



**Our reference: 083017**

23 September 2008

Wiktor Moszczynski Esq  
Federation of Poles in Great Britain  
240 King Street  
London  
W6 0RF

Dear Mr Moszczynski

I write further to my email dated 10 September.

I have now received a response from Sally Baker, Feedback Editor at The Times, a copy of which is enclosed.

As you will see, Ms Baker has made the following central points: Giles Coren's article was an opinion column, in which he was entitled to express controversial views; anti-Semitism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries included instances of Jews being burnt in synagogues by ethnic Poles; the newspaper published five letters on the matter in the week following the article; more than 60 online comments were published; and the letters in the newspaper and online constituted a fair opportunity to reply.

Before a decision can be taken as to how this matter might be best taken forward, I would be very interested in your response in light of Ms Baker's letter, and any further comments you may wish to make.

I look forward, to your response, within the next seven days if at all possible. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to talk the matter over.

Yours sincerely

Hannah Beveridge  
[hannah.beveridge@pcc.org.uk](mailto:hannah.beveridge@pcc.org.uk)

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# THE TIMES

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19 September 2008

RECEIVED  
23 SEP 2008

Hannah Beveridge  
Press Complaints Commission  
Halton House  
20/23 Holborn  
London EC1N 2JD

Your ref: 083017/083258/083278

Dear Ms Beveridge,

Thank you for your letter dated September 11 regarding the complaints from Professor Jędrzej Frynas and Wiktor Moszczynski.

Anti-Semitism in Poland before, during and just after the Second World War is well documented and has prompted much anguish and public soul-searching among politicians and church leaders in the years since. A brief search on the internet quickly reveals the depths of anger on both sides at the very mention of the two most frequently referenced atrocities by Poles against Jews, at Jedwabne in 1941 (where at least 340 Jews were herded into a barn by some of their Polish neighbours, doused with kerosene and set on fire) and Kielce in 1946 (both alluded to in Mr Moszczynski's letter). As with the Israelis and Palestinians, this is a bitter feud that will never be resolved in the columns of a national newspaper. That does not mean, however, that newspapers should shy away from discussing it.

Giles Coren's column was clearly identified as Opinion. The views in it were his, not those of The Times. He feels that his single use of the term "Polack" was not out of context in a column whose overall tone was highly critical of Poland and its people; Mr Moszczynski asserts that the term is now deemed unacceptable in American national media, but here in Britain, so far at least, we are not so fearful of spurious litigation or so in thrall to so-called political correctness.

Mr Coren stands by his assertion that the history of Polish anti-Semitism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries includes instances of Jews being burnt in their synagogues by ethnic Poles, who are de facto the ancestors of modern Poles – it matters not who the leaders were who sanctioned the actions, nor that the boundaries between ethnic Poles

and their neighbours were then different from those of modern Poland. Mr Coren cites the following:

“A different kind of anti-Jewish violence took place in the province of Posen during the Polish uprising of 1848. Poles attacked Jews mainly because they considered them allies of the Germans. In terms of violence, these riots may have been worse than elsewhere. Several Jews were killed, some with great brutality. Rioters burned down synagogues and tore Torah scrolls to shreds.” (From *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945*, by Marion A. Kaplan, OUP)

“The massacres of Tetiev commenced on March 26, 1920. The Jewish population has been hiding in cellars, in houses and in the synagogues. In one synagogue 2,000 persons sought safety. The bandits set fire to it and nearly all perished, a very few only escaped death. The witness who told us these facts stated that in all perhaps ten persons were saved, for whenever anybody jumped out of the window, he was instantly shot at... After Ostrovsky's speech the bandits dispersed throughout the township and began a veritable orgy of murder, arson and looting. Without mercy they burnt and massacred everybody. In the synagogue all the lofts were full of Jews trying to hide. The insurgents surrounded the synagogue, set it on fire and let no one escape. The following incident is typical. A Mr. Peker, who was very popular among the peasants, escaped from the burning synagogue. The bandits got hold of him and were going to cut him up with their sabres when some peasants came to his defence. Kurovsky, the head of the band, approached and said, "He may be the best of them, but since he is a Jew, he must be killed." And Peker was cut up into pieces. All those who took refuge in the synagogue were burnt alive. Those who attempted to escape were killed with sabres, with rifles, with pitchforks or clubs... We were able to obtain the following information from a survivor who had remained at Tetiev all that time. Where Tetiev formerly was only ruins remain. Hundreds of corpses are scattered all over the little town; some were done to death by sabres and others burnt alive... The insurgents had the active support of the Bank of Tetiev and of the local Poles [my emphasis].” (From *Pogroms in the Ukraine Under the Ukrainian Government (1917-1920)* by the Committee of Jewish Delegations, Paris 1927).

“A number of recorded acts of anti-Jewish violence seem to have been aimed primarily at accelerating this process, and they bear the imprint of unadorned terror... On Saturday, August 11, 1945, a mob attacked the synagogue and Jewish hostel on Miodowa St. in the old Jewish quarter of Krakow, beating the residents and worshippers, destroying their property, burning Torah scrolls, and killing one elderly Jewish woman.” (From *Patterns Of Anti-Jewish Violence In Poland, 1944-1946*, by David Engel, published on [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org))

“Even before the Germans arrived, anti-Semitism broke out again. Some Poles burned our synagogue; other broke into houses and robbed everything. Also the government stores got robbed. As soon as the Germans arrived, many Polish people offered their help in identifying who was Jewish and who was not. Most of the nice Jewish houses were taken by the Germans, others by Polish people.” (From [www.michaliszki.org](http://www.michaliszki.org) “Telling the story of a small Polish town before, during and after the Second World War”)

Mr Moszczynski has quite wrongly interpreted Mr Coren's reference to this as being "casual" and "amusing" – Mr Coren merely couched his deeply-felt personal anger in his typical satirical journalistic style. Mr Coren is further entitled to the opinion that immigrants who are disillusioned with Britain might consider returning to their home country.

Mindful that Mr Coren's column was highly controversial and indeed prejudiced, as it is entitled to be on the Opinion pages of The Times, we published in the days following a total of five letters on the matter from the many we received, the first three (including one from the Ambassador) highly critical of the column; three letters is a proportionate response. The Ambassador's letter addressed the heroism of Poles in assisting Jews and the many apologies to the Jewish community from Polish political leaders; and a letter from a Professor of Holocaust Studies at the US Holocaust Museum quoted the apology for the Jedwabne atrocity expressed by the Polish President in 2001. Two further letters later that week continued the debate. You have copies of all the letters.

We also published more than 60 hostile comments beneath the column online. Contrary to Mr Moszczynski's outdated claim, Times Online – in common with the online editions of all quality newspapers – constitutes a legitimate edition of The Times; the fact is that Mr Coren's column was published simultaneously in the newspaper and online, and the latter reaches a larger – and more global – audience than the former. The online debate contained in the comments posted below the column are an integral and vital part of the balance that The Times has sought to provide to the Coren column, and it is blinkered in the extreme to dismiss it as "a distraction"; the reality of modern media is quite otherwise. Taken together, the letters in the newspaper and the online debate constituted in our view a fair right of reply.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sally Baker". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Sally Baker  
Feedback Editor