorough analysis and not wholesale accusations and anti-Jewish epithets.

Lists of Poles and Jews who were deported to the remote regions of the “Soviet paradise” were drawn, above all, from administrative records. They swept up “class enemies” (owners of private enterprises and landed estates), as well as national and political activists, both from among the Poles and the Jews. Incidentally, the Germans used the same method during the deportations of the Polish population from the areas incorporated into the Reich. Jews, by the way, were deported *en bloc*.

All kinds of ethnic groups were represented among the agents and uniformed executors of the Soviet will. Those who saw only Jews simply held fast to the old stereotypes. It is true that Jews held all kinds of posts in the Soviet occupation zone. This attracted public attention since they were not afforded such opportunities in the free Second Polish Republic. After some time, however, Soviet authorities began removing Jews, Poles, and communists from their offices, replacing them with personnel brought from Russia proper.

In this context we should also mention the historical paradox, or unanticipated coincidence, that it was precisely the Jews who were deported and exiled by the Soviet authorities into the Soviet interior who survived the war. Liberated after the war, during repatriation, they made up a sizable proportion of the surviving remnant of Polish Jewry. This phenomenon is as good an example as any of the difference between the two totalitarian regimes as far as Jewish fate is concerned.

Among the documents with which I am familiar, of particular note is a report by Moshe Kleinbaum-Sneh, composed on March 12, 1940, about the same time as Karski’s report. Dr. Kleinbaum was one of the most distinguished Zionist figures in Poland, a talented publicist and editor, who wrote in Polish and Yiddish. Early in the war he traveled eastward. He managed to reach the

Baltic countries and continued to the still-free Europe and Palestine. In Israel he was a well-known and respected political figure and a long-standing member of the Knesset; his affiliation with different political camps marked a tempestuous and checkered history.

During a short stay in Europe prior to his departure to Palestine, Kleinbaum wrote an exhaustive report to Nahum Goldmann, chairman of the World Jewish Congress:

> For several weeks I had an opportunity to observe the Soviet occupation first-hand in three concentrations of Jewish population: Luck (capital of Volhynia), Lwow, and Vilna, from the first day (September 18), when the Red Army crossed to Polish border, until October 28, when Vilna was annexed and incorporated into Lithuania. I am therefore entitled to claim that my words express my personal opinion and the truth.
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> I witnessed the entry of the Red Army into the regional capital city of Luck. Tightly packed crowds stood along the entire length of the main road on which Soviet tanks, artillery and armed infantry moved. Most people looked on this spectacle out of curiosity. Ukrainian peasants from the neighboring villages showed up in force, as well as young Jewish communists, especially women, and greeted them with applause and shouts of encouragement. The number of these Jewish enthusiasts was not large, but their behavior that day was conspicuous and stood out in its clamor. One might mistakenly conclude that Jews were the most celebrating guests in the ceremony. The Polish population of Luck comprised–almost exclusively–government officials and military personnel. They and their families refrained from showing themselves in the streets on that memorable day. The reaction of the Jewish population (I spoke with Jewish store-owners, with a tailor, a cobbler, a teacher, a private clerk, an unemployed engineer, that is, with Jews from various social strata), which should not be confused with the ruckus made by a few dozen Jewish communists, was that, as usual, the Jews had found themselves between a rock and a hard place. Already on September 18 a joke made the rounds among the Jews: “we were condemned to death and now we are pardoned–life sentence.” At first the Nazi danger loomed large with its sentence of death against the Jews. Then the Red Army came, saved a million-and-a-half Jews from certain death, physical and civic death, but besides bare lives the Red Army didn’t save anything. For the Jewish population life under Soviet rule amounts to a life sentence: you live, but on black bread and water only, you cease to be a free human being. As you probably know, I am something of an expert on the proclivities and thoughts of the masses, and let us say that the public’s opinion is my profession [Kleinbaum was a physician – I. G.]. So here I

> announce that to the best of my knowledge at least 80% of the Jews are of this opinion and no other.[8]

Kleinbaum's report deals with the prevailing mood among the Jews, and not with attitudes of Poles to their Jewish compatriots. In this context, I have quite a few reservations about the images and conclusions in the text by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz that Professor Strzembosz described as "canonical."

Chodakiewicz dwells on a number of events and motivations behind them:

> Anti-Jewish sentiments were particularly intense in the eastern territories. These sentiments developed into actions directed against the Jews faster than anywhere else in Poland. As we have already mentioned, an active contingent of sympathizers of Jewish origin was the *only* [emphasis added – I. G.] element collaborating with the Soviets in the East... At the same time, however, it seems that alongside anti-communist action, local criminal elements engaged in independent banditry and looting directed against the Jews. Sometimes these two factors overlapped. Most of these events occurred spontaneously; some received German support. Occasionally, the new occupier simply took advantage of Polish criminals, even members of the civic guard, in auxiliary tasks involved in mass executions of Jews. Jewish accounts contain references to attacks, acts of plunder, humiliating the Jews, even hunting down and guarding the Jewish population on behalf of the SS in Jedwabne, Grajewo, Wizna, Radzłów, Goniądz, Kolno, and in other localities... A report by the Government Representation (*Delegatura*) of July 1941 notes anti-Jewish incidents with Polish participation: "In a number of cities (Brzesc nad Bugiem, Łomża, Bialystok, Grodno) the local Polish population, unfortunately together with German soldiers, committed pogroms, even slaughter of Jews. We shall supply more exact information in the next [report]."[9]

Now let us examine more closely the events in Grodno, which are often quoted as an example of Jewish "revolt." The source that Professor Strzembosz draws upon is Czesław Grzelak's colorful account of defensive battles waged by spontaneously organized units against a reconnaissance force, including tanks that entered Grodno. A long list of reminiscences and descriptions contains just one passage concerning Jews:

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[8] See Kleinbaum's report in "Dr. M. Kleinbaum (Moshe Sneh) to Dr. N. Goldmann – Memorandum Concerning the Situation of the Jews in East Europe in the Beginning of World War II," *Galed*, *on the History of the Jews in Poland* (Hebrew) vol. 4-5 (1978), pp. 561-562.

[9] Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918-1955. Współistnienie – zagłada – komunizm* (Warsaw: S.K. Fronda, 2000), pp. 247-248.

> On September 17, the first shots were heard in Grodno. A woman who was a schoolgirl at the time recounts: "In the afternoon we went out with my aunt to buy something. Shooting started on the Brygidzka Street. We saw Jews with red armbands, standing on balconies, shooting at people on the street. We darted into the Nazarene Monastery, where we waited until [the shooting] subsided. Near the house someone said that the Soviet Union crossed our border."[10]

They were quite deft, those Jews on balconies. On September 17, the day the Soviet troops crossed the border, they knew they would be in Grodno, had already procured red armbands and firearms, and shot at people walking down the street. But here a question arises. At the time there were 24,000 Jews living in Grodno, nearly half the entire population. In all likelihood Jewish schoolgirls had relatives, too, and went shopping like their Polish counterparts, so that half the shots must have been aimed at the Jews. I also have before me Dr. Tikva Fatal Knaani's book, which aroused such great interest on the part of Professor Strzembosz and expanded his knowledge of the matter. Here is what Dr. Fatal Knaani says in her book:

> During those September [1939] weeks the Jews were victims of hatred, brutality and violence. The Polish army dispersed, the remaining soldiers withdrew, wounded, defeated and broken. The government disintegrated, and among the Poles a mood of anti-Jewish violence prevailed, which mounted as Soviet troops entered Poland's eastern territories. The day before Soviet units entered Grodno, workers [non-Jews, Professor Strzembosz, as you quote erroneously from Dr. Fatal Knaani] from Grodno released political prisoners from the local jail. At the same time a gang of Poles, at the initiative of the Polish judge Mikulski, decided to "bring order" to the city. Mikulski quickly gathered his group, among them policemen and members of OZON [Oboz Zjednoczenia Narodowego; the United National Camp], armed with rifles and pistols. The gang roamed the city, killed, beat, and robbed the helpless populace. Jews were accused of admiring the Russian communists who had seized half of Poland. Twenty-five victims perished in the pogrom.[11]

Later on, Dr. Fatal Knaani writes the following in her condensed version of the events:

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[10] Czesław Grzelak, *Grodno 1939* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych, 1990).
[11] Fatal Knaani, *Grodno Is Not the Same,* p. 72.

> There were also persons who showed initiative, got organized as paramilitary units to maintain order and security, and in order to prevent anti-Jewish incidents and looting. A group of young Jews and Belorussians (workers at the glass factory) got organized in a suburb to defend themselves against the violent gang. They succeeded in disarming a group of hooligans dressed in Polish army uniforms.[12]

Which picture is veracious? Certainly not the one that presents itself as unequivocal and denounces the other as wholly inadequate. It is certain that Polish society as such was not made up of hooligans, and certainly Jewish society and the Jewish poor did not take up arms or use them. The overwhelming majority of the poor, especially in the eastern territories, was comprised of deeply devout people who regarded firearms as revolting and shedding blood as inconceivable. Jews did not loot or engage in killing, murder, burning people or revenge for Jedwabne or Radziłów.

A distinguished Jewish historian of that generation, Salo Baron, a native of Tarnów, who lectured and worked as a historian in the United States, concluded that the Holocaust effected, among other momentous changes among Jews, the disappearance of these collectivities that had never resorted to force or violence. In times of misery and horror their imploring eyes and prayers were turned to the Almighty.

I have engaged in this polemical tirade reluctantly. I was prompted to enter into this duel of words–which I usually shun–by the caustic remarks addressed to me. I do take note of the fact that I should not have suggested "that by quoting these acts of hostility on the part of the Jedwabne Jews [Professor Strzembosz] wish[es] to justify Polish or German-Polish crimes against the Jews." I am hard put to understand, however, how it was possible for a serious scholar, who has studied the history of vast areas during the war and the occupation, and is not conversant at all in Polish-Jewish relations, to be suddenly inspired by a litany of "specifics" that indicated "hostility on the part of the Jedwabne Jews." It also appears that Professor Strzembosz's article did not end up in a collection of articles about Jedwabne by accident; in other words, it forms part of the debate surrounding the murder in Jedwabne.

[12] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

One more thing pains–even astonishes–me. I have read Tomasz Strzembosz's reflections on Poland and the underground in 1939-1945. He writes there about Jews, the ghetto society, the ghetto uprising, Jewish organizations, Żegota and the fate of other minorities. Written in 1984, these texts were published in a collection in 1990. Pages 60-63 contain reasonable and convincing remarks to which I have often returned, not just as a reminder, but also out of my belief that a bond of understanding and ties was being established between us. Here are some of these reflections:

> The underground [occupied] state so understood may–and should–include not only the ZOB [Jewish Combat Organization], but also Jewish cultural and scientific activity, the work of documenting the history of the ghetto conducted by members of Emanuel Ringelblum's circle, housing self-help, and also, in part, the vast stream of economic life, smuggling and illegal production. Szczepański is right when he writes that underground national status was decided not by formal Polish citizenship, but by a factual, inner sense of citizenship, by emotional bonds and conviction. If this is so, then even the most hermetic physical isolation, the highest wall, should not take away this citizenship. Thus, the Polish underground state counted among its citizens both the ghettoized Jews and concentration camp prisoners, with whom, we should add, this state tried to establish and maintain the most keen of ties.[13]

In his remarks Professor Strzembosz refers also to the Ukrainians when he mentions:

> fairly numerous and fanatical UPA units that demanded from their compatriots unconditional support, and carried out formal recruitment in Ukrainian villages, including arson, murder of recalcitrant or insubordinate persons, and terrorizing entire areas. Under such conditions one is hard put to speak about completely free choice. Indubitable opting of many circles for independent Ukraine or the Soviet State was multiplied by a large number of people who were either passive or hesitant, or even favorably disposed toward the Polish Republic, but forcibly inducted into military service. We should also keep in mind the undeniable wrongs suffered by the Ukrainians on the part of the Polish State in the period of the Second Polish Republic, the German propaganda, as well as hopes for independence.[14]

[13] Tomasz Strzembosz, *Refleksje o Polsce I Podziemniu 1939-1945* (Warsaw: Agencja Omnipress, 1990), pp. 60-63.

[14] Ibid.

In my opinion, this voice of Professor Strzembosz, so different from the "covered-up collaboration," is the proper way to think about those terrible years.

That period of collapse, misery, and murder calls for a more thorough study and understanding of the role played by the inhuman ideologies and regimes, by promising encounters with noble individuals, as well as by frequent manifestations of conformism, evil, and descent to savagery.

Scholars who have the courage to teach about those times are faced with a difficult task. It is their duty to stare unwaveringly into the eyes of the truth, while freeing themselves of the division between "us" and "them" that especially plagues representatives of those nations, such as Poles and Jews, whose history abounds with suffering.

This is how we should think and endeavor to honor the memory of those who perished. We are duty-bound to walk down this path for the sake of the generations to come.

Translated from the Polish by Jerzy Michałowicz

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