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TADEUSZ WOLSZA
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4652-2838
The Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History
of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

'A FIGHTER FOR SECURITY TO ISOLATE THE CLASS ENEMY': THE PRISON GUARD AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN 1944/45–1956

A b s t r a c t: The article provides readers with figures and information about the Prison Guard and Service in various detention facilities in post-war Poland until 1956. The author analyses several detailed topics, like preparation for the job, staff shortages in the various penal institutions as well as prison officers' (quite often sadistic) attitudes towards political prisoners.
K e y w o r d s: repressions, prison service and guard, harassment, physical and psychological terror, penal institution.

With the entry into Poland of the Red Army in 1944 and the growing Sovietization of the country, Polish communists — supported by the so-called Sovietniks and NKVD — began to take over various detention facilities, including prisons and former German concentration camps. At the same time the Soviets created their own prison system for the needs of the NKVD's activities, including large-scale repressions against the Polish underground and democratic opposition. Today the number of NKVD camps and sub-camps is estimated at over one hundred.[1] Camps located in Ciechanów, Działdowo, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Grudziądz, Poznań, Oświęcim, Cracow, Rembertów and Trzebuska Małopolska served as transit sites from which the Soviets sent the inmates farther east. In addition, the NKVD supervised several classic special-purpose prisons in Poland. They were used as collection sites from which prisoners were sent east as well as sites where death sentences were carried

[1] Tadeusz Wolsza, 'GUŁag i deportacje na wschód: Pierwszy etap sowietyzacji Polski 1944–1945', in *GUŁag: Struktury — kadry — więźniowie*, ed. Dariusz Rogut and Wojciech Śleszyński, Białystok, 2018, pp. 81–87 (p. 86).

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out (for example on collaborators with the Third Reich). I mean here the following penal institutions: Białystok (transition site), Montelupi prison in Cracow (NKVD special prison), Lublin Castle (NKVD special prison), Sanok (NKVD special prison) and Wołów (NKVD special prison).[2] After several months of inspection of the sites by the NKVD, all of them, with the exception of the Wołów prison, were transferred to the Polish Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego — MBP).

From the very beginning of the communist prison system, the prison staff was a serious problem. Only a dozen or so penal institutions saw some of their pre-war governors and lower-rank officers return to work.[3] Managerial positions in prisons were entrusted primarily to Polish Army

[2] Ibid.

[3] Krystian Bedyński, 'Przedwojenni funkcjonariusze straży więziennej naczelnikami więzień w latach 1944–1949', *Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego*, 1999, 24/25, pp. 83–101. The author of this extremely interesting article has noted that some of the penal institution staff — experienced prison officers who were given leadership positions from 1945 onwards — were gradually eliminated. The communists would look for evidence of their, for example, harassment of communist prisoners in the inter-war period, hostile attitude to 'people's democracy', collaboration with the Germans, and violation of prison rules and regulations. To this end they used, for example, gossip, denunciations, complaints as well as ambiguous moments in the officers' biographies. The author gives the most characteristic examples: Stefan Adamczewski (Wronki), Julian Maciejewski (Poznań), Mieczysław Butwiłowicz (Sztum), Józef Sapko (Płock, Częstochowa) and Jan Zygaj (Wiśnicz). All of them were dismissed by the Ministry of Public Security before the end of 1945, while Zygmunt Grabowski (Rawicz) was kidnapped and them murdered by 'unknown perpetrators' (pp. 92–93). The findings have been confirmed by, for example, Krzysztof Czermiński, author of a monograph on the Sztum prison. As he stresses, 'After the opening in 1945 of the Polish prison in Sztum, the first officer dismissed for political reasons was its governor, Mieczysław Butwiłowicz. Another governor, Piotr Kowalski, was revealed in the early 1950s as a former soldier of the 27th Volhynia Division of the Home Army and was eventually arrested'. Krzysztof Czermański, *Więzienie w Sztumie w epoce totalitaryzmów 1933–1956*, Pelplin, 2014, pp. 195–200. Krzysztof Szwagrzyk has managed to establish that those dismissed after the war included Jan Zaniewski, a member of staff of the Kłodzko prison, an experienced officer who had worked for many years in the Krzemieniec prison. Another fired governor was Józef Durmała from Jawor, who in 1931–39 had been a guard at the Pińczów prison. The last victim of communist repressions in Lower Silesia was Tadeusz Drewicz, who until 1944 had worked in penal institutions in Ostrołęka, Siedlce and Warsaw. Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, 'Kadry Straży (Służby) Więziennej na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1956', in *W służbie prawdy: Prace historyczne dedykowane Zbigniewowi Nawrockiemu (1959–2017)*, ed. Tomasz Balbus and Jerzy Bednarek, Warsaw, 2019, pp. 347–62 (pp. 355–56). The Ministry of Public Security's documents from 1947 show that between January and September that year 1,800 prison officers were dismissed from their jobs. An official from the Ministry of Security stressed in his argumentation that 'on the one hand this is a positive moment, a cleansing of the cadre, but on the other it shows that we don't know how to educate.' *Protokoły z odpraw, zjazdów i narad kierownictwa Departamentu Więziennictwa Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego z naczelnikami więzień i obozów pracy (1944–1954)*, ed. Marek Jabłonowski and Włodzimierz Janowski, Warsaw, 2006, p. 109.

officers trained in the Soviet Union, for example in Kuibyshev. However, they were not sufficiently prepared for working in the prison service. Their only characteristic was hatred of the underground soldiers as well as members of the democratic opposition and the clergy. If the situation demanded it, they could also use a wide range of repressions against already marginalized and imprisoned communist party activists.[4] They blindly carried out orders of their superiors from the Ministry of Public Security as well as the Polish Workers' Party (later Polish United Workers' Party). In any case, the communist party attached considerable weight to the problem of the prison system. Its leadership always included a special central-level official responsible for prisons.

The staff of the various prisons and camps were headed by a governor or commandant. For the purposes of indoctrination and control the communists established a new position — political officer (the so-called special unit, commonly referred to as *spec*), whose place in the hierarchy was right below the governor. In addition, each institution had three divisions: administrative, labour and economic divisions.[5] However, the organizers of the new, Stalinist prison system did not properly resolve the organizational questions relating to the lower-rank personnel. The selection of officers (such as unit officers, corridor officers and guards) was often haphazard. Provincial prisons often filled the lowest positions with local residents with no preparation for working in their new, difficult profession.[6] On the other hand *kalfaktors* (responsible for emptying toilet buckets and distributing the modest meals and water for hygienic purposes) were German criminals, often former SS and Gestapo officers. The ministry also delegated these duties to inmates with short sentences, selected by the various governors. At the same time in 1944 the ministry made Stanisław Kwiatkowski — albeit for a short period — Head of the Department of Prisons at the

[4] Suffice to refer to the findings of Robert Spałek, *Komuniści przeciwko komunistom: Poszukiwanie wroga wewnętrznego w kierownictwie partii komunistycznej w Polsce w latach 1948–1956*, Warsaw and Poznań, 2014, as well as the memoirs of Włodzimierz Lechowicz, *Będziesz przeklinał ten dzień... 2765 dni okrutnych metod śledztwa*, Warsaw, 1989.

[5] Under the *Wstępna instrukcja w sprawie tymczasowej organizacji obozów pracy z maja 1945 r.* (Preliminary instructions concerning temporary organization of labour camps of May 1945), in communist Poland the management consisted of the camp commandant as the leader, his assistants as heads of the various divisions, as well as office, security, workshop and administrative personnel. The document also mention doctors and teachers.

[6] This aspect was noted by, for example, Roman Pietras, who had been governor in Świdnica and Koronowo: Roman Pietras, 'Wspomnienia naczelnika więzień w Świdnicy i Koronowie w latach 1945–1947', *Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego*, 2005, 47/48, pp. 95–107 (p. 98).

Ministry of Public Security. On 1 November 1944 Kwiatkowski was appointed Chief Inspector of the Prison Guard. However, he was dismissed a few months later, after he had sent a letter to all penal institutions banning the creation of party structures in prisons.[7] Undoubtedly the dismissal was influenced by another important episode from the inspector's biography — his service in the profession in the inter-war period: he worked in several prisons (Włodzimierz Wołyński [Volodymyr-in-Volhynia], Wołkowysk [Vaŭkavysk], Równe [Rivne], Baranowicze [Baranavichy], Sandomierz, Wejherowo, Rzeszów and Tarnów) in 1919–39.[8]

Towards the end of 1944 and in early 1945 there began a recruitment processes for prison officers. To this end the Ministry of Public Security conducted several training courses for guards. The first took place as early as in 1944 in the Lublin Castle prison. It was an organizational course for candidates for heads of operational groups in the prison service. Next the ministry selected several dozen officers from among the course participants and sent them across Poland to organize the prison system in the country. May 1945 was marked by the opening of the Central Prison Service School affiliated with the Regional Department of Public Security in Łódź. Another course was organized by the ministry in July 1945 in the Sosnowiec prison; the goal was to train future political officers in prisons and camps. Two months later the School for High-Rank Officers was established at the Mokotów prison. In the autumn of 1947 it was moved to Legionowo, to the Ministry of Public Security's Training Centre. Training for low-rank officers was organized on an ad hoc basis at several detention facilities: Warsaw-Mokotów, Chrusty (a branch of the Jaworzno camp), Łódź and Potulice (a labour camp later transformed into a progressive prison). In 1949 the Central School for Prison Guards was opened in Bartoszyce. It was then moved to Iława (Prison Guard Training Centre). The centre in Iława was designated for future commissioned officers. In the early 1950s the ministry began to organize another school for prison guards, in Szczypiorno near Kalisz, this time for non-commissioned officers.[9] This was slightly later followed by the opening of the Leadership Training Centre in Warsaw.

In one of the first detailed documents concerning unqualified personnel in the prison service, from November 1945, the head of the Personnel Section of the Department of Prisons and Camps at the Ministry of Public

[7] Krystian Bedyński, *Historia więziennictwa Polski Ludowej*, Warsaw, 1988, p. 31.

[8] Idem, 'Stanisław Kwiatkowski — funkcjonariusz więzienny (1919–1939, 1944–1949)', *Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego*, 2010, 67/68, pp. 185–99.

[9] For more on the subject, see Jerzy Czołgoszewski, *Więziennictwo okresu stalinowskiego na Warmii i Mazurach w latach 1945–1956*, Olsztyn, 2002, pp. 61–65.

Security, lieutenant Adam Adamski informed his superiors that out of the 9,237 positions 5,519 had been filled. He went on to discuss the level of education of the personnel: primary school — 1,041, high school — 352, university — 37; there were no data on 4,089 persons, mainly at provincial facilities.[10] The missing data may have concerned those who had not completed any school.[11] This is also the explanation of the idea to organize various training courses. The Ministry of Public Security's documents show that in 1945–47 seven training courses were organized for a total of 1,005 lower-rank officers. At the same time there were courses of higher-rank functionaries (governors, deputy governors and heads of divisions). The number of their graduates was 183. In 1948 a total of 8,211 people across the country worked in the Prison Guard. In this group 3,530 people did not finish primary school, 210 started but did not finish high school and 9 started but did not complete university.[12] The officers filled the gaps in their education by attending courses organized by the ministry. In 1948 courses for higher-rank Prison Guard officers were completed by 115 people, with 64 people completing specialist courses. One year later 128 staff of penal facilities completed courses for higher-rank Prison Guard officers in Legionowo, with 440 individuals completing courses for lower-rank officers in Bartoszyce. In 1950 the Ministry of Public Security planned new courses at the Prison Guard Training Centre in Iława. The first 230 graduates completed their courses within various divisions of the prison service on 23 June 1950. In addition, there were two four-day courses for prison librarians completed by 89 Prison Guard officers (in 1950 there were 67 libraries at 126 facilities). March 1950 was marked by the start of a course for prison bookkeepers, completed by 32 people. Referring to the educational and specialist activities addressed to the Prison Guard in 1945–50, the Head of Department VI of the Ministry of Public Security concluded that the number of people who had undergone training was 'absolutely insufficient to satisfy the needs of the prison service'.[13] In 1950 all detention facilities employed a total of 11,517 people, including 1,158 officers. Staff

[10] Bogusław Kopka, *Gułag nad Wisłą: Komunistyczne obozy pracy w Polsce 1944–1956*, Cracow, 2019, p. 118.

[11] A report prepared by Adam Adamski shows that 80 per cent did not complete primary school, 15 per cent had primary education, 5 per cent completed high school and 0.5 per cent had university education. Ibid., 118.

[12] Mirosław Pietrzyk, *Więzienie w Inowrocławiu w latach 1945–1956*, Bydgoszcz and Gdańsk, 2014, p. 150.

[13] Stanisław Pizło, 'Więziennictwo na obecnym etapie i projektowany kierunek rozwoju na najbliższy okres', 26 June 1950, AAN, Papiery Bieruta, no. I/208, fol. 6.

shortages were estimated at 2,248 people. Taking into account staff shortages at penal institutions across the country, Colonel Stanisław Pizło called for the ministry to increase its support for the Iława school and to expand the new facility in Szczypiorno.

Generally speaking, when analysing the vocational preparation of Prison Guard staff, we have to conclude that the general education level of the prison service leadership was simply tragic. 2 per cent did not complete any school. 61 per cent completed a seven-year primary school. 28 per cent began but did not complete high school. During the war 7 per cent passed their secondary school exams. Finally, 2 per cent completed high school or started but did not complete university.[14] In 1955 the Prison Service had a staff of 15,090, including 2,353 commissioned officers, and 12,737 non-commissioned officers and rank-and-file staff members. Unfortunately, we do not have detailed information about their general education and any specialist courses completed.[15]

In 1956 the level of education improved, although it was still unsatisfactory. This was pointed out by the authors of a report prepared by a commission set up to investigate the situation by the Central Prison Authority. The analysis concerned the entire personnel of the Prison Service. Among the 12,840 prison staff, 30 per cent (that is, over 3,850 people) did not complete the seven-year primary school. 60 per cent (that is, over 7,700) did. Much food for thought — primarily for the communist party leadership, I think — was provided by another conclusion from the report, concerning the leadership of the Central Prison Authority. It turned out that the remarks about the lack of general education within the group also concerned 'the leadership and senior officers'. Finally, there were data on vocational training obtained at specialist courses. That training was also described as insufficient. 'The situation is similar when it comes to vocational training, for only 41 per cent have had the necessary preparation in the form of courses and schools of the Prison Service and the former Internal Security Corps.'[16] At the end the authors of the report concluded that attempts to recruit new candidates to work in the Prison Service from among demobilized soldiers of the Polish Army, Border Protection Troops and Internal Security Corps had not brought the expected and positive results. There were several reasons: low pay, the very low popularity of

[14] Ibid., fol. 5.

[15] Sytuacja więźniów w latach 1955–1956, AIPN, Biuro Udostępniania (hereafter BU), Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych (hereafter MSW), no. I 240, fol. 3.

[16] Włodzimierz Janowski, 'Stan więziennictwa i warunków odbywania kary w początkach 1956 roku, w świetle sprawozdania komisji rządowej', *Teki Archiwalne*, 1998, 3 (25), pp. 201–20 (p. 216).

prison work in society, the colour of the uniform and the impossibility of quickly being allocated housing.[17] These arguments explain another conclusion from the document: that all those who were willing to work in the Prison Service were accepted. 'In this difficult situation, owing to a lack of other possibilities, the Central Prison Authority tolerates a number of people who are not fit for work, be it for health reasons or low general or moral-political level.'[18] Unfortunately, the critical remarks formulated in early 1956 did not lead to positive changes in 1956 and 1957. This can be partly explained by the fact that it was only from 1 November 1956 that prisons became subordinated to the Ministry of Justice (having been earlier supervised by the Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs). In 1957 the level of education of prison guards increased slightly. Among the 11,500 or so staff, about 5,300 had not completed primary school, while 4,700 had already had. 1,100 people were attending various high schools, while 260 had already completed this stage of the education process. What was new was university-level education. It turned out that 20 people had already graduated from a higher education institution, while 20 more were still studying.[19]

The leadership of the Ministry of Public Security attached great importance to the question of party membership in penal institutions and to political training. According to the Department of Prisons and Camps, 'each prison officer in People's Poland must be a fighter for security' and be involved in 'class warfare in order to isolate the class enemy as well as all those who through their criminal activities undermine the foundations of People's Poland'.[20] When it comes to the question of ideological training, it did not begin as a planned and organized activity until the autumn of 1947, when the authorities introduced mandatory press reviews (of dailies and weeklies) as well as tests and exams focused on political themes for prison guards. The first mass exam for prison guards took place in February 1948, with about 85 per cent of prison guards taking part. The results of the exam showed that the political education of prison staff required more efforts and resources to be used for the purpose. Very good grades were given to 12.2 per cent of the guards, good grades — 31.4 per cent, satisfactory — 41.9 per cent and unsatisfactory 14.4 per cent. A slight improvement was observed by the examination commission in July 1948, when the exam was repeated: very good — 15 per cent, good —

[17] Ibid., p. 217.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Notatka o więziennictwie (1957), AAN MSW, no. 1/15, fol. 7.

[20] *Protokoły z odpraw, zjazdów i narad kierownictwa Departamentu Więziennictwa Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, p. 322.

31 per cent, satisfactory — 34 per cent and unsatisfactory — 10 per cent (the data given by the Ministry of Public Security do not show where 10 per cent of the examinees disappeared). In December 1948 and January 1949 a test brought the following results: very good — 17.6 per cent, good — 38.7 per cent, satisfactory — 39.3 per cent and unsatisfactory — 4.4 per cent.[21] The ministry's documents reveal that at some facilities the governors and heads of the various divisions did not pay much attention to political training. In 1947–49 the list included prisons in Białystok, Bielsko, Cieszyn, Fordon, Koronowo, Racibórz, Suwałki and Sztum.

As we analyse the history of the various facilities, we see that the ministry sought to place within the Prison Service as many members of the Polish Workers' Party (and from 1948 Polish United Workers' Party) as possible. This was well described by Jerzy Woźniak, who served his time in prison in Mokotów, Rawicz and Wronki:

> A special role was played by the special division. Called *spece* in the prison slang, they were masters of the inmates' life and death. [...] Leadership positions were occupied by trusted individuals with a communist past or former members of the People's Guard or People's Army. The was also a group of people detached from army units and delegated by the party. They were required to be ruthless in dealing with the enemies of the socialist homeland, spies and — as they called us — servants of the capitalist regime. A vast majority of the prison staff fulfilled the expectations of their bosses. Among the guards many had sadistic inclinations.[22]

Detailed data for 1950 show that the Prison Guard had a staff of 11,517, including 1,158 officers. Among the 123 highest-rank members of the Prison Guard leadership (among whom there were 16 women), only two were not members of the Polish United Workers' Party. They were associated with the United People's Party. It is also worth pointing to the party background of the leadership. 73 people had been active in the Communist Party of Poland and the Young Communist League of Poland, while 48 — in the tolerated Polish Socialist Party. When it comes to the social background of high-rank officers in the leadership of the Prison Service, 79.5 per cent came from working class families, 13.8 per cent from peasant families and 6.7 per cent from the intelligentsia. In 1955, 58 per cent of the prison officers declared a working-class background, while 31 per cent came from 'smallholder' families.[23]

[21] Ibid., pp. 322–23.
[22] Jerzy Woźniak, *Droga do wolnej Polski*, Wrocław, 2011, p. 87.
[23] Marcin Zwolski, *Więzienie w Białymstoku w latach 1944–1956*, Białystok, 2011, p. 63.

In 1956 among the 12,562 prison officers there were 8,138 members of the Polish United Workers' Party, 1,028 of the Union of Polish Youth, while 2,456 were not affiliated. Documents also give us an insight into the data about their social background: 6,641 came from working-class families and 4,781 from peasant families.[24] In the Białystok prison in the early 1950s, 42 per cent of the prison staff declared a working-class background and 58 per cent — a peasant background.[25]

We have fragmentary data on party membership in some prisons, camps and labour facilities for inmates. In 1946 prison officers in the region of Warmia and Mazury (Olsztyn, Barczewo, Szczytno) were predominantly members of the Polish Workers' Party — 52 per cent. Over 40 per cent were not members of any party. In the Milęcin labour camp in 1946 among the 123 officers 82 were members of the Polish Workers' Party and 41 — of the Polish Socialist Party.[26] In the 1950s the level of party membership in the Białystok prison 'was usually between 80 and 90 per cent of the staff, sporadically falling below that level.'[27] In the Inowrocław prison in mid-1945 among the 55 staff 50 joined the Polish Workers' Party.[28] When it comes to the Strzelce Opolskie prison, among its 134 staff 103 people were members of the Polish Workers' Party, 25 of the Polish Socialist Party, 4 of the Union of Youth Struggle and only 2 were not members of any party. As the author of a monograph on this facility observes, a representative of the Department of Prisons of the Ministry of Public Security stressed that among members of the Polish Workers' Party there were, in addition to true activists, also people who had joined the party during a mass recruitment campaign.[29] In several reports on briefings with prison governors the problem of the personnel's party membership was the main topic of talks delivered by the management of the Department of Prisons and Camps. In 1947 Major Hipolit Duljasz noted that governors of prisons were insufficiently interested in party activity at their facilities. 'A political party,' he stressed, 'is the basis through which revolution happens among the personnel. This work should be supervised by the governor. Wherever we have

[24] Notatka o stanie więziennictwa 1 September 1956, AIPN BU MSW I, no. I 240, fol. 22.

[25] Zwolski, *Więzienie w Białymstoku*, p. 94.

[26] *Komisja Specjalna do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym 1945–1954: Wybór dokumentów*, ed. Dariusz Jarosz and Tadeusz Wolsza, Warsaw, 1995, p. 139.

[27] Zwolski, *Więzienie w Białymstoku*, p. 163.

[28] Pietrzyk, *Więzienie w Inowrocławiu*, pp. 126, 183.

[29] Stefan Białek, *Carcer inferior: Zakłady karne Strzelec Opolskich w systemie represji stalinowskich (1945–1954)*, Wrocław, 2016, p. 64.

a good governor, we have order.'[30] Other high-rank officials would later return to the topic.

Individual reports from the various detention centres as well as post-inspection ministerial reports concerning several penal facilities suggest that basically all prisons and camps, and above all labour facilities for convicts experienced a shortage of lower-rank prison officers. In 1951 there was a serious shortage of prison guards at several labour facilities for convicts in the mineral industry. In Wilków the number of missing guards was 45, in Jaroszów — 135, in Piechcin — 15, in Strzelce Opolskie — 75, in Wojcieszów — 109 and in Zaręba Górna — 14.[31] Practically speaking, the situation changed little over the following year. Wilków needed 27 guards, Jaroszów — 142, Piechcin — 16 and Strzelce Opolskie — 69.[32] Similarly, in 1953 Piechcin needed 150 guards to operate smoothly, but there were only 80 at the time. In Strzelce Opolskie, where there were 113 positions for guards, 59 were working. In Wojcieszów 123 out of the planned 181 positions were filled.[33]

An official note from the Supreme Audit Office, drawn up on 14 March 1958, shows that the condition of the prison service was still catastrophic, also when it came to prison officers. The authors of the document indicated, for example, that there were 20 per cent of unfilled positions in the service. They also added that people were reluctant to enter the profession because of low pay and lack of vocational training. Next they cited an example from Silesia, where among the 964 officers employed as many as 300 had not finished primary school. In their conclusions the authors stressed that 'as a result, officers often feel an inferiority complex with regard to the inmates and are not able to enforce the prison rules and regulations, which contributes to a continued deterioration of discipline in penal facilities.'[34]

Documents of the Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs contain data on offences involving prison guards and prison service personnel from 1952–55.[35]

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[30] *Protokoły z odpraw, zjazdów i narad kierownictwa Departamentu Więziennictwa Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, p. 107.

[31] Dokumenty dotyczące powstania OPW przy przemyśle mineralnym 1950–1951, AAN, Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego (hereafter MBP), no. 3/48, fol. 18.

[32] Raporty i sprawozdania z kontroli OPW 1952, AAN, MBP, no. 3/51, fol. 263.

[33] Raport z kontroli OPW Stalinogród, Wrocław, Bydgoszcz 1953–1954, AAN, MBP, no. 3/132.

[34] Bogusław Kopka and Krzysztof Madej, 'NIK za kratami', *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, 2004, 3, pp. 78–83 (p. 82).

[35] Więziennictwo, stan, ruch, zatrudnienie i segregacja, 1955, 1956, AIPN BU MSW, no. I 244.

Type of offence	1952	1953	1954	1955
1. Letting inmates escape	43	91	63	187
2. Contacts with inmates	148	138	129	1,174
3. Failure to follow an order	3,647	1,440	265	2,091
4. Improper attitude to inmates	·	79	58	89
5. Being taken to court	·	·	31	6
6. Dismissal from service	470	480	551	122
7. Disciplinary penalties (sleeping on duty, being late for work)	2,345	4,450	5,121	1,265
8. Other	·	·	·	1,300
Total	6,653	6,778	6,218	6,234

In addition, the authors of the document pointed to the best and worst performing facilities, in this case labour facilities for convicts and agricultural colonies. The worst labour facilities were those in Mysłowice, Piechcin, Wesoła II and Brzeziny, and the best — those in Mrowina, Kawcze, Zaręba Górna, Siemianowice II, Milowice, Gracze, Siersza, Knurów and Strzelce Opolskie.

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Scholars studying the history of post-war prisons in Poland believe — largely on the basis of memoirs — that the worst staff of penal facilities in terms of abuse of power and violence were the so-called Frenchmen, Spaniards and Belarusians. Among ruthless guards were also some of the officers who had a background in communist parties (Communist Party of Poland, Polish Workers' Party, Polish United Workers' Party) or who had come to the profession — often to take up managerial positions — from the army and the police. Presumably, the idea determining their work was encapsulated in a short sentence addressed to convicts and placed in a visible spot in front of the entrance to one of the prisons: 'You enter a criminal — you leave a citizen'. Guards were obliged to enforce unconditional obedience and cooperation, regardless of the rules and regulations or consequences. The worst situation was that of political prisoners, described as anti-state by the communists, prisoners who had been sentenced to prison for their underground activities (for example, in the Home Army, National Armed Forces, Farmers' Battalions, Citizens' Home Army, Home Army Resistance Movement, National Military Organization or Underground Polish Army), activities in the democratic opposition (for example, in the Polish People's Party, Labour Party, National Party, Polish Socialist Party),

service in the Polish Armed Forces in the West as well as Polish Guard Companies or Holy Cross Mountains Brigade (for example on charges of espionage). The communist security services also pursued activists of the Polish Underground State as well as officials of the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile. In addition, the category of political prisoners included those who protested against the Soviet presence in Poland — it was enough if they put up passive resistance. The many tragedies of people from that era also include those convicted for political activities consisting in the spread of the so-called whispered propaganda (for example jokes), listening to Polish-language radio stations (for example, Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, BBC, Radio Madrid) or even propagating views contrary to the communist ideology, for example in scholarly publications and press articles.[36]

In the analysed period it is possible to distinguish two moments which briefly halted the growth of repressions and tortures practised by prison officers and their superiors. The first, rather brief, came in 1950 and was associated with the trial of a lower-rank French diplomat, André Robineau, who in the presence of Western European journalists talked about scandalous conditions in Polish penal institutions.[37] The second began with the death of the Soviet dictator in 1953. The staff of penal facilities did not hide their dismay at the situation that emerged as a result. Some prisoners confirmed that the relations between the inmates and the guards improved. After Iosif Stalin's death, observed Andrzej Sołdrowski, a prisoner from Wronki, 'there is no more yelling, disciplinary penalties have been tempered, no more leapfrogging, no more solitary confinement, hard bed, beating — those little and varied forms of harassment; the situation has become calm and normal [...]. The way inmates are addressed begins to resemble human speech.'[38] I examine this topic from a broader perspective elsewhere.[39] The turning point of 1953 has also been pointed out by Arkadiusz Kutkowski, who cites the 'July campaign' and the inspection of 17 prisons (over 13,600 inmates were released as a result at the time). In addition, a sep-

[36] An interesting analysis of the development of the category of political prisoners over centuries in several European countries has been conducted by Jarosław Utrat-Milecki, *Polityczność przestępstwa*, Warsaw, 2007.

[37] Tadeusz Wolsza, *Więzienia stalinowskie w Polsce: System, codzienność, represje*, Warsaw, 2013, p. 33.

[38] Andrzej Sołdrowski, *Spisani na straty*, Wrocław, 1996, p. 79.

[39] Tadeusz Wolsza, 'Czy śmierć Józefa Stalina stanowiła cezurę w dziejach powojennego więziennictwa w Polsce?', in *Polska 1953–1957: Studia*, ed. Mariusz Mazur and Sebastian Ligarski (forthcoming).

arate Department of Prisons and Detention Facilities was established at the Prosecutor General's Office.[40]

Particularly infamous among the officers were the so-called Frenchmen, who began to work in Polish prisons in great numbers after 1945.[41] They were Polish communists expelled from France and deprived of their citizenship. They were usually young, uneducated and did not speak Polish well. In Poland they were sent to work in Lower Silesian coal mines, for example in Wałbrzych, or in the Ministry of Public Security's institutions, for example in the Prison Service. This seems to have been a deliberate choice, one of the stages of the replacement of the pre-war prison staff. The idea also was — given the language barrier, communist provenance and family connections of the 'Frenchmen' — to limit the inmates' contacts with the outside world or any support from the outside. When analysing the group, using the Prison Service in Lower Silesia as an example, Krzysztof Szwagrzyk stresses that they were 'strongly politically indoctrinated, did not know the reality of life in Poland and did not speak Polish well'. In addition, they had been members of the French Communist Party. Finally, Szwagrzyk points to several examples, the most characteristic of the Lower Silesian penal system after 1945. He mentions Samuel Stolar (Prison no. I in Wrocław), Edward Burakowski and Antoni Ptaszek, two unit officers from Wałbrzych, and, above all, two butchers: Jan Główka from the prison in Kleczkowska Street in Wrocławiu, and Stanisław Wujaś from Dzierżoniów.[42] The prison guard team from the prison in Koszykowa Street in Warsaw was headed by a 'Frenchman' called Zając. His reply to the accusation that the cells were hugely overcrowded and horribly stuffy circulated among inmates at the time: 'Well, nothing has changed really, has it. In the past a lot kept a few in prison and now a few keep a lot in prison.'[43] Among the staff of the Political Division in Wronki, the man who stood out was Bolesław Rabe, who had joined the Polish Workers' Party while still living in France during the war. After coming to Poland he initially worked in a mine in Zabrze and then was hired by the Ministry of Public Security (Będzin prison, Legionowo

[40] Arkadiusz Kutkowski, 'Polityka karna władz PRL w 1953 r. — jej wyznaczniki i konsekwencje', in *Yesterday: Studia z historii najnowszej: Księga dedykowana prof. Jerzemu Eislerowi w 65. rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Jan Olaszek et al., Warsaw, 2017, pp. 204–20 (pp. 213–14).

[41] Czesław Leopold and Krzysztof Lechicki [Arkadiusz Rybicki and Antoni Wręga], *Więźniowie polityczni w Polsce 1945–1956*, [Lublin]: Respublica, 1986, p. 18.

[42] Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, *Więzienia i obozy na Dolnym Śląsku (1945–1956): Przewodnik*, Wrocław, 2013, p. 30.

[43] Jan Radożycki, *Aby o nich nie zapomniano: Wspomnienia*, Łomianki, 2017, p. 324.

school, Brzeszcze labour facility for convicts).[44] In the progressive prison in Jaworzno the French group was represented by Captain Franciszek Piątkowski, a former Maquis fighter. At the prison he was made deputy governor for political affairs.[45] The problem of the so-called Frenchmen has also been explored by Anita Nisiobęcka. After analysing memoirs she has concluded that prisoners, including those who continued to be part of the resistance movement also after the war, remember 're-immigrants as particularly cruel and merciless towards the inmates. They abused them physically and mentally, and their barbarity was terrifying.' Nisiobęcka justifiably quotes Marian Pawełczak from Hieronim Dekutowski's underground army unit: 'They got their revenge for their stupidity on the prisoners, wanting to vent their anger at themselves on someone.'[46] Yet I have seen other opinions on the behaviour of the 'Frenchmen', opinions mentioning no tortures and repressions or even nasty remarks. Halina Zakrzewska 'Beda' recalls her encounter with re-immigrants from France in the Warsaw prison on Koszykowa Street:

> The boys wearing Polish Army uniforms were Poles born and raised in France; their parents were pre-war economic migrants [...]. Now I encountered them here, in the prison on Koszykowa Street. Why did they get here, why were they sent to work here after returning to Poland? Was it because they spoke an argot (their group slang) and no one among us could understand them well? I don't think that their lack of ties with Polish society in Poland was a sufficient guarantee of subordination and ideological fidelity to the regime. The boys were young, curious about Poland, its history, especially during the occupation, its social and political relations. They were sent to work for the Ministry of Public Security, but they had contact not only with us, the prisoners, but also with people living outside, with former Home Army members, in private homes and Warsaw streets, which were seething with hatred of everything that was alien, imposed. We understood each other immediately. My condition was a sufficiently glaring illustration of the whole danger of the terror of the 'liberators'. First they didn't want to believe that most inmates had been in the Polish resistance, that we were in prison not for fraud or theft, but for fighting for five years with the German invader for our country's freedom. Then they became friends with the inmates.[47]

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[44] *Więźniowie Wronek w okresie stalinowskim*, part 1: *Lata 1945–1948*, ed. Grzegorz Barczykowski and Łukasz Przybyłka, Poznań, 2016, p. 1064.

[45] Tadeusz Lustig, *Orlęta w Jaworznie: Kartki z pamiętnika 1951–1953*, Cracow, 1997, p. 19.

[46] Anita Nisiobęcka, *Z Lens do Wałbrzycha: Powrót Polaków z Francji oraz ich adaptacja w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1945–1950*, Warsaw, 2018, pp. 320–21.

[47] Halina Zakrzewska 'Beda', *Niepodległość będzie twoją nagrodą*, 2 vols, Warsaw, 1994, vol. 2: *W więzieniach 1946–1954*, pp. 15–16.

However, I have not been able to find any more such positive opinions about the 'Frenchmen'. Presumably, they were quite rare.

Another group unpopular with the inmates were the so-called Spaniards — participants in the Spanish Civil War. Scholars' preliminary findings show that 273 so-called Dąbrowszczacy (former members of the Dąbrowski Battalion) worked for the Ministry of Public Security, with at least 80 of them working in the Prison Service.[48] They were known for being particularly harsh and strict when dealing with imprisoned clergymen and all those who openly manifested their faith. That is why they put a cross on the doors of cells where such inmates were kept. Krzysztof Szwagrzyk has found a couple of those 'Spaniards' in Lower Silesia: Leon Wachowiak and Michał Sawczak, who worked at penal facilities in Wrocław.[49] Names of other 'Spaniards' — Captain Antoni Dudek (Wiśnicz Nowy prison), Józef Kubacki (penal facilities in Silesia) and Jan Erazmus (Elbląg prison) — have been added by a historian studying the post-war fate of soldiers from the International Brigades.[50] The lists of names featuring both the 'Frenchmen' and the 'Spaniards' are obviously open and additions of new names seems to be only a matter of time.

In his monograph on the Białystok prison, Marcin Zwolski also points to lower-rank personnel (guards) and higher-rank personnel (governors — as early as in 1945 this particular penal facility was headed by Jefim Perfieniuk) of Belarusian origin. Their behaviour, especially towards political prisoners, should be viewed in an exceptionally negative light as well. This is primarily because they sympathized with the communists or themselves came from that political camp. Marcin Zwolski explains this attitude in the following manner: 'it was determined on the one hand by most Belarusians having a positive attitude to the communist government and to working for it, and on the other — by a possibility [...] of social advancement despite a lack of education.'[51] I would also add here most Belarusians' hostility towards members of the post-war resistance movement. This prompted the ministry to employ the Belarusians in the Prison Service. Their presence in a penal facility guaranteed, for example, a limited number of 'kites' and, possibly, greater repressions towards the inmates. A prison governor of Belarusian origin has been found in the history of the prison on Kleczkowska Street in Wrocław. The

[48] I received this piece of information from Daniel Czerwiński from the Gdańsk branch of the Institute of National Remembrance.

[49] Szwagrzyk, *Więzienia i obozy*, p. 30.

[50] I received this piece of information from Daniel Czerwiński from the Gdańsk branch of the Institute of National Remembrance.

[51] Zwolski, *Więzienie w Białymstoku*, pp. 83–84.

man in question is Captain Andrzej Jaroszewicz, who barely spoke Polish, had basically no vocational education (he only completed five years of primary school), but who had been in the Communist Party of Western Belarus and before arriving in Wrocław had been in charge of prisons in Łódź and Sieradz among others.[52] Former members of the Communist Party of Western Belarus also included other high-rank prison officers in Lower Silesia (Wrocław, Świdnica, Strzelin and Dzierżoniów): Franciszek (Efroim) Klitenik, Mikołaj Cerach and Teodor Kołodko.[53]

Finally, Stefan Białek has found among prison guards in Strzelce Opolskie several former Red Army soldiers and Soviet guerrilla fighters, for example Adam Bobrownicki, Jan Onacik and Dymitr Ostaszewski.[54]

The attitude of prison officers towards inmates could be decoded without any problem already during the first contact, that is when a convoy bringing inmates arrived in a prison or a camp. During a kind of welcome ceremony the prisoners, even before going through the prison gate, could hear dozens of insults and vulgar epithets as well as coarse comments like bandits, prostitutes, scumbag, criminals and traitors. Several detention facilities earmarked primarily for political prisoners, had the following inscription on display: 'You enter a criminal — you leave a citizen'. The sentence was further strengthened by words from the guards: 'Kneel still, because you don't deserve this wonderful accommodation. Only here can you become citizens of this country.'[55]

Memoirs of political prisoners show that they felt great respect especially for unit officers. In their opinion these officers were exacting, demanded that the rules and regulations be observed and controlled the behaviour of inmates through peepholes. They harassed the inmates in a variety of ways, more or less oppressive. Janina Wasiłojć-Smoleńska recalls that on hot days unit officers ordered, for example, that windows should be shut. 'There were twelve of us in the cell, although it was a single cell; the window was tiny, barred and covered with blinds to boot. Little could be see through that window, but the ban on opening it on hot days was very painful to us. In addition, we knew that the ban was only the unit officer's whim, just to upset us.'[56] Unit officers also checked randomly whether palliasses were well aligned. If it turned out

[52] Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, 'Naczelnicy więzienia przy ul. Kleczkowskiej we Wrocławiu 1945–1955', *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, 2002, 6, pp. 55–58 (pp. 57–58).

[53] Szwagrzyk, *Więzienia i obozy*, p. 29.

[54] Białek, *Carcer inferior*, annex.

[55] Wolsza, *Więzienia stalinowskie w Polsce*, p. 17.

[56] Janina Wasiłojć-Smoleńska, *'Nie było czasu na strach...': Z Janiną Wasiłojć-Smoleńską rozmawiają Marzena Kruk i Edyta Wnuk*, Szczecin, 2016, p. 130.

that the work had not been done properly, there began the so-called *kipisz* or bust. In the prison jargon, a *kipisz* meant that prison officers would unexpectedly burst into a cell and do a search of the inmates' personal belongings, straw palliasses as well as all nooks and crannies in search of paper, pencils, knives, needles, scissors, twine, rags, safety pins, ink, kites etc. They scattered all objects across the cell, having thrown all inmates out. If a unit officer was particularly mean — and former prisoners' accounts suggest that there were such officers in Rawicz, Wronki and other prisons — the contents of palliasses would land on the floor in the blink of an eye. 'Straw dust was obnoxious especially during a cell search. [...] The guards threw it on the floor with delight and evident malice. After such a search the cell would turn into a dust chamber and the inmates suffocated, because the window was covered by a shade.'[57] The searches were just as oppressive in cold periods. As one former prisoner from Wronki recalls, 'in December, before Christmas, there was a bust in our cell. The guards wore long fur coats, felt boots, hats with ear flaps and thick gloves, while we were standing in our underwear, barefoot on the cast-iron plates covering drainpipes. Standing to attention, face to the wall, next to the cell, outside in the corridor. It was freezing and they were turning the cells upside down, "looking for God knows what"'.[58] A bust in Inowrocław was described very vividly by Jadwiga Janiszowska: 'when we returned, the cell looked as if a hurricane had passed through it. Palliasses turned inside out, straw from the palliasses on the floor mixed with towels and pillowcases. There was also water spilled on the floor and in it — upturned bowls, scattered sugar, cheese thrown from the shelves etc.'[59] A spot-on remark about searches can also be found in the memoirs of Juliusz Bogdan Deczkowski 'Laudański'. 'During the searches the guards were looking primarily for pencils, paper, sharpened spoons or pieces of metal to cut bread, or even family photographs, which were forbidden in cells. Sometimes we had the impression that the guards didn't really care if they found the forbidden objects. The palliasses were filled with straw, which wasn't changed for years and which had turned into chaff mixed with dust.'[60]

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[57] *W złowieszczych murach Wronek i Rawicza lat 1945–1956: Wspomnienia więźniów politycznych*, ed. Witold Jóźwiak and Witold de Mezer, Poznań, 1995, p. 51. For similar descriptions of searches, see Tadeusz Płużański, *Z otchłani*, Warsaw, 1996, pp. 201–02; Jan Stępień, 'Rekolekcje zamknięte', part 4, *Przewodnik Katolicki*, 1989, 43, p. 7. Janusz Horodniczy, *Młodsi od swoich wyroków*, Warsaw, 1997, pp. 88–89.

[58] *W złowieszczych murach Wronek i Rawicza*, p. 43.

[59] Jadwiga Janiszowska, 'Inowrocław', *Nike*, 2002, 63, pp. 6–14 (p. 12).

[60] Juliusz Bogdan Deczkowski 'Laudański', *Wspomnienia żołnierza baonu AK 'Zośka'*, Warsaw, 2004, p. 330.

Sometimes during such searches the prisoners had to hand over everyday objects they had ingeniously made. These included needles made of fishbones, knives made of cans, boxes made of pieces of paperboard and so on 'You return to the cell and find one big mess. Not only is everything turned upside down, but you see all your hard-won "treasures" laying in front of the cell.'[61] It seems that when it comes to the number of objects lost during such a cell bust, the record belongs to a female prisoner from Mokotów, who lost a unique collection of treasures: a needle, pencil, piece of paper, knife made of a piece of metal from a can, rosary made of prison bread and cross made of a toothbrush handle.[62] Unit officers were particularly eager to look for forbidden prayer books and rosaries — illegally supplied to prisons by the inmates' family members — and, above all, for paper and writing implements (for example, pencils). They were strictly forbidden, because they could be used for the purpose of correspondence with the outside world. '"Something to write with" was a great treasure,' as we read in the memoirs of a former Fordon prisoner, 'because it made it possible to send a "kite" from time to time, through released inmates who had served their time for ordinary offences.'[63] Sometimes kites would be passed by guards, who received, for example, cigarettes from the sender and then much more valuable gifts from the addressee (money, for example). With time cigarettes became a currency of sorts at penal institutions.

In the various prisons guards subjected political prisoners to all kinds of harassment and sophisticated repression. From small and harmless acts of malice to the most severe tortures, including murders (for example, having an inmate stand for many hours — a form of torture known in prison slang as Zakopane or Venice — psychological abuse, conveyor interrogation, solitary confinement, 'Anders's horse' — having an inmate sit on an upturned stool — nail tearing, beating on the heels or controlled death like in the case of Kazimierz Pużak). It is enough to recall here the criminal practices of Salomon Morel (who served in the following prisons and camps: Lublin Castle, Świętochłowice-Zgoda, Opole, Katowice, Racibórz, Jaworzno and Iława) and his associates in the Świętochłowice-Zgoda camp.[64] After over forty years, the then Minister of Justice of the

[61] Janina Malkiewiczowa, *Wspomnienia więzienne*, Lublin and Warsaw, 1987, p. 39.

[62] Janina Jeleńska, 'Na ogólniaku (w latach 1952–1953) w celi zbiorowej, karnej więzienia mokotowskiego', *Nike*, 1996, 31, pp. 14–18 (p. 16).

[63] Janina Ziembo, 'Wspomnienia', *Nike*, 1997, 38, pp. 7–10 (pp. 9–10).

[64] The matter has already been examined several times by historians of post-war camps in Poland. The most extensive analysis can be found in Edmund Nowak, *Rozrachunki z przeszłością. Śledztwa i procesy oraz inne następstwa funkcjonowania powojennych obozów na Górnym Śląsku*, Opole, 2012. Cf. also *Obóz pracy w Świętochłowicach w 1945 roku: Dokumenty*, ed. Adam Dziurok, Katowice, 2014, pp. 78–226.

Republic of Poland, Hanna Suchocka, compiled a list of nine categories of crimes committed by Salomon Morel, beginning with harassment and beating of prisoners (with iron rods, clubs, table legs, stools and so on), through mental torture to deliberately triggering a typhoid epidemic which decimated the inmates.[65]

Former female prisoners recall Helena Obiała — from Grudziądz, Fordon, Inowrocław and Bojanowo — who drove many inmates to a mental breakdown. Obiała was loathsome and ruthless. She harassed inmates without reason, constantly looking for a pretext.[66] We have several prisoners' accounts concerning Helena Obiała, who was commonly called 'Ibarura' after the name of the Spanish communist. The authors of the accounts comment on her appearance. According to Bernadeta Gołecka, she was 'ugly like an old witch, horrible, she hated political prisoners and was particularly unpleasant to them'. Gołecka then stresses that 'it may have been because of her ugliness that she was taking her revenge on particularly beautiful prisoners'.[67] Another former female prisoner noted years later that 'she was slim, wore a green uniform, had a crooked mouth and even more crooked nose. She kept a close eye on us, constantly looked through the peephole'. Her fellow prisoner stressed that she was 'a cold, ice-cold human being', well suited to her job. Janina Malkiewicz notes that she specialized in cell visits, during which she would check their tidiness and looked for a pretext to punish the inmates.[68] In one cell a dusty vent — impossible to reach from the floor and clean — was enough, in another cell a clean table, which according to Obiała was filthy.[69]

In the isolation prison in Inowrocław the guards practised all kinds of psychological harassment of women kept in single cells. Jadwiga Janiszowska recalls a 'perfidious' nuisance often repeated by the 'educators'. 'The bathroom was on the ground floor, it was small, with three showers and a high window through which wind would blow. There was no heating and it was cold even in summer because of thick walls and stone floor. When we came to take a shower, the unit officer first let water (usually cold) run for a bit — just enough to make us

[65] Obóz pracy w Świętochłowicach, pp. 88–90.

[66] Agnieszka Sławińska, *Więźniarki polityczne z Bojanowa: Łagier dla dziewcząt w latach 1952–1956*, Bojanowo, Sochaczew and Warsaw, 2017, pp. 624–27; Pietrzyk, *Więzienie w Inowrocławiu*, p. 161.

[67] Jadwiga Samociuk, 'Rozmowa przez telefon', *Jaworzniacy: Pismo młodocianych więźniów politycznych lat 1944–1956*, 2019, 7/8, p. 3.

[68] Malkiewiczowa, *Wspomnienia*, p. 65.

[69] Pietrzyk, *Więzienie w Inowrocławiu*, p. 161.

wet — and then turned the taps off to leave us to wash (also our hair). Three or four minutes would have been enough for us. Yet there were officers who, having turned off the taps, would go out to smoke a cigarette and talk to a colleague in the corridor, or would go farther away for a long time and we could not hear them. So there we were, standing (seemingly endlessly), shaking because of the cold, the soap on our bodies drying, we called out to the unit officers, but they pretended not to hear us or really could not hear us, because they weren't near.'[70] Irena Cieślińska-Skrzypiec discusses the behaviour of the guards who tried at all cost to limit contact between cells based on the use of Morse code. This activity was strictly forbidden and punishable by solitary confinement.

> In Inowrocław the guards kept a particularly close eye on us to see whether we were observing these rules; they crept silently like cats outside our door. But we had nothing more to lose [...], we risked only solitary confinement — naturally, it wasn't pleasant, but a cost and benefit analysis was in favour of the latter. [...] Having served our sentence for five years, we knew very well what time of day or night was good for conversations. We tapped quietly, briefly, but more often.[71]

In any prison it took the inmates just a few days to identify sadistic guards. In Rawicz the place were the most severe tortures were inflicted was the so-called White Pavilion, where Sergeant Andrzej Kukawka resided. Janusz Horodniczy, who as a juvenile political prisoner served time in Wronki, Rawicz and Strzelce Opolskie, was in no doubt when describing this particular prison officer as the 'most ruthless butcher in Polish prisons'. Horodniczy went on to stress that Kukawka was a sadist, a psychopath and a monster.

> Never again did I encounter a man so hated by the prison community. He was powerfully built, obese even. Fiendishly strong, he knew how to beat up a man without leaving clear traces of his cruel execution on the victim's body. At times a benevolent smile appeared on his round, full moon-like mug. Knowing him, you were aware that this smile did not bode well. He felt true pleasure only when abusing others physically and mentally. Especially those who were weak, ill or defenceless. So many prisoners lost their health because of this loathsome character! So many were maimed by him, so many took their own life! Apparently he began his career as a screw by serving as a guard in the guard box; he went on

[70] Janiszowska, 'Inowrocław', pp. 11–12.

[71] Irena Cieślińska-Skrzypiec, 'Inowrocław: Długie miesiące — ciężkie lata...', *Nike*, 1993, 6, pp. 4–17 (p. 8).

> to become a prison yard guard, then unit officer and then was given the 'honourable' title of commandant of the While Pavilion. He could not be promoted any higher, became his mind was, to put it mildly, mediocre, and he was capable of only beating and abusing prisoners.[72]

In view of his drastic behaviour at the penal facility, the underground passed a death sentence on him, but did not manage to carry it out. Jan Radożycki recalled unit officers from the Mokotów prison. 'They began to bash my back, punch me in the face, bang my head against a brick wall, and did not spare me disgusting epithets and insults. Finally, I was made to sit on the leg of an upturned stool; it pushed against my coccyx and it was very painful. Soon I fainted and tumbled onto the concrete floor'. The sadists would often repeat the tortures and again torment the inmates. 'They trod on my toes in their hobnailed boots, forced me to stand with my arms raised until I fainted.'[73]

In the Mokotów prison there were two guards who acted like butchers. Aleksander Drej and Piotr Śmietański carried out death sentences on soldiers of the resistance, including Witold Pilecki, Zygmunt Szendzielarz, Łukasz Ciepliński, Hieronim Dekutowski, Antoni Olechnowicz, Stanisław Łukasik and Stanisław Kasznica.

Tormented, abused, tortured and forced to work as slave labourers, inmates adopted a specific attitude when confronted with psychopathic behaviour. They knew they could not show their weakness and could not surrender. 'There were so many tears. But only we could see them. We could not show any weakness to the guards, because our breakdowns would have spurred them on. When dealing with them we were always arrogant and contemptuous. Such an attitude towards prison officers, *spece*, officers of the Public Security Corps, security department personnel was our only weapon.'[74] Prisoners from another detention facility in Warsaw, located on Koszykowa Street, remembered one unit officer in particular.

> There were unit officers like Szymański, whom we called Kocz, because he spoke with a lisp and pronounced the word *koc* (blanket) as *kocz*. When he was on duty, he would constantly look through the peephole, would burst into cells on the smallest pretext and repri-

[72] Horodniczy, *Młodsi*, pp. 108–09.

[73] Radożycki, *Aby o nich*, p. 333.

[74] Tadeusz Mróz, 'Więzienie progresywne Jaworzno czy obóz koncentracyjny dla niepokornej młodzieży?', in *Obóz dwóch totalitaryzmów: Jaworzno 1943–1956*, 3 vols, Jaworzno, 2017–18, vol. 2, ed. Ryszard Terlecki, 2007, pp. 142–49 (p. 148).

> mand us, even for leaving a piece of straw from the palliasse on the floor. And he would constantly listen out for anyone tapping. Others, clearly hostile to us, would walk with grim expressions on their faces, growling for no reason when opening the door, when distributing meals or calling us out for an interrogation.[75]

The available memoirs also show that there were prison officers who behaved decently towards political prisoners. This is not only about refraining from drastic physical torture. Guards would often show sympathy for the inmates; for example, they passed kites, shared meals with them or turned a blind eye to violations of rules and regulations. Sometimes a kind word and sympathy sufficed for inmates serving their time without seeing their loved ones for a few years. Stanisław Sieradzki, a former member of the Home Army, recalls a guard from Wronki, Henryk Zwierzyński.

Sieradzki, do you know someone called Białous? At first my heart froze. 'Was Captain Jerzy Białous a prisoner in Wronki?' I thought. But I replied calmly: 'Captain Jerzy was the commander of my Battalion Zośka.' And Zwierzyński said in response: 'You see, Sieradzki, yesterday I was listening to Radio Free Europe and heard what Captain Jerzy said. He greeted all Battalion Zośka soldiers who were in prison, he cheered you up, and mentioned your name.' Sincerely grateful, I shook Zwierzyński's hand.[76]

Another former prisoner from Wronki recalls that there were a few good guards. However, their attitude, their — unfortunately — limited courage was influenced by snitches. The guards were afraid that they would report their positive behaviour to the governor. That is why they did not show their sympathy for the inmates. One of them was a guard nicknamed 'Fajeczka' (pipe). An anonymous prisoner, 'Jeleń', recalls how this mysterious guard would bring the inmates sandwiches, which were consumed in the toilet in fear of the snitch's prying eyes. Another decent guard brought to the cell a box of marmalade to be shared by all inmates.[77] And another example from Wronki. 'There were three of us in the cell. It was clean, there were regular meals, the attitude of the guards was acceptable, no one called us bandits and traitors like at the Lublin Castle. There was no great discipline during walks; a man who stood out

[75] Ewa Ludkiewicz, *Siedem lat w więzieniu 1948–1955*, Gdańsk, 2005, p. 33.

[76] *Powrót do Wronek: Dokumenty pamięci lat 1945–1956*, ed. Klemens Stróżyński, Wronki, 1995, p. 37.

[77] Ibid., p. 52.

in a positive sense was Józef Walter, who stood aside and said nothing, when we were walking in groups of two or three.'[78] In the prison on Koszykowa Street, the inmates nicknamed a decent guard 'Sympatyjka'. 'You could feel' recalls Ewa Ludkiewicz, 'that he was sympathetic towards us; he was able to look with compassion when taking one of us for an interrogation and could smile almost imperceptibly. This brought a touch of optimism into this hopeless world of ours.'[79]

In conclusion it can be said that Stalinist detention facilities faced a permanent shortage of staff at lower and higher levels of prison officers. Those working in prisons were often individuals who got there by accident and who had no vocational training. The situation was not improved by schools and training courses. The courses were short, perfunctory and irregular. On the other hand, the leaderships of the Polish Workers' Party and the Polish United Workers' Party entrusted high-level positions in the Ministry of Public Security and in the various prisons to tried and tested, experienced and trustworthy people who had been in the Communist Party of Poland, Young Communist League of Poland, People's Guard, People's Army, Communist Party of France, Communist Party of Western Belarus, as well as soldiers from the Polish Armed Forces after specialist training in the Soviet Union — for example, in Kuibyshev — and from the International Brigades in Spain. Repressions and tortures to which the inmates — sentenced for anti-communist activities — were subjected were undoubtedly a result of the political background of the prison staff and their exceptionally low professional competence.

(Translated by Anna Kijak)

Summary

Post-war penal facilities were commonly affected by a shortage of prison guards. Those who found themselves in the Department of Prisons were usually unprepared for their job and completely unfamiliar with prison rules and regulations. Attempts to solve the problem made by the Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs did not bring any significant result either. Prison officers were exceptionally ruthless in their dealing with the inmates, especially political prisoners. They resorted to all kinds of harassment as well as physical and mental torture. Among the prison guards it was possible

[78] Ibid., p. 59.
[79] Ludkiewicz, *Siedem lat*, p. 33.

to find — although not very often — individuals who behaved decently, did not beat up the inmates and did not torment them. Almost every prison had guards who went down in history as butchers who tortured the inmates. It is enough to mention here Andrzej Kukawka, Salomon Morel and Helena Obiała, who will forever be remembered as prison officers most hated by the inmates.

(Translated by Anna Kijak)

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Biography: Professor Tadeusz Wolsza — full professor, member of staff of the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, and Faculty of Political Sciences and Administration, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz. His research focuses on Polish post-war émigré in the United Kingdom, the Katyń Massacre and history of sport. E-mail: mwolsza@wp.pl.