

## JERZY ŁOŚ AND A HISTORY OF ABELIAN GROUPS IN POLAND

DANIEL SIMSON

**1. A birthday.** The Polish mathematical school before 1939, that is, before the Second World War, concentrated most of its research potential and mathematical activity on a few branches including set theory, number theory, topology, functional analysis, complex analysis, foundation of mathematics and logic. Algebra was not represented as an independent field. In a strict sense, algebra did not exist at that time in Poland. However, many of the leading Polish mathematicians, in particular K. Borsuk (1905–1982), K. Kuratowski (1896–1980) and W. Sierpiński (1882–1969), realized perfectly well this abnormal situation because they realized at least the importance of algebraic methods in topology. Unfortunately, some of the distinguished Polish analysts did not understand the role of abstract algebra in modern mathematics. One of them was Władysław Orlicz (1903–1990), who in the late seventies said to me several times: “Algebra does not simplify things, it just makes them much more complicated than they are”.

Fortunately, after the Second World War in 1945, Kuratowski (who was the head of the Polish Academy of Sciences) and Borsuk initiated a discussion on a restoration program for Polish mathematics, including the existence of algebra. It seems to me that Kuratowski’s view of the role algebra plays in modern mathematics was influenced a lot by his former student Samuel Eilenberg (1913–1998), who was one of the leading persons at that time in developing homological algebra in cooperation with S. MacLane and E. Cartan (see the papers [11], [12], [13] and the book [7]).

We recall that Eilenberg was born 30 September 1913 in Warsaw. He received the Ph.D. degree from Warsaw University shortly before the Second World War under the supervision of Kuratowski. On 27 April 1939 he emigrated from Poland to the United States (see [34] for details).

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