



## WACŁAW POLKOWSKI

Warsaw, 18 June 1946. Deputy Prosecutor Zofia Rudziewicz interviewed the person specified below as a witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

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<b>Name and surname</b>	Wacław Polkowski
<b>Date of birth</b>	24 September 1896
<b>Names of parents</b>	Aleksander and Pelagia
<b>Place of residence</b>	Rembertów, Bema Street 10
<b>Place of birth</b>	Warsaw
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Occupation</b>	regional school inspector
<b>Education</b>	Pedagogical Institute
<b>Criminal record</b>	none

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During the war I was officially a teacher at the elementary school in Rembertów, unofficially I was a member of the presidium of a clandestine teachers' organization in the Warsaw district.

Polish schooling was supervised by the general administration authorities of the Warsaw district. There was a schooling department in the district, in counties and towns there were school supervisors, Germans. They intentionally strove to lower the level of education in Poland; they wanted Poles to become craftsmen and workers and not people prepared to take up higher education. The level of education even in elementary schools deteriorated visibly. The district authorities prohibited teaching history, all humanist subjects in general and geography; Polish language education was limited only to teaching how to read



and write. Handbooks constituting children's private property were confiscated as a result of a district regulation. It was permitted to use a periodical titled "Ster" ["Rudder"] issued by the Germans to teach reading. This was a publication deprived of any patriotic ideology. It was emphasized in it that children were not inhabitants of Poland, but of the General Government [Generalne Gubernatorstwo]. They were encouraged to go to work in Germany, and moreover the periodical extolled those farmers who fulfilled the obligation to deliver the required quotas. This is how "Ster" disseminated propaganda. Moreover, the publication indicated that a child should become a craftsman or a worker. Since there were no handbooks, the level of education deteriorated considerably.

The German authorities requisitioned almost all school buildings, handing them over to the army, the police, or German schools. Thus, Polish children had nowhere to study. Together with school buildings, the Germans took away school equipment, teaching aids, and libraries. The losses for schooling in this area were enormous.

The children did not get funded meals from the authorities. As a result of malnutrition and lack of combustibles, the incidence of influenza and tuberculosis increased.

During the occupation, there were no general high schools officially. At the very beginning, these schools still operated, but were soon closed by the district authorities, and then it was not permitted to reopen them. The Germans allowed only two-stage vocational schools to function, composed of a lower-level secondary school [*gimnazjum*] and an upper-level secondary school [*liceum*]. The level of these schools was much lower than it had been before the war: All general subjects were cancelled, and teaching Polish was limited to correspondence (literature and grammar were prohibited). In the field of vocational subjects, the number of hours of teaching theory was reduced, and the number of practical classes was increased. Thus, the German authorities were trying to reduce the education level of every Pole, trying to create for themselves a population composed only of craftsmen and workers, and making it impossible for a Pole to prepare for scientific work. School headmasters (e.g. Dr Tynelski, Dr Wojeński) requested a permit from the district authorities to open general-education secondary schools of the *gimnazjum* type to prepare candidates for the *liceum*, but they were explicitly and categorically refused.

The district issued a prohibition against using old secondary-school handbooks, and thus official education was based on notes dictated by schoolteachers.



Since it was impossible for children to acquire education out in the open, general schools curricula were taught in clandestine courses. The Germans fought and persecuted these. I know of two instances, one from Żoliborz and the other from Gocławek, where both teachers as well as children caught red-handed committing the "crime" of clandestine courses were arrested by the gendarmerie and then sent to a camp. A teacher well-known in the pedagogical world, Jędrzej Cierniak, together with a few children, was caught in the city center by German police during clandestine courses; he was sent to Auschwitz and murdered.

Schoolchildren were forced to work for the benefit of the Reich. Elementary school pupils had to pick herbs, collect waste, scrap metal, and so on. All for the benefit of the German military authorities. The German school supervisor for the Warsaw county, sending a regulation in which he ordered children to pick herbs and collect waste, threatened schoolmasters with demotion if the quotas were not collected and handed over.

In vocational schools, students had to work for the purposes of the German army for a specified number of months in a year, for example in sewing rooms, metallurgical plants, etc.

Although young people had school IDs, which were supposed to protect them from the obligation of forced labor, boys and girls were caught on the street by the gendarmerie or *Arbeitsamt* workers and deported to the Reich for forced labor.

German authorities showed a hostile attitude towards teachers. They tried to disgrace teachers in the eyes of public opinion by forcing them to sit in committees setting the quotas. *Kreishauptmann* of the Węgrów county, Kram, threatened that if anyone did not show up for a committee meeting, they would be deported to Germany. In Mińsk Mazowiecki, the county governor organized a meeting of teachers, during which he ordered them to encourage Poles to go to work in Germany; that was in 1941.

I believe that Fischer, as the district governor, had to be familiar with the actions of the people reporting to him. Since the Polish intelligentsia was being exterminated, arrests among teachers were very numerous. According to the still-incomplete data from the education office, in the Warsaw district alone more than six hundred teachers were murdered. In Mińsk county, only six out of three hundred teachers survived. In Ostrów



county, in connection with the killing of a county governor in 1942, the German authorities organized a massacre of Poles, in which forty teachers perished.

I did not meet Fischer personally. Dr Szubora, who at that time was a school inspector, told me of the following incident: in 1943 Fischer came to Mińsk Mazowiecki and in a conversation with the local German school supervisor he said that, at a time when people were dying on the front in Germany, one should not be interested in educating Polish peasants. Dr Szubora was present during that conversation. This is characteristic of Fischer's attitude towards Poles; he wanted to turn Poles into working cattle.

I add that Dr Szubora died in June 1944.