

Repression

According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, throughout the entire country 2,549 people were arrested up to 25 March 1968. This number includes people arrested during street demonstrations, for the production and distribution of leaflets, and as couriers sent to other academic centres. It is necessary to remember however, that in later periods, those who had been confirmed as March activists as well as people who had tried to continue the protests were arrested.

In October 1969 the Public Prosecutor's Office informed that 2,732 people had been arrested in connection with the March events. Most of them were released, 60 stood before the courts in the course of accelerated procedure, 697 were penalized in penal-administrative police courts, while 540 were still under investigation. Most of them had charges brought against them; some had their court cases discontinued. Generally penalties were fairly lenient, anywhere from a few months to a year in prison; some of the sentences were suspended. Harsher sentences were given in the sentencing of the 'Commandos', which took place at the turn of 1968-69 in Warsaw - anywhere from one and a half to three years in prison. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, acknowledged as the initiators, were sentenced to three and a half years in prison. The trial of the Gdansk conspiracy group (Gdansk Youth Intelligence Group), which had been broken up at the beginning of April 1968, was quite exceptional. Their leader, Jakub Szadaj, was sentenced to ten years in prison.

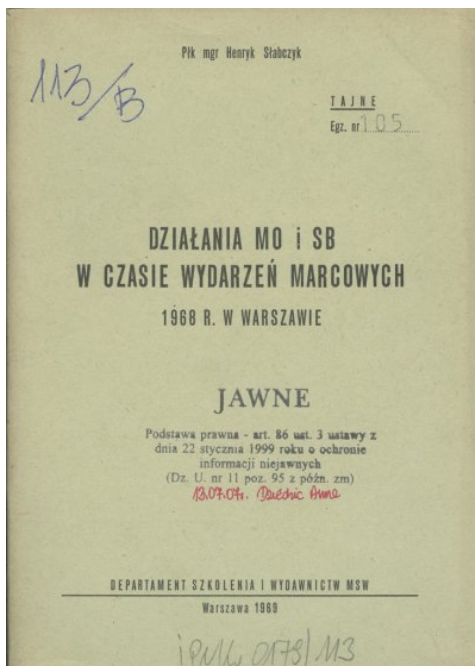
An explicit and especially intense form of repression was the calling up of students for active military duty. Unfortunately, it is not known to what extent this occurred on a nationwide scale.

For many students, the effect of their involvement was losing the possibility to continue their studies. Besides the dozens of individual cases of expulsion, students were expelled on a mass scale twice. At the Wroclaw Polytechnic, 1,553 students were crossed off at one time, as well as 1,616 at the University of Warsaw. As a result of appeals some of the expelled students were readmitted to the universities.

Academic employees also met with repression for supporting the students. Dozens of them were removed from higher educational institutions and many were forced to emigrate. Taking their places were the so-called 'March lecturers' - individuals not possessing tenure but appropriating autonomous academic positions. Of course, loyalty to the PZPR was the basic criterion for an accelerated advance.

March '68 brought in an enormous strengthening of the Security Services operational work in the academic environment as well as the Jewish minority. As a result, hundreds of people were subjected to surveillance that often lasted for many years.

Łukasz Kamiński



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