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Reflections on the mechanism of the authoritarian system of The Polish People's Republic based on actions of the Security Service towards Tadeusz Pankiewicz – the Righteous Among the Nations of The World

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REFLECTIONS ON THE MECHANISM OF THE AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM OF THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC BASED ON ACTIONS OF THE SECURITY SERVICE TOWARDS TADEUSZ PANKIEWICZ – THE RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to identify mechanisms of influence exerted by security agents on citizens in authoritarian People's Republic of Poland. The author uses the life of Tadeusz Pankiewicz, honoured with the medal "Righteous Among the Nations", as an example to show the procedures ran by the security apparatus against citizen. The case of T. Pankiewicz was unique due to circumstances of

his wartime merit for the Jewish community of Krakow, his resulting social position, prestige and great respect he was bestowed with. It is therefore understandable that his case was considered special in an attempt to analyse. The text highlights operational methods, along with critical commentary, aimed at acquiring T. Pankiewicz for cooperation, and the actual failure of these efforts. The article has rich academic value and is based on archival material.

KEYWORDS

Security, service, just, Pankiewicz, Kraków, Jews

The figure and deeds of Tadeusz Pankiewicz are widely known and admired throughout Poland, as well as abroad. During the war he used all means at his disposal to save many people, putting himself at the highest risk. He played a game of chance against German occupation forces, a game with lives being at stake. After the war, when the seal uniforms of the SS were substituted with Soviet apparatchiks for whom the occupational trauma became a pretext for acquiring power, Tadeusz Pankiewicz naturally found himself in the spectrum of their interests. Here too he had to play a game, not with human lives, but with human dignity at stake.

Tadeusz Pankiewicz was born 21st Nov 1908 in Sambor, Lwów voivodeship. His family moved to Kraków as early as in 1909, where a year later Józef Pankiewicz, Tadeusz's father opened a pharmacy in Podgórze (then still a separate town) by the market square under number 18. The pharmacy was soon to inscribe

itself into Kraków's history in golden letters.¹ In 1930 T. Pankiewicz graduates pharmacy at the Jagiellonian University, and after three years he takes over his fathers business. Upon German troops marching into Poland he leaves for Lwów, but returns to Kraków shortly. Immediately after his return in November 1939 he gets arrested as part of the so called *Zweite Sonderaktion Karaku*, but owing to lucky circumstances, gets released after only a month.

On 14th March 1941² "Gazeta Żydowska" published a proclamation of erecting 'Jewish living quarters' in Podgórze. The legal basis was Frank's decree dated 20th Sept 1940, giving the Stadthauptmann and Kresihauptmann the power to limit the stay of certain people, or groups of people on their grounds. The transfer of people was conducted quickly and chaotically, for the general governor's decree forbid Jews to use any

¹ Anna Pióro, *Magister Tadeusz Pankiewicz. Biografia*, Kraków 2013.

²Gazeta Żydowska, 14th March 1941, No. 21.

means of public transport since 15th March 1941. At the same time the Jewish district (the Ghetto) officially became a closed neighborhood. Beyond this date Jewish presence outside the ghetto walls was punishable by death. The ghetto housed all Polish Jews, as well as those from the Czech Protectorate and Germany, while Jews of different nationalities were exempted from this duty. Leaving the ghetto was only possible with a pass issued to those who could prove their employment outside the walls of the Jewish district. Regulations even allowed for leaving the city of Kraków, after deposition of the Identity Card in the Employment Office on Lubelska Street. If a given person did not receive their Identity Card until 15th March 1941, they were going to be displaced.

The decree of erecting the ghetto forced all non-Jews to move out of the area until 20th March 1941. However, this did not apply to large factories, army-production facilities, the court-building and the pharmacy on Zgody Square number 18. The personnel of these institutions received ghetto passes with the exception of the owner of the pharmacy - T. Pankiewicz - who stayed on call at night sleeping in a room adjacent to the pharmacy until the final liquidation of the ghetto on 13-14 March 1943. In an interview given years later T. Pankiewicz gives his account of the final days of the ghetto:

„Life went on in the ghetto, until one day there was absolute silence (...) I was walking along the streets of this deserted habitat, with only the sound of my footsteps being heard. Sometimes I could spot a blood-covered hand sticking out someplace. Proof that those who survived the liquidation are still out there, hiding. Late at night they knocked at my pharmacy. My coworkers Irena Drożdżikowa, Helena Krywaniak and Aurelia Danek-Czortowa and me helped those who were willing to trust us entirely”³

Actual interest in the figure of T. Pankiewicz coming from the 2nd Department (counter-espionage) of the Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa SB) may be dated 1957, when information on him began to be gathered. We may only presume why T. Pankiewicz was not subject of interest before that time. One potential

³ Izabela Pieczara, „Ambasada” w dzielnicy śmierci, Kraków 1983, Echo Krakowa No. 60, Kraków 1983.

reason is that before that date, do to obvious causes, he did not travel abroad. Another possible reason is that the Security Service did not pay much attention to Jews before October 1956, perhaps since it employed so many people of Jewish origin in its ranks⁴. It should also be considered that Jewish communities were slowly being built up after their annihilation during the war, so from an operative perspective invigilating them may have seemed a waste of time. After 1956 the geo-political situation in Poland and worldwide changed dramatically. The country of Israel was becoming more and more influential on the international arena, and so T. Pankiewicz's foreign connections may have become of importance to the „socialist reason of state”. In Poland, after the breakthrough of October 1956 a completely new political reality was introduced. The Jewish community became an outsider element, opposed to the otherwise ethnically uniform People's Republic of Poland. From November 1956 to December 1964 Mieczysław Moczar became the vice-minister, and later the minister (until July 1968) of internal affairs. He was a representative of the national-conservative faction within the party. Within such a political arrangement the invigilation of Jewish communities seemed understandable. Security documents dated around this period proved an increased interest in citizens of Jewish origin. Hence perhaps also the interest and first conversations with Pankiewicz.

His acquisition as a secret operative seemed a bit odd and did not follow typical procedures. A direct and tangible proof of a successful acquisition was in most cases a pledge of collaboration signed by the operative. The document was handwritten, in longer or in shorter

⁴ Based on the research of Ryszard Terlecki it must be noted that, contrary to popular belief, the security apparatus was represented by relatively few minority representatives, as in 1953 Jewish affiliation was declared by only 776 people, i.e. 2.3% of the total. It is not clear what nationality was declared by people of Jewish origin, but with changed names, often raised in assimilated environments; moreover, the statistical average presented itself otherwise among higher ranking officers, where the number of Jewish people was close to 40%. R. Terlecki, *Miecz i tarcza komunizmu. Historia aparatu bezpieczeństwa w Polsce 1944-1990*, Kraków 2007, p. 84)

form. The operative used to sign it with their name and surname, as well as with a pseudonym of their choice.⁵ Among available archives no pledge signed by T. Pankiewicz may be found, only a note of confidentiality, signed by practically every person ever being interrogated or meeting representatives of the Security Service.

So why did the highly bureaucratic SB decide to register T. Pankiewicz as a secret operative? We may only assume T. Pankiewicz was somehow blackmailed into cooperation, since without signing an official pledge he had no possibility of receiving any financial gratification for his work. So why did he agree to the meetings with the Security Service? It seems most probable he was forced to give account of his foreign journeys, threatened not to be able to leave the country at all.

Agents of the Security Service worked on creating very detailed characteristics of T. Pankiewicz, analyzing all aspects of his life (behavior, appearance, convictions and personal matters). These were formed based on observation, as well as reports of informants. Any element that could possibly discredit T. Pankiewicz, becoming so called compromising information⁶, was always thoroughly analyzed.

⁵ *Instrukcje pracy operacyjnej aparatu bezpieczeństwa (1945–1989)*, Edited by and author of introduction Tadeusz Ruzikowski. Warszawa 2004, p. 10.

⁶One of the basic methods of recruitment was gaining on incriminating materials: evidence of a crime or embarrassing information. Using a network of agents to identify a candidate may reveal his political convictions, attitude to work, his nature and weaknesses, addictions, habits, lifestyle, relationships in private life, etc. Even with the existence of compromising materials that could be the basis for recruitment, a full, comprehensive scan of the candidate is always desirable to ground the decision about the method that should be used during recruitment. Disclosure of individual, specific to the candidate's characteristics will determine what elements of the compromising materials held, or what arguments in case of recruitment without compromising materials should be used in order to obtain positive results. With the recruitment of candidates with use of very seriously compromising materials (intelligence agent, member of the underground) a required precondition is confessing to participation in anti-state activities and the submission of comprehensive evidence on the issue. Only an accurate diagnosis conducted in proper manner will ensure correct use of this material and result in successful recruitment for the agency. *Instrukcje pracy operacyjnej aparatu bezpieczeństwa (1945–1989)*, Edited by and author of introduction Tadeusz Ruzikowski. Warszawa 2004, p. 35.

Security agents realized from the outset, that despite the acquisition of T. Pankiewicz as an operative, his collaboration is unwilling and reserved. He only delivers information that would be otherwise available to the SB using typical operating methods (letters, phone-calls).

T. Pankiewicz in his report on his journey to Belgium (the only one in the archives personally handwritten by him) explicitly stated the whole trip is taken „by order of the authorities”.⁷ It is difficult to assume he really believed what he wrote. More probably, he knew the authoritarian mechanisms at work in socialist Poland all too well and ruthlessly abused them. A security agent reading such words and preparing a note based on the report could not openly assume them to be snide, even though he probably realized they were. In reports that followed T. Pankiewicz informed of things of minor importance, occasionally mocking SB officers.

*During the next part of the conversation „Piotrowski” showed me photographs taken upon his stay in Antwerp and Holland in the month of November. Apart from streets, squares, etc., the photographs also showed fragments of the port and of docking ships, the backside of the Antwerp rail-station, etc. Considering the use of some photographs for operational purposes I have asked the TW to deliver the film-rolls for our next meeting.*⁸

Late December 1961, after a meeting with TW 'Piotrowski', on a handwritten formal note M. Chečko writes:

*Do to the information provided not posing any operational value, but only general information, they will not be edited nor typewritten.*⁹ - in other words, they are useless.

The formal withdrawal of T. Pankiewicz from the agencies' network took place on 10th Jan 1963. In the decision of transferring his personal file to the archives it may be read:

⁷ IPN Kr 009/6633/2 (37476/I), s. 32-33 (Note by T. Pankiewicz dated 10th Nov 1961)

⁸ IPN Kr 009/6633/2 (37476/I), s. 34-35 (Report based on the words of TW „Piotrowski” dated 11th Dec 1961)

⁹ IPN Kr 009/6633/2 (37476/I), p. 38-39 (Operational note on a meeting with TW „Piotrowski” on 19th Dec 1961)

Considering he does not have possibilities for continued collaboration and due to him being hooded operative (he formally does not consider himself a collaborative), it is difficult to introduce him into communities that are of interest to us.(...) [A pledge of collaboration] was not taken, since he never filed [it].¹⁰

The analysis and conclusions, dated 20th Jun 1962, summarizing T. Pankiewicz's contacts with the SB, state:

After a few operational interviews a permanent cooperation was suggested, to which he did not agree, filing only a signed declaration of confidentiality concerning our meetings. Despite this he was registered as a secret operative under the codename „Piotrowski”. As a result of our collaboration so far we came to realize, that no interesting information may be obtained from him, since he refuses to perform any tasks, making it fundamentally difficult to introduce him into Jewish communities active in Kraków. (...) In such situation I advise to formally eliminate TW „Piotrowski” from the agency networks.¹¹

Efforts at acquiring T. Pankiewicz for active collaboration by the SB lasted from August 1961 to January 1963. His personal file, carrying the reference number IPN Kr 009/6633/1-2 (37476/I), was composed of characteristics, reports, confiscated letters, interviews with T. Pankiewicz, as well as various agency documents – it lacks a signed pledge of collaboration.

Marked with his experience and knowledge, T. Pankiewicz knew who he was talking to and why, and remained careful about not saying too much. The period of occupation, the fight for his life and for the lives of others has taught him much. According to the author's opinion, the SB failed to achieve its goals, since:

- It did not introduce a new agent into the Jewish community of Kraków (T. Pankiewicz was extremely valued and respected because of his merit).
- It did not acquire any important information concerning specific persons living abroad.

¹⁰IPN Kr 009/6633/1 (37476/I), p. 136 (Decision of transferring the personal file to the archives on 10th Jan 1963)

¹¹ IPN Kr 009/6633/1 (37476/I), s. 132-133 (Analysis and conclusions on TW „Piotrowski” from 20th April 1962)

It is difficult to categorize as real intelligence information the presented letters and street-view photographs, that the Security Service had access to anyway. After less than two years the kind of "flirt" T. Pankiewicz had with the security apparatus had ended, leaving two not overly extensive files of documents, the contents of which proves his extraordinary intelligence.

“Gazeta Wyborcza” published a farewell article on 15th Nov 1993, dedicated to T. Pankiewicz and entitled *With the eagle and David's star (Z orłem i gwiazdą Dawida)* by Grażyna Lubińska. She wrote:

Once, before the war, during one of many conversations held with the graybeard Matzner, Pankiewicz heard that: „Bread thrown into the river with a good intention will return even upstream”. Since March 1941, for two and a half years, Pankiewicz used to throw lots of bread into the river. Some of that bread did not have time to return to him, and so he left it to the citizens of Kraków and of Poland. - These words seem to be an adequate summation of the life and deeds of T. Pankiewicz.

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