

origin in the 8th and 9th grades had scored just 60-70% of the results of their peers. By 11th grade, these figures had deteriorated even further, to 40-60%.

Focusing on education is the right – in fact only – way to absorb Ethiopian Jews in Israel. We must recognize this, while admit-

ting the truth. It was obvious to her that she could succeed, here and in New York.

She is most definitely a good representative of those immigrants who have come to Israel from all corners of the globe; but more, she is the model of a young, able person with a very Israeli drive to evolve, develop and break free.

I am confident that she will go on to represent Israel with loyalty and skill in some capacity, and that all of us, newcomers and old-timers, will be the better for it.

*The writer is the director general of the United Jewish Communities, Israel; and was a judge on the TV program The Ambassador.*

## Why Poland holds out on property claims

• By STEWART WEISS

This past week saw a worldwide celebration of completing the latest seven-year cycle of Talmud study known as the *daf yomi*. In what was certainly one of the more emotional gatherings, the cycle was completed in the place it all began 82 years ago. Rabbis and laymen met in Lublin to study in the same building that once housed the renowned yeshiva Chachmei Lublin, whose founder, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, first came up with the idea of learning one folio of the Oral Law each day.

But there was something even more remarkable about this particular event in Lublin: For the first time since World War II the yeshiva building, which for many years housed a Polish medical school, has now reverted back to the ownership of the Jewish community.

What happened in Lublin is a metaphor for what is taking place all over Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland. Sixty years after Auschwitz, Holocaust survivors, or their heirs, are coming forward to claim property and assets that, by some estimates, total as much as \$500 billion. But while some cases have been successfully resolved, the road to compensation is long and steep.

A case in point highlighting the difficulty in reclamation is that of Henryk Pikielny. His grandfather, Mojzesz, founded a textile factory in Lodz in 1889, producing fabrics for women's clothing. During the war, the Nazis seized the factory, and continued to operate it.

Mojzesz perished in the Warsaw Ghetto, his wife in the Studhof concentration camp. But Henryk survived the death camps and returned to Lodz, finding the factory still in operation but now under the control of a communist, government-appointed authority.

Forced to leave Poland in

1946 due to anti-Semitic violence against returning Jews, Henryk went first to Brazil and then to Paris. For decades he tried to reclaim his family's factory; to no avail, despite an admission by Lodz authorities that he held the deed.

When the communist regime collapsed in Poland in 1990, Pikielny petitioned the new government for compensation. Not only were his appeals rejected, he was told, in 1992, that his property had been nationalized and he would receive nothing for it.

After going through the Polish court system, as well as meeting with the Polish minister of justice, Pikielny has now brought his suit to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. As a signatory to the Human Rights Convention of the European Union, which Poland joined last May, the Poles are legally bound to follow the dictates of the court.

But collection will not be easy. Despite the Poles agreeing in 1997 to return Jewish communal properties – such as the Lublin yeshiva – to Jewish auspices, less than 10 percent has actually changed hands. And the official posture toward private

properties is far more resistant.

Poland is concerned that if a precedent is set there will be a flood of lawsuits seeking to regain Jewish assets. Three million Polish Jews – 10 percent of the total population – were murdered in the Shoah. Many cities had large Jewish populations – Lodz, for example, whose 220,000 Jews made up more than a third of the populace.

*It fears that a precedent could release a flood of lawsuits seeking to regain Jewish assets*

The Poles fear that as many as 180,000 claims to property could be filed, at a value of \$20-40 billion, threatening their economy. And Jews were not the only Poles to lose property; hundreds of thousands of non-Jews would also likely jump on the bandwagon. Thus, despite the willingness of other European states such as East Germany, Romania, Hungary and Estonia to make restitution, Poland – with the most to lose – is

holding out.

This has not deterred a determined Henryk Pikielny, however. Now 76, he remains hopeful: "The Nazis stole my past, but Poland – if it claims to be democratic – can still restore my legacy."

Pikielny is encouraged by the emergence of several advocacy groups, such as the New York Legal Assistance Group, the Holocaust Restitution Committee, and Legacy ([www.polishlegacy.4t.com](http://www.polishlegacy.4t.com)), which have come forward to represent survivors' rights and seek fair compensation for them.

Legacy's founder, Solomon Taub of Israel, was able to reclaim his own family's apartment building in Krakow, and now represents dozens of clients seeking to recover their ancestral property. He laments that the effort is coming so late, but understands why: "Jews were too busy trying to make new lives after the horror of the Shoah, too busy trying to build their future to pursue their past claims. Only now, when they are finally settled and have found their place, are they ready to reclaim that which is rightfully theirs."

Still, Taub is realistic about their fight for what is right: "Justice – such as it is – may only arrive in the generations to come."

Will these attempts at compensation serve to intensify Polish anti-Semitism? Taub lets out a bitter laugh. "And when we were good Polish citizens, there wasn't anti-Semitism?"

Jehuda Evron, president of the Holocaust Restitution Committee, is more blunt: "Do we survivors really want to leave these billions of dollars as a present to Poland, a place where three million of our people were murdered?"

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A PROPERTY in Krakow, which was recently returned to its original family owners. The lower level of the 12-apartment building is currently being turned into business premises.

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