

# Protests by Polish Anti-Fascist Group Lead to Withdrawal of Antisemitic Figurines From Parliament Gift Shop in Warsaw

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One of Poland's leading anti-racist organizations has successfully prevented the continued sale of antisemitic figurines at a gift shop inside the Polish Parliament building in Warsaw, following several weeks of quiet protest.

Rafal Pankowski — a Warsaw-based scholar and cofounder of the anti-fascist organization “Nigdy Wiecej” (Never Again) — told The Algemeiner on Thursday that his group had raised the issue earlier this year, after he noticed that the figurines — which depicted Jews as wealthy moneylenders and financiers — were on sale at the shop. Among those with whom the issue was raised was Warsaw's deputy mayor, Michał Olszewski. However, a subsequent visit to the shop by one of Pankowski's associates revealed that the figurines were still on sale.

Last week, at a meeting at the office of Polish Human Rights Commissioner Adam Bodnar, Pankowski again publicly protested the sale of the figurines, notifying the Polish media and a number of Polish MPs as to their availability at the Parliament shop. According to Pankowski, the dolls were removed from sale following the intervention of the speaker of the Polish Parliament, Marek Kuchcinski.

Pankowski said the figurines “represent a deeply-rooted negative stereotype of the greedy Jew in the Polish culture.”

“They have become widespread in Poland in the last two decades or so; in fact, they were not widespread before that,” he noted. A Vice investigation published earlier this week observed that such figurines are regarded by many Poles as a positive good luck charm, with one wood-carver claiming that he made the figurines to “honor” of the memory of Poland's Jewish population, 90 percent of whom were murdered during the Nazi Holocaust.

Abraham Foxman, the national director emeritus of the Anti-Defamation League and the head of an antisemitism study program at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York, told The Algemeiner on Tuesday that the figurines were “classic antisemitism, cultural antisemitism.”

Foxman recounted that he had met two years ago with the Polish education minister, who told him that the figurines should be seen as a compliment. “I said, “That's a compliment that led to Auschwitz,” he recalled. Foxman pointed out that the antisemitic association of Jews with financial greed was not restricted to the Nazi period. “Even after the war, Jews were killed in Poland because they were seen as having money,” he said.

Antisemitic crimes in France over the last decade were a more recent example of where the association of Jews with money can lead, Foxman went on to say. In 2006, Ilan Halimi, a young French Jew, was kidnapped, tortured and eventually murdered by a gang that confessed to seizing him because “Jews have money.” Just last month, Paris Jewish community leader Roger Pinto, his wife Mireille, and their son David were taken hostage in their own home by a gang whose leader told them, “We know that the Jews have a lot of money and you will give us what you have.”

Pankowski said that while there were worse examples of contemporary antisemitism in Poland, the ongoing social acceptance of the figurines was “very symbolic.”

“It shows a climate of tolerance of antisemitism by some Polish institutions,” he added. “Despite the climate, we at ‘Never Again’ are determined to monitor and fight antisemitism in Poland now and in the future, too.”

Foxman stressed that the problem of the figurines' continued sale at outlets all over Poland could not be resolved by a ban. "You have to educate about it," he said. "They need to educate at the schools, and then maybe this problem will go away." Today, Foxman said, "you walk outside the Parliament building, and there it is."

*<https://www.algemeiner.com/2017/10/17/protests-by-polish-anti-fascist-group-lead-to-withdrawal-of-antisemitic-figurines-from-parliament-gift-shop-in-warsaw/>*