The Kielce pogrom was the culmination of the continuous victimisation of Jewish survivors. It succeeded in convincing the majority of Jews that there was no place for them in Poland. After the pogrom the number of Jews in Poland was drastically reduced. A mass exodus took place, and by the spring of 1949 only about 80,000 Jews remained in Poland.

However, even after the flight of the majority of Jews, there was no peace for the remnants of Polish Jewry. An anti-Jewish atmosphere continued to dominate, and consecutive governments began once more to exploit the old-fashioned maxim that Jews were responsible for Poland’s ills. The government tried again to redirect the discontent of the masses against the Jews, its proclaimed ultimate objective being to free Poland of Jewish presence (Gutman, 1985, p. 9).

On 1 September 1949, the Ministry of Public Administration announced that Jews who wished to settle in Israel could register for emigration. A deadline of one year was set, later extended to the end of 1950. As a result, nearly 30,000 Jews then left Poland, leaving behind only about 45,000.

The Polish ‘Spring’ – 1956

The Polish ‘Spring’ in October of 1956, after the workers’ disturbances in the city of Poznan, was a time of consolidation of communist power in the country. Following Stalin’s death in 1953 and the secret speech by Khruschev denouncing Stalinist terror, Wladyslaw Gomulka, released from prison, was returned to power. The change in the Polish government signified a relaxation of the communist rule, but it did not improve the situation of Jews. Jews were now blamed for
Stalinist ‘errors’, and in the process of de-Stalinisation thousands of Jews were dismissed from their positions.

At the same time, the new government under Gomulka began appointing to important posts individuals who were not only reactionaries in the communist definition but openly anti-Semitic. Anti-Jewish views were no longer an impediment to reaching a high position in the government. Mieczysław Moczar, who was previously purged for his ‘rightist and nationalist deviation’, became Deputy Minister of State Security in 1948, and in 1956 Gomulka appointed him Deputy Minister of the Interior in charge of the secret police. Noted for his anti-Semitism, Moczar soon became a powerful factor in Polish politics. His faction, known as ‘Partisans’, acquired wide appeal among the nationalist Poles. Moczar was successful in establishing a broad base among the war veterans and soon became the head of their 800,000-member organisation, Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokracje – ZBoWiD (Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy). Another anti-Semite and activist of the prewar Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny (ONR), Bolesław Piasecki, who was known to have tried to collaborate with the Germans during the war, also obtained an important post in the government.

As in previous periods in the history of the Jews in Poland, the government began to search for a scapegoat in order to divert public attention from its ineffective economic policy. It correctly assumed that by launching an anti-Jewish campaign it would satisfy the concealed wishes of the majority of the Polish nation. The fact that the number of Jews had dwindled in the meantime did not make any difference. Polish anti-Semites saw a Jew in every member of the government and the administration.

It must be emphasised that the anti-Semitic campaign unleashed by Gomulka was not instigated by Moscow, as is claimed by some Polish historians, but was a deliberate exploitation by the government of anti-Jewish sentiments in Polish society, an excuse for the poor economic conditions. In no other east European country under communist rule did such a general anti-Jewish atmosphere prevail. Gomulka’s new regime launched a purge of Jews first from the top positions in the party and then from sensitive posts in the government and army (Dawidowicz, 1993, p. 97).

In the summer of 1956, the Polish government in order to demonstrate to the nation its aim of getting rid of Jews, began once more to ease its restrictions on Jewish emigration. Subsequently, seeking to obtain material benefit from Jewish emigration, the government introduced new regulations in 1958 requiring dollar payments from