

Benjamin Zylberberg At The Ministry Of Foreign Affairs



This photo was taken at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw in the 1970s. The people from left to right are: Antoni Bonski, somebody I don't know, Shakhilov - Soviet adviser, Slawomir Skwierczynski, me, and Jerzy Sawicki.

In February 1945 our unit was transferred from Zamosc to Srodborowo near Warsaw, where the Jewish Center is now. In May 1945, when the war ended, I reported to the Department for Personnel Affairs in Rembertow, where I was seconded to a liaison unit. In Lublin, where the central authorities were installed, as Warsaw was in ruins, we ensured communication between the central powers and the province offices. As the trains still weren't running, the Soviet authorities gave us 'kukuruzniki' [planes which were big enough for just one person next to the pilot]. In time I requested a change of work: it was too hard for me; I was so skinny, I weighed only 40-something kilograms. So I was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where I was made head of the codes department. All the encoders in all the embassies and consulates all over the world answered to me. When I traveled on inspections I couldn't travel officially in my professional capacity, and so I was sent ostensibly as a diplomatic courier. In the Foreign Ministry I was promoted to the rank of major in the Polish Army.

In 1960 Mieczyslaw Moczar [then junior minister for internal affairs, in 1968 instigator of the anti-Semitic campaign] wanted to have me thrown out of the army on disciplinary grounds, because someone had told him that I had called him anti-Semitic. But fortunately, his superior, the minister of internal affairs, was a decent man, who annulled the dismissal and ordered the head of the personnel department to find me another job. And I was on first-name terms with the head of the personnel department, because we had done our school-leaving exam together after the war. He said, 'We'll pay you as if you were on regular service, and you can do a full-time degree.' He was an anti-Semite as well. And that's how, thanks to two anti-Semites, I did a degree; I'm a Master of Economics, a graduate of the Institute of Planning and Statistics.

After my degree somebody gave me a leg-up into the Institute of Economics and Industrial Organization on Aleje Jerozolimskie [Warsaw's main thoroughfare]. 1968 was drawing near, and unfortunately the head of the Institute was Professor Ilia Epszajn. It was a small research institution, with a dozen or so employees. As well as the Jewish professor, there were also one or two other Jews and myself, and it wouldn't have done to throw those few Jews out, so they closed the entire institute down. That was the end of my academic career. As by then I could speak five languages well: Polish, Russian, Yiddish, German and English, and I had mates in Orbis [the Polish state travel agency], I became a tour guide taking Polish people on holidays abroad.