

the algemeiner

Polish National Bank Issues Coin Honoring Anti-Communist Leader Accused of Murdering Jews

by Ben Cohen
March 7, 2023

Poland's National Bank has announced that it will issue a special silver coin commemorating a leading figure in the post-war anti-communist underground who was accused of murdering Jews in the country's Podhale region.

The coin honoring Józef Kuraś, to be issued on March 15, forms part of a series commemorating the “doomed soldiers” who fought the Soviet Union's takeover of Poland in the aftermath of World War II. Kuraś joined the anti-Nazi resistance in 1939, emerging as a leading figure in



the anti-communist movement in April 1945. For nearly two years, units of Kuraś's “Błyskawica” organization were active in southern and central Poland. In Jan. 1947, Kuraś is understood to have committed suicide rather than be taken prisoner by the communist authorities amid a gun battle in the village of Ostrowsko.

Kuraś's nom-de-guerre was “Ogien” — Polish for “fire,” a moniker he adopted after his wife, father and baby son were murdered and burned in their own home by German Gestapo agents in June 1943.

Several historians have charged that Kuraś was responsible for the murder of dozens of Jews in the Podhale region during his struggle against the communists. In his book “Fear:

Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz,” Prof. Jan Gross of Princeton University described Kuraś as as “legendary outlaw in the mountainous region of Podhale, where he battled the regime by killing Jews who were fleeing Poland by one of the Brikha exit routes.”

Gross specified that Kuraś had recorded the murder of Jews in his diary, citing the killing of twelve Jews near the village of Kroscienko on May 6, 1944.

A separate article by Karolina Panz — a Polish historian based in the town of Nowy Targ, where Kuraś was active — concluded that during 1945-47, “the number of Jewish victims exceeded thirty, including children from Jewish orphanages. Among the perpetrators of those acts of terror were partisans from the group commanded by Józef Kuraś ‘Ogień’ – one of the most important symbols of anti-communist resistance.”

Poland’s leading anti-racist organization condemned the coin’s issuance as another example of the Polish state lionizing wartime figures with established records of antisemitism.

“Since the publication of Jan Gross’s groundbreaking books in the 2000s, Poland made a lot of progress as a democratic nation in dealing with the legacy of antisemitism – but over the last years much of that progress has been reversed and a far-right nationalist outlook on Polish history has prevailed in many institutions,” Rafal Pankowski, executive director of the “Never Again” Association, told *The Algemeiner* in an email.

“This is one more instance of a glorification of a notorious antisemitic figure by an important state institution,” Pankowski added.

<https://www.algemeiner.com/2023/03/07/polish-national-bank-issues-coin-honoring-anti-communist-leader-accused-of-murdering-jews>