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EVERYDAY LIFE IN POLAND IN THE LIGHT
OF LETTERS TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE
OF THE POLISH UNITED WORKERS' PARTY, 1950–1956

Daily life in the People's Republic of Poland in the Stalinist period has rarely been the topic of scientific studies. This state of things is the effect of many factors, including the "politological perspective" dominating among Polish historians. A programme of such research has been extensively delineated by Tomasz Szarota and Leszek Dzięgieł¹. Attempts at the realisation of those ambitious plans, however, are infrequent². Assorted scholars, especially members of the younger generation, have tried to describe various fragments of reality in the People's Republic of Poland, as a rule, with a rather satisfactory outcome³.

¹ T. Szarota, *Życie codzienne Peerelu — propozycja badawcza (Daily Life in the People's Republic of Poland — a Research Proposal)*, in: "Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały" vol. 17, 1995, pp. 201–206; L. Dzięgieł, *Życie codzienne i historia najnowsza — nowe pole badań etnologa (Daily Life and Contemporary History — a New Field of Research for an ethnologist)*, "Etnografia Polska" 1996, fasc. 1–2, pp. 12–18. The latter wrote an interesting study entitled *Paradise in a Concrete Cage. Daily Life in Communist Poland. An Ethnologist's View*, Kraków 1998, which is an attempt at describing daily life in the People's Republic of Poland upon the basis of the author's own experiences. See also idem, *Swoboda na smyczy. Wspomnienia 1946–1956 (Freedom on a Leash. Reminiscences 1946–1956)*, Kraków 1996.

² A certain chance is created by the research project realised as part of a State Committee for Scientific Research grant, and pursued by a team headed by Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota; its effect is a volume of studies, ready to be published in 2001 and entitled *Życie codzienne w Polsce 1945–1955 (Daily Life in Poland 1945–1955)*.

³ Such an attempt was made by M. Ordylowski in his works: *Życie codzienne we Wrocławiu 1945–1948 (Daily Life in Wrocław 1945–1948)*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1991, and *Wieś dolnośląska w latach 1945–1956. Władza a społeczeństwo (The Lower Silesian Village in 1945–1956. The Authorities and Society)*, Wrocław 1999. This research current includes also: *Supełki do najwyższej władzy*

Nonetheless, it is difficult to speak about the emergence and development of a research current which has concentrated its prime efforts on the titular problem; the latter still remains a difficult and pioneering task. More profound studies are called for in the case of methodological aspects, predominantly the character of the exploited sources, their selection and critique.

The different categories of archival material which should become the basis for further ascertainments, include letters addressed to central Party and state institutions as well as to newspapers and periodicals. Surveys of central archives reveal, however, that large collections of original letters are a rarity. Material for the 1940s has been preserved in the Archives of Modern Records in the section dealing with the Ministry of the Regained Territories. Unique values are represented by peasant complaints from 1949–1956, discovered in the acts of the Agricultural Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers's Party (PUWP). Collections of letters sent to press editorial boards, especially those which no longer exist, are rare⁴.

Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that in the discussed period a large part of such letters, or their fragments, were reprinted in special secret bulletins intended for the elite of power. Such publications, preserved in the Documentation Archive of the Polish Radio, were prepared by, *i.a.* the Committee for Radio Broadcasting, and contained a characteristic of the correspondence (together with extensive quotations) received by the Polish Radio. Another bulletin was issued by the Bureau for Letters and Inspection at the Central Committee of the PUWP, established in December 1948.

The role of this institution grew after the Organisational Bureau at the Central Committee of the PUWP passed on 9 December 1950 a resolution "about a suitable examination and settlement of complaints and grievances of the working people

(*Petitions to the Highest Authorities*), ed. by M. Kula, Warszawa 1996; K. Kosiński, *O nową mentalność. Życie codzienne w szkołach 1945–1956 (For a New Mentality. Daily Life in Schools 1945–1956)*, Warszawa 2000; Joanna Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie. Stalinowska próba modernizacji opornej rzeczywistości (The Union of Polish Youth on the Spot. A Stalinist Attempt at a Modernisation of a Recalcitrant Reality)*, Warszawa 2000.

⁴ An exception are letters written to "Po prostu" and preserved by chance by Antoni Sulek; they became the foundation of an interesting study by Adam Leszczyński, *Sprawy do załatwienia. Listy do 'Po prostu' 1955–1957 (Matters to be Settled. Letters to "Po prostu" 1955–1957)*, Warszawa 2000.

and critical comments in the press". "The construction of the foundations of socialism", wrote its authors in an introduction, "denotes the necessity of intensifying the struggle for rendering effective all links of the apparatus of the people's authorities, a further proximity between the authorities and the working masses, and a further consolidation of socialist rule of law. In the course of the waged class struggle we face the necessity of intensifying the battle against all ills of particular links of the apparatus. At the basis of those disorders there frequently lurks hostile activity and sabotage. Often, they stem from soulless bureaucracy which is evidence of ideological animosity. We also deal with cases of the abuse of authority, the deformation of the Party line, instead of its observation, with the neglect of the principles of socialist rule of law instead of its consolidation. A ruthless battle should be waged against such phenomena in the interests of rendering activity more efficient and raising the status of the people's authorities". The resolution emphasised the importance of complaints expressed by "the working people" as well as critical press correspondence since they frequently contain not only "individual cases and wrongs, but also stress civic concern for general welfare, socialist property, and an improved style of work by the Party, state and economic apparatus".

Consequently, the Organisation Bureau at the Central Committee of the PUWP recommended, among others, that the Council of State and the Council of Ministers issue rulings concerning the principles and course of examining and settling complaints and grievances as well as critical material published in the press. It was postulated to establish a Complaints and Grievances Bureau at the Council of State, and to obligate the Central Trade Union Council (*CRZZ*) to analyse the settling of complaints and grievances by state organs. Local party committees were to analyse the settling of complaints in their own regions, and to become acquainted with reports concerning this problem, made by the chairmen or vice-chairmen of National Councils and presented at least once every three months at sessions of the executive organs. The Voivodeship Committees of the PUWP were to create special letters and inspection sections. It was also decided to expand correspondence sections in the press as well as the activity of the Bureau of Letters and Inspection (BLI) at the Central Committee of the PUWP⁵.

Apparently, the expansion of offices dealing with citizens' complaints and grievances was not a Polish invention. Naturally, it was modelled on appropriate Soviet institutions⁶. Both in the Soviet Union and in Poland they served, on the one hand, the collection of information about the functioning of the local authorities and social moods outside official information channels (the security apparatus, the Party); on the other hand, they were to produce the impression of particularly solicitous care bestowed by the communist state upon its citizens. The well-enrooted popular conviction that symptoms of injustice and wrongs were the effect of the activity of "bad" civil servants and not the "good" higher authorities (especially central ones) affected both the mass scale of the complaints and their addressees.

It is difficult to estimate the scale of the phenomenon. According to information contained in the acts of the former Central Committee of the PUWP, in 1952 assorted institutions all over the country received more than one million letters, and in 1953 — about 1.2 mln. In 1955, this number totalled already more than 1.5 mln, of which approximately one million were sent to Warsaw⁷.

Table 1 contains a statistic of letters written by citizens and addressed to some of the more important central institutions:

Table 1. Letters from private persons received by assorted central institutions in 1951–1956.

Year	CC PUWP	Bureau of Council of Ministers	Council of State	Polish Radio	"Gromada"
1951	12,294	63,743	—	—	—
1952	14,991	115,463	—	91,000	—
1953	24,046*	118,958	37,312	123,000	—
1954	81,192**	87,424	46,222	194,000****	70,343
1955	109,147***	59,500	53,535	268,000	79,426
1956 (first quarter)	25,998	—	—	—	—

Sources: Archives of Modern Records — AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-17 Bulletin no. 1/112, 13 January 1956, p. 14; 237/XXV-7, report of the Bureau of Letters and Inspection at the CC PUWP for 1955; Note on the situation in BLI CC PUWP,

⁵ Archives of Modern Records (further as: AMR), Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (further as: CC PUWP), 2327, pp. 107–110.

⁶ See: E. Zubkova, *Posltevoyennoye sovetskoye obshchestvo: politika i poslednievnost 1945–1953*, Moskva 2000, pp. 174–186.

⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-8, Note on work — complaints and grievances, p. 31–32; CC PUWP, vol. 42, Note of the Bureau for Letters and Inspection, p. 67.

p. 24. *According to other data — 21,641 (see AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-3, report of BLI CC PUWP for 1953); **According to other data — 74,942 (see AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7. Report of BLI CC PUWP for 1955); ***Including first letters concerning a given case — 95,293; second letters — 13,854. The table contains only data on direct letters from the citizens without answers from the assorted institutions to which they were addressed; ****According to other data — 195,250.

It follows from the above presented data that the Central Committee of the PUWP was not the most frequent addressee of letters sent by Polish citizens. A sudden rise in the influx of letters to the Central Committee in 1954–1955 and the simultaneous decline of the correspondence addressed to the Bureau of the Council of Ministers were connected with a transition of Bolesław Bierut to work in the Central Committee (in March 1954 he ceased fulfilling the function of Prime Minister, which he assumed in November 1952). This thesis is confirmed by the information that Bierut was one of the most frequent addressees of citizens' letters; his name was mentioned in 60–70% of the letters received by the Central Committee in 1954–1955.

Interesting conclusions are also drawn from a comparison of the number of letters sent to the Central Committee and local party committees. Apparently, letters addressed directly to the Central Committee in 1952 comprised 32.65%, in 1953 — 35.35%, and in 1954 — 57.6% of all letters sent to Party committees. In 1952, Voivodship Committees received 24.9%, in 1953 — 23.6% and in 1954 — 16.7% of all correspondence, while the County, Town and District Committees received 42.4%, 41.1% and 25.7% respectively. The proportions between letters addressed to the Voivodship and Central Committee were as follows: 1951 — 1:1.6, 1952 — 1:1.3, 1954 — 1:3.4 and 1955 — 1:4.3.

This incomplete statistic shows that among the Party committees first place as regards letters from citizens was gradually won by the Central Committee. This fact probably stemmed from two basic reasons. First, the gradual "thaw" in Polish political life after the death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953 "emboldened" the rank and file citizens to seek help at the highest rungs of power. Perhaps this was indirect proof of the fact that the latter had regained a certain minimum of social trust. Second, the feeling, confirmed by daily praxis, that the local state and Party institutions were incapable of dealing with complaints or outright demonstrated ill will, was becoming more profound⁸.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 1–6, 17–18.

The authors of the complaints were subjected to assorted forms of repression⁹. In 1953, inspections conducted by the Central Committee in the Town Committee of the PUWP in Rzeszów discovered that anonymous letters and complaints sent by non-Party members were not examined¹⁰, while those which had been addressed to the Central Committee included the declarations that their authors were writing to Warsaw since they had been unable to settle anything in the local Party committees, or did not wish to turn to the latter, since they “constitute a clique”¹¹.

Such a mass-scale influx of letters addressed to the Central Committee became the reason why the work conducted by the BLI was additionally hampered¹².

Gaps in the preserved archival documentation make it difficult to conduct even a superficial social characteristic of the authors of the letters. First and foremost, it must be kept in mind that a certain part of the correspondence was anonymous. Pertinent data are fragmentary. It is known, however, that in 1955 they constituted 13% of all complaints received by the seventeen Voivodeship Committees and the Municipal Committees of Warsaw and Łódź¹³. In 1951, anonymous letters totalled about 11% of the correspondence sent to the BLI, and in 1953 — about 8%¹⁴. The majority of the authors treated anonymity as protection against the revenge of the authorities against which the correspondence was aimed¹⁵. A similar protective procedure were

⁹ See, *i.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-2, Report of the Bureau of Letters and Inspection at the CC PUWP (further as: BLI) for February 1951, p. 56; 237/XXV-13, BLI Bulletin no. 6/42, March 1955, pp. 49-54.

¹⁰ AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-3; BLI report for 1953, p. 24.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² For more detailed information about the functioning of the Bureau see: *Akta Biura Listów i Inspekcji KC PZPR jako źródło do badań rzeczywistości społecznej w Polsce w latach 1950-1956 (Acts of the Bureau of Letters and Inspection at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party as a Source for Examining Social Reality in Poland 1950-1956)*, in: “Polska 1944/45-1989. Studia i materiały”, 1997, vol. II, pp. 191-216.

¹³ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-8, Note on work — complaints and grievances [1955], pp. 1-3.

¹⁴ Own calculations upon the base of AMR, 237/XXV-1, 2, 4, 6, 11.

¹⁵ An example of such motivation is found *expressis verbis* in a letter by farmers contained in a BLI Bulletin no. 5 of 20 March 1953; 237/XXV-6, p. 48: “We do not sign this letter since Warsaw is far away and the starosta’s office (sic!) is near, but all this and much more is true”.

collective letters, often signed by several score persons, against whom it was more difficult to apply repressive measures.

The only complete data characterising the social structure of the authors of the letters come from 1955, when 31% of the authors were workers, 22%—peasants, 20% — white collar workers, and 27% were listed as belonging to the “others” category. The authors of 88% of this correspondence did not belong to the Party¹⁶. In the first quarter of 1956 the social composition of the senders was as follows: workers — 34%, peasants — 25%, white-collar workers — 18%, “others” — 23 %, while 89% were not Party members¹⁷.

In accordance with instructions issued by the Central Committee questions presented in the citizens' complaints were to become the object of an inspection carried out by assorted Party and state institutions. We do not have at our disposal data enabling an assessment of the outcome of such inspections. It is only known that upon the basis of consultations held by heads of the Letter Sections at the Voivodeship Committees, the BLI found that about 50–60% of all complaints had been classified as justified¹⁸.

All these facts mean that in view of the absence of the original correspondence the inner, secret BLI bulletins, kept in the acts of the Central Committee of the PUWP, made since December 1950 and containing, *l.a.* excerpts from letters addressed to the Party central offices, comprise an important and extremely interesting source for becoming acquainted with Stalinist reality¹⁹. The circle of the addressees of this particular publication, limited to the then elite of power, and its unofficial non-propaganda nature are additional prominent features indicating the reliability of the information contained therein.

¹⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7, BLI report for 1955.

¹⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7, BLI report for the first quarter of 1956.

¹⁸ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-8, Note on the realisation of a resolution of the Organisational Bureau at the CC PUWP of 9 December 1950 on the settlement of complaints and grievances of the working people by the Voivodeship Committees, pp. 17–20. According to data from 1953, the checking of complaints by the Warsaw Voivodeship Committee led to the discharge of four secretaries of the County Committee, 23 secretaries of the Communal Committee, seven secretaries of Basic Party Organisations, 13 persons from the Civic Militia and Security Office, and four chairmen of production cooperatives. All told, 521 persons were punished by being discharged.

¹⁹ For more detailed data about the state of the preservation of the bulletins, their size, etc., see: D. J a r o s z, *op. cit.*, pp. 191–198.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that many of the letters were published together with an annotation about the way in which the issues mentioned in the correspondence had been settled, and the reliability of the presented facts in the light of inspections conducted by the Central Committee or entrusted to other offices. On-the-spot inspections frequently confirmed the purposefulness of civic intervention.

Enormous value for conclusions about the social reality of Stalinist Poland is ascribed to not only to the confirmed facts contained in letters from citizens, issued in the bulletins, but also to the quantitative information found in the correspondence as well as in other BLI documents, which characterise the topics of the letters. It would be difficult to exaggerate the impact exerted by political changes, and in particular the gradual liberalisation of the People's Republic of Poland after the death of Stalin in March 1953, upon the issues mentioned by the authors of the letters, and the manner in which they did so. The bulletins published after that date contain many more quotations boldly criticising the political conditions of Stalinist Poland, including dependence upon the Soviet Union, the omnipotence of the security apparatus, etc.

Regardless of the category of the authors, throughout the entire period correspondence by "ordinary men" included certain "steady" themes, testifying about the constant presence in his daily life of irresolvable problems, sometimes resulting in personal tragedies.

Let us, therefore, try upon the basis of the above described source basis create a "catalogue" of social ills in Poland during the 1950–1956 period. For the sake of greater clarity, this analysis pertains to the following groups of problems:

1. The functioning of the Party and state authorities, the political situation;
2. Relations in work places and the Army;
3. The village and agriculture;
4. Social and material living conditions;
5. Crime and the administration of justice;
6. Education and culture;
7. Nationality problems.

Ad 1. An essential part of the correspondence concerning questions associated with the functioning of the communist auth-

orities were letters about Party issues, which in 1951 constituted 18.7% of the total addressed to the Central Committee of the PUW, 18,1% in 1952, and 16% in 1953²⁰. In 1955, Party problems were discussed in 4 062 letters received by the Central Committee, i. e. 33.7% of all the correspondence²¹.

Stringent criticism concerned the life style of the Party apparatus. The letters depicted numerous examples of drunkenness, brawls conducted under the influence of alcohol, or outright shoot outs²². The described examples mentioned families of Party apparatus employees buying out commodities in state stores²³, brutal evictions of large families with small children from their homes, subsequently handed over to local Party functionaries²⁴.

Characteristic assessments were made of the attitudes of representatives of the authorities towards religion and the Catholic Church. A bulletin from May 1953 contains information about charges made against a County Committee secretary in Radom, confirmed by an inspection; his home had "religious decorations hanging on the walls" and his "wife and children attend church and are practising Catholics". The accused christened his child on 26 March 1953 and used an official car for transporting the godparents, charges which led to his dismissal²⁵.

On the other hand, anti-religious behaviour was condemned. An anonymous letters sent on 4 May 1956 from Września accused the local authorities of the fact that several years earlier they had established a commission which during the celebration of Corpus Christi Day "checked whether suspect Party members listed in a 'black book' had decorated the windows of their homes"²⁶. Other cases included accusations of members of the Party apparatus of crimes (rape, murder), masked by means of false witnesses²⁷.

²⁰ Own calculations upon the basis of AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-3, p. 9.

²¹ Own calculations upon the basis of AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7, annual BLI report for 1955, pp. 17-19.

²² AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-1, p. 3; 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 1/35, 24 January 1953.

²³ AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-1, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 9/43, 8 May 1953, pp. 85-86.

²⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 27/138, 7 June 1956. On anti-religious demonstrations of the Party apparatus in the villages see: AMR, 237-4, Excerpts from letters no. 6, 9 June 1951, p. 64.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 152.

A closer examination of the bulletins shows that the creation of local cliques monopolising power, privileges and the distribution of goods was a frequent phenomenon. Such cliques were usually composed of secretaries of Party committees, chairmen of National Councils, heads of security offices, prosecutors, judges, Civic Militia commanders, and chairmen of Communal Cooperatives (in the countryside). In certain institutions — if we are to believe the authors of the complaints — all the more important posts were taken over by a single or several families. In such a situation, attempts at criticising their functioning, abuse and thefts proved ineffective, and sometimes produced repressions applied by the accused²⁸. Complaints mentioned bribes and the abuse of posts, whose frequent symptom was the use of official cars for private family trips²⁹. An anonymous letter written by peasants protested against the fact that a County Committee imposed drunkards and embezzlers as chairmen of the Communal National Councils and rendered invalid elections conducted democratically by the peasants.

An interesting phenomenon was the rather frequent adaptation of the arguments used in the correspondence to the language of official propaganda. The authors' often resorted to arguments which, regardless of the meaning of the described facts, were to additionally besmirch the condemned persons. Hence the numerous accusations of an "improper" past (*sanacja* lineage, prewar service in Army Intelligence, immoral conduct, signing the *Volksliste*, family ties with wealthy peasants, etc.). Upon certain occasions, intrigues within local authorities, at the level of a commune or a county, assumed the form of mutual accusations and complaints addressed to the Central Committee

Ad. 2. A separate group of topics was composed by letters describing relations in work places. In 1951, they constituted 17.4% of all the correspondence received by the Central Committee, in 1952 — 18.6%, in 1953 — 16.3%³⁰, and in 1955 — at least 8%³¹.

²⁸ AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 5/39, 20 March 1953.

²⁹ AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 26/137; *ibidem*, 237/XXV-15, Bulletin no. 46/82, 25 August 1955, p. 48.

³⁰ Own calculations upon the base of AMR, CC PUWP 237/XX; V-2, BLI report for 1953, pp. 9-11.

³¹ AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-7, BLI report for 1955, pp. 17-19.

The most numerous were letters describing conflicts in places of work, dismissals, and requests for jobs. The workers branded the way they were treated by the management. By way of example, the employees of the State Cotton Industry Works in Częstochowa complained that they had to pay off one of the managers: "if nothing is given one does not receive suitable work", better paid than others. In this way, on his name day the dishonest manager received such gifts as a bicycle, a briefcase, a cigarette case, and an ashtray³². Particular ill fame was ascribed to the head of the personnel office, whose arbitrariness was described in the bulletins. In Production Works no. 8 in Pionki this worker, according to anonymous letters, "speaks to the people as if he were a steward [...], he shouts in a vulgar manner and treats the workers worse than dogs, so that they are afraid of even entering the office"; "if he has a grudge against anyone, he immediately fires him"³³. In a collective letter the female employees of the Industry Works in Kalisz accused the head of the personnel office of having "affairs" in the boarding school of the factory, the distracting the female workers from their jobs, forcing them to go dancing with him and then recording a full day's work in return for the time spent on amusement³⁴. In 1953 the head of the Highway Quarries in Lubań was accused of insulting his workers, coarsely swearing at them, and forcing the young female workers to visit him at his home. A subsequent inspection confirmed all those charges³⁵.

The analysed correspondence indicates that managers of enterprises frequently created an entourage composed of "their" people, often members of the family. In this way, many of them could pursue a specific nepotism, *i.a.* thanks to links with heads of the local Party committees and suitable unions³⁶. Such a selection of cadres facilitated enormous abuses³⁷.

The workers were also upset by excessively expanded bureaucracy, especially striking when combined with the unsatisfac-

³² AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-2, p. 53.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

³⁵ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 4, 5 March 1953, p. 35.

³⁶ See, *i.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-6, p. 90; *ibidem*, 237/XXV-11, Bulletin no. 3/62, 28 January 1954, p. 16.

³⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-11, Bulletin no. 3/62, 28 January 1954, pp. 18-21; *ibidem*, 237/XXV-17, Bulletin no. 5/116, 4 March 1956, p. 46.

tory settling of daily problems³⁸ and the falsification of production plans.

Such a negative image of the management became even more vivid when contrasted with descriptions of work conditions in industrial enterprises. The complaints concerned, among others, the duration of work. According to an anonymous letters from the Otmęt Works in the county of Strzelce, irregular supplies of raw material forced the young employees to work alongside with the adults some 16 and even 22 hours without respite. A letter addressed in October 1955 to "Trybuna Ludu" claimed that industrial enterprises in Wrocław regarded it as common practice to work overtime in unhealthy conditions; monthly, overtime totalled 120–200 hours, sometimes without suitable payment³⁹. In 1950, textile workers from the State Cotton Industry Works in Prudnik were compelled to sign lists agreeing to work for 16 hours (8 hours at work, an 8–hours interval, followed by another 8 hours of work), also on Saturdays and Sundays⁴⁰. In June 1956, textile workers from Pabianice wrote a letter to Edward Ochab declaring: "We request the abolition of nighttime shifts. There is no time to sleep during the day, because we must stand in queues to get some butter, meat or lard. We don't know whether to send the children off to school, to queue up or to sleep. In addition, there is the cooking and laundry to be done. All the workers from our firm address this plea to you, Comrade Ochab"⁴¹.

Information concerning safety and hygiene in places of work is particularly drastic. A letter written by Euzebiusz Walter, a correspondent of "Trybuna Wolności" on 16 December 1955, described the shocking plight of female workers in a match factory in Sianów, in the voivodeship of Koszalin. "Zofia Kossak (Kozik?) is a model worker [...] She has been using a phosphorus machine uninterruptedly for the past seven years. The work conditions are hard, but the wages — good, which is the reason why this first–rate worker suffers from phosphorus poisoning of tendon muscles, and is dying. Despite this, no changes have been introduced to protect the health of the workers. Only now, when

³⁸ See, *l.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–6, Bulletin no. 9/43, 8 May 1953, an anonymous author described relations in *Metrobudowa*, p. 87.

³⁹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–17, Bulletin no. 5/116, 4 February 1956, pp. 46–60.

⁴⁰ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–2, p. 22.

⁴¹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–18, Bulletin no. 29/140, 22 June 1956, p. 207.

her life is nearing its end [...] a next victim, since this is precisely how the workers who is to operate the machine feels, has been found"⁴². A large tidal wave of letters to the Central Committee was produced by the information published in "Słowo Polskie" in 1956 about the poisoning of workers in the Celwiskoza synthetic textile factory in Jelenia Góra. "It follows from the article", the authors of the letters wrote, "that hundreds of people have been poisoned, became insane or crippled, and no one has done anything about it"⁴³.

The contents of the bulletins show that thefts were committed not only by members of the management, but also by the workers. Numerous indignant opinions were caused by the conduct of inspectors in the Wool Industry Works in Tomaszów, who conducted gynaecological examinations of female workers who smuggled yarn by concealing it in their vaginas. Central Committee findings discovered that identical methods were used by women employed not only in the textile industry, but also, supposedly sporadically, in tobacco works in Łódź and pharmaceutical enterprises. Similar searches, this time for high quality thread, were conducted in the Hanka Sawicka Cotton Industry Works in Łódź, where the physician finally refused to carry out such examinations, which the employees vehemently opposed⁴⁴.

The darkest images of work conditions come from letters written by prisoners, who were given the most dangerous jobs and provided with meagre, almost starvation-level food⁴⁵.

The extant bulletins make it possible to learn about the main problems experienced by soldiers. A statement made by two junior officers from a unit stationing in Braniewo mentioned that

⁴² AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-17, Bulletin no. 4/115, 8 January 1956.

⁴³ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 29/140, 22 June 1956. The article in question is: *Celwiskoza*, written by E. Szpitałak and J. Łukasiewicz, published in "Słowo Polskie" 1956, no. 132.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ An inmate from the Work Centre in Mysłowice described work in the colliery: "Due to the excessively small number of inmates working in the section we are forced to work 12 hours in order to realise the plan [...]. The section is situated at the level of 500 metres and lacks sufficient air [...]. The prisoners are let in immediately after the blasting of the wall, when there is still a lot of smoke and dust [...]. For 15 days [...] I worked [...] without complete protection afraid that any moment the wall might collapse [...]. The insufficient daily food of the prisoners is composed of marmalade and processed cheese"; AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-14, Bulletin no. 38/74, 21 July 1955, p. 163. For a similar description of the Work Centre in Cisca, in the county of Sanok, see: 237/XXV-16, Bulletin no. 72/108, 10 December 1955.

periodically “whole groups of soldiers did not receive certain portions of food” or that the latter were reduced. The head of the unit’s supplies appropriated cigarettes and uniforms intended for the men. In the training battalion of the same unit one of the junior officers discovered “fascist methods of training the young people”, used by older soldiers in relation to the recruits (“crawling underneath beds, charges against wardrobes, painful ear tugging”). A private from another unit asked in his letter to the Central Committee: “Why do the commanders of the unit order the soldiers to be beaten? Why are we being beaten by the corporals? Why don’t we receive any medical help?”. The BLI showed that correspondence of this type, passed on to the Ministry of National Defence, led to repressions affecting the authors of the complaints⁴⁶.

In 1954–1956, the so-called compression of permanent employment produced more letters about problems with finding jobs. According to information provided by the BLI, in 1954 the Bureau of Complaints and Grievances at the Bureau of the Council of Ministers in 1954 received 3,262 requests for jobs, the most from the voivodeships of Poznań (379), Kielce (234), Warsaw (342), Łódź (300) and Rzeszów (234). The majority of the authors were blue-collar workers (1,674)⁴⁷. From 1 January to 30 November 1955 the BLI got 3,446 letters concerning dismissals from jobs and 4,223 letters with requests of finding employment⁴⁸.

A new phenomenon were difficulties with discovering employment for graduates of trade schools⁴⁹. Jobs were sought by former members of the Home Army, discharged employees of the Security Bureau and the Civic Militia as well as dismissed Army officers⁵⁰.

The correspondence cited in the bulletin shows that the employment reduction campaign, planned at the top, became an excellent pretext for firing people who were regarded as inconvenient, the ill and cripples⁵¹. The authors of the letters criticised

⁴⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-11, Bulletin of 11 August 1954, pp. 148–153.

⁴⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-13, Bulletin no. 19/55, 6 April 1956, pp. 168–181.

⁴⁸ AMR CC PUWP, 237/XXV-16, p. 122

⁴⁹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-1, p. 76.

⁵⁰ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-15, annual report for 1955, p. 9.

⁵¹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-16, Bulletin no. 7/107, 7 December 1955, p. 123.

scarce offers of jobs with a wage of 400–500 *zlotys* monthly, a sum which in 1955 was insufficient even for a small family⁵².

The described category of letters also contained descriptions of conflicts between workers and peasants due to the requisition or devastation of arable land needed by the developing industry. In 1951, Nowa Huta became the site of brawls leading to bodily assault and even manslaughter⁵³.

Ad. 3. Throughout the whole described period the village and agriculture constituted an important topic in all the letters addressed to central state and Party institutions. These issues were discussed in 5.6% of the correspondence received by the Central Committee in 1951, 3.8% — in 1952, 9% — in 1953, 13.5% — in 1955, and 13% in the first quarter of 1956.

According to a detailed report from 1956, out of the total of 14,534 letters pertaining to rural questions, which reached the Central Committee, 19% concerned “socialist economy” (production cooperatives, state farms, rural trade, state machine centres, forestry), while 81% discussed private farms (mainly complaints about the size of contributions, land taxation, seizures, auctions, requests concerning the renunciation of farms, credit distribution, land classification, the conduct of Communal National Councils))⁵⁴. The same problems appeared in peasant letters in other analysed years⁵⁵.

An analysis of correspondence concerning production cooperatives enables us to indicate the basic reasons why the cooperatives met with the peasants’ animosity. The authors of the letters complained primarily about improper methods applied during the organisation of the cooperatives. The functionaries intimidated peasants and detained them in arrests and prisons; on the other hand promises were made of easier purchases of deficit articles such as coal, rubber boots and textiles⁵⁶. In certain cases, for example in the county of Brzozów, the peasants who refused to join cooperatives were fired from crude oil mines, where

⁵² AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-13, Bulletin no. 19/55, 6 April 1955, pp. 168–170.

⁵³ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 8, 30 June 1951, p. 79.

⁵⁴ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7, BLI report for 1955

⁵⁵ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-3, BLI report for 1953, p. 11; 237/XXV-7, BLI report for the first quarter of 1956, p. 37.

⁵⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-2, BLI report for January 1951, p. 9; 237/XXV-3, BLI report for 1953, p. 10; 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 16, September 1951, p. 209.

they had some additional jobs⁵⁷. Similar threats, subsequently realised, were applied in relation to peasants employed in rural institutions (Commune Cooperatives, national councils, etc.)⁵⁸. The fields belonging to the obstinate peasants were unfairly exchanged for worse ones while creating cooperatives, and its owners were moved from their farms⁵⁹. Pro-cooperative agitation was conducted also at night, by invading the homes of the peasants or organising hours-long meetings⁶⁰. Sometimes, blatant lies were used to induce the peasants to sign cooperative declarations⁶¹. Access to collective farms was also treated as a condition for obtaining credit and artificial fertilisers⁶². Peasant letters are testimony of the social unrest and disturbances accompanying the first cooperative ventures, which frequently caused bloody fights and peasant demonstrations, in which a particularly active role was played by the women⁶³.

An essential part in the discussed correspondence was the criticism of the functioning of the "kolchozes". Some of the collective farms were incapable of guaranteeing their members decent living conditions⁶⁴. In many cases, a clear system of payment was never introduced; in practice, it was frequently and arbitrarily determined by the chairman of a given cooperative⁶⁵. In other instances, the farms turned into institutions whose purpose was to exploit the peasant members by the board (frequently members of one family)⁶⁶. Many complaints about cooperative economy are to be found in descriptions of conflicts and hostility, the avoid-

⁵⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-2, BLI report for February 1951, p. 34; BLI report for April 1951, p. 104; 237/XXV-13, Bulletin no. 13/49, 8 March 1955.

⁵⁸ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-3, Excerpts from letters no. 1, 17 May 1951, pp. 11-12. On this subject see also: 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 9, 6 July 1951, p. 92; 237/XXV-16, Bulletin no. 69/105, 1 December 1955, p. 10.

⁵⁹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-3, BLI report for 1951, p. 10; 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 9, 6 July 1951, p. 92.

⁶⁰ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 11, 20 July 1951. See also: 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 22/133, 1 May 1956.

⁶¹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 15/49, 16 September 1953, pp. 142-143; no. 20, 15 October 1953, p. 184.

⁶² AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-16, Bulletin no. 69/105, 1 December 1955.

⁶³ See, *i.a.* ANA, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 15/49, 16 September 1953, p. 133.

⁶⁴ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters, 6 October 1951, p. 209.

⁶⁵ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-2, BLI report for January 1951, p. 11.

⁶⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-13, Bulletin no. 27/63, 2 April 1955; 237/XXV-1, Bulletin no. 11, 30 August 1954, pp. 168-169; 237/XXV-II, Bulletin no. 4/63, 11 February 1954, p. 40.

ance of communal work⁶⁷, or even the leasing of land and pasture to individual farmers in return for labour⁶⁸. Other complaints concerned the uncertain fate of old people and the exclusion of the elderly, incapable of work⁶⁹.

Letters written by members of cooperatives mentioned the phenomenon of young people fleeing to towns. An important motif of this emigration was financial; one of the peasants from the voivodeship of Opole described this problem in the following manner: "It's obvious: in the cooperative wages are paid once a year, and in a factory or some other enterprise — once a month. After all, the young people need entertainment, they want to have fun, and this costs money. It is much easier to earn money in town than in the countryside — this is the explanation used by our youngsters"⁷⁰. An attempt at resolving this question was the introduction by certain collective farms of advance payments, paid to the young people prior to the term of annual accounts⁷¹.

Peasant correspondence also documents the dissolution of production cooperatives in 1956, a process accompanied by the plunder of communal property⁷².

A successive large group of letters contain complaints about the so-called social classification of land, the measurement and execution of obligatory deliveries and taxes. They contain, *i.a.* descriptions of the brutal conduct of the teams participating in consecutive campaigns of collecting up farm products. The peasants claimed that this was an opportunity for numerous forms of abuse. Searches for grain and meat were frequently a mere pretext for thefts of objects of daily use and farm outfitting (including farm animals)⁷³. Letters testify to the fact that a form of pressure employed in 1950/1951 was the prohibition of selling commodities to those farmers who had not handed over the assigned quota deliveries to the State⁷⁴. The requisitions often

⁶⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-11, Bulletin no. 11, 30 August 1954, pp. 173-174.

⁶⁸ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-19, Bulletin no. 39/150, 5 September 1956, p. 118.

⁶⁹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-6, Report for the first quarter of 1956, pp. 32-33.

⁷⁰ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 21/132, 4 May 1956, p. 57.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² See, *i.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-20, Bulletin no. 56/167, 19 December 1956, p. 131; 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 19/130, 21 April 1956, p. 25.

⁷³ See, *i.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-2, BLI report for May 1951, p. 126.

⁷⁴ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-5, Document of the Voivodeship National Council in Koszalin, p. 1; 237/XXV-11, Bulletin no. 7, 3 April 1954, p. 63; 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 9, 6 July 1951, p. 92.

took place at night, and were accompanied by threats of firearms. The homes of the obstinate peasants bore the painted inscriptions: "Here lives an enemy of Poland — a kulak". Many peasants were beaten, insulted and scorned⁷⁵. Whole families were detained in arrests, where they were forced to sign documents obligating them to provide grain supplies. The same purpose was served by forcing the peasants to attend hours-long meetings, sometimes conducted late into the night and repeated several days in a row⁷⁶.

Letters from villages demonstrate that the compulsory buying up of grain and the execution of the land tax served the creation of production cooperatives: whenever the peasants paid suitable sums and provided quota deliveries their property was frequently returned to them and payments were annulled⁷⁷. The necessity of providing obligatory deliveries meant that many farms lacked grain for sowing and faced the threat of hunger⁷⁸. It is not surprising, therefore, that numerous peasants welcomed the political changes of 1955–1956 in the hope that they would alter the state agricultural policy. An anonymous letter sent from the voivodeship of Kielce to the journal "Gromada — Rolnik Polski" in March 1956 declared: "All those quota deliveries must be abolished — enough of this poverty. Before the war the peasants did not provide compulsory deliveries and the state had plenty of food, more than now"⁷⁹. The farmers more openly criticised the increase of the deliveries, which particularly impoverished the large farms⁸⁰. Certain letters contained bitter complaints about a mistaken agricultural policy which intentionally ruined farms regarded as belonging to the "kulaks"⁸¹.

⁷⁵ See, *i.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 5, 4 June 1951, p. 49; Excerpts from letters no. 6, 9 June 1951, p. 56, 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 10/43, 10 June 1953, p. 93.

⁷⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 7, p. 69; 237/XXV-2, p. 62.

⁷⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-4, p. 30, 69; 237/XXV-2, p. 66.

⁷⁸ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-13, Bulletin no. 34, 30 June 1955, p. 116, Bulletin no. 38/74, 21 August 1951, p. 159, 237/XXV-4, Excerpts from letters no. 3, 26 May 1951; 237/XXV-2, BLI report for March 1951, pp. 62–64.

⁷⁹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-18, p. 123; see also: 237/XXV-20, Bulletin no. 50/161, 24 September 1956, p. 56.

⁸⁰ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-19, Bulletin no. 35/146, 3 August 1956.

⁸¹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-19, Bulletin no. 37/148, 25 August 1956, pp. 88–90; 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 25/136, 2 June 1956, pp. 115–118.

An essential part of the letters dealt with the functioning of trade in the countryside. As a rule, the complaints concerned the boards and employees of the Communal Peasant Self-help Co-operatives, who resorted to mutual backing in order to buy up deficit commodities⁸². The prices of certain articles were unjustly raised⁸³. Sometimes, the purchase of some articles called for bribing the representatives of local authorities⁸⁴.

Mutual backing and cliques dominating rural institutions are testified not only by the cited descriptions of relations in the Peasant Self-help. Similar criticism was expressed in letters dealing with the work performed by the Communal National Councils, equally prone to bribery and drunkenness⁸⁵.

Ad 4. The most frequently mentioned social problem was housing. In 1955, pertinent correspondence amounted to about 13% of all letters addressed to the Central Committee of the PUWP. In the first six months of that year they comprised almost 30% of the correspondence sent to the Bureau of the Council of Ministers, and 12% of the letters received by the Polish Radio. Many of the authors visited the BLI in Warsaw. From June to the end of 1955 alone, out of a total of 1 230 persons received by the BLI, 350 came to settle housing problems⁸⁶.

In this particular case, the determination of the petitioners was particularly great. They refused to be committed to a suitable office, but demanded that their cases be settled by the Central Committee apparatus. A BLI report from September 1955 characterised them as follows: "Sometimes they try to intimidate by warning that they shall turn to the Soviet Embassy, take over newly built houses as squatters, demonstrate in Defilady Square during state holidays, or even commit suicide by the throwing

⁸² See, *l.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-2, BLI report for February 1951, p. 43; 237/XXV-1, p. 7.

⁸³ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-2, BLI report for January 1951, p. 15.

⁸⁴ According to an anonymous letters from the commune of Wyszaków in the county of Bielsk Podlaski, written in December 1950, "no one can buy anything" without a "coupon" from the secretary of the Communal Committee of the PUWP, and "such a coupon can be obtained in return for eggs or butter. Everyday, people queue up next to his home in order to get the coupons"; AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-1, Excerpts from letters, 8 December 1950, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁵ See, *l.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 3/37, 19 February 1953, p. 29, Bulletin no. 19/53, 13 October 1953, pp. 173-174.

⁸⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-15, Bulletin for 51/87, 12 August 1955, pp. 86-88; 237/XXV-7, BLI report for 1955 p. 24; 237/XXV-7, annual report for 1955, p. 6.

themselves under a car of a member of the Political Bureau, etc. Frequently, they come from extremely distant localities and include pregnant women accompanied by little children”⁸⁷.

A characteristic of the letters contained in the bulletins indicates the rank of the problem: “The majority of letters dealing with housing is outright dramatic. The authors declare that often the health or even the life of children or other members of the family depends on obtaining a suitable home. Many letters come from families whose members suffer from tuberculosis. Numerous authors had turned to national councils in their places of work, the Council of State or the Bureau of the Council of Ministers. Negative responses forced them to turn to the Central Committee. They believe that only the Central Committee, having become acquainted with their difficult living conditions, will understand their situation and settle the case. Many of the authors add to the letters certificates issued, e. g. by medical or by sanitary commissions, confirming the necessity of the quickest possible granting of a suitable home”⁸⁸. Bulletin no. 23/134 of 1956 noted that a considerable part of the correspondence was written by women, who due to poor living conditions decided to resort to abortion, as well as by “squatters”, whose dramatic situation forced them to take over empty homes. Cases of attempted suicide provoked by such situations are also cited⁸⁹.

Many bulletins contain fragments of letters portraying the difficult housing situation of concrete families⁹⁰. The authors complained about the arbitrary occupation of their homes by representatives of the local authorities⁹¹.

⁸⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–15, Bulletin no. 51/87, 12 November 1955, p. 88.

⁸⁸ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–7, BLI report for 1955, p. 6.

⁸⁹ AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV–7, BLI report for the first quarter of 1956, pp. 27–29.

⁹⁰ A letter from a reader of “Sztandar Młodych”, who in November 1954 requested that the editorial board help her to find accommodation for her family: “I am a seventh-form pupil at the Society of Friends of Children Primary School in Pruszków. I wish to go on learning, but have no conditions to do so since I live in a basement flat together with my mother and sister, two brothers and an uncle. Our room is 18 square metres large. For three years, my mother has been trying [...] to obtain some sort of decent housing, but her efforts proved unsuccessful [...]. My older brother is graduating from a vocational school in Ursus and could find work there, but he is unwell. He has twice suffered from an inflammation of the joints and a sick heart. Although I am only 13 years old, I suffer from painful rheumatism. Our home is terribly damp. A pair of shoes left for a week becomes covered with a thick layer of mildew. Beds and bed linen reek of mould, and we too upon awakening, smell of it”; AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–14, Bulletin no. 29/65, 28 May 1955, pp. 47–55.

⁹¹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/ XXV–IX, Bulletin no. 23/134, p. 92.

Another group of the correspondence reaching the central authorities pertained to the material aspects of living conditions, especially wages and social benefits. The authors of the letters maintained that in 1955–1956 wages totalling 1,100–1,300 *zlotys* monthly could not pay for the most elementary needs of their families⁹². In this situation, a tide of negative reactions was produced by articles published at the beginning of 1956 in journals “Trybuna Ludu” and “Życie Warszawy”, which tried to prove that during the period of the six-years plan wages grew on the average by 26–27%⁹³. Particularly dramatic is the tone of letters describing the material status of old age pensioners, whose cause was supported by, among others, the Union of Associations of State and Army Old Age Pensioners, which wrote to the Central Committee: “The Union of Old Age Pensioners receives thousands of petitions and interventions from all over the country pleading to saving the old people from starvation. We feel obligated to draw the attention of competent circles to the below described situation of old age pensioners and widows. An old age pensioner who prior to the change of the monetary system received 3,000 *zlotys* today gets 90 *zlotys*, and a widow whose pension was 2,100 *zlotys* now receives 63 *zlotys*, which, taking into consideration that a litre of milk costs 1 *zloty* 40 *groszy* and a loaf of bread (edible even without butter) — 1 *zloty* 44 *groszy*, means that the monthly supply of those two articles costs 85 *zlotys* 20 *groszy*. Where are they to find the rest to pay rent and electricity, and to eat once a day, even if it is potato soup fit for Lent?”⁹⁴.

Fragments of letters written by old age pensioners and war invalids cited in the bulletins confirmed the facts described in Union letters⁹⁵. Some of the excerpts testify about growing dissatisfaction with the differences between the level of the rents depending on the period when they were granted⁹⁶.

⁹² AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–15, Bulletin no. 59/95, 21 October 1955; see also a letter by a railway worker — 237/XXV–2, p. 30.

⁹³ I have in mind the articles by R. F., *Jak rozwijała się w toku sześciolatki płaca realna ludzi pracy (How the Wages of the Working People Developed in the Course of the Six-years Plan)*, “Trybuna Ludu” 3 February 1956, no. 33, and by W. Brus in “Życie Warszawy” 2 February 1956, no. 27; 3 March 1956, no. 28; 5–6 February 1956, no. 30; 7 February 1956, no. 31; 9 February 1956, no. 32, AMR, 237/XXV–17, Bulletin no. 8/119, 3 March 1956, pp. 121–125.

⁹⁴ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–1, p. 24.

⁹⁵ See, *i.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–18, Bulletin of 2 May 1956, p. 33.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, Bulletin no. 20/131, p. 39.

Many of the complaints were written by re-emigrants whose pensions, converted into Polish currency, proved to be extremely low⁹⁷.

The old people also complained about the level of customs duties for articles of daily use and food, sent by their relatives living abroad. Upon certain occasions, the addressees never received the packages, since the customs exceeded the value of the contents⁹⁸. The poverty of wide social circles was the reason why sarcastic reactions were produced by the relatively high prizes won in some competitions or even lotteries⁹⁹, including the Chopin Piano Competition in 1955¹⁰⁰.

Great emotions accompanied the functioning of the health service. Successive bulletins contained many descriptions of culpable and proven negligence of medical staff, which resulted in the death or permanent crippling of patients, the absence of medical care at home, bribery and drunkenness at hospitals as well as an illegal trade in medicines¹⁰¹. The meticulously checked case of the hospital in Świebodzin confirmed the defaults committed by its staff, described in complaints addressed to the Central Committee. In 1953, several deaths in that hospital resulted from obvious malpractice¹⁰². Many birth centres, with scandalous sanitary conditions and recorded cases of new born babies being exchanged, enjoyed particular ill repute¹⁰³. Similarly scathing opinions can be discovered in letters about state orphanages¹⁰⁴ and preventorium¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7, BLI report for the first quarter of 1956, pp. 27-28.

⁹⁸ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-18, Bulletin 28/139, 12 June 1956.

⁹⁹ An anonymous letter from 1955, sent from Kallsz, condemned high prizes (up to 100,000 *zlotys*) for persons who properly guessed the outcome of the Eighth Bicycle Race for Peace: "In my opinion, paying 100,000 *zlotys* to a single person is an unhealthy symptom of our present-day reality. This view is shared by the majority of sensibly thinking people with whom I work; we are dealing with a 'propagation' of Western speculators, managers and lotteries. Will a person who receives such a sum think about useful work, or will he become the victim of gambling? The path from gambling to crime and murder is not all that long"; AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-14, Bulletin no. 33/69, 17 June 1955, p. 104.

¹⁰⁰ AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-13, p. 153.

¹⁰¹ See, *l.a.* AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-15, Bulletin no. 42/78, 12 August 1955, pp. 1-10.

¹⁰² AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-3, BLI report for 1953, pp. 16-20; 237/XXV-11, Bulletin no. 6/65, 5 March 1954, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰³ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-11, Bulletin no. 6/65, 5 March 1954, p. 51.

¹⁰⁴ In one of the orphanages (Domaszów, county of Bystrzyca Kłodzka): "The children [...] are used for heavy labour such as carrying posts for building a fence, doing the laundry in a stream, including the linen of the daughters of the head

Ad 5. An analysis of the BLI bulletins seems to indicate that crime constituted one of the basic hardships of daily life in Stalinist Poland. In a letter written to "Życie Warszawy", and published in January 1955 in one of the bulletins, a resident of Świdnica complained about hooligans, whom the local authorities did not oppose or were incapable of doing so¹⁰⁶. A similar situation prevailed in 1954 in the Warsaw district of Muranów, which, according to the author, "is a gigantic refuge for hooligans. At night we hear shouts and the sound of people running, sometimes a shot or the cry 'halt or I shall shoot' (...) People here re-live those issues, shut themselves up at home as best as they can, and are afraid to go out"¹⁰⁷.

The core of letters pertaining to the administration of justice in correspondence with the central authorities is composed of appeals from court decisions, requests for respite of the verdict, earlier release, clemency, etc. In 1956, they comprised 13.8% of all the correspondence addressed to the Central Committee; nonetheless, they were not published in the bulletins¹⁰⁸.

In 1954, a considerable part of the correspondence expressed disillusionment due to unfulfilled hopes for an amnesty marking the tenth anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland¹⁰⁹.

In 1955, a true novelty were letters by persons hiding from the security apparatus. A pretext was the declaration made by Bolesław Bierut about persons who had escaped abroad: "We would like", wrote the anonymous authors of one of the letters, "to profit from the same proclamation as the one enjoyed by those Poles who fled abroad. We wait each hour, and long for freedom. Dejected"¹¹⁰.

of the orphanage, cleaning the whole building, and carrying and dusting heavy rugs [...] They complain about the food — the milk is sour, groats are full of insects, on hot days they are served soup made of sauerkraut and pickled cucumbers, while they should receive fresh vegetable soups. The children sleep on the floor because in their beds they are bitten by bedbugs and head lice [...]. There is no medical care"; AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 3/47, 25 July 1953.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

¹⁰⁶ According to him, gangs roaming the town were composed of "young drunks"; "Every week, some 3-4 peaceful residents of the town are stripped naked. The victims are frequently wounded and are found hung on trees in a park [...] ten metres away from the Municipal Committee of the PUWP"; AMR, CC PUWP 237/XXV-13, Bulletin no. 2/38, 7 January 1955.

¹⁰⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-1, letter of 16 August 1954, p. 184.

¹⁰⁸ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7, annual report for 1955.

¹⁰⁹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-12, Bulletin no. 19, 9 October 1954, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-15, Bulletin no. 58/94, 15 October 1955, p. 204.

A bulletin of 7 June 1956 published letters by persons released from prison and demanding assistance and rehabilitation. Some of them had been sentenced for writing private letters containing unfavourable opinions about the authorities, Stalin, etc.¹¹¹. The same problem was mentioned in letters concerning the arrest and deportation to the Soviet Union in 1945 of the inhabitants of the region of Augustów¹¹².

The correspondence found in the bulletins also provides many interesting details concerning conditions of imprisonment¹¹³. Abuse of penal and penal-administrative repressions usually appeared in the earlier cited peasant correspondence about the establishment of productive cooperatives, and the meting and execution of taxes and obligatory deliveries.

Ad 6. Education and culture are rare topics of letters cited in the bulletins. This is not to say, however, that they were not one of the important themes of the correspondence addressed to the Central Committee. Data for 1955 demonstrate that they were discussed in about 3% of all the letters. As a rule, the authors complained about relations in kindergartens and assorted types of schools, centres of culture and reading rooms; the authors also appealed from decisions about non-enrolment to schools of higher learning and the compulsory retiring of the staff¹¹⁴.

The correspondence included collective complaints about the low level of teaching in country schools, mainly due to the unsatisfactory qualifications of the teachers, frequently prone to drinking. Parents protested that the children were being beaten in school¹¹⁵. The letters criticised conditions in boarding schools (bad food, neglect of hygiene, lack of heating, etc.)¹¹⁶.

Culture appeared in some of the letters written in the countryside. The authors indicated essential shortcomings such as the absence of reading rooms, cinemas or lack of interest on the part of social organisations, etc. It is not surprising that in this situation in many villages, such as Polikije in the county of Lublin, described in a letter to the Central Committee: "the only

¹¹¹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 27/138, 7 June 1956.

¹¹² *Ibidem*.

¹¹³ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-14, Bulletin no. 38/74, 21 July 1955, p. 163.

¹¹⁴ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7, annual report for 1955.

¹¹⁵ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-6, Bulletin no. 7/41, 9 April 1953, pp. 72-73.

¹¹⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-1, p. 22.

form of entertainment for young people are dances, at a which the local hooligans can show off. Drunk, armed with knives, hoes, etc., they beat up the other guests"¹¹⁷. Many comments concerned the tragic fire in a village cinema in Wielopole, which cost the lives of several score people¹¹⁸.

Ad 7. Conflicts caused by relations between nationalities were echoed in the correspondence addressed to the Central Committee of the PUWP (although not only) primarily in 1955–1956. Many of the letters dealt with Polish–German antagonism. Their authors were upset by existing traces of the German past of numerous towns in the Western Territories, expressed in inscriptions “visible on all houses in Polanica, Kudowa, Duszniki, Długopole and Bystrzyca as well as many others, where they are either very lightly painted over or a shop sign is hung so cleverly that half of the inscription is seen on both sides”. In May 1945, the author of an anonymous letter from Głogów complained that the town was inhabited mainly by Germans: “At every step of the way there are German songs and German speech — and what is even worse, they beat up the Poles; even when the Civic Militia witnesses such incidents the functionaries flee to the other side of the street because they too are afraid”¹¹⁹. The same charges about German being spoken by the local population in everyday life, were contained in complaints sent to the Central Committee from Bytom and Poznań¹²⁰. The authors also feared the return of property taken from the Germans and members of the *Volksdeutschen* group¹²¹.

From the end of 1955, the bulletins frequently published letters expressing anxiety about the arbitrary return to the eastern territories of Ukrainians resettled at the time of the “Wisła” (Vistula) campaign. A large number of such letters was sent not only to the Central Committee, but also to the Bureau of the Council of Ministers, mainly from the voivodeship of Zielona Góra, Wrocław and Poznań. This phenomenon contributed to the growth of a nervous atmosphere among peasants settled on

¹¹⁷ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–12, Bulletin no. 20, 13 October 1954, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–13, Bulletin no. 30/6, 3 June 1955.

¹¹⁹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–14, Bulletin no. 26/62, 18 May 1955, pp. 11–13.

¹²⁰ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–5, pp. 26–30.

¹²¹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV–19, Bulletin no. 37/148, 25 August 1956, p. 95.

formerly Ukrainian farms¹²². Letters written by the Ukrainians demanded the expansion of freedom of language¹²³ and permission for going back to farms left behind in the eastern parts of the country¹²⁴. The correspondence also included descriptions of growing conflicts in villages which up to then had been harmoniously inhabited by peasants of both nationalities¹²⁵. The atmosphere of tension was reinforced by the rumour in certain rural milieus about the repatriation of Poles from the Soviet Union, claiming that "remnants of the Ukrainian population in Poland" would be deported to the east, and that "mixed families would be separated"¹²⁶.

In 1956, reprints of anti-Semitic letters were presented in a special bulletin (no. 28, June 1956) intended only for members of the Political Bureau¹²⁷. The emergence of such moods was evidenced by a declaration by Jewish activists from Dzierżonów, passed at a meeting held on 28 October and accusing the local authorities of tolerating cases of insults and assault against the Jewish population¹²⁸. Another letter, written to "Trybuna Ludu" in December 1956, announced that "just as in Wrocław, the Jews do not go outside after 7 p. m. All the Jews are leaving Wrocław and other towns, the sites of assault and other incidents. You can come and see for yourselves". The author of the letter also informed about persistent rumours that Prof. Leopold Infeld and Adolf Rudnicki were planning to leave Poland. In conclusion, he wrote: "Shame, terrible shame. The Party leadership keeps silent. Why?". This question was never answered¹²⁹.

¹²² See, *l.a.* AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-20, Bulletin no. 56/167, 19 December 1956, p. 127; 237/XXV-17, Bulletin no. 15/125, 12 April 1956, p. 194.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

¹²⁴ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-19, Bulletin no. 40/151, 13 September 1956, pp. 125-132.

¹²⁵ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-15, Bulletin no. 48/84, 2 September 1955.

¹²⁶ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-18, Bulletin no. 24/135, 30 May 1956.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 168-177.

¹²⁸ "The last months witnessed 40 cases of unpunished insults and assaults against the Jews. We declare that the voivodeship and county authorities react improperly to those incidents and to our intervention. The most painful is the fact that on 27 October alone there took place four cases of assault, only a week after the Eighth Plenum", AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-20, Bulletin no. 53/164, 5 December 1956.

¹²⁹ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-20, Bulletin no. 57/168, 22 December 1956, p. 149.

The first quarter of 1956 brought a growing influx of letters with requests for permission to leave abroad, mainly to East and West Germany, Israel and France, and for the repatriation of families living in the Soviet Union¹³⁰.

The image of social reality created by the preserved bulletins prepared by the Bureau for Letters and Inspection at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party is depressing. This dominating feature stemmed not only from the truly difficult conditions of everyday life in Stalinist Poland. One should also keep in mind the character of the analysed documentation. The authors of the letters sent to the Bureau included mainly persons unsatisfied with their situation, aware of the incurred wrongs, and frequently recognising the Central Committee as the "last lifesaver", which could solve their problems, immersed in an ocean of lethargy, ill will and incompetent local offices. Without detailed comparative studies it would be difficult to describe the relation between the thus outlined image of daily life and the "Polish norm" of the period. Apparently, at least as regards certain aspects, known thanks to more thorough research (the situation in the villages and agriculture, housing), this image is, at the very least, close to the reality which emerges from an analysis of more differentiated source material. As regards other problems we may say without a shadow of doubt that the obtained likeness is a fragment of actual Stalinist reality. The only question which remains unanswered is how great a fragment of that reality can be described in the manner in which it was done by the citizens of the Polish People's Republic in their letters to the Party Central Committee.

(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska)

¹³⁰ AMR, CC PUWP, 237/XXV-7, Report for the first quarter of 1956, p. 30.