

## STEFAN PIEŃKOWSKI

The thirteenth day of the trial, 23 January 1947

**Presiding judge:** Professor, would you please tell the Tribunal what you know concerning the losses suffered, in the first place, by the University of Warsaw during the occupation, not including those suffered in combat. Aside from the list which you previously sent to the Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, which includes the names of professors, associate professors, etc., have you anything else to add? If you are in possession of some other materials, would you please present them.

**Witness:** After the Germans entered Warsaw, that is around 30 September, the university buildings were taken over by the *Schutzpolizei* from Berlin. The library was turned into the head office and library rooms were adapted to store munition, motorcycles, etc. Obviously, the personnel were removed. Next, other departments and buildings were taken over. No order was issued, only people in uniforms would come who shouted loudly and demanded that one or another room be emptied of items that hindered them. As a result, the university was incapacitated, although there was no official order. Professor Modrakowski, who served as rector, and other professors were evicted from the University and met in a private flat.

The first official act was to divest us of the university seal at the end of October. During a meeting of my colleagues, some officer demanded the seal and left with it. Other than that, there were no formal acts.

The departments and laboratories were closed. All matters concerning the University or the Technical University were dealt with by the decommissioning office of the ministry of education. Access to laboratories was only possible with proper clearance for maintenance purposes. Permission was also granted to conduct final exams at medical, pharmaceutical, mathematical-natural sciences, and veterinary faculties. If memory serves me right, that was on 22 December 1940. Then, despite the fact that the exams were in progress, the decision was revoked on the grounds that it was highly undesirable that a Pole should be awarded a degree, and that Poles were not worthy of having specialized knowledge. Consequently, all institutions operating to that end should be dissolved, and thus, the exams, which I had been recklessly allowed to conduct, were discontinued.

Another decision concerning university matters was renaming, in July 1940, the University Library the State Library, together with the National Library. From that moment on, the University Library ceased to exist formally. It was prohibited not only to buy but also record Polish books because it was supposed to be a German library.

In May 1940, the authorities, i.e. the decommissioning office, allowed units to be set up for purely industrial and economic purposes, the so-called *Prüfungsanstalten*, in the remaining laboratories. Five such units were established, the condition being that they be unavailable for anybody who wanted to learn something, because nobody was to be trained there, and all research was clearly and unequivocally banned.

One unit measured the heat efficiency of gas cookers. The gasworks needed this information. A visiting commission ruled that it was forbidden because these were highly scientific efforts, from which the Poles were banned, and these calories measurements, deemed to be to the benefit of the Polish population, were prohibited.

Initially, universities were not liquidated formally. It was only on 14 September 1940 that the decommissioning office formally stated that the University ceased to exist in September 1939, that there were no rectors, deans, and heads of research labs, and that any and all ties connecting these people to their research units had been severed. Contact with research units could only be made upon clearance.

This order was merely the legal confirmation of the factual state, which was manifested by the troops' taking over the institutions. This order stipulated the nonexistence of the Polish University, professors, and research units. It was effectively an act of liquidation. In conversations with people who had no names, an opinion was often expressed – as something obvious – that the Polish intelligentsia was to be quashed, all scientific journals discontinued, and all scientific societies disbanded.

On 23 July 1940, the scientific societies were dissolved, and all the assets were to be transferred to the custody of some unidentified office. The same applied to libraries and all institutions whose aim was to spread knowledge.

With regard to the treatment of scientific collections, there were events which followed from the basic premise that the Poles had no right to education or knowledge. These events included pillages, especially at the Institute of Physics of the University of Warsaw, which was

one of the best equipped in Europe. The way it looked was that some general showed up at the Institute together with some high-ranking official, they surveyed the Institute, deemed that it was particularly valuable, and after a few days another two men appeared, one officer and one civilian, and, having inspected the entire premises, they said they had some bad news, namely that, because none of those riches could be used here, they had to be confiscated. The operation of removing the items began, involving some 30 people and 10 vans. Everything was packed and taken God knows where, or in the direction of Berlin, as they would say.

**Prosecutor Siewierski:** All departments?

**Witness:** I am just giving an example of the physics department because this used to be one of the best equipped university departments in Europe. The same happened to the collection of works from the field of Indo-European linguistics (?) of Prof. Brückner's student. This collection was taken as well. These pillages continued throughout the entire occupation period, being done wholesale and individually, as was the case e.g. in the departments of microbiology, general botany, or organic chemistry. The way this was usually done was that two or three people inspected a department first, then they brought a van and took whatever they pleased.

The same happened in the library department, from where on 14 November 1939 the drawings of Dürer, Kohen, and others were taken. Responsible for this were Josef Mühlmann and Dr. Antoni Kraus, mandated by the General Governor. On 21 and 22 November 1939, 19 boxes of prints from the King Stanisław August Room were taken, as well as the 6 most precious manuscripts, 20 albums, and 18,459 etchings. In January 1940, around 3,000 volumes were taken to offices in the former Czech legation, where they were appropriated.

One could say that both powerful government institutions and small offices resorted to looting; both privates and officers were involved. It was not done by chance but indicated that some imperative must have been felt which compelled them to confiscate cultural heritage because it was not tended to properly and it was probably seen as a noble act. This did not happen in the West, and if it did, then it was on a relatively small scale.

With regard to the decaying of buildings, the university buildings and equipment, having suffered during the military operations, continued to deteriorate fast because the plan was for them to perish as Polish scientific institutions, so it was not advisable to maintain them.

The same principle underlay the constantly increasing rate at which premises were taken over, regardless of whether they stored books, precious specimens, or scientific equipment; these were moved from one place to another and placing these instruments and collections in humid rooms where there were no glass cabinets led to their rapid decay. For example, classical archeology collections were moved from the university building to the barn at the university yard, and apparently the soldiers amused themselves by shooting at rare museum pieces because the broken fragments bore traces of bullets. They were demolished in a barbarian fashion, e.g. Venus de' Medici was painted in different colors. It was clear that people had played with microscopes using them as missiles, or that weights had been thrown at the equipment. This paints a picture of how our collections were treated.

On 20 December 1939, during one such event, which was some kind of a police festival, the University's Auditorium Maximum burned down after fire was accidentally set to it during a drunken party, as I do not think it was done on purpose.

In 1943, when the railway directorate seized the Institute of Experimental Physics, one engineer said to me, "We realize we won't be using all this, but you won't be reborn anytime soon, but we won't be using this." Then, lines and installations, which could have easily been left alone, were completely destroyed. A great number of manuscripts, maps, Polish etchings, and books from the Stanisław August Library were moved to the Krasiński Library, where they were burned in October 1944.

Losses among the teaching staff were great as a result of military operations, and then a lot of people were executed in camps or died in the Pawiak prison. The overall number is 152, which is a very high percentage. This is the list of the persons who were executed in Warsaw, in Palmiry, died in the Pawiak, as well as during the evacuation of Warsaw, as some people were executed in transit. Maybe a few percent of these people were not executed or murdered, but died due to extremely harsh conditions, as they were deprived of livelihood and removed from their workplace; they were not allowed to teach, there were no libraries, and if you kept money in a bank, you were not allowed to withdraw it, so people were left without any means and consequently their health deteriorated rapidly, as in the case of Associate Professor Kwietniewski, who collapsed in the street from exhaustion. The losses suffered by the University were mostly losses of personnel. I remember what one officer once said: "After some time, you'll buy new equipment, raise

new buildings, but it will be very difficult to assemble new staff: that'll take years, and this is the most important thing."

The second type of losses regard the collections which we will never restore. Destroyed together with the buildings, partially or completely, were such assets as the classical philology library, Poland's largest collection of minerals, geological collections, including the first and historically significant collection of Pusch-Koreński, Europe's largest collection of Jurassic fossils, a paleontological collection brought by our scholars from Bolivia and including many original materials yet to be researched. At the University of Warsaw alone, there are 14 departments and institutes, and not one library has survived. Whatever represented any value was destroyed.

The third type of losses is the complete destruction of buildings. The University used to have 48 buildings in Warsaw, six of which burned down already in September 1939, while the others were gradually destroyed, until in 1944 the University was razed to the ground, with only one of those 48 buildings remaining. That would be it as regards the most significant losses.

**Presiding judge:** Professor, would you please attach to your testimony a list of these 152 names?

**Witness:** Yes.

**Judge Grudziński:** Professor, in 1939, were you rector?

**Witness:** No.

**Judge:** Do you recall who the Germans appointed for contacts with the University authorities?

**Witness:** I think there was a Maj. Richter at the headquarters, with whom Rector Mordakowski would speak. He was arrested for some defraudation, so there were no further contacts beyond these initial talks.

**Judge:** And what about the civilian authorities?

**Witness:** There was the decommissioning office for the Polish ministry of education.

**Judge:** I got the impression that all the orders came from Kraków – what about the orders of the police authorities concerning universities?

**Witness:** I do not know where the source was. The people who came to the Institute of Physics identified themselves with some documents and said they were taking the equipment in order to secure it.

**Judge:** In 1939 or 1940, did you or the then rector speak to the Gestapo concerning these matters?

**Witness:** I do not think so.

**Presiding judge:** Does the prosecution have any questions?

**Prosecutor Sawicki:** Professor, you said that some of the documents were sent to the Blank Palace, is that correct?

**Witness:** These were the inventories of scientific societies. Scientific societies had libraries, various equipment, and their own press. The inventories of all those scientific societies were sent there.

**Prosecutor:** One more question for defendant Fischer: were you ever present at a meeting presided over by Frank, during which Frank said that the Poles should be denied higher education?

**Defendant Fischer:** Yes, such a statement was definitely verbalized during a cabinet meeting.

**Defense attorney Chmurski:** Professor, was there any order issued by the General Government or the governor himself concerning the confiscation of works of art and science?

**Witness:** I do not know. Any action concerning our museums originated with the decommissioning office; I believe that orders came from elsewhere. I had a document – which I received through the underground – from Kraków, addressed to Mr. Fischer, which concerned the treatment of Polish science.

**Defense attorney:** Were there not similar orders issued in Kraków, too?

**Witness:** I believe so.

**Defense attorney Śliwowski:** Professor, you said that the inventories of scientific societies were sent to the Blank Palace. What societies were these, and when were the items sent?

**Witness:** There was an order, but I do not know who signed it. All our documents were sent to the decommissioning office, unlike that one, which was sent to the Blank Palace. There was an official there specifically appointed to deal with these matters.

**Defense attorney:** Was this order issued by the city mayor or some other district official?

**Witness:** I cannot tell. The order was issued on 23 July 1940 or 1941. It can be established, for sure.

**Defense attorney:** I have a question to defendant Leist: did you, in your capacity as the *Stadthauptmann* [district head] of Warsaw, receive – and if so, please specify when – the inventories of scientific societies sent by scientific units?

**Defendant Leist:** I neither demanded nor received, nor even saw any lists supposedly presented by Polish scientific societies.

**Defense attorney:** What is the name of the official to whom these inventories were sent?

**Witness:** It could be established by contacting the presidents of the scientific societies. Someone might remember that name.

**Defense attorney Wagner:** Professor, you said that on 30 September, a police unit came to the University. What unit was that?

**Witness:** *Schutzpolizei*.

**Defense attorney Śliwowski:** Professor, you said that some particular official was assigned. Was it not defendant Leist?

**Witness:** No, I believe that his name started with the letter F.

**Defense attorney:** Was it maybe Dr. Freuwohl?

**Witness:** I cannot tell.

**Presiding judge:** There are no further questions. You may step down, Professor.