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## WATCHMEN OR GUARDS? THE PRISON GUARD IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC\*

### Abstract

The officer core of the Prison Guard (*Straż Więzienna*, SW), a formation established only as late as 1932, emerged from the narrow circle of persons associated with the Prison Section, which emerged in 1918. Its membership consisted of a small cadre of Polish guards who had gained experience in prisons controlled by the occupying powers. Unless they had worked in prisons before 1918, the rank-and-file of the SW consisted of demobilised and/or retired soldiers as well as of would-be or ex-policemen. ‘Street people’ in many cases, they treated the work as temporary or took it up as an easy job. The reality they faced on the other side of the wall quickly verified their convictions about the task they had accepted. As a result, the ranks of the SW were given to heavy rotation, evident up to 1939. Employees of the interwar prison system did not enjoy much public regard; for some, leaving the army to become a prison guard felt like social degradation. Aside from a few minor exceptions – such as prison breaks, stories of convict abuse – this peculiar group of workers was generally absent from the public narrative of the re-established state. Naturally, its problems were debated among experts, but these debates did not seep into the press as often as those concerning the police. For many years after 1918, the SW continued to be perceived through the nineteenth-century image of the guard as watchman, a personification of the oppressive partition governments. SW functionaries associated with the labour union established in 1932 as well as the *Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego* (Polish Penal Review) magazine took up the daunting task of improving that image.

The article provides an analysis of their efforts, attempting a response whether their goals were achieved, at least to a degree. My focus is on the public perception of the formation, while I also try to establish whether its foundation and development was perceived as a success (as was the case, for instance, with the police). My interests, however, are not limited to the media and public image of the SW corps, but also include the conditions under which its members laboured. In this context, I am particularly interested in the realities of the prison corridor; in the

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article, I attempt to describe the tenor of the relations between guards and prisoners in contemporary prisons (especially the prevailing aggression). Finally, I pursue a reconstruction of the image/s of the SW created by convicts, with particular focus on the significance of the change associated with the year 1918.

My analysis leads to somewhat pessimistic conclusions. The major changes involved in the professionalization of the cadres and partial implementation of the prison reform that also affected the SW do not appear to have been satisfactory. Attempts to dismantle stereotypes of the guards could only achieve limited success, and the SW remained a formation of thoroughly dubious quality.

**Keywords:** Prison Guard, prisons, Second Polish Republic, penology, criminals, Poland

## I

### INTRODUCTION

In the early 1918, prison houses taken over by Polish administrators employed nearly five hundred functionaries, including three hundred prison guards. Over the following two decades, that number swelled to almost 4,300. As of this writing, there is no monographic account of this sector of the labour force that takes in not only the interwar period, but also the pre-1918 and post-1939 history of the prison service. However, the absence of such a study is not particularly surprising when viewed from an international perspective. Neither Western European nor American historiography can boast a significant scholarly investment in the history of prison personnel broadly understood, though certain attempts of this kind have, of course, been made.<sup>1</sup> The history of the prison guard is actively researched in countries such as Russia.<sup>2</sup> Some studies also address, for instance,

<sup>1</sup> Christian Carlier, *Histoire du personnel des prisons françaises du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Paris, 1997); James E. Thomas, *The English Prison Officer since 1850* (London, 1972). I have not found any monographic work of that kind devoted to the American penal personnel, though research into that area most certainly does exist. Helen Johnston, 'Moral guardians? Prison officers, prison practice and ambiguity in the nineteenth century', in Helen Johnston (ed.), *Punishment and Control in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke, 2008). Broad fragments concerned with prison personnel can obviously be found in the monumental study: Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (eds.), *The Oxford History of the Prison. The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York and Oxford, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Николай И. Пеперенко, 'Порядок стимулирования персонала пенитенциарной системы России во второй половине XIX века', *Марийский Юридический Вестник*, 11 (2014), 38–44.

its gender context, a question that is completely absent from the Polish scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

Polish historiography of the prison service includes primarily a whole strong of studies on the role and social standing of prison guards from the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> For the nineteenth century, this problematic has been explored by Jerzy Czołgoszewski, among others.<sup>5</sup> It is also present in monographs of the history of prisons and criminal policies.<sup>6</sup> The interwar history of the Prison Guard (*Straż Więzienna*, SW) has been the subject of one regional monograph (concerning the city of Bydgoszcz)<sup>7</sup> and about a dozen of survey articles of mostly popular character.<sup>8</sup> These texts

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Forsythe, 'Women Prisoners and Women Penal Officials 1840–1921', *British Journal of Criminology*, xxxiii (1993), 525–40; Helen Johnston, 'Gendered Prison Work: Female Prison Officers in the Local Prison System 1877–1939', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, liii, 2 (2014), 193–212 (includes a broad bibliography).

<sup>4</sup> Jarosław Suproniuk, 'Miejskie służby porządkowe a społeczeństwo w Polsce XIV–XVI w.', *Przegląd Historyczny*, xc, 2 (1999), 117–30; Zygfryd Rymaszewski, *Wózny sądowy. Z badań nad organizacją sądów prawa polskiego w średniowieczu* (Warszawa, 2008); *idem*, *Czynności wóznego sądowego. Z badań nad funkcjonowaniem sądów prawa polskiego w średniowieczu* (Warszawa, 2010); Paweł A. Jeziorski, *Margines społeczny w dużych miastach Prus i Inflant w późnym średniowieczu i wczesnych czasach nowożytnych* (Toruń, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Jerzy Czołgoszewski, 'Więziennictwo Księstwa Warszawskiego (1807–1815)', *Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego* (hereinafter: PWP), 69 (2010), 129–42; *idem*, 'Organizacja więziennictwa i służba więzienna w Królestwie Polskim w latach 1815–1868', PWP, 85 (2014), 115–42.

<sup>6</sup> Służba Więzienna (SW) is discussed separately in Elżbieta Kaczyńska, *Ludzie ukarani. Więzienia i system kar w Królestwie Polskim 1815–1864* (Warszawa, 1989), 409 ff.; Monika Senkowska, *Kara więzienia w Królestwie Polskim w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku* (Wrocław, Warszawa and Kraków, 1961), 92 ff.; Małgorzata Karpińska, *Złodzieje, agenci, policyjni strażnicy... Przestępstwa pospolite w Warszawie 1815–1830* (Warszawa, 1999); and Andrzej Ossibach-Budzyński, *Pawiak. Więzienie polityczne 1880–1915* (Warszawa, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Anna Kozłowska-Ryś and Krzysztof Drozdowski, *Świat odosobniony. Bydgoska służba penitencjarna w latach 1920–1939* (Poznań, Bydgoszcz and Piotrków Trybunalski, 2017). In practice, this is a monographic work on the Bydgoszcz penal system and a collection of short biographies of the penal workers of Bydgoszcz prisons and detention facilities.

<sup>8</sup> Of note in this context are mainly the numerous articles by K. Pawlak, such as: Karol Pawlak, 'Polska kadra penitencjarna', in *Nabór i szkolenie funkcjonariuszy Służby Więziennej w polskim systemie penitencjarnym. Diagnoza, ocena, prognoza. Materiały z konferencji, Kalisz 29–31 maj 1995* (Kalisz, 1995), 8–13; and broad sections concerning the SW in monographical works on the history of the penal service,

discuss legal aspects, numerical size, rules, and training organisation for members of the SW, social and existential issues affecting workers within the prison industry, publishing and organisation activities (e.g. the formation of labour unions), or, finally, the martyrdom of SW officers during the Second World War.

Only incidentally, often in a very cursory and general manner, do questions of the public image and real conditions of labour of SW functionaries come up – mostly in the context of guard-prisoner relations.<sup>9</sup> These two neglected issues constitute the object of this article. In contrast to the legal grounding of SW activities, the size of the formation, or the style of its uniforms, they have universal ramifications in spite of their local context, as problems faced by penal workers in many countries – especially those where prisons have served as a means of oppression in the hands of an invader, occupier, or conqueror, eventually necessitating a restoration (or establishment) of the social status of the prison guard.

Universal implications can also be derived from an analysis of the special nature of the work performed by the guards, who operate in a territory stretched between three realities, each of which imposes an assessment and control of the guards' labour. The realities in question are the state (i.e. the immediate superior),<sup>10</sup> the society (which observes the actuality of prisons through the lens of prison myths or stories), and the prisoners (who, though controlled and

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such as: Karol Pawlak, 'Kadra', in *Więziennictwo polskie w latach 1918–1939* (Kalisz, 1995), 26–40. See also Andrzej Konstankiewicz, 'Umundurowanie i uzbrojenie Straży Więziennej II RP (1924–1939)', in *Z dziejów więzienia w Lublinie*, 133–42. One should also refer to the articles by Karol Bedyński (a series of popular pieces published in trade press, e.g. in *Forum Penitencjarne*), also by Roman Maleszyk (e.g. *idem*, 'Ranga zawodowa personelu więziennego w Polsce w latach 1918–1939', in Jan Świtek, Małgorzata Kuć and Iwona Niewiadomska [eds.], *Autorytet i godność służb penitencjarnych a skuteczność metod resocjalizacji* [Lublin, 2004], 65–80), or reflections on SW in studies by Jerzy Migdał (*idem*, *Polski system penitencjarny w latach 1918–1928* [Gdańsk, 2011]). Observations on prison personnel appear in monographic studies of specific prisons (Mokotów, Chełm, Lublin, Białystok, etc.).

<sup>9</sup> The subject was touched upon very broadly in the review article: Maleszyk, 'Ranga zawodowa', 66.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Foucault's observations on nineteenth-century conceptions of the *panopticon*, in which both the convicts and the personnel are being supervised. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979), 204.

assessed in their own right, constantly review the attitudes of the ‘turnkeys’).

While working on this article, I referred to interwar newspaper sources which included references to prison personnel. The work would have been impossible without a query of trade magazines, including three major titles: *Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego* (1925–39), *W Służbie Penitencjarnej* (1936–9) and *Pracownik Więzienny* (1925–6). For insight into the conditions of labour of the prison guards, I looked into the administrative files of one of the largest interwar prisons, that is, Criminal Prison Warsaw-Mokotów (WKWM).<sup>11</sup>

The terms ‘prison personnel’, ‘prison functionaries’, or ‘prison workers’ used in this text refer to persons employed as prison guards (watchmen). The so-called contract workers such as doctors, teachers, or craftsmen and apprentices labouring in workshops, as well as the technical personnel – stokers, electricians, drivers, errand boys, etc. – fall beyond my purview.

## II

### POINT OF DEPARTURE: A NEW BEGINNING, WITHOUT CHANGE

In November 1918, Poland claimed control over prisons within the former Congress Kingdom, abandoned by their German and Austrian administrators.<sup>12</sup> Thus began the process of reclaiming prison facilities, which would continue until November 1921.<sup>13</sup> In time, it would be

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<sup>11</sup> The history of the Mokotów prison, established in 1903, is recorded in Maria Gordon (ed.), *Więzienie mokotowskie. Historia i terażniejszość* (Warszawa, 2004). The convicts, on the other hand, are the subject of the monograph: Mateusz Rodak, *Pospolity, cuwaksi, powrotowcy. Osadzeni w Więzieniu Karnym Warszawa–Mokotów (1918–1939)* (Warszawa, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> One symbolic image of the transition is captured in the oft-cited memoirs of Jan Zakrzewski, then acting director of the Prison Department (and then Section) by the Ministry of Justice, who in November 1918 found himself in Lublin, where a riot erupted in a local prison abandoned by the Austrian army. Most prisoners escaped, leaving the building empty for several days. See Jan Zakrzewski, ‘Pierwsze pięciolecie więziennictwa polskiego’, in Zygmunt Bugajski (ed.), *Księga jubileuszowa więziennictwa polskiego 1918–1928* (Warszawa, 1929), 47.

<sup>13</sup> Prisons were taken over gradually. Those in the former Austrian occupied territory were reclaimed already in early November 1918, followed by all prisons within the Congress Kingdom by the end of the month. In January 1919, prisons in Galicia were taken over. Another stage of the reclamation took place in 1921,

described as the birth of the Polish penology. In 1923, Jan Zakrzewski – an organiser of the Polish penal system, explained in simple terms: “The five years of the reborn Commonwealth are also the five years of the rebirth of Polish penology, or, rather, its *birth* [my italics – MR], since pre-partition Poland did not possess a modern prison service”.<sup>14</sup>

At the time, emphasising birth rather than rebirth,<sup>15</sup> though somewhat at odds with reality,<sup>16</sup> seemed rational. Prisons (such as the Citadel in Warsaw) constituted a symbol of the oppressive policies of the conquerors, even though it was perfectly clear that they were essential to the operation of a legal state. Their role and purpose would have to be defined anew. In this context, leaving the unsavoury past behind was a purposeful act.<sup>17</sup> To that end, the new administrators constantly highlighted the negative aspects of the period ended in 1918.

The penal system in partition-era Poland, including the organisation of prisons and the situation (legal, social) of the convicts, was described as drastically backward, even anti-human. It was stressed that the contemporaneous penal and criminal policies failed to keep up with emerging, innovative penal doctrines of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the narrative of partition-era prisons was hijacked by stories of martyrdom.<sup>18</sup> Tales of pre-1918 prisons generally boil down to a history of Polish patriot-martyrs, the prison cell transformed into

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when Polish administrators claimed prisons in the Eastern voivodships (in April), the Vilnius area (in July) and in Upper Silesia and the former Prussian partition (in November). Edward Neymark, ‘Piętnastolecie więziennictwa polskiego’, PWP, 8 (1933), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Zakrzewski, ‘Pierwsze pięciolecie’, 47.

<sup>15</sup> A rebirth did indeed take place in the case of the PP, which subscribed to the history of the eighteenth-century Police Commission of the Two Nations, and, obviously, the Polish army. Cf. Renata Król-Mazur, ‘Z tradycji polskiej policji. Komisja Policji Obojga Narodów w dobie Sejmu Czteroletniego’, in Adrian Tyszkiewicz (ed.), *Policja Państwowa w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Wybrane aspekty organizacji i funkcjonowania* (Kraków, 2015), 36.

<sup>16</sup> Karol Pawlak, ‘Organizacja polskiego więziennictwa’, in Andrzej Marek (ed.), *Księga jubileuszowa więziennictwa polskiego 1918–1988* (Warszawa, 1990), 65. On prisons in early nineteenth-century Poland, see Senkowska, *Kara więzienia w Królestwie Polskim*.

<sup>17</sup> Zbigniew Kopeć, ‘Margines za kratami. Więzienne narracje dwudziestolecia międzywojennego’, in Mateusz Rodak (ed.), *Margines społeczny Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, Metamorfozy Społeczne*, vi (Warszawa, 2013), 49.

<sup>18</sup> Even today, studies in the history of penal services in Polish territories discuss their nineteenth-century aspect through the figure of the political prisoner.

a sacred, mystical space (as in Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefather's Eve*).<sup>19</sup> The primary goal of prisons – isolation of people convicted for criminal offences – and their main inhabitants – criminal offenders – would rarely earn even a mention.

In many ways, the resulting image was deeply falsified. Even though a symbolic separation with the past could be achieved (e.g. by deliberate failure to mention the pre-1918 attempts – limited as they were – to modernise the penal systems in the partitions),<sup>20</sup> such break was harder to come by at the structural level, however much desired by Polish penologists of the interwar period. Inevitably, the Polish penal system inherited the pre-existing infrastructure. The prisons that had thus far served as symbols of oppression – the despised Russian *tjur'my* – had to turn overnight into landmarks of legality and social justice. The same paradox affected another symbol of the terror instigated by the conquerors: the prison guard.

The narrative of the partitions describes the guards as brutal, intellectually stunted, immoral, and physically repugnant tormentors – watchmen.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the post-1918 moment required that the former watchman become a widely respected public functionary – a guard – whose role was to perform a special kind of social service. The creators of the Polish penal system claimed that this task required a new type of prison worker, one that bore no relation to the pre-1914 (or pre-1918) era. Achieving that was a virtual impossibility. In the reconstituted state, the profession did not offer much income compared to the State Police (Policja Państwowa, PP), which is why for the first few years every applicant was immediately

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Cf. Karol Pawlak, *Za kratami więzień i drutami obozów. Zarys dziejów więziennictwa w Polsce* (Kalisz, 1999), 33 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Kopeć, 'Margines za kratami', 48. For example, the scholar relates the scandal that erupted in Vilnius in the 1920s, when it transpired that the cell supposedly occupied by the Konrad of Mickiewicz's opus was modified into a loo! Eventually, it was discovered that Konrad's cell was elsewhere.

<sup>20</sup> In this context, the input from Polish early nineteenth-century thinkers into the contemporary penal theories was repeatedly underlined. In this manner, writers could invoke contemporaneous penal theories without condoning the applications thereof. Cf. Witold M. Karpowicz, 'Początki więzienia – okres do 1918 roku', in Maria Gordon (ed.), *Więzienie mokotowskie. Historia i teraźniejszość* (Warszawa, 2004), 11–13.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. remarks from Elżbieta Kaczyńska and the reminiscences of political prisoners that she recounts. Kaczyńska, *Ludzie ukarani*, 421, 425–6.

accepted.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the post-1918 employees of the system were largely recruited from persons who had worked as prison guards well before 1914.<sup>23</sup> Until the late 1920s, guards who had begun working in prisons under the Tsar constituted nearly a half of all employees in many prisons.<sup>24</sup> The same applied to higher positions in the hierarchy, as well.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the interwar period, attempts were made to keep that fact under wraps.<sup>26</sup> Due to manpower shortages, the employees were only subjected to a cursory verification. Individual guards would be fired if former political prisoners accused them of using torture before 1918.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the experience possessed by some

<sup>22</sup> One guard candidly admitted: “To tell you the truth, typically hard living conditions, difficulty in finding another job, the necessity to earn one’s bread, that’s what makes you choose this line of work”. ‘W służbie penitencjarnej’, *W Służbie Penitencjarnej*, 1 (1936), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Andrzej Ossibach-Budzyński claims – based on very scant data – that by the end of the nineteenth century, Poles accounted for roughly a half of all prison personnel at the Pawiak. Cf. Andrzej Ossibach-Budzyński, *Pawiak. Więzienie polityczne 1880–1915* (Warszawa, 2016), 92–3. At the Lublin prison, between 1829 and 1915, Roman Catholics – presumably of Polish origin – amounted to nearly three quarters of all employed guards. Cf. Andrzej Osoba, ‘Więzienie na Zamku Lubelskim w latach 1824–1915’, in Tadeusz Radzik (ed.), *Z dziejów więzienia w Lublinie* (Lublin, 2007), 100.

<sup>24</sup> In sum, of the nearly 110 guards working at the Mokotów prison in 1929, over 40 had been employed for ten years or more, including as many as eleven with over 20 years of experience in penal work. Konstanty Jankowski – the most experienced guard – was first employed in 1901. Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie (State Archives in Warsaw, hereinafter: APW), Więzienie Karne Warszawa-Mokotów (Criminal prison Warszawa-Mokotów District, hereinafter: WKWM), Akta dotyczące pracowników więziennych, 1929, sygn. 1635, 66, 194–7.

<sup>25</sup> Assistant principal of the Criminal Prison “Mokotów” Antoni Radecki had nearly fifteen years of work experience in Russian prisons. By 1929, he was still in active service. APW, WKWM, Akta dotyczące pracowników więziennych, 1929, sygn. 1635, 66

<sup>26</sup> In 1929, the *Księga jubileuszowa więziennictwa polskiego* yearbook provided data concerning prison personnel employed in January 1919. In all, it amounted to 405 individuals, of whom over 320 were guards of either sex. Jan Zakrzewski recounted that by November 1918, Polish representatives of the Ministry of Justice managed to train 120 guards, that is, roughly a third of the total for the turn of 1918. Of the rest, the scholar of the history of the Polish penal service speaks curtly as “several dozen Poles employed in prisons in the partitions”. Cf. Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Odpowiedź ministra sprawiedliwości w sprawie zbirów carskich’, *Robotnik*, 124 (1921), 3. Four guards were fired from the Kalisz prison for torturing political prisoners in 1907–8 and 1912–14.



guards was prized and rewarded, especially in those in service at the time of the Polish take-over of the prisons or those who took an active part in the process as prison employees, e.g., by disarming German soldiers.<sup>28</sup>

The history of the Polish penal system of the interwar period was officially inaugurated by the decree of 8 February 1919 on temporary prison regulations.<sup>29</sup> Some of the rules it introduced referred to the prison personnel, composed of the prison principal (along with assistant principals, in the case of larger prison facilities) and inspectors, as well as senior watchmen and watchmen (male or female).<sup>30</sup> The decree was a stop-gap measure that legitimised the status quo from 1918. However, when compared to Russian regulations that it replaced, it simply reinstated old rules concerning watchmen.<sup>31</sup> The act from June 1887 regulating the activities of prison personnel, implemented in the Congress Kingdom in 1892,<sup>32</sup> referred to a prison guard whose functionaries empowered to conduct immediate supervision of the prisoners were named guards.<sup>33</sup> The decree from 1919, on the other hand, replaced the old term with the word 'watchman', while retaining the traditional name for upper-level employees – officers – even though it formally applied to all members of the SW.

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<sup>28</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta dotyczące awansów i odznaczeń, 1936, sygn. 1821, no pag.

<sup>29</sup> 'Dekret Naczelnika Państwa w sprawie tymczasowych przepisów więziennych', *Dziennik Praw Państwa Polskiego* (1919), no. 15, item 202.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*. The decree also foresaw a so-called lower penal service (e.g. janitors, coach driver, gardeners). Absence of discussion of gender issues from this article is explained solely by limitations of space. In my view, the issue demands separate treatment. The role and position of women in this male-dominated formation is clearly indicated by numbers. In 1923, the SW employed 193 women (6.6 per cent of the total). Similar proportions persist in the 1930s. Meanwhile, the General Directorate of the Trade Union of Prison Workers only included one female member. The *Księga jubileuszowa* largely omits women. Interestingly, female SW functionaries usually achieved the best marks at the courses for the guard organised by the Ministry of Justice.

<sup>31</sup> Already the prison manual for 1823 used the term 'prison service' and called persons tasked with overseeing prisoners 'guards' or 'watchmen'. Similar titles appear in the 1853 instructions for prison guards. Czołgoszewski, 'Organizacja więziennictwa', 120, 129.

<sup>32</sup> Kaczyńska, *Ludzie ukarani*, 365.

<sup>33</sup> Виктория Владимировна Казаченок, 'Прохождение службы в тюремных учреждениях Казанской губернии в XIX в. – начале XX вв.', *Вестник Казанского Юридического Института МВД России*, 15 (2014), 106–7.

Naturally, the fact that the Tsardom's – and, before that, Polish Kingdom's – terminology included the term 'guard' does not alter the fact that the term 'watchman' was in common usage. Both words generally describe the same object, though after 1918, the latter would be deemed pejorative and demeaning by prison employees. The *Memorial* of February 1931 addressed to the Director of the Criminal Department of the Ministry of Justice by the assembly of the prison guard union<sup>34</sup> stated plainly that "titles currently attached to some prison employees (such as watchman, senior watchman, assistant principal), whether due to their resonance (assistant principal) or identification with other occupations (house watchman) ... personally demean them".<sup>35</sup> The sentiment was not uncommon; calls for a change in this state of affairs resonated throughout the 1920s.<sup>36</sup> Yet, no formal change occurred until the early 1930s.

Of course, calls for the terminological change were not motivated solely by a desire for respectability. Instead, the change formed a part of a broader penal reform. Before 1918, the role of rank-and-file prison employees did, in fact, amount to just watching over prisoners. Already at the 'birth' of Polish penology, its creators highlighted the educational role of the guards. Early legislation concerning the Polish penal policy was thus completely at odds with the ambitious plans formulated at its inception.

As a result, in contrast to the PP, the turn of 1918 saw no act of formation of the Polish prison guard. In many areas, partition-era policies prevailed even as they were put to question. The ambiguous nature of the 1919 regulations and the absence of separate acts creating the prison corps certified SW's lowly status among other 'military-style' formations. In accordance with the law, guards employed in prisons were only empowered to oversee, to keep watch. At the same time,

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<sup>34</sup> The trade union of prison workers of the Polish Republic was established in January 1919 ('Do pp. pracowników więziennych', *Robotnik*, 221 [1919], 7). Interestingly, the original name for the union, retained until June 1919, includes the phrase 'watchmen and prison workers'. After June 1919, the phrase was trimmed to just 'prison workers'. The union was formally disbanded in March 1933, as per the ban on unions for prison workers introduced in September 1932. Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 27–8, 38–40.

<sup>35</sup> 'Do Jaśnie Wielmożnego Pana Dyrektora Departamentu Karnego Ministra Sprawiedliwości. Memorial z dnia 6 lutego 1931 r.', PWP, 2 (1931), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Dozorca, 'Moje perspektywy na rok 1929', PWP, 1 (1929), 4.

the decree listed numerous penalties the prison principals could mete out against insubordinate employees – a clear indication of the levels of competency and quality (especially education) found among prospective guards inducted into service since November 1918.

In February 1921, the principal of WKWM lamented the drastically low education levels of his subordinates. In one of his internal ordinances, he reminded the guards that the Ministry of Justice funded free literacy training, but – he concluded – “in spite of the fact that this education is provided free of charge, that it is provided in hours convenient for everyone, and finally, that half of all watchmen cannot write, only three of them signed up for the course”.<sup>37</sup> During the 1920s, low education levels among SW functionaries continued to reflect the contemporaneous status of the formation in general. Lack of prestige, low wages, and difficult working conditions meant that the service accepted practically anyone who met the minimal requirements concerning height (above 165 cm), age (35 to 40), and relative propriety. Administrative papers of the WKWM from the early 1920s include recurring appeals from the prison director, reminding the guards of penalties for insubordination,<sup>38</sup> negligence, and alcohol abuse, or calling to their consciences for basic decency. He repeatedly reminded those who tendered their resignations that “every decent man does his duty until the very last, even when he has already secured a more rewarding job”.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, employees received awards for

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<sup>37</sup> APW, WKWM, Księga rozkazów więzienia mokotowskiego, 1921–1923, sygn. 1502, 14. To a lesser degree, the problem also applied to other formations, such as the police (Robert Litwiński, *Korpus policji w II Rzeczypospolitej. Służba i życie prywatne* [Lublin, 2010], 64–5). In 1923, of the nearly three thousand lower-rank prison workers, 2.8 per cent (81 persons) had education beyond primary school, 60.6 per cent (1770) primary school only, and 36.6 per cent (1071) were home-schooled (*Funkcjonariusze państwowej*, 141). Meanwhile, among the lowest-ranked policemen, the proportions were: 6.9 per cent, 82.2 per cent, and 10.9 per cent (Litwiński, *Korpus policji*, 64).

<sup>38</sup> APW, WKWM, Księga rozkazów więzienia mokotowskiego, 1921–1923, sygn. 1502, 42. In some cases, guards recommended the use of violence against particularly exacting superiors, e.g. in April 1921, at the meeting of the prison watchmen, where one advocated “shooting at the inspectors who check the posts and at senior watchmen”, which notion, the principal of WKWM met with the approval of “certain less savvy watchmen”.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*. Pawlak relates that in 1922 only 25 per cent of functionaries employed in 1918 were still in the service. Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 31.

mundane achievements such as maintaining order in the staircase in front of their company apartments.<sup>40</sup>

In the early years of the Polish penal service, its employees were a motley crew.<sup>41</sup> However, candidate quality improved over time. Training for prison employees was organised regularly – the Ministry of Justice even created the Central School of the SW.<sup>42</sup> Aside from those who had worked as guards before 1918, the cohort of prison employees gradually expanded with ex-servicemen (both retired professional soldiers and those who had concluded their compulsory or voluntary service) – in accordance with a practice that dated back to the nineteenth century, when preference for the military was well-pronounced<sup>43</sup> – and former policemen. Thus, the service expanded with employees who exhibited far greater diligence and discipline, well-acquainted with the rules governing military-style formations. Yet, the record of former employers of the guards at the Mokotów prison – one of the most modern prisons at the time – leaves no doubt as to the social background of the employees. Over three-quarters of them declared that they had previously worked in crafts or in the industry.<sup>44</sup> The same proportions obtain among the prisoners, as

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> Naturally, the problem of cadre composition was not new. See Patricia O'Brien, 'The Prison on the Continent', in Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (eds.), *The Oxford History of the Prison. The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York and Oxford, 1998), 179–80; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. Interestingly, the criteria for candidates for guards in the nineteenth century did not include literacy. Cf. Czołgoszewski, 'Organizacja więziennictwa', 129.

<sup>42</sup> The Central School of the SW (CSSW) by the Prison Department was established in 1923. Training lasted four months and involved higher-ranking functionaries. The lower ranks received training in district schools attached to specific prisons. The CSSW was disbanded in 1932 and replaced with the School for Lower and Higher Functionaries of the SW. The training course (ending with an exam) lasted six to eight months (since 1935). See Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 35–7.

<sup>43</sup> Czołgoszewski, 'Organizacja więziennictwa', 128. Army press, for instance, printed SW recruitment ads aimed at servicemen transferred to the reserve and professional non-commissioned officers. Information about openings in prisons appeared in *Polska Zbrojna*, among others: 'Informacje służbowe. Podchorążowie, podoficerowie zawodowi i nadterminowi', *Polska Zbrojna*, 46 (1933), 7; 'Podoficerowie zawodowi i nadterminowi mogą być przyjmowani do straży więziennej i straży celnej', *Polska Zbrojna*, 289 (1931), 4.

<sup>44</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta dotyczące korespondencji ogólnej w/s personelu, 1934, sygn. 1768, 136–7

well!<sup>45</sup> Prior to their engagement at the SW, the Mokotów guards had served as unqualified labourers, farmers, or locksmiths (the most common profession among the city's lock-pickers). Thus, within the prison, members of the same artisan-worker section of the capital's population lived on both sides of the bars.

The situation prison employees found themselves in the early 1918 remained unchanged even after the promulgation of yet another document regulating the operation of the penal system. In March 1928, the President signed an act on the organisation of prisons.<sup>46</sup> The only significant change concerning prison personnel in comparison to the 1919 decree was the section on uniforms. Meanwhile, as far as the treatment of convicts and execution of punishment was concerned, the new act constituted a major step toward an improvement of the situation of the prison populations.<sup>47</sup>

The first decade of the Polish state was a period of utter frustration for the SW.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, it was encumbered by nineteenth-century perceptions about the formation,<sup>49</sup> and on the other, official

<sup>45</sup> Rodak, *Pospolitary, cwaksy*, 256.

<sup>46</sup> Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 14.

<sup>47</sup> The list of punishments foreseen in the 1919 document, for instance, was expanded by a paragraph on rewards for prisoners for good conduct. Another added paragraph discussed labour as a means of rehabilitation.

<sup>48</sup> The frustration was enhanced by internal conflict and divisions among the guards themselves, stemming from partition-based disparities. In spite of official efforts at appeasement, for instance through calls to equal pay (cf. 'Minister sprawiedliwości w Krakowie', *Czas*, 192 [1922], 3), tensions did erupt in the confined spaces of prison corridors. In an internal order to the prison service from 1928, the director of the Prison Department admonished: "I have been informed that prison functionaries transferred from another district become the object of harassment and persecution from their peers. A sad and deplorable symptom that can only be condemned!" Cf. 'Rozkaz wewnętrzny więziennictwa, nr 2 z dnia 1 lutego 1928 roku', *PWP*, 2 (1928), 8.

<sup>49</sup> In 1928, a writer for the PWP still considered it right to call upon the society "not to turn its back away from us, to cooperate with us, to finally learn that today's prisons are not about heavy chains and horrible tortures, that Polish prisons are not only concerned with cleanliness 'as in a noble salon', not only the bedsheets, but also many other things the people should know more about". Edward Szymański, 'Więzienie dzisiejsze społeczeństwo', *PWP*, 11 (1928), 4. In public discourse, 'guard' could operate as an insult. While debating the budget in March 1928, a member of the Ukrainian club proposed an amnesty for political prisoners, rebuking protests from other parliamentarians by saying: "if you want to leave these room as prison guards, go on interrupting me and vote against".

pronouncements of the guards record a disappointment with the perceived failure of the public as much as the state to recognise the value of the work performed by the service. At the onset of 1928, an SW employee queried: “Does the society not respect the momentous role guards play in improving the morality of wayward individuals? To the contrary – the treatment of prison workers among the society is marked by a completely unjustified enmity”.<sup>50</sup> After over a decade since the inception of the Polish prison service, one of its representatives wrote with dejection: “We failed, in spite of our insistent efforts, to convince the Government, the society, and the legislature to the justice of our cause, to the necessity of combating the evil that pesters and bothers us. We remain pariahs of the society; our plight was and continues to be proverbial”.<sup>51</sup> Prison employees were particularly disheartened by the supposedly unfair prioritising of the PP and the Border Guard (*Służba Graniczna*, SG), apparently at the expense of the SW.

Stefan Dąbrowski, one of the most active representatives of the milieu and the editor-in-chief of *Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego*, wrote in 1925: “No one would disagree today that the press as well as the society not just fails to recognise, but even downright ignores this area, which provides so much material for many scholars and thinkers”.<sup>52</sup> However, this is understandable – he added – once the unsavoury past of prisons in Polish lands comes into view. At the same time, he stressed that, in a modern state, the fact that only some of the national security services were favoured was disturbing. Dąbrowski’s remark concerned the police, which, in his view, received preferential treatment “while prison guards, whose services may carry even more responsibility, are pushed to the bottom ... . About them, almost nothing is ever heard”.<sup>53</sup> Similar views on the unequal treatment by

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‘Uchwalenie prowizorium budżetowego w drugim czytaniu. Przyjęcie nagłości wniosku o amnestii i komisji do nadużyć wyborczych’, *Nasz Przegląd*, 92 (1928), 3. In 1931, during another budget debate, an exchange on the so-called Brześć elections and incarceration of opposition representatives included claims that the opposition has the right “to demand that officers [of the Polish Army] are not transformed into prison watchmen ..., that they abstain from all activities that sully the uniform of an officer”. ‘Wczorajsze obrady’, *Robotnik*, 56 (1931), 2.

<sup>50</sup> S., ‘Społeczeństwo a więziennictwo’, PWP, 2 (1928), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Stefan Dąbrowski, ‘Ciężkie chwile naszego bytowania’, PWP, 5 (1930), 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Idem*, ‘Prasa a więziennictwo’, PWP, 4 (1925), 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

the state and the society of the SW relative to the PP and the SG, were held by a substantial number of prison guards.<sup>54</sup> Yet, much of the blame was put on the guards themselves, for supposedly not working hard enough on improving their own image.<sup>55</sup> The sense of isolation and lack of social acceptance and understanding, pervaded the milieu. The absence of legal measures that would serve to regulate the operation of the service was particularly galling.

### III CHANGE, TO NO AVAIL

The main demand of the prison guard thus remained the formulation of distinct legal ramifications for the service. In the early 1930s, “only prison workers operated without a decree, even though the nature of their work not only bears comparison to that of the police or the border guard, but even exceeds them in terms of risks to health and even life, as well as professional responsibility”.<sup>56</sup> The long-awaited change occurred in August 1932, when the Prison Guard was officially established.<sup>57</sup> The first article of the respective order stipulated that “The Prison Guard is established to execute punishments of incarceration and temporary detention within the framework of the judiciary”. The service was to be headed by a General Inspector of the SW, responding directly to the Ministry of Justice. The document

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<sup>54</sup> Apolinary Chmielowiec, ‘Moje uwagi o ustawie więziennej’, PWP, 7 (1928), 3. According to SW members, the asymmetrical treatment was symbolised by the absence of a medal ‘for bravery’ for penal workers. A call for the introduction of such a medal regularly appeared among the demands of the subsequent assemblies of penal workers. In 1928, it was argued that “the service performed by the prison workers is equally dangerous [as that of PP or SG] and the workers often have the opportunity to prove their bravery”. ‘Protokół z obrad X-go dorocznego Zjazdu Delegatów Związku Zawodowego Pracowników Więziennych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej odbytego w Warszawie w dn. 28, 29 i 30 maja r. b.’, PWP, 8 (1928), 9.

<sup>55</sup> Stefan Dąbrowski, ‘Więziennictwo-prasa-społeczeństwo’, PWP, 2 (1929), 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> The act of 1932 was preceded by *Przepisy dotyczące składu osobowego Administracji więziennej i wykonywania przez nią obowiązków służbowych* (Regulations concerning the personal structure of prison Administration and its responsibilities) of 1926, issued as an internal instruction of the Ministry of Justice. In time, these transferred – with substantial changes – into the prison regulations of 1931. Migdał, *Polski system*, 336.

introduced new ranks; as far as the upper stratum of the hierarchy was concerned, these included the General Inspector himself as well as the Inspector, Superintendent, Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, and Candidate.<sup>58</sup> Watchmen (lower ranks) were replaced with Foremen, Senior Guards, and Guards.<sup>59</sup> The numerous conditions required of prospective guards included complete primary education and ‘precise’ familiarity with the Polish language in speech and writing.<sup>60</sup> Changes introduced in 1932, most evident in the rank names analogous to those in PP and SG, officially promoted SW to the class of uniformed and armed formations tasked with securing social order.

The promulgation of the order creating SW was preceded by the issuance of a document of major significance to the development of interwar penal services, namely the Prison Regulations of 1931. In their first part, the regulations described in detail the responsibilities of lower-level functionaries – still referred to as watchmen – with particular focus on the stipulation that every prison guard, regardless of rank should “acquaint himself with the individual traits of character

<sup>58</sup> Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 28.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*. Oppositional press offered isolated comments summing up the expected terminological change, usually tinged with irony. For instance, *Robotnik* observed: “the title of watchman is abolished. He will now be the overseer”. (‘Nowe dzieło p. Michałowskiego’, *Robotnik*, 266 [1932], 2). In the right-leaning daily *ABC*, the subject was exhausted in one sentence: “The title of watchman is abolished”. (‘Ludzie z szarego domu. Nowa pragmatyka więziennictwa polepsza los funkcjonariuszy’, *ABC*, 224 [1932], 5).

<sup>60</sup> One of the conditions was Polish citizenship. The decree did not specify the religion of the guards, but Christians were preferred, while other denominations – such as Jews – were only admitted as an exception. At the Mokotów prison, of the 200 guards employed across two decades, only one – Izrael Offerman, employee during the 1920s – was a Jew. Meanwhile, the prison employed several Evangelicals (including Witold Ficke – the principal). In the eastern voivodships, percentages of Orthodox and Greek Catholic workers increased. In 1923, 2,583 out of 2,922 rank-and-file prison employees (88.4 per cent) declared Roman Catholic faith (*Funkcjonariusze państwowej służby cywilnej. Wyniki spisu ze stycznia 1923 r.* [Warszawa, 1925], 141). Concurrently, within the PP, Roman Catholics amounted to 96.7 per cent of all employees (See Litwiński, *Korpus policji*, 64). In 1923, Roman Catholicism was also predominant among the directors and prison inspectors (203 persons, 93.1 per cent). Of the other 15 persons, 2 were Orthodox, 8 were Greek Catholic, and 5 were Evangelical (*Funkcjonariusze państwowej*, 41). Largely similar proportions were recorded in the leadership of the PP, the only difference concerning the Jews, none of whom appeared in the upper strata of the SW.



of the inmate”.<sup>61</sup> The regulations were primarily designed to coordinate the general and particular rules of operation of penal facilities – hence the lengthy passage on personnel. This document, together with the order from 1932, amended by regulations on disciplinary proceedings (1932), uniforms and arms (1935),<sup>62</sup> and the reformation of the system of training for the SW (1932, 1935),<sup>63</sup> provided the basis for the operation of the service until 1939.

During the 1930s, SW became a fully state-controlled formation whose members were denied the right to unionise (as was the case with PP and SG), among other privileges. The dissolution of the trade union resulted in a visible decrease in public activity among penal workers in terms of improving their working conditions and public perception. The magazine that had served these purposes, i.e. *Przegląd Więziennictwa Polskiego*, morphed into a strictly scholarly journal. In its place was created the biweekly *W Służbie Penitencjarnej* (Penal Service), whose major purposes included the education and professional activation of the lower ranks and the popularisation of the achievements of the Polish penal service. The magazine thus contained an extensive section on legal (professional) advice, moralising stories<sup>64</sup> and propagandistic reports on visits to prison facilities.

Changes introduced in the early 1930s are largely the application of the resolutions from the Tenth International Penal Congress (Prague,

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<sup>61</sup> The prison regulations also addressed such issues as populating prisons, shifts in their social make-up, prisoner segregation, maintaining cleanliness, feeding inmates, providing clothing, underwear, and linens, communication between prisoners and the outside world, preventing escapes and disorder, disciplinary proceedings, organisation of formation in prisons, convict labour, special treatment of criminal prisoners, rules of temporary arrest, and sanitary and medical regulations. *Regulamin więzienny, Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (Official Journal of Law of the Republic of Poland, hereinafter: DzU) (1931), no. 71, item 577.

<sup>62</sup> In place of the brown uniforms used since 1923, dark green ones were introduced. Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 28. For arms used in the SW, see Konstankiewicz, ‘Umundurowanie i uzbrojenie’, 133–42.

<sup>63</sup> Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 37.

<sup>64</sup> S. B., ‘Głupiec’, WSP, 2 (1938), 13–16. The story in the shape of a letter in which a prison guard responds to a colleague who suggests another employment features such statements as: “Finger on the trigger – keys in hand: you write, My Dear, like a mediocre journalist in a broadsheet rag. Our fingers aren’t on the trigger, but rather on the pulse; we make sure that the man is not overcome by the beast – wily, bloody, and cunning”.

1930). Among the subjects addressed there was the issue of selecting cadres and their role in the process of convict rehabilitation.<sup>65</sup> It was at the Congress that the tasks of the penal personnel were officially described as not only control, but also social formation of the convicts.<sup>66</sup> As the so-called sociology of punishment popular at the time stipulated, to succeed, the penal system had to individualise the inmates (criminals).<sup>67</sup> Within the Second Polish Republic, the goal became a part of the new criminal code promulgated in 1932 (Article 54).<sup>68</sup>

In the early 1930s, Polish criminal and penal policy changed significantly in terms of theory, and the SW was among the entities tasked with implementing the new conceptions. At the blink of an eye, the watchmen of yesteryear were to be transformed into educators. Describing the new tasks facing the modernising formation, one renowned Polish criminologist stressed that "... it is being challenged to achieve ever greater feats, turning the former torturer or lowly turnkey into a tutor".<sup>69</sup> In 1937, General Inspector of the SW Tadeusz Krychowiak reminded participants in guard training that "the gaoler-turnkey type who can only let the prisoner out from his cell or lock him back in has died! – he must be condemned to oblivion!".<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, reflecting on the ending school year, he added: "you have completed preparatory courses at prisons, haven't you, and yet you perform so poorly".<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Among the presenters was Edward Neymark (employee of the Criminal Department of the Ministry of Justice), whose talk discussed the proper organisation of training for personnel of penal units. Neymark's postulates included centralisation of training, practised in Poland. Krzysztof Chmielewski, 'Polska doktryna prawa penitencjarnego w okresie międzywojennym – zarys problematyki', *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne*, 1 (2016), 194, 197; Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 27.

<sup>66</sup> Zygmunt Pach, an SW work leader, reminded younger colleagues that "...the role of the prison worker is not limited to key-turning skills – we have been assigned an exceptionally significant role as tutors". Zygmunt Pach, 'Kilka rad praktycznych dla kolegów – młodszych funkcjonariuszów Straży Więziennej', *WSP*, 11 (1938), 8.

<sup>67</sup> 'Legal Positivism', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legal-positivism/> [Accessed: 16 May 2018]. Includes a substantial bibliography.

<sup>68</sup> Kodeks karny z 11 VII 1932 r., *DzU* (1932), no. 60, item 571.

<sup>69</sup> Leon Rabinowicz, 'Czy istnieje postęp w dziedzinie więziennictwa i jakie stąd wypływają wnioski dla pedagogiki więziennej?', *PWP*, 8 (1933), 6.

<sup>70</sup> 'Ze Szkoły Straży Więziennej', *WSP*, 14–15 (1937), 20.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*.

Harsh statements confirmed an expected outcome; in 1932, an anonymous guard wrote in *Przegląd* that the ideal of guard-educator acquainted with “the ways of studying the human psyche, the mind of a convict, to successfully affect these stubborn souls” remained ‘still a Utopian fable’.<sup>72</sup> Yet, he believed the change would eventually occur.

The superficiality that typified attitudes toward the formation in the 1920s, expressed, for instance, in thoughtless personnel policies, came back to haunt the reformers of Polish penal policy in the 1930s. Cases of convict beating continued to occur.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, the SW was rocked by several public relations scandals in the early 1930s, which were broadly commented on by the press.<sup>74</sup> The laboriously reformed training system was failing. In 1939, during a briefing at the Ministry of Justice, prison principals were told by the director of the Criminal Department of the Ministry that, as far as training and quality of low-rank employees were concerned, “Sadly, many of these efforts go to waste, and the results do not match the outlay in time and money. Graduates of the School of Prison Guards exhibit far too little ambition to apply the knowledge gained at the school in practice. Their superiors, on the other hand, rather than helping and encouraging them, contrive to stifle their ambition”.<sup>75</sup> Criminologists involved in the penal system reform publicly disputed the ability of SW functionaries to complete the tasks they were assigned (for instance,

<sup>72</sup> A. M., ‘Przykład przede wszystkim’, PWP, 1 (1932), 8.

<sup>73</sup> Pach, ‘Kilka uwag’, 9; ‘W więzieniach. Dalsze informacje o stosunkach więziennych’, *Robotnik*, 219 (1932), 2; ‘Więzienia. Więzienie kobiece „Serbia” w Warszawie’, *Robotnik*, 184 (1933), 3; ‘Pobicie więźniów w Wejherowie’, *Robotnik*, 272 (1936), 2).

<sup>74</sup> In general, the 1930s saw several highly publicised cases in which high-ranking SW officials were the accused. ‘Nadużycia w więzieniu w Łodzi. Skazanie podkomisarza’, *ABC*, 318 (1933), 4. The most famous of those took place in 1934–1935 and involved senior SW leader Stanisław Dąbrowski, accused of taking bribes from candidates for lower-ranking positions in prisons. The case was covered in the press. (‘Afera łapownicza’, *Gazeta Polska*, 112 [1934], 10; ‘Podkomisarz straży więziennej na ławie oskarżonych’, *Gazeta Polska*, 147 [1934], 7; ‘Podkomisarz Dąbrowski i oszust Kania skazani na 5 lat więzienia’, *Gazeta Polska*, 154 [1934], 7). Other officials accused of abuse of power included the principal of the prison at Długa Street in Warsaw and three of his subordinates (‘Śledztwo w sprawie nadużyć w więzieniu’, *Robotnik*, 362 [1934], 2; ‘Nadużycia w “Arsenale”’, *ABC*, 324 [1934], 1; ‘Sprawa o nadużycie w “Arsenale” przed Sądem Apelacyjnym’, *ABC*, 62 [1935], 2).

<sup>75</sup> ‘Odprowa naczelników więzień’, *WSP*, 6 (1939), 5.

to conduct the so-called criminal-biological studies to which convicts were put in the 1930s).<sup>76</sup>

In sum, then, the twenty – or, more accurately, ten – years of work offered little in terms of an optimistic outlook, even if some of the pronouncements from the period are treated as instances of chronic doom and gloom. Perhaps this might be attributed to not only the prolonged disinterest in penal affairs – including disinvestment and poor quality of the prison cadres – but also, if not primarily, the nature of the task it was forced to face.

#### IV A GUARD'S LIFE

A cursory glance at the press, which repeatedly dismissed guards as mere turnkeys,<sup>77</sup> only contributing to the frustration of the prison cadre, indicates that the SW did indeed invite a very selective interest. The most common reason for writing about it was sensationalism. Thus, guards were the object of articles on prison breaks (that is, dereliction of duty),<sup>78</sup> prison riots,<sup>79</sup> deaths among the functionaries

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<sup>76</sup> Stanisław Batawia, 'Biologia kryminalna. Jej cele i metody oraz wyniki dotychczasowych badań', *Archiwum Kryminologiczne*, 2 (1933/4), 177, 185–6; Waclaw Makowski, 'Metody naukowe badań kryminologicznych', *Archiwum Kryminologiczne*, 2 (1933/4), 159–62. Guards themselves realised that the task was too large for them. See 'Wesoło o smutnym. Krótkie sprawozdanie z badań kryminalno-biologicznych', PWP, 1 (1934), 8–9.

<sup>77</sup> The term was typically used in articles discussing real or presumed cases of prison beating. Cf. 'Stosunki w wojskowym areszcie rejonowym w Lidzie', *Robotnik*, 137 (1923), 3. Yet, one might also find pieces in which the term is basically deployed as a proper name for prison functionaries. Cf. 'Kwalifikacje kandydatów na kluczników więziennych', *Polska Zbrojna*, 345 (1924), 8.

<sup>78</sup> 'Ucieczka więźniów politycznych', *Nasz Przegląd*, 237 (1926), 2; 'Echa ucieczki z "Pawiaka" niebezpiecznych komunistów. Dozorca więzienny skazany na 5 miesięcy więzienia za niedbalstwo', *Polska Zbrojna*, 62 (1928), 6; 'W obliczu sprawiedliwości', *Nasz Przegląd*, 142 (1929), 6.

<sup>79</sup> 'Krwawe zajścia w więzieniu w Łucku', *Robotnik*, 221 (1925), 2; 'Z powodu buntów w więzieniach', *Nasz Przegląd*, 294 (1925), 6; 'Bunt więźniów w Lubinie', *ABC*, 217 (1929), 1; 'Zajście w więzieniu mokotowskim', *Gazeta Polska*, 47 (1930), 4; 'Demonstracje więźniów w więzieniu poznańskim', *Robotnik*, 235 (1930), 4; 'Bunt w Koronowie', *Robotnik*, 149 (1932), 7; 'Bunt w więzieniu bydgoskim', *ABC*, 198 (1932), 2. Mentions of prison riots regularly included observations on guard incompetence illustrated by the necessity of calling for police support

(suicides<sup>80</sup> as well as murders committed by former inmates<sup>81</sup>), crimes committed by functionaries (frauds,<sup>82</sup> murders,<sup>83</sup> thefts,<sup>84</sup> smuggling secret messages<sup>85</sup>), as well as cases of overreach (beating or torturing inmates, forcing testimony, etc.).<sup>86</sup> Meetings of the guards' trade

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to quell mass demonstrations. Cf. 'Bunt więźniów w Sosnowcu', *Robotnik*, 418 (1933), 4.

<sup>80</sup> 'Dziś o 5-tej nad ranem zastrzelił się asystent więzienny', *ABC*, 2 (1928), 1; 'Samobójstwo dozorczy więziennego', *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 341 (1930), 8; 'Śmiertelne samobójstwo strażnika więziennego z "Pawiaka"', *ABC*, 197 (1933), 1.

<sup>81</sup> The most widely reported events of this kind were the escape from the Mokotów prison in April 1923 – when four inmates murdered three guards ('Zamordowanie trzech dozorców więziennych i ucieczka czterech bandytów', *Robotnik*, 108 [1923], 3) – and the death of a guard at the prison on Św. Krzyż, which occurred during the riot of 20 September 1925 (for a detailed analysis of the events, see Bartosz G. Kulan, *Bunt w więzieniu na Świętym Krzyżu w dniu 20 września 1925 roku* [Toruń, 2013]).

<sup>82</sup> 'Samobójstwo zastępcy naczelnika więzienia', *Gazeta Polska*, 70 (1932), 4. The would-be suicide was accused of abuse of power. The same rationale stood behind the suicide of guard Roman Sitko from Lviv in 1932. 'Samobójstwo dozorczy więziennego', *Czas*, 151 (1932), 2.

<sup>83</sup> 'Echa sprawy ś. p. Wenklera', *Polska Zbrojna*, 168 (1927), 6; 'Strażnik więzienny mordercą', *Robotnik*, 52 (1935), 2; '11 funkcjonariuszy Straży Więziennej oskarżonych o spowodowanie śmierci 3 więźniów', *Czas*, 323 (1938), 13.

<sup>84</sup> At the Mokotów prison, guards routinely stole such items as paper produced at the nearby paper mill ('Policja na tropie fałszerzy banknotów', *Nasz Przegląd*, 176 [1927], 4) as well as lightbulbs (APW, WKWM, Księga rozkazów Więzienia Karnego w Mokotowie na 1930 r., 1930 r, sygn. 1650, 34). 'Dozorca więzienny w bandzie włamywaczy', *Polska Zbrojna*, 82 (1929), 4; 'Strażnik więzienny, który kradł depozyty', *Robotnik*, 406 (1934), 5.

<sup>85</sup> "Gryps" go zdradził. Rok więzienia za ułatwianie komunikowania się więźniów ze światem zewnętrznym', *Nasz Przegląd*, 228 (1929), 6. Guards also smuggled alcohol for the prisoners ('Nieuczciwy dozorca więzienny', *Polska Zbrojna*, 2 [1933], 9).

<sup>86</sup> This mostly affected political prisoners. 'Wnioski w sprawie stosunków więziennych', *Robotnik*, 74 (1920), 3; 'W sprawie traktowania więźniów', *Robotnik*, 102 (1921), 5; 'Zaprzeczenie Minist. Sprawiedliwości', *Robotnik*, 213 (1924), 4; 'Skandaliczne stosunki w więzieniu we Wronkach', *Robotnik*, 223 (1924), 5. Troubling news on the situation of convicts in the early 1920s, fatal sanitary conditions, overcrowding, and cases of torture on prisoners led to the establishment of a parliamentary committee tasked with investigating the state of Polish prisons. In 1924, the committee visited 19 penal facilities. In the summary of its findings, the committee wrote: "In general, it has to be said that in Polish prisons, there is no system of beating and brutal treatment of inmates, though sporadic cases of breach of regulations on the part of prison authorities do occur". Overcrowding, overuse of preventative arrest, and insufficient food were highlighted. At the same

union were mentioned only reluctantly, with sporadic pieces about the demands made in terms of social and existential issues (such as pay rises)<sup>87</sup> – a demand that remained on the table practically until 1939.<sup>88</sup>

Results of a query in the archives of the Mokotów prison indicate that a lion's share of the surviving employee files consists of requests for financial aid. Encumbered with large families, the guards could barely make ends meet on their paltry salaries, in spite of certain privileges (e.g. reduced public transport fares, access to company apartments, etc.).<sup>89</sup> The problem intensified during the economic

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time, it was stressed that the situation was improving. 'Obrady sejm. Sesja druga. Posiedzenie 276. Więzienia i więźniowie', *Robotnik*, 82 (1926), 4. The committee report did not put an end to the opposition press activity consisting in publicising all cases of overreach on the part of the guards. 'W sprawie skonfiskowania odezwę LOPCio', *Robotnik*, 60 (1927), 1; 'Asystent więzienny i pięciu dozorców odpowiadają za pobicie więźnia', *Robotnik*, 72 (1931), 3.

<sup>87</sup> 'Związek pracowników więziennych', *Robotnik*, 361 (1919), 7; 'Żądania pracowników więziennych', *Robotnik*, 221 (1921), 5; 'Niżsi funkcjonariusze państwowi u p. Ministra Sprawiedliwości', *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 24 (1930), 6. Interestingly, prison workers supposedly took part in one general strike, which took place in March 1921. The demands included a pay rise. Cf. 'Strajk powszechny', *Robotnik*, 56 (1921), 3. Such activities became impossible after 1923, when the union of prison workers left the Union of Professional Associations (*Związek Stowarzyszeń Zawodowych*, hereinafter: ZSZ) and became apolitical. See Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 27. The initial association with a left-leaning union organisation may explain the symbolic interest of the leftist press with the material situation of SW functionaries. After the parting with ZSZ, the question of wages disappears from the press, in spite of the absence of change.

<sup>88</sup> Low pay was a common complaint already among nineteenth-century prison guards. Cf. Czołgoszewski, 'Organizacja więziennictwa', 127–8.

<sup>89</sup> The average wage of a guard amounted to roughly 150 zlotys (without bonuses) a month. Senior guards received about 160 zlotys (250 zlotys with bonuses). Senior guard Jan Bass from the Mokotów prison earned 265 zlotys (gross) a month (base wage 160 zlotys, bonuses: 105 zlotys). This was the equivalent of the average pay of lower-ranking officials (similar wages were received, for instance, by senior constable in PP, cf. Litwiński, *Korpus policji*, 369). It should be noted here that Bass provided the record of his earnings as reason for having his rent reduced. APW, WKWM, Akta dotyczące korespondencji ogólnej w sprawie personelu, 1934, sygn. 1768, 116. In contrast to policemen, who were statistically a younger and frequently unmarried service (as was the formation's preference, see Litwiński, *Korpus policji*, 22, 464–5), prison guards usually supported unemployed (or partially employed) wives and children. In 1931, the average age of guards employed in the Mokotów prison was 46.5 years (N=69). The youngest guard was 31 years old. At the same time, of the 104 guards whose marital status is known, only three were single,

crisis, when guard salaries were reduced by nearly 20 per cent.<sup>90</sup> By the end of 1929, trade press noted: "... apparently, they [state authorities] do not want to understand the horrific conditions of life of the prison employee, who often looks with envy at the superior quality and amount of food served to the inmates, thinking he will not find that at home".<sup>91</sup> In the 1930s, and, as might be surmised, during the preceding decade, many potential candidates who considered taking up work in the Guard resigned – as the director of WKWM stated – "once acquainted with the conditions of labour and wages".<sup>92</sup> In a speech at the Sejm, the Minister of Justice admitted that the work of the guards 'does not court much envy'. He also observed that, for their insufficient pay, the guards were forced to 'breathe the prison air' for twelve hours, something he stressed would never change.<sup>93</sup>

The crown argument in the dispute over wages and public recognition would remain the peculiar nature of the assigned responsibilities. During the 1920s, prison personnel numbered among the many civil services that included the likes of postal workers, railwaymen, tax officers, etc., but prison workers took offence to being named in the same breath as them. The proceedings of the Eleventh Assembly of Delegates of the Trade Union of Prison Workers of the Polish Commonwealth (ZZPWRP) in June 1929 describe it as "... a personal slight to the dignity of lower-rank prison functionaries, called into the honourable service of lifting up morally debased individuals, [which fact] renders them incomparable to lower-ranking officials

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while 86 had children! On average, a Mokotów guard earned the upkeep of more than two children. Two years later, in 1933, the average age actually increased to nearly 45 years (N=106) while the workforce finally extended to include guards below 30. APW, WKWM, Księga personelu Więzienia Karnego w Mokotowie, 1929–1933, sygn. 1633, 20–47.

<sup>90</sup> During budget debates in 1930, the need to reserve an amount of 50,000 zlotys in the Prison Department of the Ministry of Justice was foreseen for the purpose of providing financial aid for the SW. 'Zakończenie prac nad budżetem w komisji sejmowej', *Polska Zbrojna*, 28 (1930), 1. Subsequent budgets also foresaw substantial reductions in wages. 'Debata nad działalnością Min. Sprawiedliwości. Referat pos. Seidlera', *Gazeta Polska*, 12 (1932), 6; Pawlak, *Więziennictwo*, 31.

<sup>91</sup> Dąbrowski, 'Groza położenia', PWP, 10 (1929), 1.

<sup>92</sup> APW, WKWM, Korespondencja Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości w/s kandydatów do Straży Więziennej, 1937, sygn. 1857, no pag. In mid-1937, of the over twenty candidates admitted, half resigned for the aforementioned reasons.

<sup>93</sup> 'Budżet Ministra Sprawiedliwości w Senacie', *Gazeta Polska*, 32 (1935), 7.

from other dominions, whose own professional responsibilities differ immensely”.<sup>94</sup> Convinced that they were being typecast as the ugly duckling<sup>95</sup> in disregard of their own uniqueness, SW functionaries wrote disdainfully of “desk-bound officials assigned to specific hours systematically expended in comfortable, warm offices”.<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, they vented their frustration at being exploited for “activities unbecoming the dignity of the uniform, as cart drivers, waste removal supervisors, manure transporters, etc.”.<sup>97</sup>

Subsequent appeals to national authorities included descriptions of harmful working conditions, such as dirtiness, pervasive coldness or stuffiness inside the prison facilities (depending on the time of year),<sup>98</sup> diseases spreading among prison workers – tuberculosis and rheumatism as well as illnesses caught from the inmates<sup>99</sup> – tiredness,<sup>100</sup> but

<sup>94</sup> ‘Protokół z obrad XI-go dorocznego Zjazdu Delegatów Związku Zawodowego Pracowników Więziennych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej odbytego w Warszawie w dn. 23, 24 i 25 czerwca 1929 r.’, PWP, 8 (1929), 17.

<sup>95</sup> W., ‘18 września’, PWP, 8 (1930), 5; ‘Do Jaśnie Wielmożnego Pana Dyrektora’, 4. “Within society, the Polish guard continues to play the role of the tolerated ugly duckling, if any interest is shown in penal services at all” Bolesław Kamiński, ‘Ideowe znaczenie Związku Pracowników Więziennych’, PWP, 6 (1929), 5. “The penal service as an estate was nearly always disrespected and pushed to the far end, at the very low, ‘grey’ underside of the classes and social strata”.

<sup>96</sup> Dąbrowski, ‘Groza położenia’, 1.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Do jaśnie Wielmożnego Pana Dyrektora’, 4.

<sup>98</sup> For example, in February 1929, an employee of the Mokotów prison suffered frostbite to his ears and face. APW, WKWM, Księga rozkazów Więzienia Karnego na Mokotowie, 1929, sygn. 1628, 16.

<sup>99</sup> In 1919–30, PWP reported, out of every 100 dead guards, 36 died of tuberculosis, 14 of typhoid, and 7 of pneumonia. ‘Projekt ustawy o straży więziennej’, PWP, 6 (1932), 3. At WKWM in 1918–30, 21 guards died (average age at the time of death was only 45, and Me = 42 years). The most common (14 cases) cause of death were lung diseases (tuberculosis, pneumonia, and asthma). Four guards died on duty. Within this statistically narrow grouping, the average duration of employment at SW was just over four years. APW, WKWM, Akta dotyczące pracowników więziennych, 1931, sygn. 1687, 130–1.

<sup>100</sup> One of the most common breach of discipline among the employees of the Mokotów prison, symbolic for the entire formation, was falling asleep on duty. The documentation concerning the personnel of the penal facility at Rakowiecka Street illustrates the scale of the problem. In practice, rarely a week or month passed without a punishment for sleeping on duty for guards usually working 10–12 hours a day. Every years, between one and several dozen of cases were recorded, some of which even ended in termination or incarceration (APW, WKWM, Księga rozkazów



mostly the stress involved in socialising with convicts.<sup>101</sup> Attention was drawn to the immediate threat to the life of the guards, which required constant vigilance, yet was routinely downplayed.<sup>102</sup>

Surviving sources, however, indicate that assaults on guards were a relatively rare occurrence.<sup>103</sup> In November 1919, a particularly insubordinate inmate bit a watchman while pumping water.<sup>104</sup> In September 1922, another inmate called in for a haircut hit the watchman who held him.<sup>105</sup> Even during riots, inmates usually resorted to passive resistance (raising barricades) rather than direct aggression.

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Więzienia w Warszawie Rakowiecka 37 na 1935 r., 1935, sygn. 1790, no pag.), but most commonly in censure or assignment of additional, punitive watches or shortening leaves. Cf. APW, WKWM, Akta dotyczące pracowników więziennych, 1929, sygn. 1635, 30, 43. Cases were found where a punishment for sleeping on duty led to tragedy. In June 1933, Aleksander Kaczanowski, a guard at the Łukiškės prison, shot leader Aleksander Borejsza, who caught Kaczanowski sleeping on duty ('Krwawy dramat w więzieniu łukiskim. Strażnik zastrzelił przodownika straży więziennej', *Polska Zbrojna*, 164 [1933], 4; 'Po przewinieniu na służbie strażnik więzienny zastrzelił przodownika i usiłował popełnić samobójstwo', *ABC*, 168 [1933], 1). Kaczanowski was sentenced to 10 years in prison ('Skazanie strażnika więziennego', *ABC*, 345 [1933], 4). Guards were also punished for being late, drinking alcohol (on and off duty), sitting while on duty, lack of application in searches, neglecting duties (mistakes in counting inmates, errors in documentation, etc. APW, WKWM, Akta dotyczące kar dyscyplinarnych i porządkowych, 1936, sygn. 1823.

<sup>101</sup> W., '18 września', 5. In January 1936, a guard in Grudziądz in a fit of madness shot at colleagues and inmates from a machine gun. Once disarmed, he explained the fit with overwork, low wages, large family, and being punished with loss of leave. 'Jak obłąkany strażnik więzienny ostrzeliwał z karabinu maszynowego kapelana i więźniów', *ABC*, 23 (1936), 5. The example was recounted during a debate over the budget for the Ministry of Justice in 1936. 'Dyskusja budżetowa w nowym Sejmie', *Robotnik*, 56 (1936), 2.

<sup>102</sup> Alfred Surmiński, 'Na marginesie dyskusji o systemie progresywnym', *WSP* 3 (1939), 7.

<sup>103</sup> The problem of relations between guards and inmates was discussed elsewhere. Cf. Rodak, *Pospolitary, cuwaksi*, 470–2.

<sup>104</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Czesława S., sygn. 4790, 39; APW, WKWM, Akta dotyczące korespondencji ogólnej w sprawach więźniów, 1929, sygn. 1640, no pag.

<sup>105</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Edwarda J., sygn. 6865, no pag. In 1937, at the Rawicz prison, one of the greatest safecrackers of the inter-war period – Adam Stempel – died. The inmate was shot in his cell when he lunged at a guard armed with a knife. APW, Urząd Śledczy m. st. Warszawy, Arkusz dossier Adama Stempla, 1932–48, sygn. 1544, no pag.

Verbal threats were more pervasive.<sup>106</sup> While serving his sentence at the prison on Dzielna Street in November 1932, a well-known Warsaw pickpocket named Henryk B. demanded to be transferred to another cell. When asked to calm down, he threatened to “break everything in the cell and break the window on my [i.e. senior guard Aleksander Wnuk’s] noggin”.<sup>107</sup> In September 1928, inmate Waclaw P. told a guard that “don’t you come into this cell again or I’ll sing you a different tune”.<sup>108</sup> Convicts threatened guards with ‘payback’ after release.<sup>109</sup> In January 1927, watchman Władysław Schweitzer heard from the Warsaw thief Josek R. that “once he’s free in two weeks, he’ll break even”.<sup>110</sup>

The most common expression of inmate aggression toward, and dislike of, the guards remained ensconced in language. SW functionaries faced verbal abuse every day with insults such as ‘bitches’, ‘sons of bitches’, ‘curs’, ‘louts’; and ridicule with such terms as ‘stiff Johns’, ‘screws’ or ‘mannequins’, etc.<sup>111</sup> Reports compiled by guards repeatedly include references to vulgar expressions from the inmates.<sup>112</sup> Yet, while vulgarity was an indelible part of the lives of many of the inhabitants of penal facilities, and guards themselves did not refrain from foul language,<sup>113</sup> context ensured that they would feel aggrieved. The aforementioned reports repeatedly referred to the disdainful attitudes of the inmates, mentioning their impudence, lack of respect, heedlessness,

<sup>106</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Aleksandra R., 1919–21, sygn. 4760, no pag.

<sup>107</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Henryka B., sygn. 12969, 20. In September 1927, inmate Szczepan C. incarcerated at the prison at Długa Street threatened the watchman that he would “grab a stone and break my noggin”. APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Szczepana C., sygn. 8845, 80, Akta personalne więźnia Czesława P., sygn. 11037, no pag. In this case, the inmate threatened to “beat the mug” of a guard in reaction to an apparently too small food portion.

<sup>108</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Waclawa P., sygn. 10530, 26.

<sup>109</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Jana P., 1936–7, sygn. 14957, 15.

<sup>110</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Joska R., sygn. 9267, 95.

<sup>111</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Moszka Sz., 1926–7, sygn. 9275, 9; Akta personalne więźnia Jana P., 1922–3, sygn. 6010, 36; Akta personalne więźnia Jehudy T., 1938–9, sygn. 18420, 12; Akta personalne więźnia Lejby L., 1928–30, sygn. 10960, 34.

<sup>112</sup> Such situation also occurred in women’s prisons. APW, UŚW, Akta personalne więźniarki Serafyny K., 1928–33, sygn. 5345 (więzienie białostockie).

<sup>113</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Jana K., sygn. 14799, 57.

and disregard of orders or questions (persistent silence).<sup>114</sup> Inmates singled out guards for their young age and lack of experience, which justified lack of respect for instructions or oversight.<sup>115</sup> Inadequacies of education or income were ridiculed.<sup>116</sup> Tenacious inmates showed their disdain of section chiefs by ignoring attempts at making conversation and requesting to see higher ranking officials going as far up the chain of command as the prison principal, prosecutor, Ministry of Justice officials or even the minister himself.<sup>117</sup>

One peculiar aspect of the relations between convicts and guards were references to the pre-1918 era. Many repeat offenders perfectly remembered guards from the Tsarist period as well as from the period of occupation and then early independence. Urke Nachalnik (b. Icek Boruch Farbarowicz), a recidivist thief who penned well-read fictionalised accounts of his life as a criminal, devoted much room in his works to Russian, German, and Polish guards. His assessments, however, were not unambiguous; the key distinction was positive or negative attitude of the guards toward the prisoners, regardless of nationality.<sup>118</sup> Yet, the final verdict came in favour of Polish guards, the honour justified not by their nationality, but mostly by the atmosphere that pervaded prisons in the newly-independent country. Larger food portions post-1918 alone, the author admits, greatly increased the opinion on the entire penal system.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Leona T., sygn. 14876, 123; Akta personalne więźnia Józefa Cz., sygn. 14957, 24; Akta personalne więźnia Waclawa B., sygn. 15250, 54; Akta personalne więźnia Arnolda M., sygn. 17306, 36.

<sup>115</sup> APW, UŚW, Akta personalne więźnia Władysława S., 1930–7, sygn. 5317. We see cases in which convicts lecture guards on what they can and what they cannot do. APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Moszka L., sygn. 17061, 16.

<sup>116</sup> The problem was discussed in the press. Des, 'O stosunkach wewnątrz więzienia', PWP, 10–11 (1927), 2.

<sup>117</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Stanisława W., sygn. 10127, 3; Akta personalne więźnia Czesława P., sygn. 11037, 34; Akta personalne więźnia Bolesława M., sygn. 11590, 17; Akta personalne więźnia Henryka Bicza, sygn. 12969, 24; Akta personalne więźnia Jana J., sygn. 13285, 29; Akta personalne więźnia Józefa G., sygn. 14760, no pag.

<sup>118</sup> Significantly, in the broad array of guards he characterises, he identifies among the worst two guards of Jewish extraction. Yet, the guard as brutal persecutor was personified by a German guard named Ról. Urke Nachalnik, *Życiorys własny przestępcy* (Łódź, 1991), 180.

<sup>119</sup> Urke Nachalnik, *Żywe grobowce* (Warszawa 1934), 11.

Polish guards received a glowing review from Włodzimierz Wiskowski, a former policeman convicted for embezzlement, who spent five years behind bars in the 1930s. In his published memoirs, he wrote that only one of the many guards he met deserved the name of a sadist.<sup>120</sup> In the writer's opinion, the guard's sadism was explained by years of work in Tsarist prisons.<sup>121</sup> Naturally, Wiskowski's memoirs, written as they were by a man clearly distinguished from his prison-house peers by education and culture, a former legionnaire and policeman, and passed through the sieves of both self-censorship and editorial intervention, cannot be taken at face value. Likewise, Nachalnik's memoirs should be read critically, though there is much to be said about their nuanced perspective on the SW milieu.

The final assessment of the performance of the guards depended on several factors, primarily the personal experiences of the inmate. At WKWM, mere days after it was taken over by the Polish, an inmate told to cease conversing with another shouted back: "you wanted Poles, there you have'em; won't even let you talk, just throw the book at you as soon as they can".<sup>122</sup> Political and non-Polish prisoners often treated the SW as a representative of an enemy state.<sup>123</sup> Then, there were occasions where the guards' patriotism – that is, their moral right to serve in a Polish formation – was put to question.<sup>124</sup> In such instances, convicts denied them the right to don the uniform of a Polish officer or the national insignia, often motivated to such harsh judgements by the perception of having received less food than was due for dinner.<sup>125</sup>

Post-partition distinctions also played a part. A guard in a prison in the former German partition overheard an interesting conversation between a convict from the lands of the Congress Kingdom and an inmate from the Poznań area. The former tried to instigate a riot, saying: "I can't see why these inmates are so scared ... to have those watchmen ... beat up, some of us may bloody well fall in the process, but we would get so few watchmen easy. Where I live, in Warsaw, no

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<sup>120</sup> Rodak, *Pospolitary, cuwaksi*, 471.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>122</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Jana K., sygn. 2840, no pag.

<sup>123</sup> Rodak, *Pospolitary, cuwaksi*, 472.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, 473.

<sup>125</sup> APW, UŚW, Arkusz dossier Edwarda W., sygn. 1748, 35.

one would bat an eye”.<sup>126</sup> In response, the other told him that “this isn’t Warsaw, but the Poznańskie, and you better hold your tongue”.<sup>127</sup>

The most complete image of the relationship between the inmates and the guards, which often lasted for years, was provided by one writer for the *Przegląd*. In his account, “An inmate generally sees the prison administration as the enemy. It is ‘they’ that lock him up, it is ‘they’ who force him to accept a specific way of life, etc”.<sup>128</sup> For some convicts, the relationship took on the guise of an open conflict, with constant confrontation an everyday experience. At the same time, the vast majority of the convicts treated the guards either neutrally or with a modicum of decency. Outright affection was rare, aside from complaints or requests to the prison principal. This does not alter the fact that a fondness or even affection could find expression in certain common situations. However, these were consistently censured, and making familiar with inmates amounted to a major offence. Principal of the Mokotów prison repeatedly scolded his guards for familiarising with former inmates, who went on to visit the prison employees at their company apartments once free.<sup>129</sup>

After 1918, but mostly since the early 1930s, much effort was put into normalising the image of the prison service. However, after twenty years of existence of the formation, it became apparent that much yet remained to do in that regard. In 1937, trade press repeated the penal system’s mantra: “In our society, there is distaste for prisons and prison guards. Inherited from the partition era, this distaste is justified with memories of persecution of our freedom fighters by partition governments”.<sup>130</sup> In other words, nearly twenty years after independence was regained, it remained necessary to argue “that the Polish prison guard is not the partition-era butcher and tormentor, but a member of the society labouring for the good of the country, serving a major and responsible role, whose profession deserves as much respect as any other”.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, as statements of the leadership suggest, the quality of the cadres also left much to

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<sup>126</sup> APW, WKWM, Akta personalne więźnia Dawida S., sygn. 5513, 9.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>128</sup> Des, ‘O stosunkach wewnątrz więzienia’, 2.

<sup>129</sup> APW, WKWM, Rozkazy dzienne WKWM (czerwiec 1932 – czerwiec 1933), sygn. 1712, 234.

<sup>130</sup> J. Zabielski, ‘O typ dobrego więziennika’, WSP, 7 (1937), 5.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibidem*.

be desired, with the figure of the hysterical, overburdened guard a recurring reference in speeches.<sup>132</sup>

Naturally, the SW of 1939 was far removed from the formation established in 1918 by a cohort of completely random persons, mostly utterly unprepared for the demands of the service as a prison guard. By then, sports and cultural associations of the prison guard (such as an orchestra) or self-help funds were established, guards were included in the public health system and retirement programme, and the service had even acquired a holiday home at Otwock. After twenty years of operation, the ranks of the SW included an increasing amount of people with quality education, for whom the choice of profession may have been conscious, and service provided a source of pride. The same can be said of the two sister services (PP and SG). On the other hand, for most – though certainly not all – Poles, the uniform of a Polish policeman or border guard, certainly that of a soldier, communicated the staying power, stability, order, and security of the Polish state. Can the same be said about an SW uniform? Regular participation of the SW guard of honour in major state celebrations certainly implies that the formation had been inserted into the narrative of the rebuilt state. The assessment of the social role, and especially the image and quality of the prison guard thus inevitably remains ambiguous. Certainly, in 1939, the success anticipated – though not without trepidation – in 1918 was still a long way away. The question whether such a success is at all possible in an area such as penology remains unanswered.

*trans. Antoni Górny*

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