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THE ACT ON SECURING THE SOCIALIST DISCIPLINE OF LABOUR A CONTRIBUTION TO THE TOTALITARIANIZATION OF SOCIAL LIFE IN POLAND

Labour belonged to the most important values in the catalogue declared by the ideologists of communism. Paradoxically and contrary to the propaganda, the quality of labour was one of the major weaknesses of the communist system in Poland since its beginning and a source of its demise in the long run. A measure of its irrationality could be the fact that throughout its existence it was impossible to create a mechanism promoting good labour, whereas the remedies undertaken often did not improve the situation, but even made it deteriorate. In some periods they even reflected the totalitarian character of the state. The article presents the premises governing low labour productivity in nationalized workplaces during the first decade of the so called People's Poland, as well as the activities undertaken by the regime to improve labour discipline during the Stalinist times. In this context, the article discusses the impact of the Act on Securing the Socialist Discipline of Labour passed in January 19, 1950. It was in fact a special act – its consequence was having more than 800 thousand cases referred to court, about 350 thousand people convicted, while more than 30 thousand sent to prison.

Keywords: *labour discipline, labour productivity, totalitarianism, repressions.*

In the catalogue of the values declared by the ideologists of communism, labour belonged to the most important ones. In Marx's works, it was assumed the most important human characteristic as a species¹; Engels claimed that the new system would see that "productive work will no longer be a means of enslaving the man, instead, it will become a means to his liberation giving each a possibility to develop"², while Lenin argued

¹Jasińska Aleksandra, Siemieńska Renata, *Wzory osobowe socjalizmu*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw 1975, p. 75.

²Popławski Henryk., *Podstawy prawne i istota socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy*, Warsaw 1953, p. 44.

that “communist labour” will mean “a gratuitous labour for the benefit of all. A voluntary labour, a labour above the norm, a labour without looking at the pay”³.

It is a paradox of history that the communist system, which considered labour one of its fundamental values, lead to a profound destruction of work ethic, while the so-called socialist labour became a synonym of an ill-organised, ineffective labour, carried out with the least effort⁴. Nothing illustrates the departure of words from practice better, while also revealing the similarity between the two totalitarian systems: communist and fascist, than the fact of “decorating” gates to Soviet gulag camps (through which passed more than 18 million people from 1929 to 1953) with some of Stalin’s “words of wisdom”, which read “In the USSR, labour is a matter of honour, a matter of valour, a matter of heroism” and gates to Nazi camps with the famous verse from the gospel of John “Arbeit macht frei”⁵.

Despite the propaganda, in fact, what was one of the main weaknesses of the communist system in Poland since its beginning and the source of its demise in the long run was the quality of labour. Sayings popular in that time such as “„Czy się stoi czy się leży, 2 tysiące się należy” (Whether I stand, whether I lie, two thousand zloty should be mine) or „Oni udają, że nam płacą, my udajemy, że pracujemy” (They pretend they pay us, we pretend we work)⁶ illustrate it well. A measure of the system’s irrationality was the fact that throughout its existence it was impossible to create a mechanism promoting good labour, while it was often the case that the means of improvement undertaken not only did not improve the situation, but even worsened it. In some periods, they did nothing but reflect the totalitarian character of the state.

³Heller Michał, *Maszyna i śrubki. Jak hartował się człowiek sowiecki*, Pomost, Warsaw 1989, p. 114, 117.

⁴Work ethic is defined by U. Swadźba as “a group of values and norms characteristic for a given social group or the whole society that relate to the fundamental value of labour”. This value is supplemented with values such as: reliability, conscientiousness, honesty, respect for labour, which are its attributes. These values and norms manifest in practice in specific types of behaviour.” Swadźba Urszula, *Śląski etos pracy. Studium socjologiczne*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2001, p. 34.

⁵Applebaum Anne, *Gulag, Świat Książki*, Warsaw 2005, p. 528-530; Aleksandrow Nikołaj, *Socjalistyczna dyscyplina pracy*, Współpraca, Warsaw 1949, p. 15; Chumiński Jędrzej, *Systemowe uwarunkowania erozji etosu pracy w PRL (na przykładzie środowiska robotników przemysłowych 1945-1956)*, Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu, Ekonomia no. 3 (74), Wrocław 2009, p. 251-253.

⁶Ost David, *Kłeska Solidarności. Gniew i polityka w postkomunistycznej Europie*, Muza, Warsaw 2007, p. 284.

The paper will present the reasons that determine the low effectiveness of labour in the nationalized working places in the first decade of the so-called People's Poland and the measures undertaken by the regime during the Stalinist times aimed to improve labour discipline. The effects of the Act on Securing the Socialist Discipline of Labour passed on 19 April 1950 will be discussed in this context⁷.

THE REASONS FOR ENACTMENT OF THE ACT ON SECURING THE SOCIALIST DISCIPLINE OF LABOUR

According to the statistics from the Ministry of Justice, the main occupation of Polish courts was conducting cases against employees committing offences against labour discipline, and the largest group were the proverbial loafers. According to estimates courts registered more than 800 thousand of such cases in the years 1950-1955, though some of them were registered twice, while the amount of the sentenced exceeded 350 thousand people. From May 1950 to December 1952 alone courts sentenced 184 952 people, which indicates that they made up 29.6% of the whole with the number of sentences in the years 1950-1952 estimated at 624 698 total. The data are not entirely credible, though, at least because of the Act being in power for only 7 months in 1950. If we were then to adopt the index of sentenced people per 10 thousand inhabitants it would reveal that, for example, in 1951 out of 122.58 sentenced as many as 42.91 (35%) dealt with labour discipline. A year later, the index estimated almost 33%. Thus, by introducing the criminalisation of acts in the sphere of labour, the communist authorities made hundreds of thousands of Poles criminals and originated a tremendous social and economic problem for themselves⁸.

However, the answer to the question why this happened is not easy to answer. Certainly, the imitation of the solutions adopted in the Soviet Union by all the countries of The Eastern Bloc was important. The negation

⁷ *Ustawa z dnia 19 kwietnia 1950 r. o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy*, Journal of Laws 1950, no. 20 pos. 168.

⁸ Archiwum Akt Nowych (New File Archives, hereinafter AAN), Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości (The Ministry of Justice) cat. no. 1426, *Sprawozdanie Departamentu Nadzoru Sądowego Ministra Sprawiedliwości w przedmiocie działalności sądów na odcinku stosowania ustawy o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy w roku 1952*, p. 1; *ibid* cat. no. 2713, *Dynamika przestępczości w latach 1946-1952*, p. 16-21.

of the thesis on national ways of building socialism in 1948 meant a far-reaching assimilation of these countries to the Soviet standard, while the penalization of many social phenomena and exacerbation of penalties was in accordance with the Stalinist thesis of the aggravation of class struggle with the progress of building socialism. What is significant is the fact of the introduction of article 130 of the USSR constitution to the constitutions of the countries of so-called people's democracy, which imposed an obligation on the citizens for strict social and personal discipline. According to its contents, every citizen was since obliged to "perform the law, respect labour discipline, meet social obligations with honesty and respect the rules of people's socialist cohabitation". A similar article appeared in the constitution of the People's Republic of Poland (article 76) and the constitutions of the other countries of the so-called people's democracy⁹. Note that penalizations for work abandonment and unauthorized absence were introduced in the USSR with a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council as early as 1940.¹⁰

The second reason for the adopted extraordinary solutions were actual very negative phenomena occurring in the sphere of labour, such as low efficiency, high staff turnover, high unauthorized absence, mass late-coming, wastage, lack of respect for the property of the work-place, and so forth. They emerged at the dawn of the system, and the problem was that, while they could be attributed to the post-war chaos in the beginning, they were mainly the effect of pathological features of the created economic system in the following years. The fact that at the end of the three-year plan in 1949 the average efficiency level in Polish industry was about 20% to 30% lower than before the war (table 1) is very meaningful. In comparison to 1937, the efficiency per worker in textile industry was 79%, steel production 80%, coal mining 68% (per employed underground) and sugar industry 71%, etc. The estimates for the clean production value in 1938 and 1949 expose disproportions between the efficiency before and after the war. The post-war industry had a production value of 87.8% of the pre-war per employee production (according to estimation data clean production per employee, if estimated in the prices from 1956, was 37 thousand zloty in 1938, while 23.5 thousand in 1949)¹¹.

⁹Popławski Henryk, *Podstawy prawne...*, p. 74.

¹⁰Gubiński Arnold, *Socjalistyczna dyscyplina pracy w prawie karnym*, Wydawnictwo Prawnicze, Warsaw 1954, p. 262.

¹¹Fiejka Zdzisław, *Zmiany wydajności pracy i zatrudnienia w przemyśle w latach 1949-1959*, *Studia Ekonomiczne*, Nr 6/1961, p. 62-63.

Table 1. Labour efficiency in some industries in 1937 (in old borders) and in 1949 r. (in current borders)

Highlight	1937	1949	1937/1949 percentage
Mining industry – hard coal extraction per one work-day of employees working underground	2680	1826	0,68
Iron ore mines – yearly production per one employee in metric tonnes	115	99	0,86
Steel industry – steel production per one worker in metric tonnes	39,3	31,3	0,80
Sawmills – lumber production per one employee in cubic metres	116	104	0,90
Cement mills – cement production per one employee in metric tonnes	331	329	0,99
Textile industry – textile production per one industrial group employee in metres	2470	1960	0,79
Sugar refineries – sugar production per one employee in metric tonnes	29	20	0,69
Tobacco industry – tobacco products production per one employee in metric tonnes	2,8	2,2	0,79

Source: own preparation based on Fiejka Zdzisław, *Zmiany wydajności pracy i zatrudnienia w przemyśle w latach 1949-1959*, Studia Ekonomiczne, no. 6/1961, p. 63.

The data concerning redundancy in employment are also meaningful. As early as the first half of 1947, the industry employment status was so disturbing that the Central Planning Office (CUP) made it aware to particular departments that employment limits were commonly exceeded. The problem was even more serious since the production did not rise in line with the increase of employees. In comparison to the inter-war period (year 1937 = 100%), the rise in employment was 318% in the first half of 1947, yet the production increased only by 150%, which means a decrease in per-employee efficiency to 47% of the 1937 level; the corresponding rates in mining were: 171, 99 and 58, in energy industry: 288, 135, 47, chemical: 85, 73 and 86, electro-technical: 87, 77, 88, leather: 145, 66, 46, and paper: 131, 117, 89. Particularly unfavourable was the fact that the increase

in employment concerned most of all unproductive employees – and especially administrative personnel in industrial plants¹².

By comparing the two parameters: pre-war production size (1938 data) and employment (1937 data – in new borders) with post-war production and employment, excess employment in the whole 1950 industry can be calculated. According to economic-historical studies, not until that year did Polish industry manage to reach pre-war production level (in new borders). The problem is, it was achieved with an employment rate of 640 thousand, i.e. 45%, higher than the pre-war one (according to estimations the 1937 industry employed 1410 thousand people, in 1950, 2050 thousand)¹³.

Such a situation was the target of criticism from party dignitaries who frequently were unable to change anything. As early as mid-1945, Hilary Minc, the man responsible for economic matters on behalf of the Polish Worker's Party, spoke about the necessity "to raise the alarm, to ring the great bell of distress" because of the "extremely low productivity"¹⁴. A few months later in December 1945, the head of the Central Planning Office (CUP) Czesław Bobrowski claimed "If the efficiency of workers can be called bad, then the efficiency of factories is just catastrophic"¹⁵. Most of the factories were deficient and operated at a loss. Forcing production brought excessive consumption of resources, administrative apparatus expanded, and the phenomenon of hidden unemployment emerged among manual workers¹⁶.

This situation did not improve much at the time of the three-year plan. At its conclusion in December 1949, Minc officially admitted the increase of work efficiency to be definitely higher in those days than the increase in

¹²Chumiński Jędrzej, *Mentalne bariery rozwoju gospodarczego PRL (na przykładzie pracowników przemysłu)*, [in:] Chumiński Jędrzej (ed.), *Modernizacja czy pozorna modernizacja – społeczno-ekonomiczny bilans PRL 1944-1989*, Gajt, Wrocław 2010, p. 109; AAN, KC PZPR cat. no. 295/XI/190/, *Sprawozdanie CUP o sytuacji gospodarczej w Polsce za II kwartał 1947 r.*, p. 123-125.

¹³Wilczewski Ryszard, *Rozwój przemysłu w Polsce w latach 1947-1955*, [in:] Kaliński Janusz, Landau Zbigniew (ed.), *Gospodarka Polski Ludowej 1944-1955*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1974, p. 256; Jankowski Stanisław, *Odbudowa i rozwój przemysłu polskiego w latach 1944-1949*, Warsaw 1989, p. 228-230; Jezierski Andrzej, Leszczyńska Cecylia, *Historia gospodarcza Polski*, Key Text, Warsaw 1999, p. 418-426.

¹⁴Ogólnopolska Konferencja Przemysłowa, Poznań 1945, p. 35.

¹⁵Protokół z posiedzenia Rady Gospodarczej PPS (1945-1946), Z Pola Walki, No. 1-2/1982, p. 229.

¹⁶Chumiński Jędrzej, *Ruch zawodowy w Polsce w warunkach kształtującego się systemu totalitarnego 1944-1956*, Akademii Ekonomicznej we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 1999, p. 117.

wages. As much as the latter supposedly rose by 100%, the increase of productivity in the whole industry fluctuated between 60%--70%. That unhealthy situation was possible only because of the plunder of the property of the private sector (especially as a result of the so-called battle for trade) and the stocktaking of the formerly German property¹⁷.

The issue in dispute is the interpretation for the reasons of low productivity in Polish industry. Party apparatchiks were inclined to see its main source in the activity of "the social enemy" and negative behaviour of worker environments. Bolesław Bierut's speech at the 3rd plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in November 1949 was symptomatic in that matter, as he said:

The fact is that there are many negative symptoms in the sphere of labour discipline, which require a determined attitude and determined struggle for their immediate suppression. [...] Before the war, in the capitalist system, when the working class was lashed with the whip of unemployment, there was almost no unauthorized absence. At present, when there is no unemployment; the class enemy is using this to lead the most backward and unscrupulous workers astray from the path of honest labour. Meanwhile, there are comrades among us who would like to >>explain<< unauthorized absences with various "objective" reasons, who forgot the existence of the class enemy, who do not see that the relaxation of labour discipline is one of the forms of his maleficent activity¹⁸.

People who had a better understanding of economic issues would have rather pointed to objective conditions, such as the inclusion of hundreds of thousands of people who had never worked in factories before into the worker environment, as well as their low qualifications, motivating wage system, very difficult financial situation of employees, serious provisioning problems, fatigue resulting from the taking of additional jobs, and people's indifference to public matters because of the political system in power, etc. The report made in 1949 based on the opinions of miners who came from France is very interesting in this context. In their case, they could actually confront working conditions in the capitalist and socialist economy. The result was dramatically unfavourable for the latter. The low level of extraction was mainly the result of the lack of resources to work. While in France all the resources necessary for extraction were always at hand; there was a specific "struggle" for essen-

¹⁷ AAN, KC PZPR cat. no. 237/V/37, *Konferencja prasowa w KC PZPR w dniu 31 grudnia 1949 r.*, p. 12.

¹⁸ AAN, KC PZPR cat. no. 237/V/37, *Konferencja prasowa w KC PZPR w dniu 31 grudnia 1949 r.*, p. 12.

tial resources (wood, carts) between the miners in Polish mines. The same applied to technical equipment, e.g. drills. The drills were individually assigned to each miner in French mines, while in the Polish ones, whether one acquired a working tool depended on who was the first to get to the storeroom or how good one's relations with the supervision were. Out of the lack of oil the miners were forced to use makeshift means, e.g. urine. The workers never knew what assignments they would be directed to – as these decisions were made by the supervision immediately before the work started. The workers were offended by the wasteful exploitation of the mines with a threat of mining collapse in the future and the lack of maintenance of the machines, deteriorating at an intimidating pace. There was also water in the mines, resulting in clothing and footwear decay. An unclear wage system and the administrative personnel's arrogant treatment of the miners were a constant source of conflict. The prevalence of Security Officers who arrested people for trivial reasons was also a problem¹⁹.

To illustrate the issues raised, it is worth quoting the general data concerning the severity of the pathological phenomena in Polish industry for the years 1948 and 1949. In 1948, 207 950 000 working hours were missed, which was 9.6% if compared to due hours, out of which 3.6% were missed due to sick leaves, while 1.2% was unauthorized absence. A year later, 266 784 000 hours were missed; therein 4.1% were sick leaves, while 1.3% unauthorized absence. Considering that the production value per employee can be estimated as 5.24 pre-war zlotys, the losses were 1.089 billion pre-war zlotys in 1948, and 1.397 billion in 1949²⁰. It is also worth recalling a little more concrete data for 1948. They present information about the time unworked by the production workers broken down by absence due to illness, unauthorized absence and that caused by downtime, as well as overtime achieved in 1948. What results is that the number of missed and unauthorized hours was more than 23.5 million, which was 1.24% of all the hours worked by production workers (that means that every employee missed 28 hours per year). Almost the same amount, 30.9 hours per employee, was not worked because of downtime caused by organizational difficulties. Many hours,

¹⁹ AAN, KC PPR cat. no. 295/XI/10, *Raport por. Kazimierza Piechowiaka dla I Wiceministra Obrony Narodowej gen. dyw. Spychalskiego (1 czerwca 1949)*, p. 128-136.

²⁰ AAN, PKPG cat. no. 3368, *Wstępne sprawozdanie z wyników działania ustawy o socjalistycznej dyscyplinie pracy*, p. 2-3; także *Notatka służbowa dla ob. Dyrektora Generalnego Cz. Chmielewskiego*, p. 8.

i.e. over 71.3 hours, were also lost due to sick leaves (84.9 hours per production worker). The scale of mismanagement is illustrated by the fact that at the same time in 1948 it was necessary to realize more than 143.7 overtime hours in the industry (i.e. 189.7 hours per employee). It is important to note that the hours missed were more than 82% of the overtime hours. Hence, had downtime or unauthorized absences been eliminated and sick leaves controlled, overtime would have not been necessary almost at all (table 2).

Table 2. Production workers' downtime, overtime and hours skipped without authorization and due to illness in 1948

Highlight	Hours total in thousands	Percentage in respect to total worked hours	Amount of hours per one production employee
Amount of production workers' downtime hours	23438,6	1,24	30,9
Amount of production workers' overtime hours	143788,0	7,6	189,7
Amount of production workers' hours skipped without authorization	23558,2	1,24	28
Amount of production workers' hours skipped due to illness	71389,0	3,77	84,9

Source: own preparation based on AAN, CUP, cat. no. 704 p. 26, 27, 30, 31. It seems that some data are not entirely reliable. This concerns, at the very last, the amount of downtime hours and hours missed without authorization.

The year 1949 did not bring any substantial improvement. The percentage of unauthorized hours was still significant (table 3). 35 412 100 were missed, which means a loss of 185 560 000 pre-war zlotys (i.e. 1.15% of industry production value in 1949), and what is more, daily there were 16 096 workers who did not arrive at work. Another serious problem was also a very strong staff fluctuation. In relation to the average number of the employed, 44.7% quit work (table 4).

The scale of negative occurrences in the sphere of labour cannot be understood without accounting for the substantial change in the composition of the worker environment. Hundreds of thousands of people were includ-

Table 3. The hours worked and missed per one employee in national industry in 1949 (in hours)

Highlight	Amount of employee-hours per one employee		
	Worked	Missed - unauthorized	Percentage of missed hours to worked hours
Ministry of Mining and Power Engineering	2525	34	1,34
Ministry of Heavy Industry	2445	30,6	1,25
Ministry of Light Industry	2395	21,8	0,91
Ministry of Agricultural and Food Industry	2480	13,3	0,53
Total	2448	26,3	1,1

Source: own preparation based on: AAN, Państwowa Komisja Planowania Gospodarczego cat. no. 3368, *Godziny przepracowane i opuszczone przez jednego pracownika w przemyśle państwowym w roku 1949*, p.7.

Table 4. Staff fluctuation in national industry in 1949

Highlight	Total number of employees	Number of dismissed	Fluctuation percentage - dismissed to employed
Ministry of Mining and Power Engineering	349792	156850	44,84
Ministry of Heavy Industry	403203	122201	30,31
Ministry of Light Industry	557214	225862	40,53
Ministry of Agricultural and Food Industry	79242	115615	145,90
Total	1389451	620528	44,66

Source: own preparation based on AAN, Państwowa Komisja Planowania Gospodarczego cat. no. 3368, *Płynność załóg w przemyśle państwowym w roku 1949*, p. 6.

ed within the ranks of the workers. They were recruited mainly from the rural population, women and adolescents' professional activation groups and various groups that would be qualified as "lumpenproletariat" before the war, or the environments pauperized after the war. The process of their socialization into a new professional environment occurred in conditions extremely unfavourable for the formation of desirable attitudes and social behaviour. In fact, pathological phenomena emerged in the industrial plants and the whole socialist economy right from the beginning of the system, such as chaos and disorganization, intensifying bureaucratization, omnipresent mismanagement, growing problems related to poor labour discipline, low efficiency, high staff fluctuation, recurrent downtime, common dilettantism of managing staff etc²¹.

It is extremely difficult to discern precisely what the scale of changes in the composition of the industrial workers' environment was. The research conducted by the CUP shows that only 28.2% of industrial workers had been working in their plants for more than 10 years in 1947 (the data for 386 073). Most of them were taking an internship there for up to 1 year (26.4%) and 3 years (21.3%). Some industries had even bigger percentages e.g.: 61.8% were taking the internship for 3 years in metal industry, 66.2% in textile, 63.3% in metallurgic, 67.5% in the food industry etc. If also accounting for those working for no more than 5 years, it can be assumed that 2/3 of the employees in the whole industry were employed immediately before the end of the war or right after it²². What is exactly essential is the change in the social-demographic characteristics of the workers such as the level of education or environmental origin. Unfortunately, only fragmental data are available to illustrate these characteristics for the workers employed before 1939 (1243 people), in the time of the German and Soviet occupation (2279) and in the years 1945-1956 (16 124 workers)²³. These are certainly not representative samples, al-

²¹ Chumiński Jędrzej, *Robotnicy wobec doświadczenia codziennego w zakładach przemysłowych (1945-1989)*, in: Miernik Grzegorz and Piątkowski Sebastian, *Życie codzienne w PRL*, Radomskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, Radom-Starachowice 2006, p. 26-27.

²² Chumiński Jędrzej, *Ruch zawodowy...*, p.72-76.

²³ The information on the social and demographic characteristics of industry employees was obtained by browsing the personal files of the employees employed in two working places in Wrocław: the State Water Meter Factory (presently "ASPA" Welding Equipment Company) as well as Confection Centre no. 1 (presently "Intermoda" Garment Factories and "Otis" Garment Factories). Out of the working places from Kraków two were chosen: the SA Railway Signal and Equipment Factory (since 1953 the plant was named Casting Machine Factory - presently in liquidation) and Kraków Garment Factories (pres-

though taking into consideration that the information possessed concerns 0.14% of all the employed in Polish industry in June 1939 and almost 0.6% of all the employed in the nationalized industry in 1956, they can be assumed to illustrate some general tendencies.

It is worth emphasizing then that if we were to account for only basic factors potentially deciding on the values of the workers, i.e. level of education and environmental origin, the post-war worker environment was clearly characterized by worse values. They were less educated – as illustrated by the education factor, which was 6.82 for the employed before 1939 (women 5.89 and men 7.18); whereas for those starting their work in the years 1945-1949 (women 6.5 and men 6.87). Paradoxically, the best educated people were the workers of the occupation time (women 6.63 and men 7.25). The reason is found in the then overwhelming pauperization of Polish society and the taking up of manual labour by the members of other social groups, including the lower middle class and intelligentsia (table 5). The analysis of environmental origin is what also indicates the deterioration of worker environment composition. The percentage of the workers born in rural areas was 47.1%, while for those taking up work in the years 1945-1956 it rose to 61.9% (table 6). There are however no major differences between women and men. Before the war, the amount of female workers from the countryside was 43.9%, while it was 48.3% for males, being 61.7% and 62.1% after the war respectively. On the other hand, 49.4% of those employed as workers during the occupation were born in the countryside.

The illustration of the role of “new” employees in Polish industry is a high percentage of the employed in the lowest age category of up to 20 years old. They made up 26.8% of 1 534 957 working people in 1949 (411 261 people), including 23.2% of men (248 967) and right up to 35.1% of women (162 285). This percentage was 26.3% for people employed in mining, 27.7% for metallurgy, 28.3% for the plants dependent upon the ministry of light industry, 24.2% for chemical plants and 18.8% for the plants in the hands of the Ministry of Agricultural and Food Industry²⁴.

ently “Vistula” Garment Factories). The places chosen represent two major city industries: metal and machine, and confection. This choice was also motivated by a desire to ascertain the specific characteristics of the employed in the typically “female” and “male” industries.

²⁴ AAN, PKPG cat. no. 3231, *Zatrudnienie według płci i wieku poza rolnictwem w sektorze socjalistycznym (1949 r.)*, brak paginacji.

Table 5. Education index of industrial workers employed before the war, during the occupation and in the years 1945-1956

Education level	Workers employed		
	before the war	during the occupation	in the years 1945-1956
Education index in total	6,82	7,02	6,68
Women	5,89	6,63	6,5
Men	7,18	7,25	6,87

Source: personal files of employees located in the archives of: ASPA Welding Equipment Company and INTERMODA Clothing Industry Plant, and OTIS Clothing Industry Plant in Wrocław as well as Casting Machine Factory (in liquidation) and VISTULA Clothing Industry Plant in Kraków. In total, there are data on 1221 employees employed before the war (incl. 336 women and 885 men), 2250 during the occupation (843 women and 1407 men) and 16 018 people employed in the years 1945-1956 (8105 women and 7913 men). The education index was calculated according to the formula: The index is a weighted arithmetic mean of existing categories of education. The calculations were made according to the formula proposed by Zbigniew Strzelecki, where:

$$W_{av} = \frac{\sum N_i K_w}{N}$$

W_{av} - average education level of the staff; N_i - amount of employees at a given education level (i = education level); K_w - given education level conversion factor according to years of education; N - number of staff.

Particular education levels were assigned with the following weighs: illiterate - 0, up to 4 grades - 3, 5-6 grades - 5,5, finished elementary - 7, incomplete vocational 8, complete vocational 9, incomplete secondary technical and general - 9, complete secondary technical and general 11, incomplete higher 13, higher 15.

See: Strzelecki Zbigniew, *Zmiany w poziomie kwalifikacji załogi*, in: Szulc Władysław (ed.), *Kształtowanie się załóg w regionach uprzemysłowionych*, SGPiS, Warsaw 1974, p. 207-208.

The aforementioned data indicate that essential change occurred in the composition of the worker environment in the first decade of the so-called People's Poland. A substantial part of it were people who started to work after the war, insufficiently qualified, mostly coming from the country. They naturally had serious problems with the adaptation to labour in industrial plants. The demoralizing nature of the social and economic system only deepened the problems as it was impossible to create a mechanism promoting good labour. The intensification of pathological phenomena which emerged in the economy almost immediately after the war should be perceived in this context.

Table 6. Environmental origin of industry workers employed before the war, during the occupation and in the years 1945-1956

Employment time	Place of birth environment						
	Cities				Country	No data	Total
	Up to 10 thousand inhabitants	10-50 thousand inhabitants	50-100 thousand inhabitants	above 100 thousand inhabitants			
Workers employed before 1939	77	109	21	378	586	72	1243
Women	19	31	3	112	148	24	337
Men	58	78	18	266	438	48	906
Workers employed during the war	152	173	62	665	1127	100	2279
Women	56	85	17	254	391	43	846
Men	96	88	45	411	736	57	1433
Workers employed in the years 1945-1956	1065	1061	264	3119	9983	632	16124
Women	548	588	125	1473	5020	385	8139
Men	517	473	139	1646	4963	247	7985

Source: own preparation. See table 5. In section „No data” most of the people were born beyond the borders of the Polish state.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ACT ON SECURING THE SOCIALIST DISCIPLINE OF LABOUR AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Passed on 19 April, 1950 (and enforced since 17 May 1950) the Act on Securing the Socialist Discipline of Labour fundamentally changed the regulations of labour discipline²⁵. Those problems were not regulated in the form of an act in the interwar period. General information was given in the President of the Republic of Poland's ordinance from March 1928 on the labour contracts of blue and white collar workers²⁶. Specific issues were instead specified by collective agreements signed by employers and workers' representatives, according to the procedure provided by the act of 14 April 1937²⁷.

Initially, old norms were used to regulate the issues of labour discipline after the war, although as indicated, "into their old form", "a new, distinct form was poured". The changes were first of all about "the concretion of workers' duties in the labour process and establishment of a broader range of forms and means of responsibility" as well as "about the usage and an increasing extension of the means of indirect impact on the discipline of the working people". A catalogue of employees' duties was specified in the labour contracts, collective agreements and labour regulations, understood as respecting the fixed time of work, the obligation to secure an appropriate quality of work, respecting safety rules, an obligation to take good care of company property and an obligation to respect general rules of social conduct²⁸. The catalogue of penalties for breaking labour discipline was also highly expanded.

The 1950 Act was the beginning of a new stage in the methods of labour discipline regulation. Although earlier they were scattered, since 1950 the obligation of labour discipline began to be regulated by law or within the resolutions and ordinances of central executive bodies. Despite its name, the 1950 Act did not regulate all of the issues concerning labour discipline and was actually limited only to one aspect – the obligation to respect la-

²⁵Kulesza Józef, *Ustawa o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej pracy*, Przegląd Związkowy, Nr 5/1950, p. 238.

²⁶Salwa Zbigniew, *Socjalistyczna dyscyplina pracy*, PWN, Warsaw 1961, p. 68.

²⁷*Ustawa z dnia 14 kwietnia 1937 r. o układach zbiorowych*, 1937 Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland no. 31 pos. 242.

²⁸Salawa Zbigniew, *Socjalistyczna...*, p. 70–79.

bour time. It introduced harsh sanctions for leaving workdays. Ordinal penalties were: reprimand with a warning, wage deduction of an average of one or two workday pay for each workday left, transfer to a lower order position for a time no longer than a month (article 5). Ordinal penalties were used against the people who missed up to 3 workdays without authorization throughout the year or, according to the resolution of the Cabinet from 5 May, 1950, missed part of a workday being more than one hour (either because of tardiness or a prolongation of the lunch break). A third (and every following) workday absence for more than 20 minutes and less than 1 hour (e.g. because of late arrival) was also treated as an unauthorized day. A less than 20 minute workday absence was subject to make the day considered unauthorized if it had a "recurrent" character²⁹. Article 7 and 8 of the Act specified the code of conduct if the unauthorized absences concerned the fourth and following days. In this case a workplace was obliged to bring the case before the Magistrate court, which could sentence the worker "to remain in work currently conducted for a time no greater than three months with a simultaneous deduction of 10 to 25% of wage". Should serving the penalty have been evaded, or in case any other "transgression against the rules of the present act" took place, a penalty of up to 6 months of imprisonment was ordered (article 13). Severe sanctions were introduced for those workplace managers who authorized absences against the circumstances or refrained from bringing cases before the court. It was punishable by up to 3 months of imprisonment or a 150 thousand zloty fine, or both together (article 12). It should be emphasized that the complementary legal acts concerning the authorization of absences at the very last practically incapacitated the workplace managers.

The Act of April 1950 was imprecise in the view of lawyers and introduced interpretational difficulties in many cases, causing numerous inconsistencies and anomalies in its usage. A required fast-track procedure was also a disadvantage. A court had actually no more than a week to hear a case after an application had been filed; an appeal could be made within three days after the sentence, while a court of appeal had two weeks to consider the appeal from the day the court of first instance had announced its verdict³⁰.

²⁹ Uchwała Rady Ministrów z dn. 5 maja 1950 r. w przedmiocie określenia przypadków usprawiedliwiających nieobecność w pracy oraz warunkach i trybie usprawiedliwienia nieobecności, *Monitor Polski* of 5 May, 1950, no. 51 pos. 584.

³⁰ Salwa Zbigniew, *Socjalistyczna...*, p. 94-95.

From the beginning, the problems were amplified by a vast influx of cases to the courts. During the first month of applicability of the Act, to 13 June 1950, already 3934 cases reached the court; whereas 6881 by 20 June, 8905 by 27 June and 11 514 by 3 July. The courts sentenced 4462 people by the beginning of July 1950, acquitted 586; 635 cases were dismissed, and in 1300 instances the cases were suspended due to the inability to establish the defendant's permanent residence. To force the managers to comply with the provisions of the Act, two major supervisory operations commissioned by party authorities were carried out, in which the public prosecutor's office, representatives of labour unions, and the Supreme Chamber of Control (NIK) participated. Between 23-27 May, the first batch spanned 640 workplaces; therein serious transgressions were indicated in 330, and in 20 cases it ended with the prosecution drawing up an indictment against workplace managers. The second supervisory operation was held 21-23 June 1950 and encompassed 950 workplaces³¹.

During a little more than 7 months in 1950 (from 17 May to 31 December 1950) 98 115 cases were received by the court (out of which 88 917 under art. 7, 115 under art. 12 and 9083 under art. 13). The largest influx of cases occurred in 1951 – 170 812 and 1952 – 177 909. Unfortunately there is no the data on the influx of cases for 1953. In turn, in 1954 112 800 cases were received, while 84 097 in 1955. Taking into account that the influx of cases in 1953 did not deviate from the situation in 1951 and 1952, we can estimate that in the years 1950-1955 ca. 800 thousand cases were received by the court (there is no data for 1956 either). Out of that number 319 432 people were sentenced (since there is no data for 1955 and 1956 it can be assumed that the amount of sentences in the years 1950-1955 was ca. 350 thousand people), therein 287 188 under art. 8 and 32 244 people under art. 12 and 13³², with imprisonment (table 7). It needs to be emphasized at the same time that lawsuits are only the proverbial tip of the iceberg of those convicted under the Act on the Socialist Discipline of Labour. The amount of reprimands with a warning, deductions from the remunerations payable and transfers to a position of lower order commissioned by the workplace rose into millions across the whole economy. Already in 1950, the

³¹ AAN, KC PZPR cat. no. 237/V1b/9, *Sprawozdanie z czynności organów prokuratury i sądu w zakresie realizacji przepisów o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy (1950 r.)*, p. 55-74.

³² Wszystkie dane dotyczące liczby spraw przed sądami ustaliliśmy na podstawie: AAN, Ministerstwo sprawiedliwości cat. no. 2713, p. 19-21, 110-113; cat. no. 1426, p. 1-23; cat. no. 400, p. 44-73; cat. no. 2096, p. 50-56; także: KC PZPR cat. no. 237/5/52, p.52-57.

amount of penalized was larger than that of the employed. That meant that some people were punished repeatedly. Only in mining, 75 thousand of ordinal penalties were imposed in 1950 (including about 31.5 thousand reprimands with a warning and 31 thousand payment deductions and re-groupings) and in 1951: 127 thousand, 73 thousand and 47 thousand respectively. Miners were imposed with more than 500 thousand ordinal penalties until mid-1953³³. Incidentally, what often happened is that the workplaces imposed penalties devoid of any legitimacy. Fines were usually imposed “by intuition, more or less, or according to branch or head manager’s whim”. The reasons were often peculiar e.g. “for arousing unrest in the pit shaft and the imitation of the supervision”, “for halting work and idleness”, “for referring unruly to the supervision”, “for threatening the supervision and disobeying an order”, “for sleeping at the bottom”, “for demeaning the authority of the higher supervision”³⁴.

Table 7. Case influx and people convicted under the act on securing the socialist discipline of labour

Year	Case influx	Convicted		
		under art. 8	under art. 12 and 13	Total
1950	98115	37860	4583	42443
1951	170812	67342	8486	75828
1952	177909	64568	7529	72097
1953	-	64633	5881	70514
1954	112800	52785	5765	58550
1955	84097	-	-	-
Total	643733	287188	32244	319432

Source: own preparation based on AAN, Ministry of Justice cat. no. 2036, *Notatka w sprawie wykonania ustawy o socjalistycznej dyscyplinie pracy (1954 r.)*, p. 50-56; *ibidem*: cat. no. 1426, *Sprawozdanie Departamentu Nadzoru Sądowego Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości w przedmiocie działalności sądów na odcinku stosowania ustawy o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy w roku 1952*, p. 1-23; AAN, KC PZPR cat. no. 237/V/52, *Notatka dot. analizy danych dotyczących kształtowania się absencji w ważniejszych pionach gospodarczych (1952 r.)*, p. 52-57.

³³ AAN, KC PZPR cat. no. 237/V/52, *Notatka dot. analizy danych dotyczących kształtowania się absencji w ważniejszych pionach gospodarczych (1952 r.)*, p. 52-53; Chumiński Jędrzej, *Mentalne bariery...*, p. 129-130.

³⁴ Sachnowski Zdzisław, *W walce o umocnienie demokracji*, Przegląd Związkowy, Nr 4/1955, p. 149.

From the Act's inception, the industrial workers were the main victims, especially miners. The data for the years 1951-1952 (table 8) are very meaningful. According to official statistics, men constituted 76.9% (101 482 people) of 131 910 people convicted under art. 8 in the years 1951/1952, while women 23.1% (30 428). As much as 97.3% (128 348) people were blue-collar workers, while 2.7% (3562) white-collar. The largest group among the convicts were miners – 29.5% (38 911), textile workers – 14.1% (18 548), metallurgy workers – 6.3% (8290), metal industry workers – 7.6% (9995). A large group was also made up of construction workers – 13.8% (18 211) and Polish State Railways (PKP) employees – 5.9% (7831). The data concerning people charged under art. 13 are similar. For 7529 people sentenced to jail in 1952 men were 78.7% (5923 people), women 21.3% (1606), blue-collar 98.7% (7431), white-collar 1.36% (98). Miners were 44.7% (3363) of the sentenced, textile workers 14.6% (1100), metalworkers 8% (602), metallurgy workers 5.2% (389), construction workers 7.3% (554) etc. Note the very significant percentage of workers in trial in relation to the general number of employed in particular years. In 1951 and 1952, the percentage of cases in relation to the general amount of employees in the socialized economy exceeded 3% (in 1951, 170.8 thousand cases were directed to the court, and the employment rate was 5631. A year later: 177.9 thousand and 5839 thousand respectively). The percentage of convicted in 1951 was 1.3%, while 1.2% in 1952. Additionally, it should be recalled that these percentages were significantly higher in some industries. For example in mining, the percentage of convicted people was 8.7% in 1951 (20 554 people sentenced, 235 404 employed), 7.9% in 1952 (18 357 and 233 036 respectively); whereas it was 2.5% in the textile industry in 1951 (8571 and 345 340) and 3% in 1952 (9797 and 327 477), 2.9% in metallurgy in 1951 (4010 and 136 996) as well as 3% in 1952 (4280 and 142 863). Incidentally, 6% of the staff in for example mining, 2.5% in metallurgical industry, 2.8% in textile industry qualified as notorious loafers by authorities³⁵.

What is yet worth commenting on is the age structure and qualification level of the people punished for the offences of labour discipline. They were actually very young people and mostly poorly qualified. The conducted study of 2259 cases indicates that 74.6% of the general number of the convicts were workers aged 25 and under. This percentage was 72.8% in mining, while even 82.4% in the textile industry. The amount of un-

³⁵ *Rocznik statystyczny 1955*, Main Statistical Office (GUS), Warsaw 1956, p. 197; *Rocznik statystyczny przemysłu 1945-1965*, GUS Warsaw 1967, 288-289.

Table 8. People convicted in the years 1951 -1952 according to gender, blue and white collar workers, and industry departments

Highlight	Convicted under article 8						Convicted under article 13	
	1951	%	1952	%	total	%	1952	%
men	52980	78,67	48502	75,12	101482	76,93	5923	78,67
women	14362	21,33	16066	24,88	30428	23,07	1606	21,33
total	67342	100,00	64568	100,00	131910	100,00	7529	100,00
blue collar	65508	97,28	62840	97,32	128348	97,30	7431	98,70
white collar	1834	2,72	1728	2,68	3562	2,70	98	1,30
total	67342	100,00	64568	100,00	131910	100,00	7529	100,00
mining	20554	30,52	18357	28,43	38911	29,50	3363	44,67
textile industry	8751	12,99	9797	15,17	18548	14,06	1100	14,61
iron and steel industry	4010	5,95	4280	6,63	8290	6,28	389	5,17
metal industry	3089	4,59	6906	10,70	9995	7,58	602	8,00
food industry	1774	2,63	775	1,20	2549	1,93	-	-
agricultural industry	3544	5,26	2665	4,13	6209	4,71	195	2,59
construction	10052	14,93	8159	12,64	18211	13,81	554	7,36
Polish State Railways	3755	5,58	4076	6,31	7831	5,94	340	4,52
cooperatives	1526	2,27	1014	1,57	2540	1,93	-	-
other	10287	15,28	8539	13,22	18826	14,27	986	13,10
total	67342	100,00	64568	100,00	131910	100,00	7529	100,00

Source: own compilation based on: AAN, Ministry of Justice cat. no. 1426, *Sprawozdanie Departamentu Nadzoru Sądowego Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości w przedmiocie działalności sądów na odcinku stosowania ustawy o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy w roku 1952*, p. 1-23

skilled workers in for example the textile industry was 73.9%, while 38.7% in metallurgy. It is claimed in the conclusion of the analysis that “among the convicted under the Act on the Soc. Disc. of Lab. unskilled workers aged 17-25 prevail”³⁶. The fact that the least disciplined were the youngest workers is symptomatic. They entered active professional life already in the new system, which was unable to create mechanisms that promoted good labour. This context should also guide the perception of the very low level of work ethic among Polish employees occurring during the whole time of the People’s Republic of Poland – it is because these people remained professionally active for the following dozen years or more.

The territorial structure of those convicted of exceeding the regulations of the Act is a reflection of the professional structure of employees. Most cases were heard by the courts in industrialized regions: Katowice province (then Stalinogród), 38.9 % of all cases in 1951 and 37.7% in 1952, Wrocław: 14.1% and 14.4% respectively, city of Łódź: 9.9% and 10.4% and Kraków province 5.6% and 4.9% (table 9).

In the end, an analysis of the sentences passed will be presented. The authorities recommended that the penal repression under article 8 “be aimed at the middle and upper margin of the sanctions provided by the Act when it comes to labour obligation assessment, and at the lower and middle margin when it comes to partial deduction of an employee’s compensation”³⁷. Hence, as one can assume, the visible decrease in the number of convictions ruling the shortest period of up to 1 month of remaining in the present workplace in 1952 compared to 1951 (from 58.3% to 48.4%). This reflects the general tendency of tightening penal sanctions for violation of the provisions of the Act. It can also be observed in the rulings on prison sentences (article 12 and 13). Although sentences of up to 1 month in jail were issued for 81.9% of the convicts in 1951, it was only 56.7% in 1952, while the percentage of the people with 6 month sentences rose from 1.5% to 4.4%. It complied with the demands of the superior authorities, who believed that the rulings under article 13 were too liberal and “a tightening of penal repressions” was necessary.

The analysis of the convictions indicates yet another interesting phenomenon – there was actually a substantial disproportion between the

³⁶ AAN, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości cat. no. 400, *Analiza orzecznictwa w sprawach karnych z ustawy z dnia 19.04.1950 r.*, p.44-45.

³⁷ AAN, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości cat. no. 1426, *Sprawozdanie Departamentu Sądowego Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości w przedmiocie działalności sądów na odcinku stosowania ustawy o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy w roku 1952*, p. 20.

Table 9. Percentage of the convicts according to district courts in the years 1951 - 1952 and relation to the general crime rate in a given district

District court	Percentage of convicted in year		Percentage of convicted for crimes against labour discipline in relation to the general number of convicts in a given district	
	1951	1952	1951	1952
Białystok	0,36	0,79	5,6	6,1
Bydgoszcz	2,11	1,93	17	15
Gdańsk	3,2	2,85	22	21
Kielce	2,36	2,95	18,3	26,2
Koszalin	1,07	0,93	17,2	12,6
Kraków	5,64	4,89	28,4	25,2
Lublin	2,02	1,49	17,6	12,6
Łódź - city	9,91	10,48	74,1	68,5
Łódź - province	2,36	2,73	22,8	24,8
Olsztyn	1,53	1,21	20,2	13,6
Opole	1,66	1,77	23,3	24,8
Poznań	2,23	2,28	17,2	19,6
Rzeszów	1,1	2,46	14,3	26,1
Stalinogród	38,9	37,73	65,4	60,7
Szczecin	2,22	2,04	37	23,3
Warszawa - city	4,75	4,5	44,9	37,3
Warszawa - province	2,31	1,91	14,9	9,5
Wrocław	14,16	14,46	40,3	45,2
Zielona Góra	2,04	2,62	30,5	33

Source: AAN archive, Ministry of Justice cat. no. 2713, *Przestępstwa przeciwko socjalistycznej dyscyplinie pracy* p.111.

number of cases directed to court and the number of sentences. 45 130 cases (35.8% of all) led to acquittal (mainly due to the lack of documentary evidence of the offence required from the workplaces) or termination (it was i.e. the result of the amnesty in 1952; the amount of acquittals and terminations was 27.5% in 1951). A good deal of cases also had to be suspended because of the "disappearance" of the defendants who abandoned their places of residence, and the Police was not able to locate them.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE ACT ON SECURING THE SOCIALIST DISCIPLINE OF LABOUR

Totalitarian systems have a property of criminalizing the phenomena that are not liable to legal regulations. The Act issued in April 1950, however, had a special character. A short deed, as it consisted of only 20 articles, it rendered hundreds of thousands of employees criminals within a few years of its taking effect, and more than 30 thousand people went to jail because of it.

The analysis of the Act also allows us to delve deeper into the relations within the workplaces in the Stalinist times. It is beyond doubt that the source of many pathologies was burdening the head management of the enterprises with prosecutorial functions. It was because the responsibility of carrying out the investigations and charging an employee rested upon them. If that was not enough, when an absence was assumed unauthorized the case was non-appealable. An equally devastating impact on labour relations was made by a regulation that obliged the representatives of the labour unions to give an opinion on all the applications directed to the court.

Many cases heard by courts proved how very instrumental the treatment of the employees was, what ruthlessness and brutality accompanied the approach to their often very dramatic life situation. There are many examples like that. So, a woman in the eighth month of pregnancy employed as a smith was placed before the court. Unable to keep up with the hard work, she skipped a few days – but the court sentenced her to remain at the same post for another 2 months. Another female worker employed in the Jedność steelworks, 6 months pregnant, was asking for a transfer to do lighter work, but to no avail. After skipping a few days, she was also sen-

tenced by the court. A sixteen-year-old employed in a mine, who lawfully refused to work night shifts also received a sentence, while a fourteen-year-old boy who quit working for PKP due to the great difficulties of the job, was also placed before the court. Although he informed his superior verbally about the desire to quit, he did not do it in writing. A worker living in an 8 square meter room with 6 members of family was also sentenced. He abandoned work because he tried to apply for an accommodation replacement. There were also applications for imposing a penalty on a worker with no legs, a disabled person with hip stiffness, a person with cancer, etc. Curious was the case of a miner who was reported 4 times for punishment by the mine. Seriously ill with duodenal ulcer, he had a medical certificate of the necessity of transfer to perform a lighter task and received referral to hospital. Because of the lack of places in hospital, he was not accepted for treatment; he was skipping work-days because the mine did not offer him any lighter job. In this situation the court acquitted him of all charges. Another miner also suffering from stomach was less fortunate. Despite a certificate from a doctor that he was only able to perform light work, the court sentenced him to remain two months working as a hewer. Another miner employed in the mine for 22 years missed 4 days of work after a 10-day stay in hospital because of sciatica. A doctor considered him unable to work post-factum, yet the court sentenced him to remain 6 weeks more on the current post and to a 20% deduction in wages. Neither was there any understanding for a worker who drove his child, who was suffering from tuberculosis and whooping-cough, to a sanatorium³⁸.

Some situations are very hard to believe they even occurred. A miner was dismissed on disciplinary grounds in one of the mines in Wałbrzych with his case of an 8-day absence directed to court – as it turned out he had died in an accident in the mine; his body lay in a shed and simply forgotten. Another miner, who legally stayed in a sanatorium, was declared a loafer in the mine and the Militia was ordered to arrest him. These cases were a result of a tremendous pressure to punish employees. As it was recalled by Kowarz, the secretary of the Party in Wałbrzych, he received calls with questions “How many have you dismissed on disciplinary grounds”. Upon his answer that it was 100 he was informed “one hundred, few – 400 have to be dismissed, then it will be better”. The re-

³⁸ AAN, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości cat. no. 400, *Analiza orzecznictwa w sprawach karnych z ustawy z dnia 19.IV.1950 r.*, p. 44-73.

sult was such that in the 4th quarter of 1954 746 people from the mine supervision were punished disciplinarily, while in December 1954 500 people were dismissed on disciplinary grounds³⁹.

The course of the trial itself often out-raged the rules of law. Seldom was the documentary evidence provided to courts by the workplaces complete; it often happened that judges confirmed the guilt of the defendant on the phone; the sentences were hackneyed, not taking into account the life situation of employees; various sentences were passed in courts for the same offences, their reasons usually "short and general within the hackneyed template". This situation can be hardly surprising, though, given the fact that during one session a judge heard 100 cases, while particular trials usually lasted a few minutes. Union organizations also had their role in rendering labour relations pathological. The opinions given during the trial were usually limited to statements that "the defendant is known as a loafer" or "is causing damage to our country" or "has disgraced the discipline of labour for himself"⁴⁰.

What has to be emphasized, though, not all workplace administrations were prone to excessive zeal. The party authorities expressed regret that in some workplaces:

The importance of the penalties under the Act of Securing the Socialist Discipline of Labour becomes blunted to a great extent by the automatic and sluggish manner of settling the matters of absence. [...] A tolerant attitude to loafers, oftentimes justified with a concern of discouraging the employee by the application of sanctions provided by the Act against him or her, often leads to full authorization of the absences caused by such situations as e.g. participation in wedding celebrations for several days, arrival of relatives etc. or also to giving faith to unverified explanations of the people in question. [...] These facts contribute to the emergence of a mood of demobilization among the staff and confidence that an authorization is easy to obtain in cases not provided by the Act or even unserious ones, which cannot create a proper socialist attitude to labour among the workers⁴¹.

It is also worth dwelling on the efficiency of the drastic measures introduced. They were, actually, quite limited according to consistent views,

³⁹ AAN, KC PZPR cat. no. 237/II/10, *III Plenum KC PZPR 21-24 stycznia 1955 r.*, p. 467-468.

⁴⁰ AAN, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości cat. no. 400, *Analiza orzecznictwa w sprawach karnych z ustawy z dnia 19.IV.1950 r.*, p. 48; tamże: cat. no. 2036, *Notatka w sprawie wykonania ustawy o socjalistycznej dyscyplinie pracy (1955 r.)*, p. 52.

⁴¹ AAN, KC PZPR cat. no. 237/V/52, *Notatka dot. analizy danych dotyczących kształtowania się absencji w ważniejszych pionach gospodarczych (1952 r.)*, p. 53.

formulated still in the time when the Act was in force. In 1952 it was estimated that:

Despite the use of repressive measures against loafers, the previous period did not bring any major breakthrough in the state of labour discipline in comparison with the period before May 1950, while in some departments (mining, construction), the state of labour discipline does not indicate any serious improvement⁴².

The reasons for such a state of affairs varied. Unauthorized and increasing absence was, as the party authorities estimated, the result:

Inappropriate distribution and insufficient supply of the network of commercial facilities, shortcomings in the operation of kindergartens, nurseries and the network of social health care and supply problems in the recent time. Facts of wilful abandonment of work by female workers were reported in some of the textile plants in Łódź – women who undertook better paid private services at that time. The difference in wages between particular places cause wilful abandonment of work or quitting work and employment in other enterprises, which occurs particularly in the cities where new industrial or construction objects emerge. In “Katowice” plant and a number of other plants a severe increase of absence and manpower flux occurred due to systematic failure to execute production plans by those plants, which in turn deprived the workers of their extraction bonus⁴³.

A growing indifference of the miners was also an important factor. The mass scale of penalties resulted in people being less and less concerned by the following chicanes. This could be assumed to have been the reason for the 1955 attempts aimed to liberalize the act. In March 1955, workplace managers were allowed to decide on the authorization of workers' absences and their relief from work in a more relaxed manner thanks to the no. 180 resolution of the Cabinet. In May, then, the period for which the workers' absences were counted was changed from a year to a quarter by a decree⁴⁴.

When assessing the Act one cannot miss yet another aspect: the dramatic increase of the number of work accidents. This related especially to mining. The repressions were an attempt to force increased extraction on the miners. What was used for that purpose were the so-called rolls (that is work in the extended time) and the assignment of Sundays and holidays as workdays. The mines were all covered with management announce-

⁴²Ibid, p. 52a.

⁴³Ibid, p. 55a.

⁴⁴Salwa Zbigniew, *Socjalistyczna...*, p. 97.

ment posters, which threatened the miners that “one who disobeys labour discipline will be subjected to the following punishments: displacement from a good place of accommodation to a worse one, displacement from a good job to worse, administration of fines of 20 zloty and higher and dismissal from work”. The price paid by the miners for increased extraction was dramatically high. It is sufficient to note that each day the six-year plan was executed on average one miner died during work in coal industry. In the years 1949-1953 alone, the toll was 1812 people. A very dramatic rise occurred at the beginning of 1954, when 222 people died in mining accidents during the first three months. In total, more than 2500 miners lost their lives in Polish mines in the years 1949-1955⁴⁵. In 1954, the amount of accidents in the entire national economy increased by 14.4% (18 347 – 145 443 accidents total) in comparison to 1949, including a 51% increase of severe cases (there were 14 215 of them total in 1954) and 13% fatalities (1464)⁴⁶.

CONCLUSION

The Act on Securing the Socialist Discipline of Labour was only a fraction of the broader process of totalizing social life in the Stalinist times in Poland. It was supplemented by other deeds, which in fact implemented a militarization of labour relations. The Act of 7 March 1950, among other issues, brought a two-year deprivation of the right to change the workplace for some categories of employees of important occupations or specializations. People who would break this “workplace attachment”, which resembled feudal relations, were under threat of imprisonment of up to 6 months and of up to a 250 thousand zloty fine⁴⁷. Trade school and higher school graduates limited their choices in the workplace limited, through the adoption of a 3-year valid so-called work order. A person avoiding or abandoning the designated post was under threat of imprisonment of up to 3 years and a fine of up to 100 thousand zloty. A workplace man-

⁴⁵ Chumiński Jędrzej, *Mentalne bariery...*, p. 129-130.

⁴⁶ AAN, CRZZ Wydział Statystyki cat. no. 15, *Zestawienie wypadków przy pracy w 1954 r.* brak paginacji; AAN, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej cat. no. 796, *Analiza ogólna statystyki wypadków przy pracy zgłaszanych w latach 1947-1949*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Ustawa z dnia 7 marca 1950 r. o zapobieżeniu płynności kadr pracowników w zawodach lub specjalnościach szczególnie ważnych dla gospodarki uspołecznionej, Dz.U.RP nr 10 poz.107.

ager who wilfully employed a person with a warrant was also subject to imprisonment of up to 6 months and of up to a 250 thousand zloty fine⁴⁸. However, a particular curiosity was the decree of 4 March 1953 on intensifying the fight against low-quality production (it was a copy of the Soviet legislation). It threatened the manager of the plant, production departments, and technical control employees with 5 years of prison for the introduction of any merchandise into the market that did not fulfil quality norms. If the products were used in national defence or intended for export the punishment was from 2 to 10 years⁴⁹.

Parallel to legislative measures, the impact of the security apparatus on economic life expanded. In October 1951, 46 688 informers cooperated with the security authorities in all of the economy departments. Security Departments and Security Sections operated in the 719 biggest and most important institutions, employing 1680 Security Officers. Almost 115 thousand employees were under constant surveillance, while the security apparatus arrested 10 527 people in the years 1950-1952 alone⁵⁰.

Yet, even compared to the repressive Stalinist system, "the Act on Securing the Socialist Discipline of Labour" was a special deed. Seldom in history does an act emerge which results in millions of people being punished with ordinal penalties, more than 800 thousand employees placed before the court, about 350 thousand people convicted and more than 30 thousand jailed. It came to an end only after the rebellion of the workers in Poznań, when its provisions were abolished on a wave of desalinisation with the act of 10 September 1956⁵¹.

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⁴⁸ *Ustawa z dnia 7 marca 1950 r. o planowym zatrudnieniu absolwentów średnich szkół zawodowych oraz szkół wyższych*, Dz.U.RP nr 10 poz.106.

⁴⁹ *Dekret z dnia 4 marca 1953 r. o wzmożeniu walki z produkcją złej jakości*, Dziennik Ustaw PRL nr 16 poz.63.

⁵⁰ Archiwum IPN w Warszawie, BU cat. no. 1572/1455, *Tablice statystyczne B Departamentu IV oraz Wydziałów IV WUBP i Referatów IV PUBP za 25 październik – 25 listopada 1951 r.*, p. 207, 210.

⁵¹ *Ustawa z dnia 10 września 1956 r. w sprawie uchylecia przepisów o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy*, Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland no. 41 pos. 187.