

*The Dialectics of Pain from 9*

According to Kazimierz Krajewski, Tomasz Łabuszewski, Piotr Niwiński, and others torture was all pervasive and ubiquitous at every stage of the interrogation process. The secret police tortured captured insurgents right on the battlefield, mostly to extract information about their units but also to terrorize their civilian sympathizers. Members of the families of the insurgents were routinely tortured as well. Women, children, and the elderly were not spared. The Communists frequently despoiled their homes and sometimes even destroyed them. [24]

Regional historian Krystyna Pasiuk conducted a case study of a single independentist insurgent unit fighting the Communists in the Suwałki area between 1949 and 1954. She confirms that “contemporary interrogation offices were torture chambers... [and] the beating of the prisoners was the norm.” However, Pasiuk stresses that the secret police torture was the most ferocious during the initial arrests. Later, once every insurgent that was not killed on the battlefield was captured, “the beating ceased.” By that time, having eradicated the immediate threat, the secret police had enough evidence to secure convictions and, because of the hopelessness of their predicament, the insurgents were physically and psychologically exhausted enough to confess to anything. [25]

However, in some cases torture was evidently applied even following a police provocation when the functionaries of the terror apparatus were intimately aware of all the details of a situation they themselves had set up. According to historian Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki that was the case with the so-called Polish Organization of Anti-Jewish Youth (Polska Organizacja Młodzieży Antyżydowskiej – POMA) in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. This creation of the secret police attracted a handful of conspirators, most of whom were likely UB agents. Nonetheless, the participants were forced to confess that the POMA enrolled 200 persons in its covert structures and 100 persons in a guerrilla unit. In reality, the POMA existed mainly in the interrogation records of the UB. [26]

At times, insurgents ostensibly tried for a particular crime were hardly interrogated concerning that charge. Instead, the secret policemen simply forced them to reveal the infrastructure of their organization, to divulge the whereabouts of their confederates, and to confess to general charges like “killing Jews” or “killing Communists.” According to several scholars, this was most notably the case with the so-called “Wierchowiny trial” of 23 officers of the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne – NSZ) in Lublin in 1946. [27] Further, as Krzysztof Szwagrzyk has shown, the torture did not automatically stop when the interrogation was concluded. For example, military judge Major Feliks Aspis ordered his prisoners to be tortured if they retracted their confessions in court. [28] Also the research of John Micgiel confirms readily that the Communist legal system employed illegal means to extract confessions from its prisoners. [29]

Jerzy Kułak focused on the interrogation methods of the functionaries of the Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa – UB) and concluded that “torture and killing of prisoners were typical features of their work.” [30] Next, he analyzed nine major show trials held at the central level and numerous other cases before lower Communist courts. The scholar has established that every prisoner was tortured either physically or psychologically or both. The secret police targeted the heroes of the anti-Nazi and anti-Soviet underground, opposition politicians, and Catholic priests. Almost all of them were forced to confess to untruths both during their interrogation and during their show trials, which were broadcast live on the Polish Radio. Besides securing guilty verdicts in almost all cases, the Communists pursued successfully also another goal: to compromise them morally and everything they stood for before the Polish society. False confessions disseminated by mendacious propaganda served to destroy, or at least to undermine, the traditional nationalistic symbols and to

create new pseudo-nationalistic images depicting the Communists as the only decent and patriotic force in Poland. Torture was an indispensable tool to achieve this comprehensive goal. According to Kułak,

The main objective of the political trial was to change the consciousness of the people (unlike in a normal country, where the objective is to punish the criminals). The people were to be informed that hitherto they had lived in the morally tainted environment of pre-war Poland, where the ruling class had perfidiously lied to them. The Communists also aimed at destroying the legend of the war-time and post-war independentist underground. The homo sovieticus was to be persuaded that thanks to the media and newspapers, i.e. the propaganda of the Communist proxy regime, he knew the truth about the government of interwar Poland. The truth was presented to him as a conspiracy theory concocted by the Communist secret police. A denizen of the Polish People’s Republic could learn that the leadership of the AK continued the criminal policy of [Polish pre-war Foreign Minister Józef] Beck and [Marshal Edward] Śmigły-Rydz who collaborated with Nazi Germany. One understood from the Communist propaganda that the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising had been coordinated with the Germans and that the Communists were the only true patriots, fighting for Poland’s independence. Meanwhile, the AK and the Office of the Government Delegate unscrupulously denounced the Communists to the Gestapo in exchange for freeing members of the pro-London underground. The latter conspiracy was hence only apparent, because it feigned its struggle against the Germans in congruence with the theory of “passive struggle.” Thus, the Communists changed the meaning of such words as honor, patriotism, and independence.

Once the Polish society learned that all of its heroes were really traitors, renegades, Nazi agents, murderers of democratic activists and peasants, the [Communist] People’s Tribune and other newspapers were also able to announce that the [Catholic] priests are American and English intelligence agents and had earlier served the Gestapo.

If those were baseless allegations, their influence on the society would be nil. However, the charges against the greatest authorities of pre-war Poland and the heroes of the struggle for national independence, so eagerly preached by the Communist press, were leveled by pre-war political activists, government officials, soldiers of Underground Poland, oftentimes heroes of the Cross of Virtuti Militari [Poland’s highest military decoration for valor], and persons enjoying universal respect.

Thus, the Communist system proved that every single human being could be broken. In exchange for the halt to the unimaginable torture and in the hope of escaping the death sentence, the prisoners, who had been interrogated for many months in the dungeons of the Ministry of Public Security on Koszykowa Street in Warsaw and who had been turned into the human wrecks, were ready to sign anything so that the secret policemen would desist beating them; so that the prisoners could sleep for a moment following a week-long, non-stop interrogation session, where only the interrogating officers rotated.

Most of the accused and witnesses acquiesced in playing the role assigned to them by the secret police officers and propaganda experts. During the show trial, the prisoners stuck strictly to the plan masterminded beforehand by the supervisors of the investigation. Even if the main accused in a case did not play well the role that had been imposed on him, there were plenty of witnesses who splendidly filled in the gaps. The audience at the show trial also influenced its atmosphere by angrily reacting to the testimonies of the accused and witnesses. [31]

**Footnotes**

[1] This paper was written for the 61st Annual Meeting of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America (PIASA) at McGill University, Montreal, Canada, June 6-7, 2003. [UP]

[2] Quoted in Czesław Leopold and Krzysztof Lechicki, *Więźniowie polityczni w Polsce, 1945-1956* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo “Młoda Polska,” 1981), 6. [UP]

[3] Materiały konferencji prokuratorów wojewódzkich z udziałem przedstawicieli MBP, 19 December 1950, Archiwum Akt Nowych [afterward AAN], Prokuratura, file 1555, 5, quoted in Antoni Kura, “Represje aparatu bezpieczeństwa publicznego w latach 1944-1956,” *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, no. 6 (June 2002): 29-33. [UP]

[4] This is a letter smuggled out of a Communist jail and delivered to his wife in December 1950. A Polish underground soldier of the Home Army, Ciepłiński fought the Nazis and Communists. He was captured by the Communist secret police, tortured, and shot on March 1, 1951. “Gryps Łukasza Ciepłińskiego do żony i syna z grudnia 1950 r.,” quoted in Zbigniew Łazarowicz, “Mord na Mokotowie,” *Nasz Dziennik*, 3 March 2003. [UP]

[5] For example, Henry VIII of England had the relatives and friends of his second wife, Anne Boleyn, tortured to establish her marital infidelity, including incest. It is debatable whether the alleged infidelities took place at all or the king was looking for a convenient excuse to get rid of his consort. If the latter was the case, then the Boleyn affair falls outside the category of the mainstream application of torture. [UP]

[6] All these legal authorities are quoted in Edward Peters, *Torture* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 1 [afterward *Torture*]. [UP]

[7] A Polish underground fighter imprisoned by the Nazis secretly sent out a letter from jail describing the torture one had to endure. It included pouring water into a prisoner’s nose, beating him on the soles of his feet, and thrusting needles under his fingernails. See AAN, Delegatura Rządu, file 202/II-63, 151-52. For further information on the torture by the Nazi secret police and its cooperation with the Nazi judiciary against the Polish underground see also Leon Teresiński, “O działalności Sądu Wojennego Rzeszy w okresie II wojny światowej,” *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce*, vol. 25 (1972): 189-198; Juliusz Pollack, *Wywiad, sabotaż, dywersja: Polski ruch oporu w Berlinie, 1939-1945* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1991), 93-95. [UP]

[8] Torture of Nazi concentration camp inmates is a separate issue, usually not connected to any police interrogation but, rather, undertaken to satisfy the sadistic urges of the camp personnel or to punish an infraction. [UP]

[9] This aspect of Communist terror is best depicted in a literary form by Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York, Macmillan, 1941). For a detailed historical analysis see Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). [UP]

[10] For example, whereas erstwhile secret policeman Colonel Grzegorz Kilanowicz aka Korczyński was severely beaten, former military intelligence supervisor General Mendel Kossoj aka Waław Komar was “merely” deprived of sleep. Accused of “right-nationalist deviation” Korczyński withstood the torture. Suspected of “cosmopolitanism,” Komar promptly broke down. See Jerzy Morawski, “Spacer dla wrogów partii,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 July 2002; George H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948-1954* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 135-154. [UP]

[11] On the independentist insurgency see *Zrzeszenie “Wolność i Niezawisłość” w dokumentach*, 6 vols. (Wrocław: Zarząd Główny WiN, 1997-2001); Jerzy Ślaski, *Żołnierze wyklęci* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1996); Grzegorz Wąsowski and Leszek Żebrowski, eds., *Żołnierze wyklęci: Antykomunistyczne podziemie zbrojne po 1944 roku* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen and Liga Republikańska, 1999); Kazimierz Krajewski and Tomasz Łabuszewski, *Białostocki Okręg AK- AKO : VII 1944-VIII 1945* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen and Dom Wydawniczy Bellona,

1997). The standard published work on the WiN is Zygmunt Woźniczka, *Zrzeszenie “Wolność i Niezawisłość” 1945-1952* (Warszawa: Instytut Prasy i Wydawnictw “Novum” – “Semex”, 1992). However, it was partly plagiarized from Tomasz Honkisz, “Opór cywilny czy walka zbrojna? Dylematy polskiego podziemia politycznego, 1945-1952,” (Ph.D. thesis, Warszawa, Akademia Nauk Społecznych przy Komitecie Centralnym Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej, 1990). On the overt independentist political opposition see Marek Łatyński, *Nie paść na kolana: Szkice o opozycji lat czterdziestych* (London: Polonia Book Fund Ltd., 1985); Romuald Turkowski, *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe w obronie demokracji 1945-1949* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1992); Andrzej Paczkowski, *Stanisław Mikołajczyk: Kłeska realisty* (Zarys biografii politycznej) (Warszawa: Agencja Omnipress, 1991); Mirosław Piotrowski, *Pro fide et patria: Stronnictwo Pracy i duchowieństwo Kościoła katolickiego na Lubelszczyźnie po II wojnie światowej* (Lublin: Ośrodek Studiów Polonijnych i Społecznych PZKS w Lublinie, 2001). [UP]

[12] “O czym nie pi szą szmatławce,” *Polska i Świat*, no. 3, vol. 7 (1 July 1945), Hoover Institution Archives, Polish Subject Collection [afterward HIA, PSC ], Box 61, Folder Polska i Świat. [UP]

[13] See a secret communication (gryps) from “Tygrys,” quoted by Marek Dereń, “‘Warszyc’ i jego żołnierze,” *Nasz Dziennik*, 23 April 2002. [UP]

[14] The following prominent insurgent commanders chose that kind of death: AK-Wilno Land Self-Defense (Samoobrona Ziemi Wileńskiej – SZW) Staff Sergeant Anatol Urbanowicz “Laluś” (suicide, May 27, 1945), WiN Major Marian Bernaciak “Orlik” (suicide, June 21, 1946), WiN Second Lieutenant Zbigniew Sochacki “Zbyszczek” (suicide, July 3, 1946), WiN Sergeant Antoni Kopaczewski “Lew” (suicide, September 8, 1946), WiN Lieutenant Jan Woś “Farys” (suicide, November 16, 1946), WiN Second Lieutenant Wiktor Zacheusz Nowowiejski “Jeż” (suicide, December 6, 1946), NZW Staff Sergeant Józef Zadziński “Wolyniak” (suicide, January 1, 1947), The “Thunder” Partisan Group Second Lieutenant Józef Kuraś “Ogień” (suicide, February 22, 1947), AK-SZW Sergeant Paweł Klikiewicz “Irena” (suicide, May 17, 1947), NZW Lieutenant Henryk Jastrzębski “Bohun” (suicide, April 13, 1948), WiN Second Lieutenant Waław Kuchnio “Spokojny” (suicide along with his wife Zofia, June 8, 1948), WiN Second Lieutenant Tadeusz Zieliński “Igła” (suicide, June 24, 1948), WiN Platoon Leader Władysław Sobczak “Czajka” (suicide, July 9, 1948), NZW Second Lieutenant Franciszek Majewski “Słony” (suicide, September 26, 1948), WiN Platoon Leader Antoni Suliga “Wicher” (suicide, October 23, 1948), WiN Captain Zdzisław Broński “Uskok” (suicide, May 21, 1949), NZW Platoon Leader Piotr Rzędzian “Szczupak” (suicide, January 15, 1949), the Conspiratorial Polish Army (Konspiracyjne Wojsko Polskie – KWP) Second Lieutenant Andrzej Jaworski “Marianek” (suicide, August 1949); NZW Lieutenant Kazimierz Żebrowski “Bąk” (suicide, after dispatching his wounded son Jerzy “Konar”, December 3, 1949); WiN Lieutenant Mieczysław Pruszkiewicz “Kędziorek” (wounded and dispatched by an underling, Walerian Tyra “Zuch,” who then committed suicide, May 14, 1951), WiN Platoon Leader Lucjan Niemyjski “Krakus” (suicide, August 22, 1952), WiN Major Jan Tabortowski “Bruzda” (wounded and dispatched by an underling, 23 August 1954). See Kazimierz Krajewski et al., *Żołnierze wyklęci: Antykomunistyczne podziemie zbrojne po 1944 r.*, 2 nd expanded and corrected edition (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen and Liga Republikańska, 2002), 79, 91, 112, 117, 120, 127, 129, 131, 138-40, 144, 147, 162-64, 195-96, 203, 228-29, 287, 292, 295, 309, 348 [afterward *Żołnierze wyklęci*]. [UP]

[15] For example, the underground paper of the NZW Przasnysz county command reported: “Ponownie nasze szeregi

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