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## Fury in Poland Over ‘Antisemitic’ Defense of Pope John Paul II

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by Ben Cohen  
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Media personalities and Jewish organizations in Poland reacted with outrage over the weekend after one of the country’s most popular weeklies published an interview with an antisemitic publicist who accused a prominent newspaper of being controlled by a “Judenrat” — a reference to the administrative bodies created by the Nazis to control Jewish populations in occupied Europe as they awaited deportation.

The context for the comments of Stanisław Michalkiewicz was a report carried by Poland’s TVN broadcaster by the journalist Marcin Gutowski about the late Polish-born Pope John Paul II. Gutowski alleged that when John Paul served as Archbishop of Krakow during the 1960s and 1970s, he had mishandled complaints against three priests concerning child sexual abuse.



Responding to Gutowski’s claims in an extensive interview with the right-wing populist outlet *Do Rzeczy*, Michalkiewicz — an established fixture on Poland’s far right, antisemitic scene — charged that the late pontiff was the target of a media conspiracy “launched in Poland by two centers.”

Said Michalkiewicz: “The first is the Judenrat of *Gazeta Wyborcza* [one of Poland’s leading dailies], and the second center is TVN, i.e. Jewish television for Poles.”

Later versions of the article removed both the reference to the Judenrat and the depiction of TVN as a broadcaster supposedly serving Jewish interests.

He went on to argue that the “campaign of mudslinging against John Paul II is aimed at sawing off even this semblance of nobility from the Polish nation, in order to deprive it of defense before Jewish organizations start again fight for their claims.”

Two years ago, amid a heated controversy, Poland passed new legislation that effectively closed off Jewish restitution claims related to Nazi-era persecution, insisting that the German government was the sole address for such claims.

Several Polish media commentators pounced on Michalkiewicz’s remarks, pointing out the irony of invoking antisemitic tropes in defense of a pope who is lionized in the Jewish community for his efforts to enhance relations between Catholics and Jews.

In a tweet directed at Piotr Semka, a writer with *Do Rzeczy*, Bartosz Wieliński, deputy editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, sarcastically greeted him with the word “Shalom” before asking whether he had “reactivated *Der Sturmer* [a notorious pro-Nazi newspaper] in your editorial office.”

Wieliński noted that John Paul II was the first pope in history to attend a synagogue, famously visiting the synagogue in Rome in 1986.

“In 2023, people who consider themselves Catholics download a staunch antisemite to defend the Polish pope,” he said.

Michał Szułdryński of the *Rzeczpospolita* news outlet issued a similar condemnation. “To defend John Paul II by referring to antisemitic arguments is to spit on the teaching of the Polish pope,” Szułdryński said.

The central Europe office of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) also weighed in, observing that *Do Rzeczy*’s editorial team had decided that the accusation that antisemitism in Poland is thriving “is best answered by publishing an interview with someone known for his antisemitic statements.”

“Labeling what one dislikes as ‘Jewish’ is classic antisemitism,” the AJC continued.

Separately, the “Never Again Association,” a Polish anti-racist NGO, announced on Monday that it had filed a formal complaint with Poland’s Media Ethics Council.

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