

## Project in Posterum

(Preserving the past for the future)

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### The Dialectics of Pain[1]:

*The Interrogation Methods of the Communist Secret Police in Poland, 1944-1955. Glaukopis, vol. 2/3 (2004-2005).*

#### Part I

*Find the man and we shall find a paragraph for him. A Stalinist saying*

*Our task is not only to destroy you physically, but also to smash you morally before the eyes of the society. [2]*

**Major Wiktor Herer**, a superior officer - Office of Public Security, to a prisoner, 1948.

*The duty of the public security is to beat the enemy; the duty of the prosecutor is to guard revolutionary legality. Each of those organs has its own methods of work.[3]*

**Józef Różański**, Director - Investigative Department of the Ministry of Public Security, Warsaw, December 1950.

*I believe that Christ will be victorious! Poland will regain her independence and human dignity will be restored.[4]*

**Lieutenant Colonel Lukasz Ciepliński, a Polish underground leader, shortly before his execution, December 1950.**

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Throughout the ages, torture has been applied to extract information needed for a utilitarian purpose. With a few exceptions, [5] the objective has been to find out the truth. According to a 3rd century legal authority, Ulpian, "By quaestio [torture] we are to understand the torment and suffering of the body in order to elicit the truth." Writing in the 13th century the judicial expert Azo explained that "Torture is the inquiry after truth by means of torment." Four hundred years later, the lawyer Bocer defined the phenomenon in the following way: "Torture is interrogation by torment of the body, concerning a crime known to have occurred, legitimately ordered by a judge for the purpose of eliciting the truth about the said crime." [6]

The practice reflected the theory into the modern times. For example, the Nazi Gestapo tortured captured members of the underground to force them to reveal the whereabouts of their confederates. Once the interrogation was over, if the victim survived, he or she was disposed of, that is, either sent to a concentration camp or shot. A few of them were even given a brief trial and sentenced based upon the evidence the Gestapo provided. [7]

In essence, the Nazi secret police torturers were interested in learning the truth from their victims. [8] Not so the functionaries of the Communist terror apparatus. The Communist interrogators also tortured members of the underground or, more broadly, their political opponents. However, the reason for inflicting pain was two-fold: to extract true information and to force the prisoner to confess to false charges which the interrogators themselves knew were untrue. The objective of the latter endeavor was to break the spirit of the individual under interrogation and then to destroy his image in the eyes of the public. [9] Nonetheless, just like in the case of the Nazi police, the ruthless reputation of the Communist secret police, justly earned by its frequent application of torture, served to terrorize not only the immediate victims (and intended victims) but also the population at large.

This paper investigates the process within which torture was used and abused throughout various stages of the interrogation.

#### Communist Torture in Contemporary Sources

The use of torture by the Communists was ubiquitous. The secret policemen of the Public Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego - UBP, or, colloquially, UB) tortured cruelly even a few of their own comrades accused of ideological "deviation," including in a secret prison in Miedzeszyn. [10] However, torture was applied primarily against the independentist camp. This entity encompassed all covert and overt forces from the extreme left to far right enrolled in the anti-Communist underground and the political opposition, originating in the war-

time Polish Underground State and its Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK). The most notable among them were the Freedom and Independence Union (Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość - WiN); the National Military Union (Narodowe Zjednoczenie Wojskowe - NZW); the National Party (Stronictwo Narodowe - SN); the Christian Democratic Labor Party (Stronictwo Pracy - SP) and, last but not least, the Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronictwo Ludowe - PSL). Because of its scope, terror also affected the population at large. [11]

#### According to an underground newspaper of July 1945:

It has been established that the NKVD and RB [sic UB] torture their prisoners terribly at the Chopin Street [police headquarters] in Lublin, at the Strzelecka Street [facility] in Warsaw, and in Wlochy. The most popular methods of extracting confessions include ripping off fingernails slowly, applying "temple screws" [i.e., clamps that crush the victim's skull], and putting on "American handcuffs." The last named method causes the skin on one's hands to burst and the blood to flow from underneath one's fingernails. The torture is applied passionlessly in a premeditated manner. Those who faint are revived with a morphine shot. Before the torture session some receive booster shots [zastrzyki wzmacniające]. The torturers strictly observe the opinion of the chief interrogating officer whether it is acceptable to allow the interrogated to die.... At the infamous Lublin Castle [prison], because of the injuries inflicted during interrogation, mortality among the political prisoners reaches 20 persons per week. [12]

In a dramatic plea for help, smuggled out of a jail in Radomsko in April 1946, an imprisoned insurgent of the Conspiratorial Polish Army (Konspiracyjne Wojsko Polskie - KWP) begged his superior, Jan Rogółka ("Grot"):

Lieutenant, Sir, yesterday, meaning on Thursday, they gave it to me again. This time I was not electrocuted but just whipped on my back and buttocks. Next, they beat me on the soles of my bare feet. They used an iron rod and a whip on my bare legs. They kicked me so much that I barely dragged myself back to the cell. They torment me as if I were an animal, but I have not broken down. I am surprised myself because yesterday I was so sick. Despite that I withstood everything. Once they found out that I was sick, they immediately took me to be interrogated in the morning. Mercy, SOS, because they will murder all of us. Almost all of us in the cell are investigated in the same affair and all of us are tortured the same way.... It is very cold here. Lieutenant, Sir, half of me is gone but I've been observing everything nonetheless. Our infamous tormentors are: Lieutenant Wiczorek, a dark-haired young man, who lives on Krakowska Street, and Mr. Kowalski. I'd like a [food] package, because we suffer hunger. Please tell them at home to send me one; otherwise I shall succumb to tuberculosis. [13]

Secret police terror was so fierce that by 1948 quite a few insurgents preferred to die in battle rather than allow themselves to be taken alive. Some even committed suicide or, upon request, dispatched their seriously wounded comrades to spare them from being captured. [14] The insurgents wanted to avoid torture and the almost inevitable break-down, leading to the denunciations of one's own confederates and civilian supporters. Under the circumstances, at least on one occasion the underground press praised the suicide of a disabled insurgent as "heroic." [15] The weak and wounded were considered a liability. On January 1, 1947, an insurgent commander, Captain Władysław Lukasiuk ("Młot"), admonished one of his underlings that under no circumstances are you allowed to have any wounded [insurgents].... You must be aware that today each wounded is considered 80% lost.... Whoever leaves the unit gets caught right away and is forced to denounce us [każdy sypie].... The civilian population is quite aversely predisposed [zrażona] to us because we have caused them grief since [captured insurgents who broke down under torture] 'Burza' and 'Mewa' drive around with [the UB and KBW] and denounce everyone [sypią wszystko]. [16]

Although most broke down, a few exceptional individuals withstood the torture. In October 1945, the UB arrested Stefania Broniewska, a courier of the National Armed Forces. She was tortured mercilessly but remained defiant throughout. According to a secret police report, on November 11, 1945, I, Szlek Kazimierz, a functionary of the UB in Będzin, would like to report that, during our interrogation, Kowalska aka Broniewska Stefania, the wife of General Bogucki [i.e. Colonel Zygmunt Broniewski, the Commander-in-Chief of the NSZ], refused to testify about the organization of the NSZ and other matters related to it. She behaved in an arrogant manner, wanting to show her superiority over us, the working class. She stated that she had been working in the NSZ since its inception, that she was devoted to its ideology, and that she would never recognize as correct the policies of the Government of National Unity [i.e. the Communist proxy regime of Soviet occupation]. Further, she expressed her negative feelings about the Polish-Soviet alliance calling the [Red] Army and the Soviet Nation [sic] her enemies. When questioned, she refused to give any information about the organization and people she is affiliated with. She said she would die and take the secrets to her grave but the current democratic system [i.e. Communist dictatorship] would not persevere. He who laughs last, wins, she said, believing fervently in the victory of the NSZ. [17]

Torture continued even when the factor of the fierceness of the battlefield was no longer applicable. A close analysis of the interrogation records allows us to ascertain the ubiquity of torture, additionally revealing the modus operandi of the Communist secret police. Let us look for example at the interrogation record of a Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK) liaison from Wilno. She was captured and interrogated by the NKVD in Wilno. The record of the session of July 7, 1945, is contained on a single sheet of paper. The front was completely covered with a text of exceedingly large letters in undisciplined hand-writing. Only half of the reverse side was used. One third of the front page contained the data of the person under interrogation. Then the interrogating officer asked (and wrote down) two questions. First, he asked whether the woman realized that the allegations against her stem from Article 58-1a of the Soviet criminal code: counter-revolutionary activities. She answered in the affirmative which, was written down. The second question concerned her activities in the underground. The interrogating officer wrote down three short answers she provided, containing mostly false information. Then, according to the rules, he read the contents of the document to the prisoner and had her sign it on both sides. Lastly, he appended his own name to the record. Apparently, this should have been a short procedure: no longer than ten minutes. However, at the top of the page, it was noted that the interrogation session started at 12:40 and ended at 14:00 (2:00pm). Meanwhile, according to her recollections, the AK liaison woman was tortured mercilessly for hours. Anytime the written interrogation record seems too short relative to the amount of time spent assembling it, we can safely assume the prisoner was tortured psychologically or physically or both to extract a confession from him or her. [18]

In fact, torture was routine even in cases of detention unrelated to any insurgent or political activity. In July 1951, a Soviet diplomat informed his superiors that in the Province of Bydgoszcz during the peak season of grain purchase [i.e. forced grain seizure] many arrests of middle peasants [średniacy] took place by the militia organs. They were held in detention and beaten during interrogation.... In Bydgoszcz a peasant woman was tortured applying barbarian methods. She was interrogated and beaten and then before her very eyes the militiamen drank a shot glass of vodka each and thus 'fortified' the militiamen continued the beating. [19]

**Frequent use of torture by the secret police throughout Poland eventually prompted the Minister of State Security**

**to criticize his underlings in a secret speech:**

The question of the qualification of a crime is an important issue to maintain a correct policy of repression. The qualification of the crime must strictly adhere to the reality of the crime, must be fully in harmony with the evidence, and completely tally with the objective truth. Only then will our repression and punishment be correct. All instances of "cooking up the case" [naciąganie sprawy] during the investigation is harmful and unacceptable. However, this sin is not unknown to some of our operatives, the investigators in particular.

Based on its experiences, the Prosecutor's Office in a letter to the leadership of the [Communist] party states that "we frequently encounter a lack of objectivity during interrogation, a complete disregard for the circumstances and evidence provided by the suspects, the practice of shaping the witness testimony in a manner convenient to construct accusations but not in congruence with reality... The interrogating officers often strive to make the investigative material (suspect and witness interrogations) tally ideally with the material supplied by the [secret] agents..."

An analysis of the Kielce case (Kozienice) and other similar cases shows that poor operational work very often leads our employees to resort to the means of physical persuasion on a detained person. The very fact that people are arrested without the appropriate justification, without checking and cross-checking information and denunciations, without any responsibility, and in incomprehensible and unnecessary haste somehow pushes the [security] employee to look for proof. On the one hand, his attitude is that, after all, he is dealing with a criminal. On the other hand, he therefore even more zealously attempts to find the proof by coercing a confession because he simultaneously attempts to justify his incorrect decision that led to the arrest of the suspect in the first place. At the same time, the security officer fails to notice that he himself goes down a wrong path and continues to make mistakes. Even if he has made a mistake by arresting a person without checking and justifying it with evidence, the mistake must be rectified as soon as possible. We must not persist in error and make further mistakes by "beating the evidence out" [dobijanie się dowodów] because that always turns out to be false in the subsequent investigation or during the trial. [20]

#### The Scholars

Indeed, the UB frequently excelled in "cooking up the case" and "beating the evidence out." According to Janusz Borowiec, who studies the secret police in the Province of Rzeszów, the proof of the widespread application of torture can be gathered from the court records between 1946 and 1955. However infrequently, at least some of the bravest of the torture victims complained openly to judges about the treatment they had received from the UB men. Borowiec discovered no less than 31 individual and group instances of physical torture that varied from beating, electrocuting, and hanging by the genitals, to killing during the interrogation. Incidentally, Borowiec learned that practically all the victims had confessed. [21] Sebastian Bojemski arrived at a similar conclusion after studying the records of the police interrogations and court trials of soldiers of the National Armed Forces in Warsaw. Almost everyone confessed; a few truly exceptional individuals who refused to talk paid dearly for it with their health, if not with their lives. [22]

In her valuable study of a provincial insurgent command, scholar Anna Grażyna Kister has shown that a single arrest of a suspect who was subsequently tortured by the secret police could and did trigger a veritable chain reaction of terror. For example, following the capture and torture of a few insurgents connected to the AK Lublin District Command, the NKVD and the UB seized "more than 440 persons" in Lublin between October 7 and November 11, 1944. The prisoners were tortured and forced to divulge the names and addresses of further 280 Home Army soldiers. [23]

*The Dialectics of Pain to page 10*