

papierosów ani rozmawiać nie było wolno. Po długim postoju na dworcu pociąg ruszył. Więźniowie siedzieli ciasno jeden obok drugiego, drzemiąc, szepcząc między sobą i rozmyślając nad przyszłym losem. W wagonie, w którym byli księża, niektórzy przystąpili do spowiedzi.

Aby iść do ustępu w środku wagonu, trzeba było zgłosić się do policjanta, który nogą wstawił między drzwi i futrynę

przytrzymał drzwi ubikacji. Gdy mijali jakąś większą stację, ktoś przez szparę w storze okiennej zauważył jej nazwę: *Liegnitz* (Legnica). Prysłły wszelkie nadzieje – jechali na północ, w kierunku Berlina.

Andrzej R. Małecki

THE SONDERAKTION PRISONERS IN WROCLAW

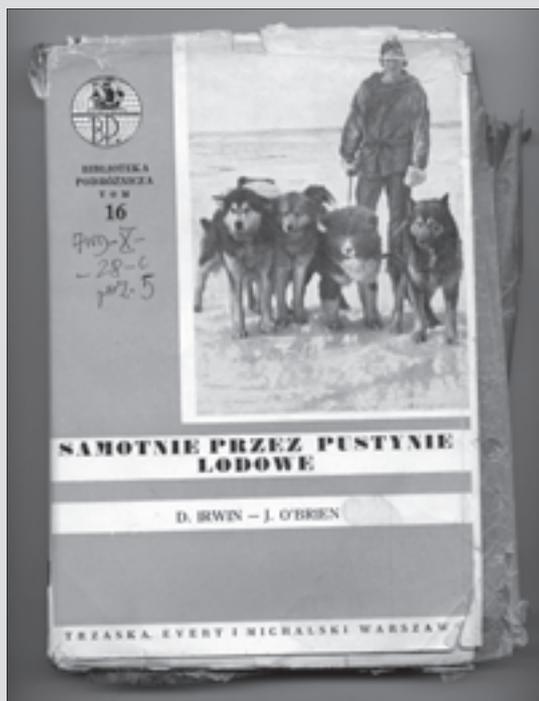
Just before four o'clock in the morning on 10 November 1939 a special train from Kraków rolled into the main railway station of Wrocław (Breslau at the time). It carried 173 prisoners: professors, academic staff and students of the Jagiellonian University, the Mining Academy and the Commercial Academy, along with Dr. Stanisław Klimecki, Mayor of Kraków – the persons who were arrested on 6 November in Kraków in the Gestapo special operation which has come down in history as the Sonderaktion Krakau. The 18-day Wrocław episode of their ordeal was about to start. According to the recollections of Dr. Vilim Frančić, as they were approaching Wrocław, the historian Jan Dąbrowski made a few remarks on the future treaty which would come after the Germans lost the war. It was clear to him that the River Oder would mark the border between Poland and Germany. The only thing he was worried about was whether under the treaty Poland would get the whole of Wrocław, or just the territory on the right bank. For the third month of the war, his line of thinking – that the Polish State, which had only just fallen, would recover its medieval territories – was truly prophetic.

The train was sent onto a sideline and the prisoners were ordered to alight. They were ushered into the station restaurant, which had been cleared of customers, and was guarded by ordinary policemen. The SS-men stayed outside to make arrangements for the next stage of the journey. Inside the restaurant it was warm, the seats were comfortable, and the waiters were polite. You could get a drink of surrogate coffee, at 25 pfennigs for a cup of weak white coffee, and smokers could stock up on cigarettes. The trouble was not many had German money. Professor Jan Zubrzycki, who had taken money out of the bank for his clinic just before the arrest, made loans of several hundred złoty to friends. Some people managed to get and dispatch postcards to their families thanks to the services of the German waiters. Most of these cards were addressed to friends in offices or institutions, which were the only places to which post was still being delivered in Kraków. Professor Izidor Stella-Sawicki sent a postcard to the office of a friend who was the managing director of the municipal

tramway company. Rector Tadeusz Lehr-Spławiński addressed his card to Professor Jan Olbrycht at the Institute of Forensic Medicine. Many of the senders followed Professor Władysław Konopczyński, and wrote that they had just had a cup of delicious *Breslauer Kaffee*. Thanks to these cards the families of the arrested learned fairly soon of their whereabouts.

About 5.30 the prisoners were told to make ready for the next part of their journey. A roll-call was read out, but in a different order than before, attendance was checked and the prisoners were split up into groups of 20. Then they were led out into the station forecourt where four police buses with dimmed lamps were waiting. The few travellers passing by looked curiously at the arrestees, including many priests and grey-haired old men. The first group of professors was taken over the poorly lit streets and after a few minutes reached the *Untersuchungsgefängnis* (remand prison) on Freiburgerstrasse (now ulica Świebodzka 1). This prison was not big enough to hold them all. The next group, which included 10 priests, was taken to the penitentiary prison (*Strafgefängnis*) on Kletschkauerstrasse (ul. Kleczkowska 35), and five persons were transported to the jail in the police station, from where after a few days they were sent to the Kleczków prison.

In the middle of the Freiburgerstrasse complex there is a four-storey octagonal tower with a glass dome, with four wings leading off from it, giving the facility a cruciform shape. Inside the tower an iron staircase runs in a zigzag arrangement of flights connecting the floors. A latticed gangway leads along the walls of each floor. Each wing has wide corridors, with no floors except for the metal gangway along the walls at each level with stairs leading up to them. Doors lead off to the cells from these hanging gangways. At each level there is a thick wire net across the facility. The middle of the tower holds a guard room from which the entire prison interior may be observed from ground floor to the topmost storey. This trellis-like structure reminded Professor Tadeusz Kowalski of a vast industrial plant or a huge ship. The association with a ship was quite appropriate, because the



Książka Samotnie przez pustynie lodowe, którą dostarczyła prof. Janowi Włodkowi jego żona

A book sent to Prof. Włodek by his wife

metal components of the structure were constantly being painted with varnish which gave off a specific smell. Only in B wing were the corridors divided up into separate floors.

About a hundred of the Cracovian professors found themselves in the Freiburgerstrasse prison. The remaining seventy were sent to Kletschkauerstrasse. Today this establishment is part of a group of redbrick buildings in the allotment bounded by ulica Kleczkowska, Reymonta, Kraszewskiego and Struga. On the high prison wall on the Reymonta side there is a small metal plaque in tribute to the 687 Czechoslovak Anti-Fascists executed here in 1940–1945, and a stone tablet commemorating the Polish victims of the Communist system tortured to death behind these walls. Near the prison, in the direction of Wrocław-Nadodrze station, there is an obelisk with a symbolic red drop of blood in memory of the Anti-Fascists of various nationalities (Germans, Frenchmen, Czechs and Slovaks, and 314 Poles) guillotined in this city in 1933–1945.

The biggest difference between the Kletschkauerstrasse and Freiburgerstrasse prisons was that in the former the cells were solitary, but the cells in the latter held several inmates. Cell no. 306B on

the second floor had been converted from a prison museum and held 20 prisoners. Although many of those who had been accustomed to comfort found the congestion and need to accommodate to life with others in a small area and dreadful sanitary conditions extremely problematic, the opportunity to talk to colleagues and exchange ideas proved to be of fundamental importance. Those detained in Kletschkauerstrasse were deprived of this psychological asset. For them the switch from an active life to a state of idleness with nothing but the mulling over of one's own thoughts day and night was a real torture. There were various ways in which prisoners tried to get the better of this hopeless solitude. Father Konstany Michalski started by drawing up a calendar, so as not to go down in the monotonous, mind-numbing passage of time, not to lose his bearings in the elapsing days of the month and week, for otherwise the mind would have plunged into confusion. Professor Bogdan Kamiński got a needle and some cotton from a guard and was busy darning his clothes and making himself a pair of gloves from the camelhair lining of his coat.

An idea of the way the Germans ran their institutions at the time is given by the fact that the chief warden of the remand prison turned down the prisoners' request to permit them to exchange their money and purchase things they needed in the city, even though there were no goods available for sale in the prison shop, certainly not for prisoners who were not working. On the other hand the management of the penal prison made arrangements for the exchange of its prisoners' Polish currency and allowed them to purchase a variety of goods. Whatever was absolutely out of the question in the remand prison could well be possible in the penitentiary.

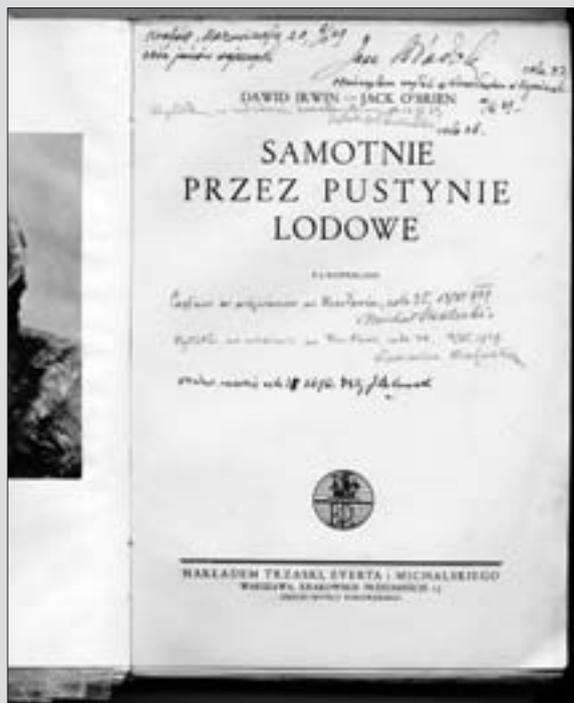
The police authorities of Breslau had been informed of the arrival of such a large number of prisoners only at the last moment. Initially it was thought that they would stay only for a few days and then move on. However, soon it turned out that they would be kept in the city's prisons for much longer, most probably due to the congestion of the concentration camp at Buchenwald, which was originally envisaged as the target destination of the Sonderaktion Krakau detainees. The authorities in Breslau had no information about the new arrivals from Kraków, and thought they had been detained pending interrogation. An investigation was expected regarding the "crime" the professors had committed. However, the Breslau authorities soon realised that the Cracovian prisoners, against whom the Gestapo had not laid any charges whatsoever, were neither on remand, nor indeed convicted of any criminal offence.

For the management of the prison the presence of the university professors was certainly a sensation. No investigation was conducted during their stay in Wrocław. Only their personal data were recorded – name and surname, date of birth, marital status, religion, profession, and address in Kraków. The prisoners were

allowed to keep all their personal belongings and were not issued with prison garments. Neither were they made to work, although according to the regulations all prisoners were obliged to work. The rule which was strictly observed was the prohibition on prisoners leaving their cells for any reason whatsoever except for the regulation exercise in the prison yard. They had to use the pots that stood in their cells for physiological needs. However, the guards turned a blind eye to other rules such as the prohibition on smoking or playing cards. Some of them went round the prohibition on prisoners being allowed to read newspapers without permission from the Gestapo by supplying old newspapers for use as toilet paper.

Most of the wardens were pensioners who had been called back into service from retirement to replace younger men conscripted into the army, and they were sympathetic and kindly disposed to the prisoners from Kraków, willing to do a variety of small favours. Remarkably, many

of these elderly guards understood, or even spoke some Polish. Some came from Polish families, which showed how recent the "Germanness" of the Breslau region was. One could go as far as to say that the Cracovian group enjoyed a special status in the Wrocław jails. They could even sense that the prison management and wardens were on their side against the Gestapo. Professor Stanisław Urbańczyk later wrote that they could feel that they were under the protection of the law. The regulations up in the cells enumerated not only prisoners' obligations, but also listed their rights, and in Wrocław those rights were not denied them. It was only once they got to the concentration camp that they became social outcasts, outlaws left without the protection of the law.



Adnotacje profesorów, którzy czytali książkę w więzieniu we Wrocławiu. Książka była w depozycie w Sachsenhausen

Notes made by academics who read this book in the Wrocław jail. In Sachsenhausen the book was kept in deposit

A full description of everyday life in the Freiburgerstrasse jail has been made by Professors Jasn Gwiazdomorski and Stanisław Maziarski. Getting up time was 5.30 a.m., except for Sundays, when prisoners were not woken up. After the lights were put on in the cells prisoners washed and put their privies, dirty water buckets, and fresh water cans out into the corridor. In cells with several inmates some of the prisoners washed later, as there was not enough time and water to go round. Breakfast was brought around six. It consisted of unsweetened black surrogate coffee made from ground roasted cereal, sometimes a bowl of porridge, and a large slice of brown bread. After breakfast the utensils were washed and the beds were made. Around seven, when it became light outside, the lights were switched off. Only then could the window blinds be pulled up, because of the mandatory blackout in the city.

The privies, buckets and water-cans were put out into the corridor and then collected four times a day, accompanied by shouts of *Kübel und Wasserkannen raus!* and *Kübel und Wasserkannen holen!* from the wardens. Around nine o'clock some of the inmates took a light meal consisting of bread sprinkled with salt. There was plenty of salt, but no sugar or any other sweet food, not even marmalade. Between 10 and 11 there was *Freistunde*, about half-an-hour's exercise in the prison yard. The prisoners marched around a right-angled triangular yard with a perimeter of 120 steps, at intervals of five steps one from another, watched by guards. After a quarter of an hour they turned and walked in the opposite direction. There was supposed to be no talking during the exercise, but this rule was not strictly enforced, and it was the only opportunity for communication with prisoners from other cells. Elderly and sick inmates could take a "treatment" exercise known as *der kleine Kreis* prescribed by the prison doctor, which meant walking in a small garden in the middle of the prison yard instead of round the whole yard.

Dinner was at 12 noon. Prisoners came out with their bowls into the corridor and waited in a queue to have their portion served from the dinner tub. They would get one dish: soup made of turnips, carrots, peas, potatoes and a cereal, lentils etc., and a slice of brown bread. On Sundays there would be a small portion of meat in the soup. After dinner in some of the cells it was customary to have a quiet half-hour's rest from the constant noise of conversation. Books from the prison library were read in the afternoon. Lights were put on in the cells after dusk, and the blinds had to be pulled down immediately. Supper was at six o'clock, and it consisted of soup or unsweetened tea with a large slice of bread with liver sausage, a portion of margarine, and sometimes cheese and onion and jacket potatoes. You had to hurry with supper, to have all the utensils washed up and be in bed by seven, when lights were put out. Sometimes lights-out was even earlier. Conversations continued in bed, but usually by around eight there was silence.

The sanitary conditions in the prison were far from adequate. The greatest inconvenience was the fact that privies stood in cells holding many prisoners, separated off from the rest of the cell with just a thin screen. The chief warden flatly refused to allow prisoners to use the toilet in the corridor to void the bowels. So they had to put up with the smell, as some prisoners were against opening the windows because of draughts. The weekly bath was a highlight of prison existence. In the Freiburgerstrasse jail Saturday was bath-day, and the prisoners would use the bath located on the ground floor. It was the only opportunity in the week to wash in hot water; only cold water was available in the cells. The bathroom was cold, and hot water was in short supply; the showers would be turned off fairly soon. As

Professor Gwiazdomorski recollected, you had to undress in a jiffy, wash very quickly, and dress as fast as possible. Elderly prisoners were afraid of catching a cold and did not take baths. Once a week the prison barber shaved prisoners, but the hygienic conditions in which those shaves were conducted were miserable. The brushes and razors were not sterilised, so some prisoners preferred to shave themselves.

The old prison doctor (or perhaps orderly) Sossinka tried to look after our prisoners' well-being. During his morning round he would do his best to administer whatever he was asked for to all who wanted his help. His favourite medication for the treatment of all complaints was Tinctura Valerianae, and milk of magnesia for digestive disorders. He also administered aspirin and sleeping pills, prescribed a diet of rolls instead of brown bread, and *der kleine Kreis* as a general treatment for all who were feeble or sick.

In some cells the Cracovian academics practised a special custom to break the monotony of prison life. They held scholarly lectures and autobiographical talks. These events were initiated by Professor Tadeusz Kowalski in cell no. 306, who spoke on his life story and the motives behind his choice of an academic career. Other autobiographical talks were delivered in the evenings after seven, once everyone was in bed, by Professors Stanisław Maziarski, Ignacy Chrzanowski, Kazimierz Nitsch, Stanisław Pigoń, Jerzy Lande, Stanisław Gąsiorowski and Jan Gwiazdomorski. The Mayor of Kraków, Dr. Stanisław Klimecki, gave a long talk in three instalments on his life. The life stories were so successful that they led to the commencement of a parallel cycle of scholarly lectures, held around eight o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon. They were given by Professors Tadeusz Kowalski, Stanisław Gąsiorowski, Tadeusz Estreicher, Stanisław Pigoń, Marek Gatty-Kostyál, Wiktor Ormicki, Kazimierz Piwarski, Stanisław Leszczycki, Kazimierz Nitsch, Stanisław Maziarski, Jan Gwiazdomorski, Stanisław Turski and Kazimierz Lepszy, and some speakers delivered two lectures. Evening talks and lectures were held in the neighbouring cell, too. The most frequently addressed subjects were ancient history (by Ludwik Piotrowicz), the natural sciences (by Józef Fudakowski and Jan Wojciech Zabłocki), with a few on medical topics (by Aleksander Oszacki) and the history of music (by Zdzisław Jachimecki). Years later Professor Stanisław Urbańczyk, who was an inmate of this cell, wrote that one of the valuable recollections he had of his detention in Wrocław was the lasting friendship senior colleagues bestowed on him there, confirming the respect he had had for them ever since his student days.

The tedium of prison life was sometimes broken by events which acquired a special meaning against the uniformity of everyday routine. A few days after their arrival in Wrocław news went round the group that one of them was about to be released. After a few days it turned out that the lucky man was 82-year-old Edward Windakiewicz, who held an honorary doctorate from the Mining Academy. On 14 November the Freiburgerstrasse institution was visited by the prison superintendent, who gave the Cracovian prisoners some advice in a fairly calm and sympathetic manner regarding the regulations and detention in the remand prison. He implied that it was the Gestapo who decided what would happen to them and that they were better off in the prison, since things would be much worse in a concentration camp. He also said that in view of the Gestapo decision to keep them in the prison for a protracted stay he would give orders for the issue of bedclothes and for their underwear to be washed in the prison laundry. This is indeed what happened, and the

inmates were issued with prison undergarments for the time that their private clothes were in the laundry. A week later their things came back, washed and neatly ironed. Even their socks had been darned by women prisoners in the neighbouring block. The most important outcome of the superintendent's visit was his promise that he would ask the Gestapo to permit the prisoners to write home and to receive parcels. His request was successful, and on the next day the prisoners were given correspondence cards. On the same day, 15 November, the Kletschkauerstrasse inmates were allowed to write home, on letter paper with a watermark reading BEHÖRDEN-EIGENTUM. They had a second opportunity to write home on 23 November. Of course their letters were subject to censorship by the Gestapo. Unfortunately their correspondence was delayed, first in Breslau and also once it reached Kraków, so that their families didn't get it until mid-December, when they were already in Sachsenhausen.

On 18 November the inmates of cell no. 306 received a visit from the prison chaplain. He consoled them that they would not be going any further and would be home well before Christmas. He told them that the ministry of education in Berlin had appealed on behalf of the professors of Kraków. He also promised to return in a few days' time. He didn't keep this promise, but his visit gave the prisoners a lot of hope. As they were later to learn in Sachsenhausen from Father Tadeusz Glemma, the chaplain who visited him in Kletschkauerstrasse told him that they would be taken straight to a concentration camp, but made him keep this information

secret. Around 20 November Professor Leon Sternbach was taken to the prison hospital, following an attack of diabetes. News of this soon went round all the prisoners in Freiburgerstrasse. November 21 was the first day when the early morning temperature dropped below zero degrees Centigrade, and the first snow fell on 25 November, but it soon melted away.

Finally, on Monday, 27 November 1939, at around nine o'clock in the morning, a warden came and told Professor Jan Sarna to pack. He was to leave the cell. Professor Jan Dąbrowski was told to do the same. Their fellow prisoners thought this signalled their prospective return home, and they all tried to give the men who were leaving some news for their families. Most probably these two academics were released thanks to an intervention by the Hungarian consulate in Kraków. Both were married to Hungarian women.

An hour later wardens came again and told them all to pack and that they would be leaving Breslau around ten o'clock that evening. An attendant from the prison storehouse came to collect their bedding. During the exercise period the guards reassured the prisoners that no doubt they were being released and sent home. Then long hours of waiting passed, full of expectation of a quick return home. About eight in the evening the doors of the cells were opened and wardens told the professors to leave the cells and wished them good luck. In

the corridor the storehouse attendant gave each of them a package containing four double rations of bread with margarine and slices of smoked bacon fat and said it was to last them for the whole of the next day. Professor Bogdan Kamiński asked a warden where they were going. The reply he got was not very clear, and thinking that he had heard *Hause* believed they were being sent home. He had never heard of Sachsenhausen before.

But all the hopes they cherished of being sent home vanished once they were out in the prison yard. They were cordoned off by policemen who packed them into police wagons amid a stream of abuse and offensive language. At Freiburgerstrasse Professor Zdzisław Jachimecki, who had a large bundle of belongings, was squeezed into a tiny compartment at the front of the vehicle. He was pushed in with knee-kicks and hit on the back to make him fit in. At the Kletschkauerstrasse jail Professor Karol Dzięwoński was pressed into the boot of one of the vehicles and nearly suffocated.

The vehicles went from the prison to the station and back again. The prisoners were set off at the tunnel in the main railway station and guarded by a unit of Schutzpolizei men and their NCOs in helmets and armed with rifles ready to shoot. Professor Kamiński recalled that he tried to move just to change his position, but each time a fanatical young Nazi ruffian took aim, very accurately, at his head, from a distance of just a few steps away. As they were waiting in the station tunnel surrounded by men pointing guns at them a German woman started yelling from an overhead platform, "Schurchill should come and help them, where's Schamberlein now?" mispronouncing the names in the German way and repeating the same thing over and over again.

Finally, around ten o'clock at night, they were loaded up into unlit carriages with blacked out windows. 55 persons were crammed into each of these old-fashioned carriages with benches around the walls. They were guarded by four fully armed men and two NCOs. The middle of each carriage was filled up with the prisoners' baggage. The commander of the prison train selected a few individuals who were to be hostages and would be shot if any of the prisoners tried to escape. Smoking, looking out of the window, and talking were prohibited. After a long spell in the station the train set off. The prisoners sat tightly packed next to one another, trying to sleep, whispering to each other, or wondering what lay ahead for them. Some in the carriage carrying the priests made their confession.

To get to the toilet in the middle of the carriage they had to ask permission from a policeman, who would keep the toilet door ajar with his foot. When they were passing a big station someone noticed the name through a crack in the blackout: *Liegnitz* (Legnica). All their hopes were shattered – they were heading north, in the direction of Berlin.

Andrzej R. Malecki



Tablica pamiątkowa na murze więzienia przy ul. Sądowej we Wrocławiu, odsłonięta 15 listopada 1999 r., zrealizowana przez wrocławskie środowisko akademickie, z inicjatywy Stowarzyszenia NE CEDAT ACADEMIA, dla uczczenia 60. rocznicy Sonderaktion Krakau

Memorial tablet on the wall of the prison in ulica Sądowa in Wrocław, unveiled on 15 November 1999, put up by the Wrocław academic community on the initiative of the NE CEDAT ACADEMIA Association to mark the sixtieth anniversary of Sonderaktion Krakau

OBÓZ KONCENTRACYJNY W SACHSENHAUSEN SACHSENHAUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP



Archiwum UJ • Jagiellonian University Archives

*Transport więźniów do obozu w Sachsenhausen
Transport of prisoners to Sachsenhausen*



Archiwum UJ • Jagiellonian University Archives

*Baraki w Sachsenhausen
Huts in Sachsenhausen*



Archiwum UJ • Jagiellonian University Archives

*Odprawa esesmańska strażników
SS guards reporting for duty*



Archiwum UJ • Jagiellonian University Archives

*Wyżsi rangą esesmani podczas marszu
Senior SS officers marching*



Archiwum UJ • Jagiellonian University Archives

*Szubienica na terenie obozu
Concentration camp gallows*



Archiwum UJ • Jagiellonian University Archives

*Krematorium w Sachsenhausen
Sachsenhausen crematorium*