

Schmuel Zygielbojm:

A Lost Cassandra, the Holocaust and Zionism

By Jerry Klinger

Schmuel Zygielbojm was one of two Jewish members of the Polish WWII Government in Exile in London.

Zygielbojm represented the Bundists. Dr. Itzhak Schwarzbart represented the Zionists. The two Jews found it very difficult to work together to save Jews.

As a last desperate act to focus an uncaring world's attention on the increasingly known extermination of European Jewry, Zygielbojm dramatically took his own life. The world in 1943 cared for a few days and moved on.



Cassandra, in Greek mythology, was the daughter of King [Priam](#) and Queen [Hecuba](#) of [Troy](#). Her beauty caused [Apollo](#) to grant her the gift of [prophecy](#). However, when she did not return his love, Apollo placed a curse on her so that no one would ever believe her predictions. She is a figure both of the [epic tradition](#) and of [tragedy](#), where her combination of deep understanding and powerlessness exemplify the tragic condition of humankind.

A few months ago, I was transferred the responsibility to manage the memory of Schmuel Zygielbojm on a very unusual web site, www.Findagrave.com. It is a vicarious connection that enables the visitor or the web traveler to touch a part of history, the famous, near famous or memorialize a personally important someone. Perhaps I was assigned Schmuel Zygielbojm because of my long involvement with preserving the Jewish past. I had never heard of Schmuel Zygielbojm. It was an esoteric gift that opened a window into the Holocaust and an understanding of Zionism that I had never understood before.



Schmuel Mordecai Zygielbojm was born in the tiny Polish village of Borowice February 21, 1895. Borowice, located in the pastoral S.W. of Poland near the Czech border, was founded in 1644 by Meertin Marksteiner, a Protestant Swiss carpenter who had escaped from Bohemia and the religious oppression of the Thirty Years War.

During World War II, Borowice was the site of a Nazi forced labor camp that worked to death, or simply murdered, hundreds of Poles and Russian soldiers.



Schmuel was one of ten children living in deep poverty when the family moved to Krasnystaw in 1899. He had to leave school by the time he was ten to help support the family. He worked in a small factory making boxes. The family uprooted themselves again and moved to Warsaw then back to Krasnystaw and finally to Chelm at the outbreak of WWI. In Chelm, Zygielbojm discovered Bundism. Bundism became for many Jews, a secular socialist faith of salvation and redemption. It was an idealistic solution to the world's *Jewish problem*.



“The General Jewish Labor Bund of Lithuania, Poland and Russia“, generally called *The Bund* ([Yiddish](#): *boond* from the [German](#): [Bund](#) meaning federation or union) or the Jewish Labor Bund, was a [secular Jewish socialist](#) party in the [Russian Empire](#), active between 1897 and 1920. The Bund sought to unite all Jewish workers in the [Russian Empire](#) into a united [socialist](#) party. They hoped to see the Jews achieve recognition as a nation with a legal minority status. Of all Jewish political parties of the time, the Bund was the most progressive regarding [gender equality](#), with more than one-third of membership being female.# The Bund eventually came to strongly oppose [Zionism](#), arguing that emigration to [Palestine](#) was a form of [escapism](#). The Bund did not advocate separatism. Instead, it focused on culture, rather than a state or a place, as the glue of [Jewish "nationalism."](#) In this they borrowed extensively from the [Austro-Marxist](#) school, further alienating the Bolsheviks and Lenin. The Bund also promoted the use of [Yiddish](#) as a Jewish national language and to some extent opposed the Zionist project of reviving [Hebrew](#).

The Bund won converts mainly among Jewish artisans and workers, but also among the growing Jewish [intelligentsia](#). It led a trade union movement of its own. It joined with the [Poalei Zion](#) (Labor Zionists) and other groups to form self-defense organizations to protect Jewish communities against [pogroms](#) and government troops.

The Bund was the only Jewish party that worked within the [Soviets](#)

Poland fell under German occupation in 1914. November 1914 the Bund Central Committee appointed a separate Committee of Bund Organizations in Poland to run the party in Poland. Theoretically the Bundists in Poland and Russia were members of the same party, but in practice the Polish Bundists operated as a party of their own. Three years later, December 1917, the split was formalized.

In 1921, the Communist Bund dissolved itself and its members sought admission to the Communist Party. The last Bundist groups ceased to functioning in Soviet Russia by 1923. Many former Bundists, like [Mikhail Liber](#), were murdered during Stalin's purges in the 1930s. The Polish Bundists continued their activities until 1948.

With the passion of a religious fundamentalist, Zygielbojm entered his lifelong mission as a community organizer and Bundist ideologue. He was only 22 years old when he was elected as a delegate to the first Polish Bundist Convention in Lublin in 1917. His natural skills and speaking ability were quickly recognized. He very rapidly was propelled toward a leadership position in the Bund. Three years later he was appointed secretary to the Professional Union of Jewish Metal Workers and a member of the Warsaw Committee of the Bund. His star continued rising. In 1924, he was elected to the Central Committee of the Bund, a position he maintained for the rest of his life. By 1930, he was Secretary of the Central Council of Jewish Trade Unions and editor of the *Arbeiter Fragen*, the trade union journal. In 1936 he was sent to Lodz, a major textile center, becoming the leader of the Jewish worker's movement there.

Leadership of the Jewish Labor Movement in Poland during the 1930's was a very influential position. The size of the Jewish Labor Movement in Poland alone was multiples of the American Zionist Movement. The influence of the Jewish Labor Movement in Poland during the 1930's was significantly greater than the American or the British Zionist movements. After Justice Louis Brandeis left the leadership of the American Zionist Movement, and the mini-Holocaust and its trauma from World War I had passed, membership in the American Zionist Movement collapsed. Jews, when not threatened, were largely uninterested in Zionism. But in Poland, with anti-Semitism rising again even more virulently after World War I, the Jewish Labor Movement and the Polish Bund became major, powerful representatives of the Jewish people and their aspirations.

Zygielbojm was elected to the Lodz city council in 1938, a position he held for only a year before World War II broke out. On September 1, 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland from the West. Shortly, Soviet Russia invaded Poland from the East. Zygielbojm hurried to Warsaw to aid in its defense.

Poland crumbled in three weeks before the armed might of the Nazi war machine and the pincers of the cynical land grabbing Soviets.

German occupation meant German control. The Nazis needed the Jews to administer the Jewish areas.

The Germans demanded 12 prominent leaders from Warsaw to be kept as hostages to guarantee cooperation in administering the city. They and their lives would be responsible for proper order and responsiveness to the Nazis. Warsaw City President Stefan Starzynski proposed that the Jewish workers unions provide one of the hostages – Ester Ivinska. Zygielbojm was outraged that a Jewish woman was to be used in that manner. He, along with Abraham Gepner, volunteered in her place.

The hostage system did not serve the Nazi purposes very long. Zygielbojm was released. Quickly he moved to organize the Bundists as an underground resistance movement. Publically, he was appointed to the Warsaw Judenrat – the Nazi's Jewish administrative apparatus.

November 4, 1939; the Nazis ordered the Judenrat to create a ghetto and relocate all Jewish within the ghetto. The Jews had three days to carry out the order. A furious debate erupted within

the Judenrat. Zygielbojm was vehemently against cooperating with the Nazis. The motion carried as the majority of the Judenrat felt that not complying with the Nazi demands would result in even worse treatment and demands later.

Zygielbojm warned the Jews, “*A historic decision has taken place here. I was, it seems, too weak to communicate that we must not do this. I feel, however, that I do not have enough moral strength to be able to take part in this. I feel that I would not have the right to continue living if the ghetto is carried through and my conscience does not remain clear. I declare, therefore, that I resign my appointment. I know that it will be the duty of the chairman to report my resignation to the Gestapo at once and I consider the consequences that this will have for me personally. I can, however, not act differently.*”

Marek Edelman commented: “*The only member of the Judenrat who had the courage to leave that agency despite the death penalty for such an act was Comrade Artur (Szmul Zygielbojm).*”

Zygielbojm continued protesting to against complying with the Nazi demands. His protests quickly reached the ears of the Gestapo. He was ordered to appear before the Nazis to answer charges against him. The Bundists understood that if Zygielbojm went to the Gestapo headquarters he would not return. They quickly decided that he must leave Poland for his own safety but more so as a representative of the Bund, he was also a credible witness to the world of the growing Nazi atrocity machine. The Bundists provided funding and a false Dutch passport. Crossing Germany in December of 1939, he reached Holland. At a meeting before the Socialist International in Brussels, he shocked the attendees with one of the earliest first hand reports of Nazi atrocities against the Jews. His reports were hard to believe by the incredulous listeners.

Belgium fell to the Germans, May, 1940. Zygielbojm fled to France. Just four months later he escaped to the United States where he toured and lectured about the monstrous barbarism of the Nazis in Poland. Wherever he was, he was the center of a secret conduit of Bundist reports from Poland. The reports told in cold black and white of the growing Nazi horror and the visible implementation of the Nazi plans to exterminate world Jewry. Zygielbojm spoke with authority and veracity to all who would listen.

March 1942, he returned to London. He was the Bundist representative of Polish Jewry opposite Dr. Itzhak Schwartzbart, the Zionist Polish representative to the National Council of the Polish Government in Exile. Zygielbojm, a rigid anti-Zionist ideologue, refused to cooperate with Schwartzbart the Zionist. Zygielbojm felt cooperation with the Zionists would be a visible rejection of his Bundist core values. He deeply and sincerely believed, in a post war Poland, the evil of anti-Semitism would be eradicated.

Reports continued to come to Zygielbojm and the Polish Government in Exile the only thing being eradicated in Poland were the Jews. He threw himself in a furious effort to organize aid for Polish Jewry, appealing to public opinion with a particular focus on the World Socialist movement to find some means of rescue.

Two months later, May, 1942, a horrifying report reached Zygielbojm from the Warsaw Bund. The report detailed the Nazi *Final Solution* efforts. It specifically provided details of *Atkionen*,

extermination camps, the nature and detail of the slaughter of Jews. The report stated bluntly that some 700,000 Jews had been murdered. Zygielbojm was staggered.

Rather than release the information through the Jewish Press he understood a simple fundamental truth. Information that was disseminated by Jews would not be trusted by a basically anti-Semitic audience. They believed Jews lie, Jews cheat, Jews will misrepresent facts to further their own interests. The unbelievable reports could not be issued by Jews. They had to come from the non-Jewish press to have any credibility, any legitimacy. Zygielbojm released the information to the Daily Telegraph and other British newspapers.

“June 2, 1942, Zygielbojm said on a BBC broadcast, *“The Jews in the ghettos who day-by-day see their relatives dragged away en masse to their death, knowing only too well that their own turn will come.”*

Later, speaking before the British Labor Party Zygielbojm described the Jewish tragedy in very human terms:

“Today, you have heard the frightening news from Poland; these are facts that make blood curdle in the veins. I have in my hand an excerpt from a letter that a Jewish woman in one ghetto wrote to her sister in another ghetto in Poland. The letter is a shocking call to the world. The woman writes: ‘My hand shakes. I cannot write, our minutes are numbered; only God knows if we will see each other again. I write and I cry; my children lament. They want so much to live... We all say goodbye to you...’”

He went on:

“This is the atmosphere in which the Jews live in the ghettos of Poland. Try to imagine the people who see their nearest being dragged away to their death every day and each one knows that their turn must come. Imagine the thousands of Jewish mothers, the mothers who look at their children and know that their death is inevitable ... Imagine the great crime of methodically massacring an entire people. Each of us who understands the cruelty of the crime must be shocked by the feeling of shame that we find ourselves among the living, to belong to the human genus, if means are not found to stop the greatest crime in human history. The conscience of every person must be shaken; the serenity of those who ignore the facts must be exploded ... Each of us who does not do everything possible to stop the mass slaughter will take upon themselves moral co-responsibility for the dead. In the name of the hopeless innocent people sentenced to death in the ghettos of Poland, whose hands stretched out to the world unseen, I call on all people, to all nations whose conscience is still weak, to erase the burning shame that is directed at the human race - force the Nazi murderers to stop the systematic massacre of a people!”

Zygielbojm drafted a resolution of the National Council containing three proposals:

- 1) That the National Council of the Polish government demand all of the Allied nations, particularly America and Britain, to immediately devise a plan of special acts against Germany that will force an end to the slaughter of the Jews.

- 2) That airplanes over Germany drop large numbers of leaflets containing precise descriptions in the German language concerning the slaughter of the Jews.
- 3) That the Polish government takes steps for a special conference of all of the Allied governments to be called quickly to publish an uncompromising protest and a powerful warning in the name of all the fighting nations to the German people and their government.

He had already drafted proposals concerning the undertaking of sanctions against Germany on two earlier occasions which he had submitted to Churchill and Roosevelt. The responses were diplomatically evasive. Now he sent the President and the Prime Minister a final appeal:

“As the plenipotentiary representative of the Jewish workers' movement in Poland and in the name of the Jews who are being murdered in vast numbers behind the gates of the ghetto, I turn to your governments with this last desperate appeal. Here is an excerpt from the last report that has again come from Warsaw: ‘A fierce storm is raging on the heads of Polish Jewry and the terrible storm gets stronger with each day. The entire Jewish population is being exterminated, the men, the women and the children. Of the three and a half million Jews from before the war, there now remain alive no more than a few thousand and the mass murder continues further. The surviving Jews in Poland beg you to find the means to save the remnant of Polish Jews who remain alive.’

As a man who represents the unfortunate Jewish population of Poland, I give you their last appeal for rescue.”

Zygielbojm released the text of a speech he had made on 1 September 1942, the third anniversary of the outbreak of war. As he had reported earlier, 700,000 Jews had been murdered by May 1942. Some had been shot, some starved, some gassed. 7,000 Jews were being deported daily from Warsaw. Zygielbojm appealed for immediate help, before Europe became a cemetery. In another speech broadcast by the BBC earlier that year, he had said:

“It will be a disgrace to go on living, to belong to the human race, unless immediate steps are taken to put a stop to this crime, the greatest that history has known.”

Zygielbojm spoke again on the BBC in December 1942, saying:

“If Polish Jewry's call for help goes unheeded, Hitler will have achieved one of his war aims – to destroy the Jews of Europe irrespective of the final military outcome of the war.”

Jan Karski

On 2 December 1942, Jan Karski¹, a courier from the Polish underground to the government in exile, met with Zygielbojm in London. Karski described his first impressions: *“(Zygielbojm) had the hard, suspicious glance of the proletarian, the self-made man who could not be cajoled, and was constantly on the alert for falsehood. His early life had probably been severe -- he may have started out by running errands for a tailor or perhaps had been a street cleaner, I shall have to be careful and exact, I thought.”*

Apart from eye-witness testimony about the extermination of the Jews, Karski brought with him a message from Leon Feiner, a member of the Bund:

“ ... We here feel hate for those who were saved there because they are not saving us ... They are not doing enough. We know that there, in the humane and free world, it is absolutely impossible to believe what is happening to us here. Let them do something that will force the world to believe ... We are all dying; they will also die there. Let them lay siege to Churchill's government and others, proclaim a hunger strike, let them even die of hunger rather than budge until they believe and take measures to save the last remnants who are still alive. We know that no political action, no protests or proclamations of punishment after the war will help. None of these make any impression on the Germans ... ”

Zygielbojm was distraught on hearing Karski's evidence and Feiner's message. Despite his anguished appeals for action to save at least a fragment of Polish Jewry, Zygielbojm became haunted by his inability to communicate the true nature of the disaster in influential circles. For the next five months he continued his desperate efforts, even as news emerged of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the ghetto's destruction. Finally, upon learning of the death of his wife Manya and his 16 year-old son Tuvia in Warsaw, Zygielbojm decided to heed Feiner's call for an act of self-sacrificing protest. On 12 May 1943, he committed suicide in London by turning on the gas in his apartment. He left letters addressed to the president of the Polish republic, Wladyslaw Rackiewicz, and the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile, Wladyslaw Sikorski, which included these words:

“Responsibility for the murder of the entire Jewish population lies primarily with the murderers themselves, but indirectly humanity as a whole is responsible – all of the Allied nations and their Governments, who to date have done nothing to stop the crime... By their indifference to the killing of millions of hapless men, to the massacre of women and children, these countries have become accomplices of the assassins ... Of the three and a half million Polish Jews, no more than three hundred thousand remained alive in April 1943... And the extermination continues...

... I cannot keep quiet; I cannot live while the remnants of the Jewish people in Poland, who sent me here, are being destroyed. My comrades in the Warsaw Ghetto have died a hero's death in the final battle, with a weapon in their hands. I did not have the honour to fall like them. But I belong to them and to their grave – their mass grave. May my death be a resounding cry of protest against the indifference with which the world looks at the destruction of the Jewish world, looks on and does nothing to stop it...

... I know how little a human life is worth today. However, while I could not do anything during my life, perhaps with my death I will help to break the indifference of they who have the ability to save now, perhaps at the last moment, the still living Polish Jews...

... My life belongs to the Jewish people in Poland and, therefore, I give it to them.”

Karski was stunned to hear of Zygielbojm's suicide. *“I felt as though I had personally handed Zygielbojm his death warrant, even though I had only been the instrument... ... Zygielbojm's death did not have a shadow of consolation. It was self-imposed and utterly hopeless... I wonder*

now how many people can understand what it means to die as he did for a cause that would be victorious, yet with the certain knowledge that victory would not stave off the sacrifice of his people, the annihilation of all that was most meaningful to him. Of all the deaths that have taken place in the war, surely Zygielbojm's is one of the most frightening, the sharpest revelation of the extent to which the world has become cold and unfriendly, nations and individuals separated by immense gulfs of indifference, selfishness and convenience. All too plainly, it marks the fact that the domination of mutual suspicion, estrangement, and lack of sympathy has progressed so far that even those who wish and strive for a remedy by every possible means are powerless and able to accomplish pitifully little."²

Zygielbojm suicide did make international news. He did draw further attention to the murder of the Jewish people by his self sacrifice. For a number of weeks his story was talked about then quickly forgotten. Time Magazine, in the United States wrote about Zygielbojm's suicide, May 31, 1943.

"All his life Zygmunt Zygielbojm fought the good fight for the Jewish people of Warsaw. When the Germans came he organized workmen's battalions. At the hour of surrender he stood before the Germans, defying them in a fiery speech and prophesying: "We shall perish, but we will never go to your ghetto."

Zygielbojm's wife & children perished in the terror that followed. But the Jews helped Zygielbojm to escape. He carried their appeals and exhortations to France, then to America and to Britain. There he became a member of the Polish National Council, was in continuous touch with the Polish underground.

From those who escaped Zygielbojm learned the full story of the battle of the Warsaw ghetto, in which the Jews killed 1,000 Nazis before they were slaughtered or packed and locked in box cars until they smothered to death. The last visitor also brought a message wrung out of the bitterness and frustration of the Jews who still survive.

The message said that if Jewish leaders abroad had not forgotten the misery of their race, they should go to the U.S. Embassy and the British Foreign Office and stay there until arrested—and, if arrested, they should go on a hunger strike until death. But the ghetto despaired of action: "At 11 in the morning you will begin telling . . . [the exiled Jewish leaders] about the anguish of the Jews in Poland, but at 1 o'clock they will ask you to halt the narrative so they can have lunch. That is a difference which cannot be bridged."

Alone in his room in London, Zygielbojm sat brooding over the message. The U.S.-British conference at Bermuda had ended in rationalizations. The disease of anti-Semitism festered among the exiled Poles and throughout the world was infecting minds which thrived on prejudice and bigotry. Zygielbojm was only one man, and a tired one. He went to a closet, took down a bottle of poison and drank it."³

Whether Zygielbojm died by drinking poison or turning on the gas in his flat did not matter. He was dead. By his own wishes, and in symbolic sympathy with the millions of Jews who were

converted into *Luftmenschen* in the ovens of Nazi killing centers, Zygielbojm's body was cremated. His cremation became a bigger long term problem than his death.

The exigencies of the war, the excuse of the need to prosecute the war to the fullest and not focus on saving Jews, even amongst the Jews, returned to the central objective. Zygielbojm was quickly replaced by another Jew, Emanuel Scherer.

Dr. Itzhak Schwarzbart, was one of the most accomplished Jewish political leaders in pre-War Poland. A lawyer, a devoted Zionist, having served as deputy to every Zionist Congress in the inter-war period, a brilliant speaker and publicist, highly respected, he was one of only five Jews elected to the Polish Sejm. Schwarzbart escaped with the Polish government in 1939 and made his way to London being fully endorsed to represent Polish Jewry by Polish Zionist groups on Palestine and the Agudat Israel, the Jewish religious movement. Schwarzbart regarded himself as the legitimate spokesman of Polish Jewry and took every opportunity to assert that position.

Relations between the secular Bundist Zygielbojm and the Zionist Schwarzbart were far from harmonious.

Schwarzbart, like Zygielbojm, came to view their respective jobs as doing their utmost to support Polish Jewry with a particular bent toward their political constituencies. Schwarzbart took a very Zionist interpretation of what he was trying to do.

Theodor Herzl had made clear in his Zionist writings that Palestine was not the home for all the Jews. It would be a home and refuge for those Jews who chose to move there. The establishment of the Jewish state would be the mechanism to normalize world Jewry and gain and respect and acceptance for Jews, hence, ending the reasons for anti-Semitism.

Schwarzbart was a realist. He hoped for the establishment of a permanent Jewish home in Palestine as promised in the Balfour Declaration. But, like most Jews, including Zionists, he had serious doubts that it would ever come about. As a pragmatist, he believed that someday Germany would be defeated and the Jews would largely stay in Poland. The issues of Polish anti-Semitism would be addressed and redressed. The New Poland, after the war, would be a Poland that would guarantee full civil rights and equality to the Jew. To that end, in parallel with Zygielbojm, he worked to maintain and improve Polish-Jewish relations both on and through the Polish Government in Exile in London. Unlike Zygielbojm, Schwarzbart understood that a law assuring the end to anti-Semitic distinctions in Poland would assure the change of attitudes on the ground.

Ultimately, in the eyes of Polish Nationalists, Schwarzbart remained a Jew. It was not until the information brought by a Catholic, Jan Karski, that it became painfully clear that Polish hostility to Jewry, even in the face of Nazi common atrocities, had not abated. Both his and Zygielbojm's efforts to send aid to Polish Jewry was at best luke warm and frequently sabotaged by the Polish government in Exile.

As Schwarzbart's constituency died he sunk into a deeper and deeper depressed resolution. He had received reports of the early development of the Holocaust, even before Zygielbojm, yet he

too could do little about it. His high moral hopes that the dissemination of the information would stir the Allies to do something about the mass murder of Jews quickly proved, devastatingly, fruitless.

Gargantuan efforts with the Polish Government in Exile by Schwarzbart did have one success. December 10, 1942, the Polish Foreign Minister issued a moral call to the Allied governments to do something about the murder of the Jews. A week later, December 17, 1942 the governments of the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and the French National committee issued a declaration threatening the Nazis that they would be brought to justice for crimes against the Jews. The declaration of Justice was transmitted throughout the world. In the end, it too, came to no result.

Schwarzbart and Zygielbojm cooperated in joint calls for help to Polish Jews.

Unrealistically, Schwarzbart urged that the Polish Home Army be used to attack the extermination camps. The proposal was rejected. Promises to Schwarzbart that Jewish Palestinian parachutists would be sent to aid the Jews were never honored.

Zygielbojm, distressed beyond comprehension, depressed, protested in the only way he felt possible by killing himself. Schwarzbart remained and struggled on with no virtually no help, other than a few words, for the Jews of Poland.

Schwarzbart wrote in his diary, May 18, 1943,”

Blackness all around: The Jewish question in Europe has been eliminated almost completely. It appears that we shall not get the Land of Israel. Jews of Great Britain-a lost position...Russian Jews-remnants destined for assimilation. I do not see a way out. There is only extermination (p. 238).

On December 1, 1943, Schwarzbart wrote: “This is the end of Polish Jewry. Lord, my spirit is broken. Truly, there is nothing to live for.”⁴

Schwarzbart remained at his post until March, 1945. He immigrated to America and continued to work for Jewish and Zionist causes until his death in 1961.

The war ended. Most of Polish Jewry had been exterminated. The *Final Solution* had largely been successful. Many of the surviving Bundists immigrated to America where they established themselves largely in New York and the North East of the United States. The booming American postwar American economy, the incredible acceptance of Jews and the extraordinary lack of European anti-Semitism, quickly and increasingly made Bundist philosophy irrelevant in America. As the older generation of Jewish immigrants, from the 1900-1930, died off, Bundist influence diminished with them. In 1955, the Bundists, now realigned as the Jewish Labor Movement, reluctantly accepted a legitimate role for the existence of the State of Israel in their philosophy. Their hostility to basic Zionism remained.

Schwarzbart was forgotten but the story of Zygielbojm and his refusal to accede to Nazi degradation was not. In 1959, a surviving son of Schmuel Zygielbojm found the cremains of his father in a shed in a Jewish cemetery in Golder's Green, in London. He had been denied a Jewish burial. Jews, even Jews who are atheists, openly hostile to Jewish religious values are entitled to a Jewish burial in the consecrated ground of a Jewish cemetery. Zygielbojm was not because he had been cremated. The fact that he had died and was cremated in a protest to try and save Jewish lives did not matter. He had violated basic premises of Jewish faith and could not be buried properly in the cemetery. Zygielbojm's son, with the assistance of the American Bundist and Jewish Labor Movement, brought his ashes to America. They all felt he would be given proper and better respect in New York than he would have in Israel. Zygielbojm, in life and in death, was not a Zionist.



1961, before a respectful assemblage of 3,000, a permanent memorial and a proper funerary resting place in the New Mount Carmel Jewish Cemetery on Long Island was erected.



Another 35 years would pass before Zygielbojm and his heroic efforts for the Jewish people were remembered again. “In May 1996 a memorial plaque was unveiled on the corner of Porchester Road and Porchester Square, London W2, in a ceremony attended by the Polish ambassador, Zygielbojm's family in America, the mayor of Westminster and around 200 people, including holocaust survivors, anti-racist activists, Polish socialists and others.

At the unveiling a speech was made by David Rosenberg of the Jewish Socialists' Group and Zygielbojm's last letter was read in Yiddish and English by Esther Brunstein and Julia Bard.

The unveiling was followed by a memorial meeting addressed by: Perec Zylberberg (World Coordinating Committee of the Bund), Ryszard Stempowski (Polish Ambassador), Majer Bogdanski (Bundist veteran and JSG member), David Cesarani (historian), and Zygielbojm's daughter in law Adele and grandchildren Paul and Arthur.”, [5](#), [6](#)

In Poland, a memorial to Zygielbojm was erected in Warsaw.



There are no memorials to the Zionist, Dr. Schwarzbart.

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www.JASHP.org

[1](http://www.wallenberg.umich.edu/karski.html) <http://www.wallenberg.umich.edu/karski.html>

[2](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/terrible_choice/ter006.html#Zygielbojm) http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/terrible_choice/ter006.html#Zygielbojm

[3](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,851704,00.html#ixzz1MzFhUI23) <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,851704,00.html#ixzz1MzFhUI23>

[4](http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203217.pdf) http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203217.pdf

[5](http://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/history2.html#4) <http://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/history2.html#4>

[6](#) Photo of Zygielbojm plaque courtesy of Mr. Gordon Kenward, the London representative of JASHP.

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