

FELIX DZERZHINSKY



PRISON  
DIARY  
AND  
LETTERS



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## FOREWORD

Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky, disciple and comrade-in-arms of the great Lenin, valiant son of Poland, was an ardent fighter for communism.

Dzerzhinsky was known as the "Iron Felix." He is spoken and written of as a knight of the Revolution—a knight without fear or reproach. His own liking was to be known as a soldier of the Revolution.

The poet Mayakovsky, addressing the youth of his day, wrote:

*To the young man  
pondering over  
his life,  
wondering whom  
to take as his model,  
I say—  
Don't ponder,  
model it  
on Comrade Dzerzhinsky.*

Dzerzhinsky's whole life serves as an inspiring example of struggle for the happiness of the people.

At the age of seventeen Felix solemnly vowed to fight to the last breath against oppression and exploitation. And this vow was sacredly kept.

Nearly a quarter of his life—eleven years—was spent in tsarist gaols, in exile and penal servitude. Shackled,

and immured for years in prison, he always found strength for life and struggle. "The more terrible the hell of our present life, the clearer and louder I hear the eternal hymn of life, the hymn of truth, beauty and happiness.... Life can be joyful even when one is in chains," he wrote on June 2, 1914, after being sentenced to penal servitude.

Dzerzhinsky's prison diary and the letters to his relatives published in this volume show how the will of the revolutionary was steeled by severe trials, how his courage grew in the struggle to emancipate the people from exploitation and slavery.

Dzerzhinsky's diary and letters are not a chronicle of his life. On the other hand, their every line is evidence of the great mind and ideological probity of their writer, who had a deep love for the working man and a boundless hatred for the oppressors.

The diary and letters reveal the integrity of Dzerzhinsky, a man thoroughly devoted to the Party, a man whose faith in the people and the future triumph of communism was unshakeable. They reveal those traits of character which made him a true servant of the people, and an embodiment of the finest qualities of a Communist.

The diary entries were made during his imprisonment in the Warsaw Citadel, a notorious tsarist prison in which the autocracy detained the more dangerous revolutionaries. The first entry was made on April 30, 1908, the last on August 8, 1909. This was the time when, after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, reaction was on the rampage throughout Russia.

Many pages in the diary are devoted to the bloody terror unloosed by the tsarist authorities—the humiliations to which prisoners were subjected, the torture and hangings. All the foulness of the tsarist regime and its stooges—gendarmes, spies, agents-provocateurs and

traitors—is laid bare. At the same time not a few pages tell about the heroes who courageously withstood the sufferings imposed by prison life and who went to the gallows with heads unbowed.

Dzerzhinsky's diary was first printed in Polish in 1909-10 in the journal *Przegląd Socjal-demokratyczny* (*Social-Democratic Review*), an underground publication of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania—a Marxist party. A brief foreword pointed out that the diary, in addition to being a moving human document, was of no little importance for the history of the Revolution.

The diary and most of the letters cover the period spent by Dzerzhinsky in prison, exile, penal servitude and, partly, abroad, that is, when contrary to his will, he was cut off from direct participation in the revolutionary struggle. For this reason they do not reflect the tireless and multifarious activity of the revolutionary fighter. But they do show that even during the hard times of enforced inactivity Felix Dzerzhinsky lived with but one thought, one desire—to further the cause of the Revolution.

Despite prison bars, he, in his diary, reacted to the social developments of those days.

Since there was always the danger that the diary might fall into the hands of his gaolers, Dzerzhinsky could not openly express his views on Party matters or on the current developments in the working-class movement. This is particularly true of the letters. He was restricted to writing about personal and family affairs. His correspondence was censored either by the prison authorities or by the gendarmes, at times it was subjected to chemical analysis. Only on rare occasions was he able to get a letter smuggled out. And even then he was never sure that it wouldn't fall into the hands of



the police. So that even in the smuggled letters there are many allegoric and agreed expressions.

The letters express concern for his fellow comrades, for his friends and relatives, and especially for the children. He was passionately fond of children, seeing in them the men and women of the morrow for which he fought.

In the letters to his sister he writes in the most tender vein about the upbringing of her children, and advises her how to inculcate in them a healthy and strong spirit, to teach them to be truthful and sincere, not egoists, but people capable of living and fighting for others. "To be a bright torch for others, to be able to shed light—that is the supreme happiness which man can achieve. He who achieves this fears neither suffering, pain, sorrow nor need. Death no longer holds terrors for him, although it is only then that he learns really to love life." (Letter of June 16, 1913.)

Felix's letters to me were often devoted wholly to our boy. Every line breathes the deepest paternal love. With prison bars between him and his family, Dzerzhinsky never saw his son until he was seven.

But the love he bore his son was subordinated to a basic idea—that of educating the growing generation in the spirit of selfless struggle for the emancipation of the working people.

Here is how he pictured the upbringing of his son:

"Jasiek should not be a hothouse plant. . . . He should be able to fight for truth, for our idea. He should cherish a broader and stronger feeling than the sacred feeling for his mother or for the loved ones near and dear to him. He should be able to cherish the idea—that which unites him with the masses, that which for him will be a torch throughout life. . . . This sacred feeling is stronger than all others, stronger by virtue of its moral commandment: 'That is how you should live, that is what you should be.' " (Letter of June 24, 1914.)

With his burning energy, Dzerzhinsky had difficulty at times in attuning himself to the isolation and the senseless vegetative life behind bars. But he drew strength from his clear understanding of the noble aims of the struggle, and he dreamed of the bright future, of communism.

Sometimes he had the feeling that prison was sapping his strength and that after release from the long years of penal servitude he would be unable "to do anything useful." But always came the reassuring thought: "He who has an idea and who is alive cannot but be useful. As long as I have life in me . . . I will wield pick and shovel, perform the most humdrum task and do my very best. . . . I shall do my duty, shall go right on to the end of the road. . . ." (Letter of January 19, 1914.)

In the letters written in 1915 and 1916, he often writes about being reunited shortly with his near ones, expressing thereby his faith in the coming victory of the Revolution.

Liberated by the February Revolution of 1917, Dzerzhinsky immediately found himself in his revolutionary "element." He threw himself into the struggle for the Great October, and afterwards into the fight against the counter-revolutionaries, into the work of rehabilitating the shattered transport system, building the industry of the U.S.S.R., reinforcing the unity and might of the Party.

The letters written between 1918 and 1926 reflect only to a very insignificant degree Dzerzhinsky's tireless activity after the victory of the October Revolution.

The letters written in Moscow during 1918 throw light on his work while holding the difficult and responsible post of Chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage and his faith in the victorious outcome of the struggle to maintain and consolidate Soviet power.

These letters, and also the letter written to his sister in 1919, show that while holding this post, Dzerzhinsky was guided by his desire for justice and the well-being of the people.

The letter dated October 23, 1918, written in Berlin (Dzerzhinsky was there on his way back from Switzerland where he had spent a few days with his family for the first time in eight years), describes the situation in Germany during the first days of the democratic revolution there. It emphasizes the solidarity of the revolutionary workers and their leader, Karl Liebknecht, with the socialist Revolution in Russia.

The letters from Kharkov written in 1920 tell about his work as chief administrator behind the lines of the South-Western Front. At this time in the Ukraine, behind the lines of the Red Army then battling against the whiteguard Poles and Wrangel, bands of counter-revolutionaries were terrorizing the population and ravaging villages. Simultaneously with rooting out banditry and combating profiteering, Dzerzhinsky carried on large-scale political work among the people.

The letters of this period, and the letter dated May 20, 1926 (when he was Chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy), reveal a typical Dzerzhinsky characteristic—inability to be an “onlooker,” the striving always to be close to the masses, to become acquainted personally with the state of affairs in the localities, to delve deeply into things and to see them through.

The 1920 letters from the Western Front tell of the days when the Red Army, having defeated the invasion of Soviet territory (Ukraine and Byelorussia) by the counter-revolutionary troops of the Polish landlords and capitalists, and pursuing the retreating enemy, entered Polish territory. In Białystok—the first Polish industrial centre liberated from the whiteguard forces—the local

Communists formed a Provisional Revolutionary Committee for Poland—the first worker-peasant government in Polish history. One of its members was Felix Dzerzhinsky.

The Polish workers in the liberated areas, he wrote, were wholly behind the Revolutionary Committee. He also described the terror to which the working class and its Communist Party were subjected by the bourgeois authorities and pointed to the perfidious role of the Right-wing leaders of the Polish Socialist Party (PSP)—a petty-bourgeois, chauvinist party.

Writing on August 25, 1920, he underlined the dignified behaviour and the revolutionary role of the Red Army, bringing freedom to the Polish people.

Dzerzhinsky, who deeply loved his native Poland, and who was one of the leaders of its first Marxist party—the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania—one of the leaders in the fight against tsarism and the bourgeoisie, was pained by the fact that in 1920 the Polish working class had not succeeded in overthrowing the landlords and capitalists and in establishing worker-peasant rule.

He had, however, the unshakeable belief that the day would come when the Polish workers and peasants would smash the chains of landlord-capitalist slavery and take the road of building socialism.

This dream was realized twenty-four years later when the Soviet Army and Polish troops liberated the long-suffering Poland from the Hitler tyranny. It was then that a free, independent people's Poland came into being, which is now building socialism in fraternal co-operation with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries.

Dzerzhinsky's letters from Siberia, written in 1922, describe his work there as People's Commissar for Railways.

In the summer of 1921 the young Soviet Republic, which had just begun to recover from the effects of the imperialist war and the Civil War, suffered another calamity. An unprecedented crop failure, followed by famine, was experienced in the Volga area—the granary of Russia. Industrial centres were threatened with hunger; threatened, too, was the spring sowing in the famine-stricken areas; the very existence of the newly-born Republic of Soviets hung in the balance.

At the beginning of January 1922, Dzerzhinsky set out for Siberia in his capacity of special representative of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of Labour and Defence of the R.S.F.S.R. He was empowered to take extraordinary measures to ensure the dispatch of grain to Moscow, Petrograd and the famine-stricken districts along the Volga. This, a most difficult and responsible assignment, was fulfilled with honour.

His Siberian letters acquaint us with the difficulties which he encountered, with his energy, flexibility and determination to overcome all obstacles. They show his powers of self-criticism, his ability to learn the difficult job of economic management, then new to the Communists, and his deep sense of responsibility for the work assigned to him.

Dzerzhinsky's diary and the letters to his relatives clearly illuminate his splendid life. In a way they reflect the immense work carried out by the Bolshevik Party, its struggle to consolidate Soviet power, and the difficulties which had to be overcome by the first socialist country during the Civil War and intervention, at the time of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and during the rehabilitation.

*Zosia Dzerzhinska*

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born in 1877. I attended school in Vilno. In 1894, then a seventh-form pupil, I joined a Social-Democratic self-education circle; in the following year I joined the Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party and began to teach Marxism to the apprentices working in factories and handicraft shops. The apprentices christened me Jasiek. I left school of my own accord in 1896, holding that I should practise what I believed in, and that it was necessary to be among the masses and to learn from them. So I requested my comrades to assign me to mass work and not to restrict me to the training classes. At this time there was a conflict in the organization between the intellectuals and the workers; the latter insisted that the intellectuals should teach them to read and write, impart general knowledge and so on, but should not mix in their affairs or go among the masses. Despite this I managed to become an agitator and introduced people to politics for the first time. I did this by attending social evenings, visiting the taverns and all the places where workers congregated.

At the beginning of 1897 I was assigned by the Party, as agitator and organizer, to Kovno—an industrial centre where there was as yet no branch of the Social-Democratic Party and where the Polish Socialist Party

organization had recently collapsed. Here I found myself right in the heart of the factory workers and came face to face with frightful poverty and exploitation, especially of female labour. It was here that I really learned how to organize strikes.

In the second half of 1897 I was arrested in the street, having been betrayed by a young fellow who accepted the ten-ruble reward promised by the gendarmes. Having no desire to tell the gendarmes my address, I told them my name was Żebrowski. In 1898 I was exiled for three years to the Vyatka Gubernia—where I lived first at Nolinak and afterwards (as punishment for being incorrigible and causing trouble for the police and also because I had found work in a tobacco factory) in Kai-gorodskoye, a village five hundred kilometres farther north. The place was unendurably lonely, so much so that in 1899 I fled from it and made my way back to Vilno. My arrival coincided with unity talks between the Lithuanian Social-Democrats and the Polish Socialist Party. I was the avowed enemy of nationalism and held that the Lithuanian Social-Democrats had committed a deadly sin when in 1898, at the time I was in prison, they failed to join forces with the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. I had said as much in a letter which I sent from prison to Dr. Domaszewicz, the Lithuanian Social-Democratic leader. In Vilno I learned that my old comrades had been exiled. The leadership was now in the hands of students. I was not allowed to mix with the workers and the comrades hastened to get me out of the country. I made the acquaintance of smugglers who took me in a travelling Jewish show-waggon along the Wielkomierz Highway in the direction of the frontier. A young fellow passenger in the waggon undertook for ten rubles to procure a passport for me in one of the wayside townships. Then, with the passport

in my pocket, I boarded a train for Warsaw where I had the address of a member of the Bund.\*

There was no Social-Democratic organization in Warsaw at the time—only the PSP and the Bund. The Social-Democratic Party had been smashed. I made contact with the workers and managed to rebuild our organization—at first with the shoemakers and afterwards with the woodworkers, metalworkers and bakers who had left the PSP. A desperate struggle with the PSP ensued, which ultimately ended in our victory despite the fact that we had no money, no literature and no intellectuals in our ranks. The Warsaw workers nicknamed me the Astronomer and Frank.

Arrested at a meeting in February 1900, I was detained first in No. 10 Block in the Warsaw Citadel and afterwards in the Siedlce Prison.

In the year 1902 I was exiled for five years to Eastern Siberia. In the summer of that year, while on the way to Viluisk Prison, I escaped by boat accompanied by the Socialist-Revolutionary, Sladkopevtsev.

This time I went abroad, the arrangements being made by friends, members of the Bund. In August, shortly after my arrival in Berlin a conference of our Party—Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania—was held. The conference decided to launch the newspaper *Czerwony Sztandar*\*\*.

I settled in Cracow for the purpose of maintaining contact with the Party and helping it from the other

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\* Bund—General Jewish Social-Democratic Alliance, an opportunist petty-bourgeois nationalist party.

\*\* *Czerwony Sztandar* (Red Flag), organ of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, was founded on the initiative of Felix Dzerzhinsky at the Berlin Conference of the party in August 1902. It continued until 1918; in all, 195 numbers appeared.



side of the frontier. From this time on I became known as Josef.

Up to January 1905 I travelled from time to time to Russian Poland\* for underground work. In January I took up residence there as a member of the Board of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania. A few months later, in July, I was arrested at a secret meeting but was released under the October amnesty.\*\* In 1906 I was sent as a delegate to the Unity Congress in Stockholm. As the representative of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania I became a member of the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. From August to October I worked in St. Petersburg. At the end of the year I was arrested in Warsaw and released on bail in June 1907.

Arrest again followed in April 1908. This time I was tried on the old and new charges and sentenced to exile on each charge. At the end of 1909 I again found myself in Siberia, in Taseyevo. I fled from there after seven days, making my way first to Warsaw and thence abroad. I resumed residence in Cracow from where I used to travel to Russian Poland.

The year 1912 found me in Warsaw but not for long. I was arrested on September 1, charged with absconding from exile and sentenced to three years penal servitude. After the outbreak of war in 1914 I was taken to Orel where I served my sentence. I was transferred to Moscow in 1916 and charged with Party activity during the 1910-12 period. This earned for me another six-

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\* That part of Poland which then belonged to Russia.

\*\* The October amnesty followed the tsar's manifesto of October 17, 1905.

year penal servitude sentence. The February Revolution, however, released me from the Moscow Central Prison.\*

In Moscow I worked until August when I was sent as a delegate to the Party Congress\*\* which elected me to the Central Committee. After the Congress I remained in Petrograd.

I took part in the October Revolution as a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee and afterwards, when the committee was dissolved, I was instructed to organize a body to combat counter-revolution—the Cheka—(7/12/17). I was appointed Chairman of this body.

I was made People's Commissar for Internal Affairs and, on April 14, 1921, also People's Commissar for Railways.

1921

*Felix Dzerzhinsky*

#### EDITOR'S NOTE

Felix Dzerzhinsky was elected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1917. In 1924 he became a candidate member of its Political Bureau. In that year he was appointed Chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy of the U.S.S.R. He simultaneously continued to lead the OGPU.

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\* In pre-revolutionary Russia the Moscow Central Transit Prison. It was also known as the Butyrki Prison. On March 1, 1917, the insurgent workers and the Moscow garrison which sided with them seized the prison and freed the political prisoners.

\*\* The reference is to the VI Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.) which opened on July 26 and ended on August 3 (8-16 August, New Style), 1917.

On July 20, 1926, Dzerzhinsky died from heart failure, after delivering an impassioned speech at a plenary meeting of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the C.P.S.U.(B.) against the Trotsky-Zinovyev opposition.

## PAGES FROM A PRISON DIARY\*

1908-09

APRIL 30, 1908

These two weeks during which I have been cut off from the outside world have dragged like centuries. My mind has been at work, going over the past with its exciting activity and searching for the real meaning of life. I am calm enough, yet the strange tranquillity is utterly at variance with these walls and with the things from which they have separated me. The point is that everyday life has been replaced by a vegetative existence, activity by introspection.

Today I received a notebook, pen and ink. I want to keep a diary, to converse with myself, to reflect on life so as to learn as much as I can for my own benefit and, perhaps, a little for those friends who think about me and who are pained for me, and in this way maintain my strength until I am released.

Tomorrow is the First of May. In the office of the secret police one of the officers, smiling sweetly, said to me, "Do you know that we are rounding up lots of your people before your celebration?" Today I was approached by the gendarme, Colonel Ivanenko, who want-

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\* The diary was kept by Dzerzhinsky during his imprisonment in the Warsaw Citadel. It was first published in Nos. 16 and 17-18 of the *Social-Democratic Review* for 1909 and in No. 19 for 1910. This edition is slightly abridged.

ed to know if I was a confirmed Social-Democrat and if I would be willing to work for him. "Maybe you've become disappointed?" he queried. I asked him if he had ever heard the voice of conscience, whether he had ever had the feeling that he was serving an evil cause. . . .

There is a traitor in one of the cells in my corridor—Michał Wolgemut, a fitter by trade and ex-member of the PSP military organization. Wolgemut was arrested at Sokolów after an armed attack on a post-office when six or seven soldiers were killed. When the gendarmes intercepted a letter to his comrades urging them to rescue him, the chief security officer Zavarzin\* had a ten-hour talk with him, promising liberty as a reward for acting as informer. Wolgemut agreed. Twenty-seven people have been arrested in connection with the case, among them seventeen-year-old boys and girls. I see Wolgemut during exercise, he looks the picture of abject misery and, as far as I have been able to observe, never talks with anyone, nor does he tap any messages.

What is the way out of the present hellish life with its wolfish exploitation, oppression and violence? The outlet lies in an idea of life based on harmony, a full life, embracing society as a whole, all humanity; in the idea of socialism, in the idea of solidarity of the working people. This idea is now nearing realization, the people are ready to accept it with open hearts. The time is now ripe for this. The ranks of the advocates of this idea should be united, the banner unfurled, so that the people can see it and follow it. And in our times this is the task of tasks for the Social-Democrats, for the handful still at large.

Socialism should cease to be merely a scientific preview of the future; it should be the torch kindling in the hearts of people indomitable faith and energy.

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\* Zavarzin—chief of the secret police in Warsaw.—*Ed.*

A small but ideologically strong handful of people, uniting the masses around their banner, can give them that which they lack, that which would enliven them, give them renewed hope, disperse the fearful atmosphere of unbelief and the thirst for revenge which boomerangs against the people.

No government of murderers can maintain order or divert life into the old channels. The blood of the guiltless people, the hunger and suffering of the masses, the tears of the children and the despair of the mothers—the sacrifices which the people must make in order to overcome the enemy and achieve victory—will not be in vain.

It is late. Here in this place I intend to maintain a regime that will enable me to conserve my strength. And I feel that I have the strength which, I think, will enable me to hold out and return. But even if I should not return, this diary will, perhaps, reach my friends and they will have at least a particle of "me" and they will know that I was calm and that I called to them in the moments of silence, in the moments of sad thoughts and gay and that I am as well as it is possible to be in this solitude, alone with thoughts of spring, nature and of friends—here where the silence is such that one can visualize the smiles of friends.

## **MAY 2**

Both yesterday and today I have experienced a strange unease, trembling and alarm.... Why, I don't know. Unable to concentrate, my thoughts fly in all directions, like leaves chased by the wind.

I had another visit from the colonel today. I trembled all over when I saw him, I felt as if a disgustingly slimy creature were creeping over my body. He politely informed me that my case had been transferred to the military court and that the indictment had already been

sent to me. He expressed regret that the case had been taken from the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice\* and assured me that the military court very often delivered juster verdicts and less severe sentences than the Court of Justice. He inquired if I had books, asked about the food and added that it would not be a bad idea to have a theatre in the prison. When I again asked him if he had ever had a conscience, he replied in a sympathetic and mournful voice saying that I wasn't quite myself.

Throughout this not very long conversation I had the feeling of a snake creeping over me, circling my body and clinging to me. I had no fear, I knew that I would come out of the trial all right. But I was physically repelled and felt that I wanted to vomit. I returned to my cell conscious that I no longer had the strength to maintain my usual peace of mind. I had the feeling that I was covered with dirt, human dirt. . . . Evil, like red-hot tongs, seizes and roasts the body of the living man and blinds him. It darkens the whole world, filling every particle, every breath and every atom with pain, excruciating pain. Andreyev\*\* has described war as being insane and monstrous; but life is a hundred times worse; and not only the life here in the dungeons, but life generally.

Prisoners are put in irons every day. When I was taken to my cell—the same cell in which I was placed seven years ago—the first sound I heard was the jangling of the chains. It accompanies every movement of the man in fetters. The cold, heartless iron on the human body. These irons—eternally greedy for heat and never

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\* Court of Justice in pre-revolutionary Russia was a collegiate court which tried civil and criminal cases. It was the second link of the general system of justice. The supreme court was the Senate (Supreme Court of Appeal).—*Ed.*

\*\* Leonid Andreyev, Russian writer and playwright (1871-1919), who described the horrors of war in a story written in 1904.—*Ed.*

knowing it—are always associated with prison. Most of the prisoners in my corridor are now in shackles—seven out of thirteen. When they are taken out for exercise the silence which enshrouds the prison is broken by the monotonous jangling which penetrates the depths of the soul and becomes overriding. And the prisoners move, gazing at the blue of the sky, at the trees now budding into leaf, without seeing the beauty or hearing the hymn of life, without feeling the warmth of the sun. They are shackled for the purpose of depriving them of everything, leaving only this funeral knell. There isn't the slightest danger of anyone breaking out of this place; no one has ever escaped or been rescued from these walls; each prisoner is watched by a soldier armed with a rifle, by a gendarme; everywhere there are gendarmes, soldiers, iron bars and walls. The prisoners are put in irons for the sake of revenge, for the sake of blood and the desire to please those at the top who know what they want but who get others to do the shackling for them, just as they get others to act the role of executioners. The role of executioner devolves on these soldiers and gendarmes—the people for whom the shackled have committed their “crimes.” The gendarmes have not volunteered for the service, they are “pressed” men, levies. So that those who do the shackling have no idea of what they are doing. They are used to it and have no understanding of what they deprive the prisoner; the conditions of their own lives blind them to the beauty of the world.

Today I saw a young fellow taken away from the blacksmith's shop after being put in irons. It was obvious from his face that everything had congealed within him; he tried to smile but the smile merely contorted his face. Bowed, he held the chain in his hands to keep it from trailing along the ground, and with superhuman strength followed, almost running, behind the hurrying



gendarme who, apparently, had to put several more in irons. The gendarme, aware of the prisoner's suffering, stopped for a moment and, smiling, said, "Oh, I forgot to give you the strap (with which to hold the irons)."

#### MAY 7

I had a visit from my lawyer today. I have now spent three weeks in strict solitary confinement. The effects are already making themselves felt. I couldn't speak freely, though no one was present during our talk; I had forgotten such a simple word as, for example, "notebook," my voice trembled, and I felt a shudder run down my body. My thoughts were in a muddle, but I felt quite calm. This had nothing to do with nerves. I am segregated and the sudden break with the solitude knocked me off my balance, so much so that in the matter of a few minutes I was unable to right myself and regain balance.

The lawyer looked at me and said, "Your nerves are on edge." I returned to the cell angry with myself; I had not said all that I had wanted to say and, in general, spoke as one does in sleep.

And so I shall be tried by the Court of Justice. How is one to understand them? Possibly Ivanenko wanted to frighten me or to see how I reacted to the news. Or it may be, and this is much more likely, that he spoke the truth when he said that a decision had been taken but that the case had not yet reached the Court of Justice. It may be that there will be two investigations—one in the Court of Justice, the other in the military court. But that doesn't matter very much. Still I must be prepared for a sentence of several years and learn to be patient.

I read from morning till night, burying myself in literature. And after days of this I go about feeling as though I had seen in my sleep different eras, people,

nature, princes and paupers, the pinnacles of fame and the depths of infamy. And I have difficulty in tearing myself away from my books to eat the prison fare; I swallow what there is and return to my reading to follow the events and the destiny of the characters—follow them every bit as avidly as only recently I plunged into the whirlpool of my own little world of trifling things, fired by a noble idea and filled with enthusiasm. And only for a time is this sleep interrupted and replaced by the nightmarish reality.

A moment ago a woman in a nearby cell fought with a gendarme. She shrieked hysterically, screaming for help as if she were about to be murdered. For a long time, a terribly long time, her screaming resounded throughout the building. The inmates of some of the cells began to bang on their doors. The gendarme in our corridor in a frightened and pleading voice wailed, "Please, don't bang on the doors, I haven't sworn at anyone, I haven't offended anybody." When one of the prisoners requested him to summon the Governor, declaring that he would complain about the beating up of a prisoner, the gendarme meekly replied, "All right, complain." The soldier on sentry duty outside threateningly ordered the banging on the cell doors to stop and called loudly for the corporal of the guard. My neighbour, a seventeen-year-old student, who is charged with having taken part in an armed attack on a post-office near Sokolów, plus another four offences, tapped on my wall, asking, "What is this? A demonstration?" The man in the cell above also tapped out: "What are these savages doing?"

Things settled down in a little while, the deathly silence returned, to be broken only by the distant whistling of the locomotives.

At night, lying awake in the silence, the mind registers every movement and the slightest sound indi-

cates their place of origin—beyond the paling there the prisoners are being taken to be shackled. At such moments I get up, and the more attentively I listen, the more distinctly I hear, despite the care and secrecy, the sounds of sawing and hammering. It dawns on me that they are erecting a gallows, of this there is no longer any doubt. I return to my pallet and cover my head with the blanket. But there is no relief. I have the firm conviction that somebody will be hanged today. The victim knows about it. They fall upon him in his cell, bind him and gag him to smother his cries. Maybe he has not offered any resistance, has allowed himself to be bound and dressed in the death shirt. And they take him away and watch how the hangman seizes him, watch his death agony and, with cynical words, throw him into the grave as if he were carrion.

Is it possible that these same gendarmes who keep watch over us, that this chief warder always kind and with languorous eyes, or the obliging Governor who whenever he approaches me always doffs his hat, is it possible that these people whom I see, can be present at this spectacle and take part in it? They are used to it. But how does the man feel who is being led to the gallows? His whole being revolts. Is there to be no salvation? To be deprived of life in a moment, to cease to exist, to walk to one's death, to see with one's eyes all the preparations and to feel the clammy touch of the hangman. The feeling of revolt is parried by the cold, inexorable necessity and cannot become reconciled to it, cannot come to terms with it. In the end the doomed man walks calmly to his death, to get it over, to end his torment.

I came upon a few words written on the wall of the cell by a previous inmate: "I, Josef Kunicki, arrested together with my wife on June 6, 1907, while walking in the street in Vilno, was sentenced to death in Suwałki

by the military court for killing an informer and belonging to the military organization of the Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party. On February 19, 1908, I was taken to Warsaw for execution. I am writing this on March 3, 1908." Nearly three months lay between the sentence and the day on which the foregoing words were written. And in all probability he spent the whole of the time alone, tormented by his longing for life.

Not far away from me the young fellow of whom I have already written tapped out a message saying he wasn't a coward, but that he didn't want to die for money. From his messages I can appreciate what is taking place in his mind. It is quite possible that he will be discharged.

All the prisoners in my vicinity are victims of informers. Four of those who took part in the attempt on Skalon\* turned traitors; the man who killed the cavalry captain in Radom turned traitor and then disappeared. Sokołów and Włocławek are traitors.

I have been told that one of the prominent leaders of the PSP turned traitor and betrayed large numbers of people in Warsaw, Sosnowiec, Lublin and other places.

#### **MAY 9**

Reading makes the time pass surprisingly quickly; it is already late but I have no desire to go to sleep and keep putting it off. I hardly realize that my cell door is locked and I am oblivious to the terrors that surround me. I give no thought to the future nor to what is taking place beyond these walls. The onset of spring has not greatly affected me. I see it unfolding, the trees becoming green, the grass growing, and I breathe the balmy air. Today I heard the first thunder and now I see beyond the window the gentle spring showers and hear

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\* Skalon—Governor-General of Warsaw.—*Ed.*

the patter of the raindrops. I am weary. . . . At the moment I have no desire to get caught up in the whirl of things, and I am satisfied and derive calm from my reflections on life, either mentally or by reading about the days of long ago. . . . I am no longer aglow, but deep down in me there is being accumulated that which will burst into flame when the moment comes. And who can say when it will come? Today, tomorrow, or perhaps a year from now. Will the flame be kindled and envelop me while still fretting here or will it find me already in action as a builder of life?

Let my will be dormant for the present and let warmer feelings repose until I succeed in breaking out of this sensation of death.

The indictment was handed to me yesterday. One of the members of the Court of Justice kindly explained that three days would be allowed for me to name witnesses, that the case would not be heard before August in the Court of Justice and that Senate—or did he say Minister of Justice?—instructions to transfer cases such as mine to the military court were not yet applicable to my case and that my trial could not be held before August since trips had to be made to Siedlce, Radom and other places, after which there would be a recess. For these reasons it has been found necessary to postpone the trial until autumn. He added that the Court of Justice had decreed that I, together with the comrades granted bail, be held in detention. This means that one of us will have waited twenty-three months and two others twenty months before being brought to trial.

In my case the indictment offers no proof whatever of my guilt, and if the matter had depended not on the arbitrary action and prejudice of the judge, but on juridical proof, I would now be free. In passing let me say that I have no hope at all of being released. In all likelihood they will frame another charge against me in

the military court, and if for some reason or other they are not doing so now, it will be done in the event of the Court of Justice acquitting me. The documents found on me, although they cannot be regarded as proof of my Party membership, will be used as a pretext for a charge.

#### MAY 10

For the past two days the cell next door has been occupied by an eighteen-year-old girl who was arrested four months ago. She sings, and her singing is not prohibited. It was she who clashed with the gendarme. After the scene she was taken to this cell. She is young, almost child-like. The loneliness is driving her crazy. She taps out messages to me, asking me to send her a rope so that she can hang herself. The rope, she insists, must be made of sugar so that her death should be a sweet one. She is so impatient and so nervous when tapping that it is almost impossible to make out her messages. And yet she keeps on knocking, unable, evidently, to adapt herself to prison life. Only a little while ago she tapped out: "What should I do to banish my sadness. Please advise me."

Every day there are conflicts between her and the gendarmes. As lively as a child, she simply cannot stand the regime. As I write these lines she is again at loggerheads with the guards. She stopped singing, called for the warder and went to the toilet. On the way she knocked at the door of my cell and upon returning she coughed and stopped outside her cell, requesting the gendarme to open the door for her, pleading a sore hand (rumour has it that during a scene, when she struck a gendarme with a jug, the latter brought his sabre down on her hand). The rules and custom of this place lay down that the prisoner, not the gendarme, should open the door. The reason for this is the fear that the prisoner might attack the gendarme while he is unlocking the

door: the supposition is that every prisoner is a blood-thirsty murderer, and for this reason the gendarmewarder is never allowed to enter the cell. The gendarme, in keeping with the rules, insisted on her opening the door. "But my hand is painning me," she said, "I cannot open the door and I won't open it. I shall stay here." The gendarme threatened to summon the Governor, saying that matters would be worse for her.

"What do I care," she retorted. And when the gendarme, hesitating to take brutal measures and with the intention of frightening her, went over to the bell, she turned to the door of the cell opposite which contains a young army officer and another prisoner and began to talk with them. The infuriated gendarme noisily opened the door and shouted, "Come along now, I've opened it for you." For a long time afterwards he kept muttering, "Swine." I rushed to the door, began to bang on it and shouted, "Hi, gendarme." He came only after I had shouted for the third time. All my pent-up anger broke loose. At first he tried to tell me that it was none of my business, but when I said that I had heard him use the word "swine," he began to justify himself, saying he would have opened the door but she always made scenes, that whenever anyone stooped to unlock the door she always slapped his face.

This girl—she is half child, half mad—will cause a lot of trouble one of these days. This time she upset everybody with her weeping and the quarrel with the gendarme. When she visits the toilet she rushes to the window and shouts to the comrades on exercise, and when the gendarme remonstrates she makes a fuss.

While on exercise on May 1st she shouted, "Long live the Revolution" and other slogans, and began to sing the *Red Flag*. This upset the other prisoners who deliberated whether to join with her in the singing and slo-

gan shouting. No one wanted to act the coward, but not everyone can pluck up the courage to sing in public. In any case a demonstration, an aimless venture, could not evoke a response. Silence reigned in the prison.

Later, someone on the floor above tapped out the message: "This evening we shall demonstrate by singing." But the tapping was done with extra caution and ceased at times for fear the gendarme should hear it. The singing did not take place.

Sometimes the girl makes us angry. Her laughter, singing and the clashes with the gendarmes bring into our life something strange and alien and, withal something precious and desirable, but not in this place. What does she want, why does she go out of her way to make trouble? One's first reaction is to be angry with her. But then you begin to think about her plight: "Is it her fault that she, a mere child, finds herself behind bars when she should still be under her mother's care, when she should be enjoying herself with playmates, like all children?" Maybe she has lost her mother and has had to fight for a crust of bread? After all, she is a working-class girl. The monstrous system has forced her to take an active part in the Revolution. And they are now taking revenge on her. How many there are like her, doomed from childhood to a miserable, inhuman existence! How many there are whose feelings are distorted, who are doomed never, not even in their sleep, to see real happiness or experience the joy of living? And it is in the nature of man to feel and experience happiness! A handful of people have deprived millions of this and, by doing so, have corrupted and twisted their own nature; all that remains is "madness and horror," "horror and madness," or luxury and pleasure, for which they have recourse to alcohol, power and religious mysticism.

Life wouldn't be worth living were it not for the light shown to humanity by the star of socialism, the star of



the future. Because the "ego" cannot live in isolation from the rest of the world and from people. Such is the "ego."

### MAY 13

We had a thunder-storm an hour ago. Everything shook from the thunder, including our wretched building. The lightning flashes illumined the gloom and their rosy reflections penetrated my cell; it rained cats and dogs, the howling wind bent the tree beyond the window and hurled itself against the wall. Calm has set in, a pale moon, indifferent to all the pother, looks down, the measured tread of gendarme or sentry is no longer heard, there is no singing or clanging of chains. Nothing save the dripping of raindrops on the window-sill and the faint whistle of a distant locomotive. Sadness takes hold of one. But this is not the melancholy of the prisoner. I have experienced the gradual onset of the same feeling while at liberty—the sadness of life, the longing for something indefinable and yet as essential to life as air, as love.

Two prisoners were put in irons today. They were taken past our windows from the blacksmith's shop. Hanka, my neighbour, hailed each of them with the cry: "Long live the Revolution." They, encouraged, responded with the same slogan. I think they received the death sentence today. On my way to exercise I noticed a bustle in one of the corridors—the corridor of the doomed. I have often walked through this corridor when being taken to the Governor's office and, although totally ignorant of its purpose, I have, nevertheless, detected the whiff of death. There is nothing dark or gloomy about it—it has three large windows. It contains six cells, from No. 45 to No. 50; the doors of these cells are not unlike our own—yellow, with blotches of rust; still, they are different. On one of the doors I noticed a

completely rusty padlock, a big hole in another—an unmistakable sign that a mortal struggle had taken place with a prisoner who had resisted to the last.

Two days ago, I was told, my neighbour received a visit from the Governor-General, the captain of the secret police and the chief of the gendarmerie; they intimidated her, saying that the gallows awaited her and her brother, but she could save herself by turning informer and betraying her friends and their arsenal. She, they said, had been betrayed by others, she could cheat the gallows only by following suit.

The other day I read on one of the walls: "Teodor Jabłónski, sentenced to death. Cell No. 48 (the death cell). The prison doctor has just been. The execution takes place today. Good-bye to life! Comrades, farewell! Long live the Revolution!" Alongside was another message: "The death sentence has been commuted to ten years penal servitude. He now faces another charge—that of killing an informer in Płock Prison. 13/5/08."

#### MAY 14

The death cells are never empty. A few minutes ago while on exercise I caught a glimpse of a man at the window of No. 50. He was a young man, pale, with the appearance of a worker. The ventilation pane in the window was closed. He came to the window at intervals, pressing his face against the frosted glass of the lower part. Only the upper panes afford a glimpse of the sky through the netted wire which is so dense that there is hardly room for a matchstick. In order to look into the yard the prisoner must stand on the table or on the rail of his iron bedstead. But since the gendarme patrolling the corridor frequently looks through the peephole, the prisoner cannot remain at the window for more than a moment. No. 50 is a "solitary" cell. It is completely isolated, and its inmate is deprived of the comfort of

even tapping a message to a neighbour. There is nothing to take his eye, nothing to soothe his frayed nerves; the cold stone floor is filthy, the door is filthy, the window-frame and table are a garish yellow, the dark, dust-covered walls are mottled with blue and white stains, the ceiling resembles a coffin lid, there is the treacherous peephole in the door, and the ghastly, pale daylight. And on the other side of the door the hushed tread of the gendarme who every now and then raises the flap of the peephole to make sure that the victim has not cheated the hangman.

#### **MAY 14, EVENING**

Today my neighbour Hanka tapped out this message: "They put me in a cell with another woman named Ovcharek. We were together for a fortnight. Ovcharek told me that she had had a visit from her lawyer. I, in confidence, gave Ovcharek my mother's address and asked her to tell the lawyer to call on my mother and suggest that she should go away. Ovcharek agreed to do so. She was then summoned to the office where she met an agent of the secret police and told everything. She returned from the office with a parcel for me. It contained all kinds of delicacies, including caviare. She said it had been sent to me by the Party. I was in pain at the time, caused by the beating up. You can imagine how I felt. My mother was ill in bed, recovering from an operation undergone three weeks earlier. Suddenly the police arrived and, telling her what I had said to Ovcharek, ordered her to accompany them. She was taken to security headquarters and thence to the Pawiak.\* The shock was such that she died there within three weeks. My father, too, is in gaol. Two months ago

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\* The Pawiak was a preliminary investigation prison in Warsaw.—*Ed.*

he was sentenced to twenty years penal servitude. My brother and I are held in custody. So the whole family is now in gaol. I now have another prisoner—S.—for company. When they brought her to my cell she, Judas like, kissed me and said, 'Thanks, officer, for putting me in a cell with a friend.' Yet this was the one and only time I had ever seen her. I made a scene and insisted that she be taken away. Yesterday one of the secret police came to my cell and said that this S. had sworn that I was the main supplier of arms purchased abroad, that I was the leader of an armed group in Warsaw, that my brother was also a member of the group in which he was known as 'Iskorka.' She told them the most fantastic things about me."

There are many women prisoners here. I see them at exercise and their voices come to me from the corridors. They quarrel with the gendarmes, and laugh and talk loudly. Their conditions are worse than ours, though it seems the gendarmes act with more restraint and don't interfere when they close the peephole. But it would be wrong to attribute their restraint to kindness. The simple explanation is that they want to avoid trouble. Evidently they are anxious not to upset the women, since this might bring the male prisoners to their aid; nor do they concentrate them in particular corridors, because one female prisoner causing a scene would give them more trouble than all the males. And if this were to happen the gaolers could be unable to cope with them.

Of the nine women who take their exercise in the part of the yard facing my window only three behave normally. Two girls, both of them Poles, walk hand in hand during exercise. The third, also young, a Jewess, is serious and calm. The others break into unnatural laughter, are noisy, and talk with Hanka, who simply cannot become reconciled to the regime. Her unruliness

was the cause of another unpleasant scene today. Hanka climbed on to her table, began to talk, or, to be more precise, to shout at two women in the exercise yard. They responded and began to talk with her. The gaoler warned them a couple of times to stop talking, but they paid no heed to him. In a rage he rushed to Hanka's window, opened it and began to swear at her. But his efforts were of no avail—the women completely ignored him. Shortly afterwards I tapped a message to Hanka saying that I was cross with her because she had allowed herself to be humiliated for nothing at all. She promised that she wouldn't let it happen again, but within an hour she had forgotten all about her promise. This is understandable, for she is still a child and cannot live cooped up in a cell, without any impressions whatever, when even older people who have had more than one experience of solitary confinement sometimes lose their equanimity.

Either last night or early this morning another big contingent of prisoners arrived. I saw them at exercise—two lines of ten, then of seven and finally of six. Presumably the military court was trying their case. Some of them were in irons, ragged and badly clothed, with a fur hat showing here and there. They walked in groups, talking quietly; some, gloomy and downcast, walked singly. They are factory workers, railwaymen, a soldier and, it seems, peasants, while some of them, judging by their faces, are either workers or intellectuals. The distance and the netted wire make it hard to decide. Hanka thinks they are bandits, but I think they belong to the "factionalists"\* and that they are innocent; and if they really are bandits they must have belonged to the Party at one time. Where will the gaolers put them?

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\* "Factionalists"—members of the Right-wing nationalist Polish Socialist Party—the so-called Revolutionary Faction of the PSP who believed in individual terror.—*Ed.*



F. E. Dzerzhinsky. 1896



F. E. Dzerzhinsky in Kovno Prison. 1898

There are no large cells in this prison. Maybe they will put them in dozens in the death cells where there is accommodation only for two. At any rate they have taken them along the death-cell corridor.

#### M A Y 16

Spring is now at its height. The fruit trees are a riot of leaves and blossom. The days are becoming longer, the breath of summer is in the air, the yard is becoming warmer and the cells stuffier and stuffier.

Hanka is suffering terribly; she no longer sings and she has become docile. She has learned that her brother was sentenced to death yesterday. In the evening she tapped to me: "Maybe they will hang him today, but I do not know whether or not they will let me take farewell of him. I shall be left all alone. Perhaps they will carry out their threat and hang me too. He is so young, only twenty-one." What could I say to her? I tapped back, saying she was an unfortunate child, that I shared her sorrow, and that we must bear up. She replied saying that she felt life was no longer worth living. When death—remorseless death—takes away one of our dear ones it is impossible to get rid of this thought, to get away from it, to forget; it returns again and again, and you stand on the brink of something dreadful, powerless, helpless and deprived of reason.

For the past week or ten days the cell above mine has had another occupant, who it is I don't know. He doesn't tap, nor does he answer my messages. Soon, I don't know why, but I began to have the impression that it was W.,\* and day by day the conviction grew on me. I tapped out his name, but failed to elicit a response.

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\* Dzerzhinsky had in mind the worker Warden, member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania who was subsequently sentenced to six years penal servitude and who died in prison.—*Ed.*



I hit the ceiling with my boot, but this, too, had no effect. Whoever it was he hardly moved. For days I did no reading, watching all the time at the window to see if he would appear at exercise. But he never left his cell, and I was unable to see and make sure that it was he. Something took place in his cell today. He knocked on the door. After that I heard the familiar scraping of the key being turned in the lock and the bolt being drawn.

After a brief silence I again heard the sound of the key, this time locking the door. The knocking began again, rhythmically and calmly, with short intervals. The door opened and closed twice, followed by more knocking, at first with hands, afterwards with feet and even with a mug. This went on for the best part of an hour. What took place I never knew, nor do I know now. Somebody twice entered his cell after this, and that was the end of the noise. Everything above me quietened down, silence reigned, just as if no one had ever been there.

Such is the daily round. Only at intervals does one of the cells become animated, and when this happens all the inmates of the silent cells rush to the doors, anticipating an outbreak and wondering whether they too should join in breaking the silence. For a long time afterwards they find it difficult to settle down, to return to the dead letters of their books. At such moments each is conscious of where he is and what he is. The supposition that W. occupied the cell above me was, I think, the manifestation of the unhealthy imagination which is inseparable from prison life.

#### **MAY 21**

In the evening while reading by lamplight I heard the heavy tread of a soldier. He came up to my window and pressed his face against the glass. He did so quite boldly, either from curiosity or interest.

"Hello, brother," I said in a friendly tone, "you can't see anything."

He showed no sign of wanting to go away.

"Yes," I heard him say. He inhaled a deep breath and a moment later asked, "Are you lonely? They have locked you up (a string of oaths followed) and keep you here!" Steps were heard in the yard and the soldier went away.

These coarse but sympathetic words evoked in me a wave of feeling and thought. In this accursed building to hear from the lips of those the very sight of whom makes one angry, nervous and evokes hatred, words bringing to mind the noble idea, testifying to its vitality in our prison surroundings and to the contact which we, the prisoners, maintain with those who at the present time are forced to kill us! What immense work has already been done by the Revolution! It has spread everywhere, awakening minds and hearts, firing them with hope and pointing to the goal. None can get away from this! And should we at present, seeing the spread of evil and how cynically, for the sake of paltry gain, people kill one another, fall into despair, this would be a terrible mistake. In such cases we do not see beyond our nose, remain oblivious to the process of raising the dead. The war with Japan revealed the degree of disorganization and collapse in the Russian army, while the Revolution merely laid bare the evil that is corroding society. But this evil has to be exposed in order to exorcise it. And so it will be! But in order to accelerate this, it is necessary to instil in the masses the conviction of its inevitable bankruptcy, so that they should not have the slightest doubt about their ability to do the job in serried ranks, fully prepared for the struggle. This is the job of the theoreticians, while the job of the others is to lay bare and uncover this evil, expose the suffering and torment of the masses and of

the individual revolutionaries torn from our ranks by the enemy, and impart to them that significance which is really theirs and which gives them the heart to emerge from the ordeal with flying colours. Only in this way can we inspire in the masses the courage and moral consciousness of the necessity of struggle. We need both those who influence the mind and those who instil in the soul and in the heart confidence in victory. We need scholars and poets, teachers and agitators. I recall the tremendous influence exerted by the book *From the Battlefield*, published by the *Proletariat\* Party*, which describes the suffering endured by the people and their staunchness and courage. I would dearly like to see more books of this nature. True, it is more difficult now to compile and compare the facts, because they are much more significant and numerous. But our forces are greater now. If somebody would undertake to do this work, or even to guide it, we could have such a book in the space of a year or two. It would reflect not only our torments and our teaching, but also that longing for the really full life for which man is ready to fight regardless of the suffering and the cost.

The brief words spoken by the soldier set me thinking. We have many of these soldier-guards and gendarme-warders.\*\* But we are deprived of the opportunity of getting to their hearts and minds. Conversation with them is forbidden. And in any case on what footing to talk with them! We meet the gendarmes as enemies and

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\* *Proletariat*—the first revolutionary workers' party in Poland, formed in the first half of the 'eighties of the last century—*Ed.*

\*\* Among the gendarme-warders were privates drawn from the peasantry. These were conscripts who, having no choice in the matter, were directed to the gendarmerie. Dzerzhinsky succeeded in establishing good relations with some of them; it was these who smuggled out part of this diary and delivered it to the required address.—*Ed.*

we only see the soldiers. In the corridor the three gendarmes are relieved every four hours. Each returns to the same corridor once in ten or fifteen days. This makes it difficult to know if any of them is friendly and approachable. Moreover, they are kept busy—they escort us singly to the lavatory, to the exercise ground, to the office, unlock the cell when the soldier-orderly fetches meals, sweeps the cell and takes away the reading lamps. The gendarmes who escort us to exercise are then sent to other work. The result is that they are often vulgar and bad tempered, regard us as enemies, try to shorten the exercise time and return us to our cells. I should say though that those who on their own initiative herd us back to our cells are few. They often look at us through the peepholes, make us wait a long time before they unlock the door when we knock. Some of them are just tired; one feels that they are in terror of their superiors, and discipline is rigid. I have known instances when some of them even sympathized with us. Once when I asked one of them to change books for me he immediately turned to a fellow gendarme who happened to be passing along the corridor and said, "Be sure you tell them in the office." On another occasion while on exercise I had the feeling that the gendarme was about to cut short my walk and take me back to the cell; when I drew his attention to the fact that there was still a minute to go (there was a clock in a glass case on the wall), he was most indignant that I should suspect him of wanting to cut a minute off the walk. He said as much in such a friendly tone that, in confusion, I replied:

"Your people do all kinds of things."

In this "House of the Dead" it is exceedingly difficult to engage in conversation with a gendarme. It is characteristic in the highest degree that whenever prisoners meet accidentally they are unable to speak with one

another. On one occasion the gendarme forgot that the lavatory was engaged and brought along another prisoner. When the latter saw this he immediately turned about and went back to his cell. This prisoner occupied the cell opposite mine and I heard him say to the gendarme, "There was somebody in there, why did you take me?" On another occasion, upon meeting an imprisoned army officer, I shouted, "Hello, comrade!" but he, taken aback by the unexpected salute, could only gaze at me in astonishment.

One loses the ability to engage in conversation in this place. In the corridors the gendarmes talk with one another and with the orderlies exclusively in whispers. When a gendarme comes to somebody's cell with one of his superiors, he closes the door so that the other prisoners should not hear the conversation and the voices. The gendarmes are forbidden to enter into conversation with the prisoners or to go into their cells; the soldiers who act as orderlies are closely watched by the gendarme-warders to make sure that no words are exchanged with the prisoners. If I need something from the orderly I must make the request not to him directly but through the gendarme. There is a mat in the corridor for the purpose of deadening footsteps. Sometimes the only sound penetrating the cell is the whispering of the warders and the scraping of the keys in the locks.

The slightest sound from without, coming through the window, merely intensifies the mysterious graveyard silence. This silence presses on everyone and affects all of us, both prisoners and gaolers. On one occasion I told the gendarme that he should not waken me for exercise as he had done this morning, adding that if he did I would make a scene. I was quite calm, but even during this brief exchange of words I felt myself trembling. I noticed that the gaoler, too, could not explain

himself freely. And when one of us, taking a grip of himself, manages to blurt out a few words to the gendarme, or sings or laughs, it seems as if we have seen a ray of light. And the gendarmes feel this too.

In speaking about this sepulchral silence I should point out that we no longer have any prisoners in irons in my corridor, and in my part of the yard only one man in chains takes his exercise (some of those brought in irons from the provinces have had the chains removed, the remainder have been transferred). Thanks to the absence of the clanging of the fetters the silence is no longer so painful to the brain, but it still acts strongly on the spirit.

Only echoes of life penetrate to us from the outside; the day is full of noise in which it is difficult to distinguish the separate sounds—this is the breath of life—sunshine, rain, the sounds of the town, of the cabs and marching soldiers. In this noise of life there are brought to us at times the merry voices of children, the loud laughter, the joking and swearing of gendarmes and soldiers; we hear military music, the singing of soldiers and, occasionally, the monotonous sound of an accordion. At weekends we hear raucous singing to the accompaniment of the accordion. At night-time we hear the whistle of locomotives and the rumble of trains. And when the gentle breeze rustles the leaves, the impression is of the soft whisper of the forest or the gurgling of a stream. Alas, the sounds but intensify the internal silence and frequently evoke anger and even frenzy, the constant remembrance that you are not dead, that they penetrate the bars and windows through which the living, outside world is seen only in the shape of a blur. Yet if these sound impressions were completely absent, things would, of course, be much worse.

**M A Y 22**

Today in the upper corridor but not directly above me there was another scene. This time one of the prisoners didn't merely knock, he banged on the door with his stool, shouting, "You cannot do this!" I don't know what took place. The noise continued for ten minutes and was followed by deadly silence.

**M A Y 23**

Today for the first time I have had a visit. My brother's wife and little Wanda\* came to see me. The girl played with the netted wire,\*\* showed me her doll and said, "Come here, Uncle." I am very glad that I have seen them. I am very fond of them. They brought me flowers which now stand on my table. My sister-in-law was delighted to find me looking so well and I assured her that I was in good fettle and happy. I told her that in all probability I would be sentenced to penal servitude.

I paid two visits to the office today (saw my visitors and my lawyer) and each time I passed the corridor with the death cells. Apparently two of them were occupied; I saw the orderly pass along with two dinners. I am sure that the prisoners there have been sentenced to death because in addition to the gendarme a soldier with a rifle was on duty.

From the outside world people dear to me send me greetings and despite the oppressive life are boldly marching forward performing their duty. I can see them. And they are many. Some are placed as I am, some are

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\* Dzerzhinsky's niece.—*Ed.*

\*\* The visit took place in the presence of the captain of the gendarmes. Visitors were separated from the prisoner by two rows of wire netting separated by a considerable distance.—*Ed.*

still active, while others are far away,\* but in mind, heart and in deeds they are here. I see, moreover, those who are dear to the heart, those who radiate happiness, filling life with energy and staunchness.

Today my neighbour Hanka is quiet and sad; I managed to get a white flower (narcissus) smuggled to her; she tapped out a message saying that she loved me and hoped that I would not be cross with her for using this word. I realize how difficult it must be for her, deprived of the company of people, of liberty and flowers; how she would like to cling to somebody, to hear a tender voice and not to be so terribly alone. "Now I am absolutely alone in the world," she tapped to me. I am attached to this child and I feel for her as if she were my own.

#### MAY 28

For a week past Hanka has been spitting blood. Today she was visited by the doctor who found her in a bad state and suggested that she be transferred to the hospital. But she refused to go. When I argued with her, saying that she should go, that it would be better for her there, she replied that she would be completely alone and that when she recovered her cell would be occupied and for this reason she had no desire to go to the hospital. So she remained.

Hanka has been very weak all day. From time to time she tapped lightly on the wall to reassure herself that I was near; when I responded she tapped out: "I love you very much." What a dear child. Separated from you by the dead wall I am conscious of each of your movements, of every step and every beat of your pulse. Surely this girl is not fated to die all alone, without anyone to tend her, to smile at her? I haven't the courage to

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\* Evidently in exile.—*Ed.*



convince her to go to the hospital where she would not have anyone near her. Maybe she will not die, maybe the bleeding will stop, she is so young and strong and full of life. Here everyone loves her. Passing her cell they say, "Hello, Hanka," or "Good-night, Hanka." The gendarmes do not shout at her; some of them even do things for her. Not long ago one of them chatted with her and said that he was sorry that she was so lonely. A few days ago when they wanted to take her to a bigger cell and put another woman prisoner with her she refused to go.

In this corridor only two of our cells neighbour each other and the same is the case on the floor above. The upper cells are occupied but no messages are tapped. There are two people in the cell above Hanka, and they, as if for spite, kept running about all day in their heavy boots. She shouted to them that they shouldn't make a noise, that every step hurt her head, but they, apparently, did not hear her and continued to run. The soldier on sentry duty was cross with her for shouting and asked the gendarme the reason why. Hanka burst into tears, feeling herself utterly helpless. Only towards evening did the occupants of the cell above stop their running. Evidently the warder told them not to do so.

Hanka has been singing a revolutionary song; she herself thought out the tune which was sad, quiet and complaining. But after singing for a little while she began to cough. The blood, evidently, began to flow in her throat again.

#### **M A Y 31**

Yesterday and today, it seems, they tried the people charged with the attack on the post-office near Sokółów. Fifteen men and one woman were sentenced to death, two women to fifteen years penal servitude, while two others were found not guilty.

Hanka received her indictment yesterday. She is charged on eight counts, with leadership of an armed unit, with the attack at Rogów, with an attempt on the life of Skalon, etc. They say that she is sure to be hanged. Skalon said that the death sentence would not be changed: "She has lived too long as it is."

The student from Siedlce who occupies the cell next to mine was sentenced with them, and so, too, was the traitor Wolgemut.

### **JUNE 3**

Another eight people were sentenced to death yesterday.

Today Hanka was summoned to the office whence she soon returned excited and gay. The Governor presented her with the choice: Either turn informer, in which case the sentence will be commuted to penal servitude for life, or be hanged. He told her that she was young and beautiful. She replied by laughing in his face and chose death.

Now she counts the days, calculating how long she has to live, sleeping as little as possible and often spends the night walking up and down her cell.

At other times, exhausted and reduced to despair, she cries out, "Why do they drink our blood all the time! I have consoled myself by thinking that all this will soon come to an end and yet they still continue to kill.... The young people no longer hasten to us." But such words are not heard from her very often. She is now singing again, making scenes with the gendarmes and shouting, "Even when I suffer torments I will try not to let them know. They will get no pleasure out of it."

At times one feels from her words that she drifts between the desire to live and the thought of inevitable death at their hands, that she is contemplating suicide, but that the ray of hope keeps her going. And when she

taps messages to me saying that she will not bow her head, that she will not tremble on the way to the gallows, I feel that she is speaking the truth, that this is the real Hanka. She longs to have at her side someone she holds dear, to see him, to feel his attachment, to speak freely with him, and then she curses the wall separating us. That is how we live alongside each other, almost as if we were near and dear friends in a strange fairy-tale. And I curse myself over and over again that it is not me that stands in the shadow of death.

#### **JUNE 4**

Yesterday they executed the people sentenced for the attack in the vicinity of Sokołów. The prisoner in the same cell as one of the sentenced men, paying no attention to the gendarme, shouted to Hanka while taking exercise, "They have hanged him!" Today during exercise we saw only one of the men who had been sentenced to death—the Siedlce student who previously occupied the cell next to mine. He told us that he had been brought back from the place of execution. Tomorrow fifty-one people will be tried in connection with the killing of a cavalry captain in Radom.

Hanka is not singing today: she rebukes herself saying that yesterday she was singing while people were being hanged. She asked me where the corridor with the death cells was located; the sooner she is there, she said, the better. On the way to the gallows she would sing the *Red Flag*.

The gendarmes in the yard outside our windows are very noisy in the evenings, talking, shouting, laughing and clapping their hands. Today in addition to the applause and the laughter there were cries of encore. Afterwards, when they left for the corridors to relieve the others, they peered through the peepholes to make sure that the prisoners were not tapping messages, and

every time a prisoner visited the lavatory they carefully searched it for letters. At night-time they take the doomed men to the place of execution.

A woman prisoner, I don't know who she is, is in the cell above mine.

## JUNE 5

Half an hour ago (it is now about 11 p.m.) two Radom men were brought from the court to our corridor. Both have been sentenced to death. When Hanka shouted to them from her cell, "We shall meet soon! Good-bye!" they replied, "We can take it, we are not downhearted!" The gendarme stopped them and whispered, "Enough, enough!" An hour ago one of the prisoners, a woman in the side corridor, swore at the gendarme and for about half an hour banged furiously on the door; the prisoner in the adjoining cell also banged with his fists. Then everything became quiet; what happened I don't know. Hanka acts strangely, is excited, cannot find any relaxation in reading and hopes only that the end will come as quickly as possible. Not that her spirit is broken. On the contrary, she thinks of how she will behave in the court so that her sentence should not be commuted. With the gendarmes she acts freely, haughtily, without paying the slightest attention to their cries of "Silence," "Move away from the window." "He who fights is bound to perish," she said to me. I, too, feel as calm as she does. He who lives must die, and he who is able so to love life is also able to die without poisoning his last moments with despair. If it were possible to find somebody who could describe all the horrors of this house of the dead—the struggle, the rise and fall of the spirits of those entombed here in order to be hanged, who could reproduce all that takes place in the mind of the imprisoned heroes and equally of the vile and usual types, in the mind of those sentenced to death—then the life

of this place and its inmates would be a mighty weapon and a torch in the struggle; for this reason it is necessary to collect and to give people not only a simple chronicle of the sentenced and the victims but to give a picture of their lives, of their spiritual state, their noble impulses and their baseness, their sorrow and their joy—notwithstanding the torment; to re-create the truth, the entire truth, infectious when it is splendid and powerful, and evoking scorn and disgust when, shattered, it stoops to vileness. This can be done only by someone who himself has suffered much and loved much. It is he alone who can disclose this pulsation and the struggle of the soul, not those who write obituaries.

#### **JUNE 6**

I had visitors today. They brought greetings from the outside world, wonderful flowers, fruit and chocolate. Stasia\* and Wanda came to see me. During the visit my mind was in a whirl—I couldn't take possession of myself nor concentrate. All I heard was the words: "How well you look," and I remember that I said, "It is terrible here." I also asked them to send me books and linen for which I have no use whatever. When I returned to my cell I felt very strange indeed—no pain, no sensation, only the irksome feeling that one has before vomiting. And the wonderful flowers seemed to speak to me. I felt this without understanding a word.

Then somebody was brought back from the court and from the corridor there came to me a quiet and firm voice saying, "The gallows," and the hoarse exclamation of the gendarme: "No talking." In the morning, during exercise, I saw soldiers removing bundles of straw from the death cells. Apparently so many were held for execu-

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\* Dzerzhinsky's sister-in-law.—*Ed.*

tion that there were not enough planks and pallets in the cells. They are now getting them ready for the eight Radom people sentenced yesterday.

Today Hanka has been docile and sad. I requested the chief warder, who is regarded as a good fellow, to take some flowers to her. But he refused.

The strange feeling which came over me after the visit has passed. Hanka drove it away. Somewhere on the floor above a newly-born infant is crying. The comrades in Hanka's corridor who are awaiting trial and execution, warmly declare their love for her. This makes her cross. She said that she did not know them sufficiently well for them to take the liberty of saying such things.

#### **JUNE 7**

Hanka had a visit from her lawyer today. Her case will be heard next Thursday. He told her that she could not hope to escape the gallows. She is nervous, longs for the day to come and finds it impossible to kill time. She has not sung at all today and is upset by the delay—another four days to wait. I managed to get the flowers to her after all, and she tapped to me that she would take them with her to the gallows.

The gendarmes were noisier than ever in the yard this evening. "How naive and stupid I am," Hanka tapped to me, "after all, this is their only recreation. But the laughter and the music irritate me so, and I think they do it deliberately in order to wear us out."

#### **JUNE 12**

All the Radom people have had the death sentences commuted to penal servitude. I have been assured that Hanka's sentence will also be commuted. A few days ago another woman prisoner was brought to her cell. Ever since laughter and singing have resounded in the

corridor. Hanka is angry with me for not tapping to her more frequently. The point is that I am beginning to dislike her. I admit that if I knew her better, if I didn't have the feeling that she was merely an "abstraction," she would certainly be aware of my coldness.

All this week, notwithstanding the visit and the books, I have had a strange feeling, as if death were near, that I had come to the end and that everything had been left behind....

#### **JUNE 28**

I haven't written anything for a long time. Hanka has been transferred to the cell opposite mine. On Thursday, the 18th, she was tried for the attempt on Skalon. For two days she was sure that she would be hanged. Her lawyer promised to visit her in the event of the death sentence being commuted, but he did not come. The sentence, however, has been commuted to penal servitude for life. A couple of days ago the lawyer informed her that Skalon had commuted the sentence merely because it was not convenient for him to send her to the gallows since the case concerned him personally, but that he would confirm the death sentence for another charge. Tomorrow they will hear the case of the bombing in Marki. In addition to this charge she has to face six more.

The cell next to mine is now occupied by a comrade from Kielce. He was tried on Thursday and his death sentence has now been commuted to fifteen years penal servitude; in a fortnight's time he is due to answer the charge of having taken part in the killing of two guards. Previously this cell had been occupied by a comrade from Lublin who was told that he had been recognized by the provocateur Tarantowicz. The latter testified against him, saying that he was responsible for the

death of a postman and five soldiers. It is certain that he will be sentenced to death. They say that this provocateur betrayed an entire branch of the Polish Socialist Party, that he is so busy denouncing people that the investigators have to queue to examine him. The Radom people, already tried on two charges, have twice been sentenced to death and each time the sentence has been commuted to penal servitude.

## **JULY 2**

They took Hanka away from us on June 29. I only managed to catch a fleeting glimpse of her through the ventilator window when she was taking exercise. Her trial took place on the 30th. Judging by the sign that she made to me in putting her hand to her neck she has received the death sentence. She was removed from our corridor, and a group of prisoners were given three days in the punishment cells for sending a sharply worded complaint to the Prosecutor denouncing the gendarmes for their attitude to the women prisoners, and demanding that the latter be transferred to the women's prison. Some of those who complained were taken to the punishment cells, others were placed in different cells so that they should no longer have any contact with one another.

The cell next to mine is now empty. The Kielce man has been taken to another cell. Although only twenty-one he faces seventeen charges. When they come to him to read the indictment he refuses to listen, saying that he has had enough and that he will find his way to the other world without having to listen to it. He regrets merely that he cannot live for another twenty years, and asks how many charges they would bring against him in the event of him living to forty. Another batch of prisoners in irons has arrived. I hear and see them only when they go out for exercise. Some are mere boys, beardless, pale



and hardly more than fifteen or sixteen years. One of them can hardly move. Evidently there is something wrong with his legs. At exercise he sits on a bench. Another does not hold the strap of his irons and they clang all the time. The others, on the contrary, walk proudly in their fetters, jangle them and step out boldly and erect.

I experienced a bit of amusement the other day: I was in the lavatory and the gendarme forgetting about this brought in a comrade from Radom. Both of us were astonished. He has already had three death sentences commuted to twenty years penal servitude, and awaits another two of fifteen years for taking part in digging a tunnel under the prison and for belonging to the Left Polish Socialist Party.\* These sentences have been imposed despite the fact that he had no part whatever in the killing of the gendarme captain and others. At the time these acts were committed he was no longer a member of the movement. Another prisoner, occupying the same cell and likewise sentenced to death, is a genuine Left and in principle is wholly opposed to individual terror. The gendarme realized that he had made a blunder but did not separate us and smiled as he brought me back to my cell.

Our corridor is now very depressed without Hanka, without her songs and her jokes, but we get to know

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\* Under the impact of the 1905 Revolution in Russia the Polish Socialist Party split in two at the end of 1906: the Left PSP and the Right, chauvinist, so-called revolutionary faction of the PSP (factionalists). The Left PSP, which never wholly rid itself of nationalism, was opposed to terrorist methods of struggle. In tactical questions it was close to the Russian Menshevik Liquidators. During the First World War, part of the Left adopted an internationalist standpoint and drew close to the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania; in December 1918 they merged. The united party became known as the Communist Party of Poland.--Ed.

about her from her singing which comes to us from the distance, faint, it is true, but still loud enough to be heard.

### **JULY 3**

Today after dinner they opened the window in my cell. I am now allowed to keep it open from 4 to 5 p.m. (during exercise the windows looking out on to the yard are closed). I can now see the leaves, quite a large segment of the sky and am able to breathe fresh air. I stood for a long time beside the window holding on to the bars. The fresh air intoxicated me, and what with recollection, yearning and the knowledge that I am deprived of freedom, I felt depressed. Here, in the heart of Warsaw they hold me in prison, in their fortress, whence their rule derives. A soldier who looks like a Kalmyk, armed with a rifle, keeps guard over me and watches me attentively. Away in the distance I can hear the whistle of a locomotive, the rumble of a train in which free people are travelling. They are many, very many, whereas here we are but a handful. And again my good spirits revive although alone in this cell and in this building I feel depressed.

### **JULY 6**

Hanka was removed today. When passing my cell she shouted, "Good-bye! They are taking me away for ever!" The gendarme rasped out: "Silence, no talking," and they proceeded on their way. Another three prisoners have arrived in my corridor including the Anarchist Vaterlos, who is kept in chains. Vaterlos has already been sentenced to fifteen years penal servitude and is still to be tried on another charge. A foreigner, judging by his name and pronunciation, he spent three days in the punishment cell for complaining to the Prosecutor. With him in his cell is a Jew from Ostrowiec. The charge

against the latter, I don't know his name, is that, during the arrest of workers, he threw a bomb into a factory. The cell next to mine is occupied by a woman. Who she is I don't know, she only arrived today and taps badly. Then there are the two from Radom, the army officer Belokopytov from Zambrów, young and rosy-cheeked like a girl, an artillery man arrested for not informing on his comrade who, allegedly, belonged to the All-Russian Officers Union. With him in the cell is a worker who has been imprisoned since November 1, 1907, charged with belonging to the military organization of the PSP (he has been denounced by a certain "Sztubak"). There are two workers concerning whom I know nothing at all, and lastly, the traitor Wolgemut, who, they say, has already sent thirty people to the gallows. In the cell with him is a Jew from Białystók who, apparently, is also a traitor, for, although repeatedly warned about Wolgemut, he remains with him in the same cell.

## **JULY 7**

This has been a gruesome day. In the morning in one of the branch corridors somebody banged on the cell door and shouted for the gendarme, but this did not last very long. Shortly afterwards Vaterlos began to bang on his door, calling for the Governor. He was told that the Governor would come shortly, but he failed to turn up. Vaterlos banged at intervals throughout the whole of the day. Finally, at 9 o'clock in the evening, he went out into the corridor and declared that he would remain there. The place was crowded with gendarmes and soldiers who threatened him and insisted that he return to the cell. But Vaterlos refused to budge. The matter ended in them picking him up and throwing him into the cell, whereupon he shouted, "Comrades!" All the prisoners began to bang on the doors. Only then

did the Governor appear. They spoke quietly, in German. All I could make out was that Vaterlos wanted them to remove his companion (before being taken to the punishment cell he had Dr. Sachs as cell-mate. Sachs, too, has had a taste of the punishment cell and is now in solitary confinement) and that they should punish the soldiers for their brutality. Vaterlos was taken immediately to another cell. During this incident the soldiers were running about beneath the cell windows threatening to kill Vaterlos. Afterwards, however, they themselves asked what had taken place and expressed sympathy with him. I myself heard one of the gendarmes inciting the soldiers against us, but they listened to him in silence. Hanka is still here—I saw her taking exercise.

According to the prison grapevine, my neighbour's father was hanged, her mother died in prison and a brother has been exiled. The Jew whom Vaterlos did not want in his cell received a three-year sentence yesterday; another man got eight years penal servitude, despite the fact that he is absolutely innocent.

Muszalski, one of the Radom prisoners, has been sent to the punishment cell for making a complaint. Instead of saying they were taking him there, he was told that he was being taken to the office. Vaterlos, who refused to go to the punishment cell voluntarily and lay on his bed, was carried there on his mattress.

## **JULY 9**

Two of the Radom prisoners (Muszalski and Garbowski) and the Jew from Ostrowiec have been taken from here. One of the cells is now empty. Two new prisoners have arrived—Borucki and a man named Majewski from Radom. Immediately after leaving the punishment cell Vaterlos wrote a second complaint to the Prosecutor and the latter, on the pretext that he had been insulted, ordered him to be taken back to the punishment cell for

another seven days. But he is still here. The punishment cells, apparently, are filled.

The cell above mine is occupied by a woman prisoner. Her name, I have learned, is Grycendler. She was first sentenced to exile, then released on a bail of two thousand rubles and afterwards re-arrested. She conducted a twenty-three days' hunger strike in the Piotrków Prison. They say that the conditions there are terrible for the women.

### **JULY 23**

Yesterday fourteen prisoners were put in irons; on the way to the blacksmith's shop one of them bitterly smiled and said, "My last free steps." Today the shackles were removed from five of them. These, it seems, have been brought from the provinces to stand trial. My neighbour Sulima is most unhappy, yet she says she feels good and sings for days on end. Her father was hanged, her mother died in prison, one brother is held in the Siedlce Prison, another is detained in No. 4 Block in the Citadel, while a third brother, fourteen years old, has been released. She shares the cell with another woman. The latter is charged with having participated in digging the tunnel under the Radom Prison. She spends her whole day in prayer. She is due to be tried tomorrow.

After his week in the punishment cell Vaterlos was taken to another cell, but I don't know which. On the floor above, the prisoners in cell No. 20 were on hunger strike for several days in protest against the bad food; they ended their strike yesterday. Until recently the food had been reasonably good (a diet of 37 kopeks being allowed for each prisoner). Last September things changed; the political prisoners continue to receive the 37 kopeks' fare, but the ration for criminal offenders has been reduced to 11 kopeks. It should be said that the criminals include those whom the authorities regard as

such. For example, the two Radom men—Muszalski and Garbowski—are now listed as criminals. After four days' hunger strike their ration was improved, but only in a small measure. Ruchkin, an ex-soldier from Zambrów who occupies a cell in our corridor, is considered a criminal too. The only charge against him is that he belonged to the Party. Not only is the food bad, the portion is small and these prisoners are hungry all the time.

## **JULY 26**

Two men were put in irons today, Sunday. Evidently they will be sent to exile tomorrow. Five of the people charged with digging the tunnel have been found not guilty. One of them, Wierzbicki, is still here. The soldier from Zambrów has had his ration increased to 37 kopeks.

Hanka now shares a cell with Ovcharek, whom she had accused of treachery. I think she must have been lying. I now incline to the belief that all her stories were exaggerated. But there was no question about her believing what she said. There are now three of them in the cell. For the first two days Hanka was excited and gay during exercise, now she is lonely and depressed.

Today I succeeded in counting the number of prisoners on exercise; there were 60 in our part of the yard, which means that the total must be in the region of 120. Of the sixty, ten were women, four artillery officers (Belokopytov, Krakowiecki, Zapolski and Pankov) and a cavalry officer named Kalinin. The women's names are: Marczevska, Niewiadomska, Ovcharek, Sulima, Hawelka, Rudnicka, Pranchil from Ostrowiec, Grycendler, Rosa Kagan (Social-Democrat) and Smierdzińska. There are six prisoners in each of two cells, five in one, four in another and three in each of two cells.

On the upper floor the offices formerly used for investigation purposes are being turned into cells. According to the grapevine, they house not only those who are

being investigated but also many who are serving their sentences. Rumour has it that those sentenced to less than eight years penal servitude will no longer be sent to Siberia, because the prisons there are overcrowded; they will be sent instead to prisons in European Russia and in the Kingdom of Poland.

#### **JULY 29**

All the cell windows were closed and sealed today. The cells, now sealed, are like tombs—neither sky, trees nor swallows can be seen. Even fresh air has been taken away from us. According to rumour this has been done because the prisoners were exchanging notes with one another, dropping them with twine from window to window. It is said that a new Governor has arrived (his predecessor was here only for a short time) and that he refused to take over the block unless the windows were nailed down. Yesterday they allowed the windows to be opened, today they have sealed them tightly.

Four new prisoners have arrived in our corridor during the past few days. The prisoner who shared the cell with my neighbour has been transferred to Radom. Her place has been taken by a woman named Kaljat from Piotrków. This has been one of our bad days. Somebody has the idea of protesting, of fighting back; it is quite possible that this may lead to a clash—but nothing can help now, they will not open the windows.

#### **AUGUST 7**

A man named Katz arrived in our corridor a few days ago. Arrested in Berlin on the 25th of June, the day after he had attended a meeting, he was held there for two weeks, kept under strict observation and not allowed to inform anyone of his arrest. At the end of the two weeks he was taken on an express train to Wierzbołowo and handed over to the Russian authorities. He was bound

hand and foot all the way to Kovno. They say that the Minister for Foreign Affairs cabled the Berlin police requesting that he be sent to the Warsaw Citadel. After one day in Kovno he was taken here. He is charged with belonging to a group of anarchists.

We have had two other new arrivals—a bandit named Malewski and a worker named Stanisławski from Pabianice; the latter is charged with belonging to the PSP faction and will be tried tomorrow.

#### **AUGUST 16**

We have heard that Stanisławski has been found not guilty. Malewski was tried on Friday. He and two others were sentenced to be hanged, while another man received twenty years penal servitude. Malewski went about all day like a man out of his mind; after the trial he told us that he was innocent. The gendarme on duty informed him that the Governor-General had commuted his death sentence to fifteen years penal servitude, but when imparting the news the gendarme had smiled so cynically that Malewski found it impossible to believe him. The judge informed Malewski that he had twenty-four hours in which to lodge an appeal. He, however, did not know what to do—whether to wait for his lawyer or do something about it himself. Since time was passing he sent a telegram to his mother asking her to come and do something to get the death sentence commuted. Today he has been quite calm. The sentence, evidently, has been mitigated.

A few weeks ago several members of one of the PSP armed units were put on trial. Everyone was astonished at the mildness of the sentence. Only one, Montwill, received a fifteen-year sentence; five were set free, while three (Zipko, Jastrzębski and Piotrowski) were sentenced to eight years in prison. One, sentenced to two years and eight months penal servitude, had his sentence



reduced to six months. Rumour has it that the sentence of exile passed on Mańkowski has been reduced to one month's imprisonment. The accused woman, too, got off lightly. This has amazed everyone, and some think that the period of repressions has come to an end.

Arising from the closing of the windows one of the women prisoners suggested that we should break all the glass. But the suggestion was not taken up. Somebody else suggested going on hunger strike until all the prisoners were allowed the 37 kopeks' fare, but this suggestion, too, failed to meet with support. Hardly any gains have accrued from the hunger strikes. Last September when Waterlos went on hunger strike twice—for fifteen and eight days respectively, he was assured that his demands would be granted, but the promise was not honoured. Kilaczycki, too, refused food on two occasions, demanding that his fetters be removed. On the sixth day of his strike they actually removed the fetters, but replaced them a week later.

The hunger strikes no longer make any impression. The authorities know that they cannot be continued very long and that not all can participate in them. Only the staunchest can hold out, and even these suffer greatly from the action.

Some say that the new Governor is a "good" fellow. It was he who discovered ways and means of satisfying the wolves, while keeping the sheep alive: the windows are still sealed, but the doors leading on to the corridors are left open during exercise. As to the food the better-off prisoners have received permission not to draw their full ration, so that part of it goes to those on the 11 kopeks' fare. In the course of time this may result in everybody getting less, and in more being pilfered. It should be said that now the gendarmes behave more gently. In recent times we have not heard any swearing even from those of them who hate us and who are

delighted when they can hurt our feelings in any way. Had it not been for this improvement it would have been impossible to have held out and things would have developed into severe clashes. After all, this is a place from which people go either to the gallows or to long years of penal servitude; they still remember the days when they were free and cannot become reconciled to the thought that for them everything is finished either for ever or for many, many years.

That which oppresses most of all, that which the prisoners find most unbearable, is the secrecy which surrounds this building, the mysteriousness of it, and the regime which is designed to ensure that each prisoner knows only about himself and even then not all but as little as possible. And he tries as hard as he can to break through the secrecy; hence the constant exchange of notes, the search for the most artful means of transmitting messages to one another, the coughing in the corridor, and the singing and whistling in the cells. There is a complete system of signals. When the old "letter boxes" for correspondence are discovered, new ones are devised. Those who have brought the means of contact to perfection devote themselves to this and nothing else. They are transferred from cell to cell in the endeavour to break them, but nothing can cool their ardour. And when other means fail, then, during exercise, they make all kinds of signs from the cell windows or from the lavatory to those walking in the yard. The baffled gendarmes shrug their shoulders, hoping that sooner or later the offenders will be removed. The message-transmitters know everything. Often when their information is incomplete they do not hesitate to make it up. Hence the flow of information concocted any old how. All means are used in the effort to lessen the secrecy of this place.

The news has reached us that the secret police have

sent six agents to the prison and that there are provocateurs among the inmates. This, naturally, has made us watchful. And true enough, provocateurs have been found. But suspicion has fallen also on people who in all probability are completely innocent. Not long ago when one of the officer prisoners was walking with a new arrival, a prisoner shouted from the lavatory window, "That man is a police agent!" Hanka, for example, declared to me that Ovcharek and Sm. were downright traitors, yet afterwards, just as if nothing had happened, she lived with Ovcharek in the same cell and walked and chatted with her during exercise. It seems, however, that they have quarrelled again, because they are now in separate cells. Today for some reason or other Hanka was sent to the punishment cell. An atmosphere of mistrust, which is spoiling our collective life, is being created; everyone tries as hard as he can to keep to himself.

True, the agents are numerous. The occupants of the cells are changed so frequently (in most cases there are two to a cell and there are cells which house three or more prisoners) that the purpose is unmistakably clear—to enable the undiscovered agents to learn as much as possible. A few days ago while looking out of the window I saw a man on exercise, an intellectual, who I am absolutely sure is an agent. I shouted to his companion, "Comrade, the man walking with you is a scoundrel, a provocateur." The next day I saw them taking exercise alone.

Now I suspect another. Before my arrest I knew the name of a certain female traitor. I have now learned that the name of one of the women prisoners, one who behaves with the utmost circumspection, is the same as that very traitor; what is more, I accidentally discovered that she is closely acquainted with people with whom the traitor was acquainted and that certain

features of her character coincide with the traitor, and so, against my will, the doubt which at first I suppressed is growing into a firm conviction. It goes without saying that I have not shared my suspicions with anyone and I shall do everything to clear up the matter.

During the past few days my neighbour Sulima has been alone in her cell; her friend Kaljat, who is due to be tried in a few days, has been transferred to another cell. The Radom prisoner, Wierzbicki, has also been taken away.

#### **AUGUST 21**

This has been a day of commotion. Mattresses, bedsteads and prisoners are being taken from one cell to another. My neighbour Sulima, our "poor orphan," as we call her, has been transferred to another corridor, to the cell occupied by Ovcharek, despite the fact that she was most reluctant to leave us. Zipko, who occupied a cell on the upper floor (he has received an eight-year sentence) was transferred today to the Arsenal Prison. A man named Mostowski, from Radom, and Kruger, a member of the Left PSP, are in our corridor. Mostowski has been sentenced to penal servitude for life.

The two cell-mates of the spy Wolgemut have been taken to other cells; he, it seems, is no longer here.

The ex-officers Avetisyants and Salamei, both members of the Military Revolutionary Organization, and the former military engineer Weidenbaum and the student Rudenko occupy cells in No. 3 corridor. Avetisyants and Salamei were sentenced to three years' fortress confinement (the sentence expires on August 24, 1909), Weidenbaum was sentenced to one year for insulting the Tsar (his sentence expires on July 7, 1909), while Rudenko, at the request of his mother, has had his sentence reduced from four years penal servitude to one year. They get papers every day but these when read

are taken away to prevent others from reading them. This group was brought here from the guardhouse on July 11 on information supplied by the Pabianice police chief Ionin, who is detained in the guardhouse. He and two other guards shot the prisoner Grizel. Ionin is a scoundrel, one of the "heroes" of the punitive expedition in Latvia. The information supplied by this degenerate is most characteristic. He declared that the guardhouse was the centre of the members of the Military Revolutionary Organization, that its appeals were printed there, that literature was stored in the place and that from there agitation was conducted in the army and so on. Naturally, he achieved his aim—the officers were taken here. The guardhouse, which adjoins No. 10 Block, is a two-storeyed building. The basement contains the cells for soldiers undergoing investigation for criminal and military offences. The first floor houses officers and "noblemen" guilty of disciplinary offences and under temporary detention. Their cells are not locked and the windows are without bars. The second floor is set aside for officers awaiting trial and those sentenced to fortress confinement. The second-floor cells are locked and the windows have bars but are often open for weeks on end. This happens in those cases when the captain of the guard is a decent officer. They get newspapers and have no difficulty in maintaining contact with the outside world.

An officer named Szamanski, who in 1905 refused to take reprisals against workers on strike, spent sixteen months in this place; a Cossack officer named Rubtsov, charged with refusing to shoot workers sentenced to death by court-martial, spent two months here awaiting trial. He was dismissed from the service. A junior officer of the gendarmes charged with allowing ten political prisoners to escape also spent two months in the place. Among the prisoners at present is the Captain of

the Nebogatov Squadron. He was sentenced to ten years' fortress confinement for surrendering his ships to the Japanese. Then there is Second Lieutenant Deneko (of the Ivangorod fortress artillery), a Tolstoian, sentenced in April 1908 to six years in a labour battalion for refusing to serve in the army. The sentence was commuted and he was deprived of his rank.

#### **AUGUST 29**

“At one time I endured prison life without difficulty, now that I am old I find it hard. In those days I never gave a thought to the future, but I lived for it, because I was strong; now, seeing no perspective, I often think about the future and find life difficult. I cannot get used to the fact that I am imprisoned, that I cannot exercise my own will. I cannot become reconciled to the ever-recurring thought that the morrow will be every bit as dull, monotonous and empty as today. And the sadness, growing into nostalgia, evokes physical pain and drains the blood. I long for the fields, for the world of colours, sounds and light, for the places where one can hear the murmur of the forest, where the sky merges into the infinite realm of white cloud; I long for the open country where one can breathe pure air, where there is sunlight and the fragrance of flowers, where one hears the gurgling of stream and rivulet and where the sea never ceases to whisper and break upon the shore. And the day, the night, the dawn and the twilight are so entrancing and yield such happiness! I await the death sentence, which in all probability will be commuted to long years of penal servitude. Something has gone wrong with my lungs. I spent three months in hospital, being discharged from there a few days ago. I have a hunch that I will not be very long here. I am not complaining, not cursing my fate, and despite my intense longing to be at liberty, to run away

from here, I am calm. I am writing this because I have no desire to lie. Surely there is nothing to be ashamed of being in love with life, nor should one cloak with falsehood the horrors which poison, befoul and corrupt life. And if I were to succeed in getting out of this place does anyone think I could change my way of life so as not to come back here again?"

This, approximately, is the content of a letter I received from a comrade who was discharged from the sick-bay a few days ago. I met him during exercise and we arranged to exchange letters. He had been kept in irons for months on the pretext that he had escaped from penal servitude, which of course was a brazen falsehood. He became ill and spent three months in the sick-bay. He is charged with having taken part in killing a spy.

The trial of the eleven Radom prisoners charged with belonging to the PSP and with taking part in raids on *monopolki*\* took place on August 25. Two women were found not guilty, while the other nine, including the traitors Harewicz and Tarantowicz, received the death sentence. The death sentences were afterwards commuted. The death sentence on one of the traitors was commuted to six months' (!) imprisonment, while the other was sentenced to exile; the remainder received sentences ranging from 10 to 20 years penal servitude. This Tarantowicz occupied the cell next to mine for some time and was known as Talewicz. It was he who complained about having to die at such an early age and who declared that if he were forty years there would be against him not seventeen but many more charges. We have another pair of spies here—Sagman (alias Zverev, alias Orlov), who goes about in student's uniform, and Wolgemut.

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\* *Monopolki* was the name given in Poland to the wine and spirit shops owned by the tsarist government.—*Ed.*

## AUGUST 31

The trial of the 37 Warsaw Social-Democrats took place today. Twelve were sentenced to exile, and twenty-five were found not guilty. Seven Social-Democrats from Lodz were tried on the 25th; according to the grapevine, three were sentenced to four years penal servitude, one was exiled and three were freed. It is said that no evidence of their guilt was offered and that the court based itself exclusively on the testimony of a colonel of the gendarmes.

## SEPTEMBER 6

I regret to say that today I have had proof that my suspicions concerning Hanka have been justified. She spent some time in Tworki (an asylum) whence she was freed by Pruszków Social-Democrats. After her arrest she betrayed her liberators. She accompanied the gendarmes to the homes of her comrades and identified them. Here in the prison she is using a false name, carefully concealing her real name (Ostrowska). Why did she turn traitor? Who knows. Maybe they beat her, or it may be she really is insane. For the past few days she has occupied a cell on the upper floor. I have found it necessary to warn the other prisoners about her. Possibly she will deny her treachery. I imagine she will fight for at least a shred of confidence. Be that as it may, the scorn which she deserves is the heaviest cross that anyone can bear.

Sometimes I see other provocateurs taking exercise. Two of them make a terrible impression. They never raise their eyes, their faces are literally the pale masks of out-and-out criminals—hardened and with the mark of Cain on their brows. They remind one of a cowering dog threatened with a stick. One is Wolgemut, the other, Sag. Three others are quite jaunty, swaggering about as if nothing had happened. It is difficult to judge



by their faces what they really are (Tarantowicz and Harewicz were involved in the case of the Radom military organization of the factionalists). Another pair laugh, joke and are always gay; these are professional provocateurs, especially Sagman (alias Zverev and Orlov), who operated as an agent abroad.

Four prisoners were put in chains today including Montwill. He now occupies the cell on the floor above me.

Rumour has it that a mother with two children has been sentenced to exile for 12 years, and that her lodger, who killed a soldier during a raid on the house, escaped together with her husband. The children are in the cell with her. Today while they were walking in the courtyard I saw her slap the elder boy. I saw this from the window and I wanted to shout at her. Here in prison, behind bars, everything becomes strangely exaggerated. The boy, however, continued to play, running about in the yard, chasing the chickens and gathering leaves.

There is a strange emptiness in my head. All kinds of disconnected dreams, separate words, people and objects follow in quick succession, and in the mornings when I get up I dread the thought of the day ahead.

The cell next to mine is occupied by the young army officer B. I exchange notes only with him. He wanted to join me in my cell, even if only for a short time, but somehow I prefer being alone. Beginning with tomorrow we shall take exercise together. This will be enough and it will bring variety into our life. But for how long?

Vaterlos has received the indictment. He is charged with being a member of the Anarchist-Communist Party (eighteen men and six women have been charged in this connection under Article 102, Part Two); he has already received a fifteen-year sentence for robbing a merchant. When one reads of these attacks and killings it is difficult to believe that a man like Vaterlos could take part

in planning and carrying out such acts. He is one of those who simply cannot suffer the slightest violence or any injustice. It may be that this is why people like him become fanatics, blindly follow their ideals and sacrifice their feelings.

## OCTOBER 11

Montwill was hanged in the early hours of the 9th. On the 8th they removed his fetters and transferred him to the death cell. On Tuesday, the 6th, he was tried for taking part in an attack on a train near Lap, in which soldiers of the Volhynia Regiment were travelling. He had no illusions and on the 7th, while we were taking exercise, he came to the window and bade us farewell. He was hanged at 1 o'clock in the morning. Yegorka, the hangman, received his usual 50 rubles. From the floor above, the Anarchist K. tapped to me that they "had decided not to sleep for the night"; a gendarme said that the thought of someone being hanged "caused a shudder, making sleep impossible." Montwill's last words were: "Long live independent Poland!"

In the early hours of the morning of the 8th they hanged the aged occupant of cell No. 60. After these nights, after committing such fearful crimes, nothing has changed: the autumn days are as bright as ever, the soldiers and gendarmes are relieved regularly and, as usual, we go out for exercise. Only in the cells is it quieter, there is no singing now and many are awaiting their turn.

The cell next door, No. 53, houses the bandit Kozłowski, who was sentenced to death on September 25. To this day he does not know whether the sentence, which has been sent to the Governor-General of Vilno for confirmation (the crime was committed in the Grodno Gubernia), has been commuted. His lawyer told him that

it would be either confirmed or annuled within eight days.

In cell No. 51 there is a man also sentenced to death for banditry. This is Grzyb from Sosnowiec, who swears that he is innocent and I think he is telling the truth. He was sentenced on September 22 and still does not know whether the sentence has been commuted or annuled. And this despite the fact that he is always asking the prison authorities.

A comrade told me that he had as a cell neighbour a bandit named Ceniuk—also sentenced to death—who for thirteen days was sure that he would be hanged; finally they told him that his death sentence had long been commuted to fifteen years penal servitude.

The artillery Lieutenant B. has shared my cell since September 24. He has been detained here for the past ten months on the charge that he failed to inform on one of his comrades alleged to have been a member of the All-Russian Officers' Union. The charge is based on the grounds that they shared an apartment. This case is being investigated by Lieutenant Colonel Wąsiacki, a notorious scoundrel. Another six officers and about forty soldiers are involved in this case. Ever since May, Wąsiacki has been promising to complete the investigation yet it drags on from week to week. On the last occasion he said that each would receive the indictment by September 14 and that the case would be handed to the Prosecutor. But so far nothing has happened. All the officers were forced to send in their resignations, otherwise they would have been dismissed from the service for misconduct. Wąsiacki informed B. that he would not be released on bail unless he resigned from the service.

Highly characteristic is the conversation that took place in March between Wąsiacki and Uspensky, Chief of No. 10 Block, when the latter was returning from the

courtroom. Wąsiacki asked if everything was in order. The reply was: "Yes, all five have been sentenced to death."

The Anarchist Vaterlos and the officer Kalinin (who occupies cell No. 19) have now been seven days in punishment cells; the Anarchist Katz, also from this cell, has been given four days punishment, while Marczevska-Ostrowska and Malinowska from cell No. 20 have been given three days punishment.

In our cell (No. 52) and in the cell above us we have installed a "telephone" from cell to cell. In other words we have bored holes in the wall. Not long ago these holes were blocked up, but we reopened them the same day. This was discovered the following morning and the holes were blocked again, but at our expense. After this many of us refused to continue with this method of communication. The Anarchists, on the contrary, suggested keeping the holes open demonstratively. But only three cells—18, 19 and 20—fell in with the suggestion. Governor Yolkin ordered Vaterlos to be taken to the punishment cell. Five husky gendarmes headed by a captain hustled him there regardless of the fact that prisoners in the other cells kept banging on the doors. The inmates of cells Nos. 18, 19 and 20 insisted on seeing the Prosecutor although they were advised not to do so since the man is a rotter and would deal even more harshly with them.

The Deputy Prosecutor actually arrived on the scene. Then, a few days later, came the order to put the inmates of the three cells in the punishment chamber. After this the relations between the prisoners became frigid and strained.

The tactic of the Anarchists is to fight for every tiny detail, constantly, without let-up. The tactic of the others is the direct opposite—to take care, above all, to conserve the strength of the prisoners, to avoid conflicts

whenever possible but at the same time to uphold one's rights and one's dignity. Not long ago things almost went as far as a trial over one of the Anarchists who tried to provoke a conflict and to embroil the prisoners in the other corridors by falsely stating that all the prisoners in his corridor had decided to make a demonstration, whereas in reality no one knew anything at all about it.

For several weeks we have had a new chief warder and, by all accounts, he is an out-and-out scoundrel. He was invited here by Wąsiacki. I saw him when I was having visitors. He listened attentively to our conversation and in order to get nearer, insolently sprawled on the table and even interfered in our conversation. What shocking behaviour! The visitors brought me galoshes, but he refused to accept them saying that galoshes were not needed here.

Ever since his arrival it has been impossible to ask for a bath, or for a book from the library; the so-called shopping\* which used to take place twice a week now takes place only once. Undoubtedly he has discovered that there were revolutionaries among the local gendarmes. He seized all the Russian books which they had borrowed from the library and burned them; many of the gendarmes have been replaced. Rumour has it that all the "corrupted" ones are to be sent to the "squadron" and that fresh men are to be sent here. The commander of the "squadron" refuses to take these men, pleading with the general not to send them since he fears they will "corrupt" the entire squadron, and those whom he will have to send to the prison in their stead will likewise be "corrupted" by contact with us. One thing is clear, that the army, generally speaking, is "corrupted,"

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\* Purchase of food from the prison store. The prisoner paid with his own money.—*Ed.*

that many of the conscripts are "corrupted" and they in turn "corrupt" the others, the fearful conditions of the service "corrupt" them.

The alarm was caused by one of the gendarmes sending an anonymous letter to General Uthof written in block letters demanding that in addition to the 50 kopeks paid to each soldier they should get the "extra" 1 ruble 50 kopeks a month to which they are entitled by virtue of their service in No. 10 Block. Instead of paying out this money the commander puts it into a special fund.

#### **OCTOBER 25**

For the past week I have been alone in cell No. 3 in the first corridor. There are only five cells in this corridor. The window looks out into the garden of the prison hospital. It is peaceful here, lonely, and what is more most of the gendarmes are new arrivals. Only the worst of the old contingent have been left. Today my neighbour tapped to me that Waterlos has been on hunger strike for twelve days demanding better food, writing materials, a bath and interview with the Consul. It is said that he is already unconscious. After spending seven days in the punishment chamber he was taken to cell No. 50, which is completely isolated; formerly it was used as a death cell and is now designed chiefly for bandits. They say that he and Kilaczycki will be kept here for years since they fear that in the event of their being transferred elsewhere they would either make a getaway or be liberated by friends.

#### **NOVEMBER 12**

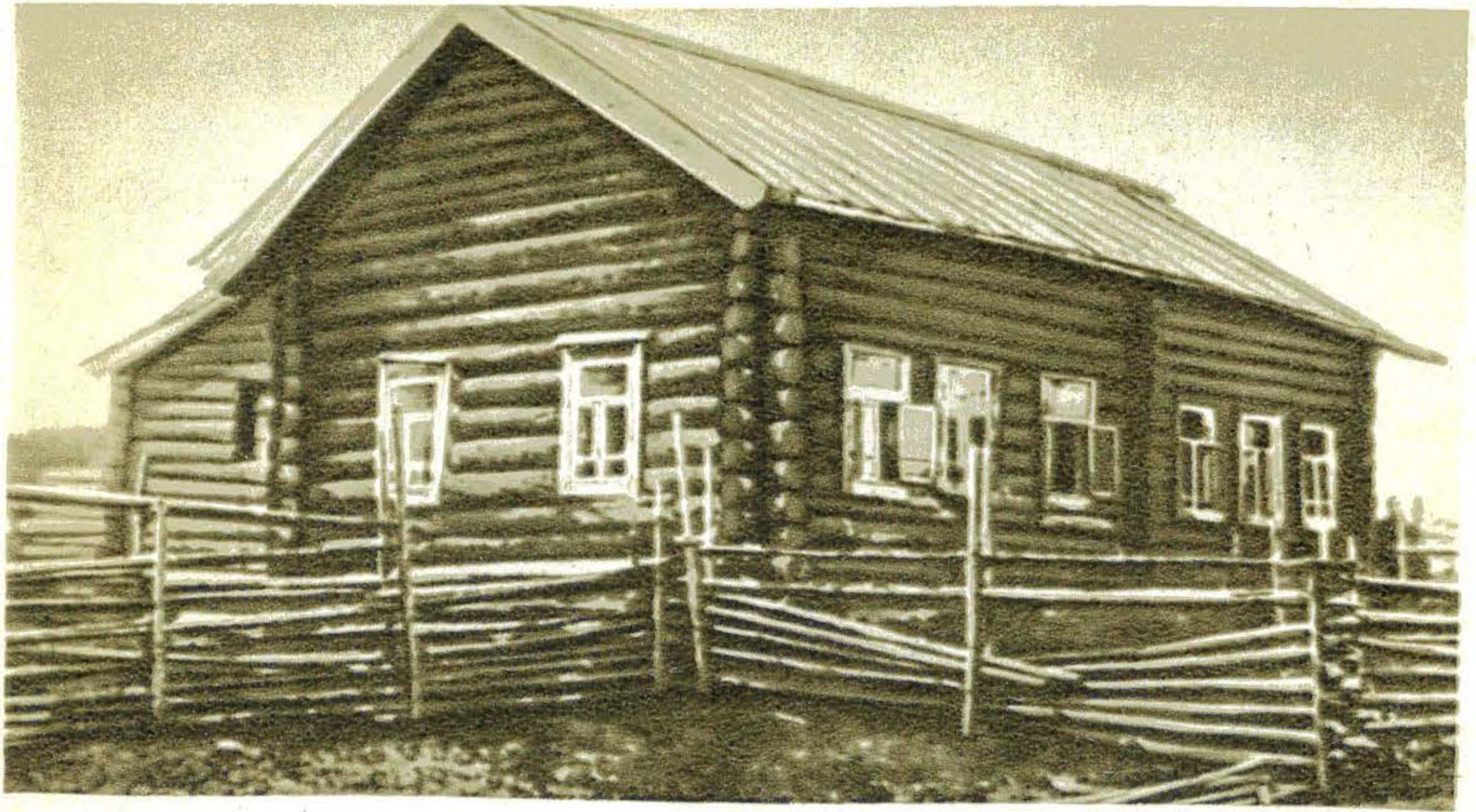
Three days (7th, 8th and 9th) were taken up with the case of myself and my comrades; for me these three days were quite a break. The trial took place in the Court of Justice. I was taken there in a cart, handcuffed.

I was excited and delighted at being able to see the street traffic, the faces of free people, the shop windows and the advertisements. Meeting my comrades and seeing several friends in the court made me happy. The courtroom had large windows, all kinds of accessories and lastly the bench itself consisting of seven men, the Prosecutor, the experts, priests, witnesses, defence counsel, friends and relatives. Then there was the swearing in of the witnesses, experts and interpreters, the testimony, the Prosecutor's speech demanding the supreme punishment according to Article 126, Part Two, and his statement that we were being punished not in order to correct us but to get rid of us. This was followed by a speech by Rotstadt who defended himself and speeches by the defence lawyers. The sentence was delivered after an interval of more than one hour. I was sentenced to exile, Rotstadt and Ausem to four years penal servitude, and Landau to one year fortress confinement. They found us guilty under Part Two of Article 126 despite the fact that we proved that the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania never had stores of arms and explosives and that adequate proof of Party membership in relation to Ausem and myself was lacking (prior to this, in May, the Court of Justice in Lublin had sentenced Rotstadt to six years penal servitude; he admitted his membership of the Party but denied that the Party had stores of arms), and despite the fact that in relation to Landau there was no proof whatever that the meeting of the five people which took place in his house was of a Party nature or that he knew anything about it. The sentence was motivated exclusively by the "voice of conscience," and this "conscience" was no less attentive to the demands of the authorities than the "conscience" of the military judges. I was the only one sentenced to exile, and in all probability only because they knew that they could inflict a sentence of pe-

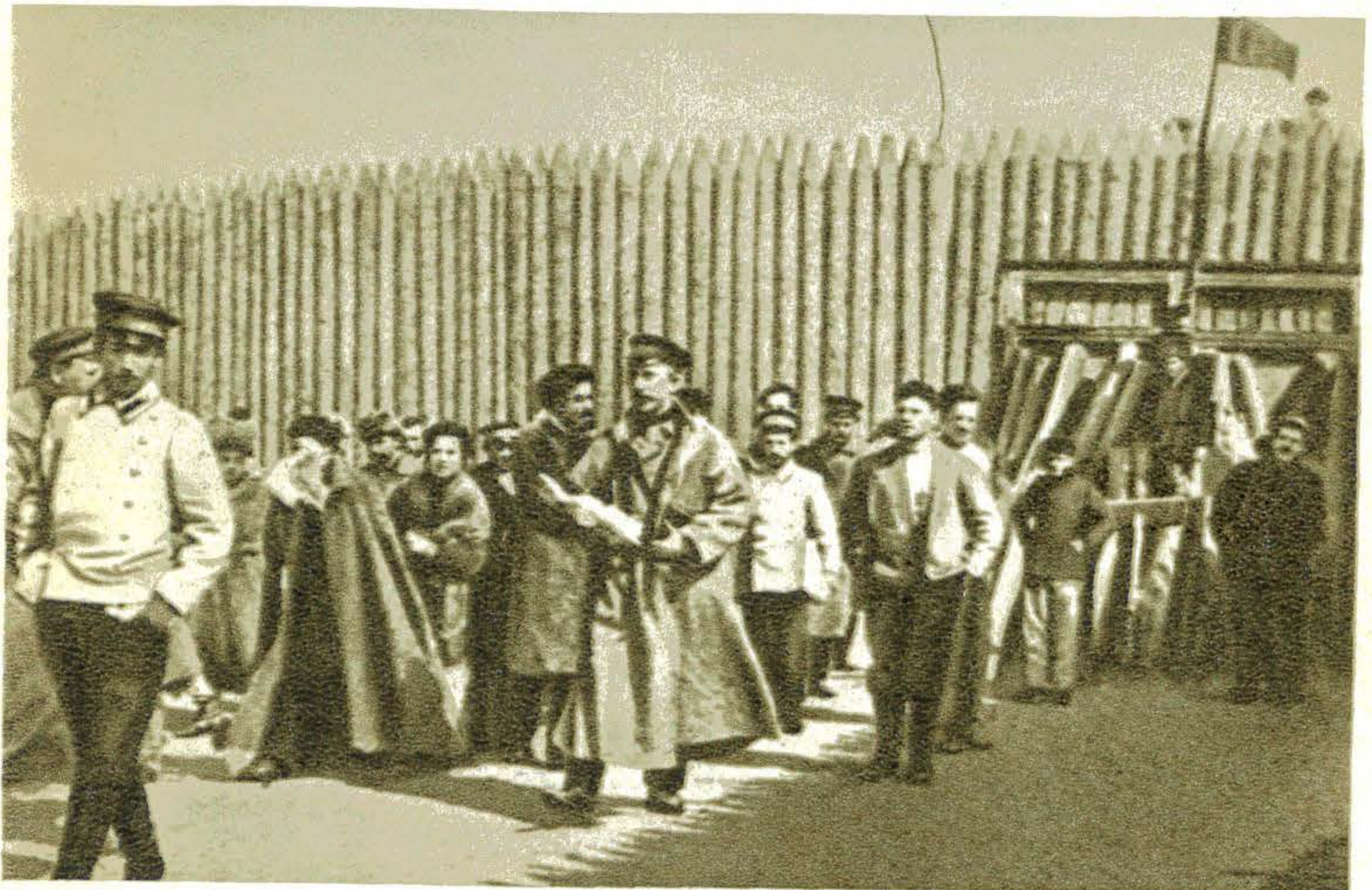


F. E. Dzerzhinsky in the Siedlce Prison. 1901





House in the village of Kaigorodskoye, Slobodskoi Uyezd, Vyatka Gubernia, where F. E. Dzerzhinsky lived in exile from late 1898 till August 28, 1899



Rising of political prisoners in the Alexandrovsky Tsentral Prison. The flag, hoisted by F. E. Dzerzhinsky, bore the word **Freedom**. 1902

nal servitude for the other charge. They say that the gendarmes are bringing a third charge against me. The cases of the Social-Democrats will now be tried by the Court of Justice under Article 102.

During the trial I never gave any thought to the matter that it was we who were being tried and banished for years. I didn't think about this, although I had no illusions whatever about the sentence. I gazed at the judges, at the Prosecutor, at all those present in the court, on the decorated walls, and derived the utmost satisfaction from seeing the fresh paint and colours, from seeing other people and new faces. It was as if I had been present at some kind of celebration, not sad and not terrible, at a celebration which did not concern me in any way. My eyes absorbed the fresh impressions, I was happy and felt that I wanted to say something pleasant to everyone.

There was only one moment when I felt literally as if they had gathered to bury someone. This was when they ordered us into the court to hear the sentence, when we were suddenly surrounded by fifteen or twenty gendarmes brandishing their sabres. But this feeling vanished when the President began to read the sentence: "On behalf of His Imperial Majesty," etc.

Today I am back once more in my cell. I have no doubt at all that I will be sent to penal servitude. Will I be able to hold out? When I begin to think about the long days I shall have to live in prison, day after day, hour after hour, presumably here in this same No. 10 Block, I experience a feeling of horror and from the depths of my soul the words break out: "I cannot endure it!" Still I will find the strength, as others will, just as many more have endured much worse torment and suffering. At times I think that I cannot understand how it is possible to hold out, but I recognize that it

can be done and I become conscious of a proud desire to do so. An ardent longing for life is hidden somewhere deep down, and there remains only the peace of the graveyard. Should I fail to muster the strength, death will come and rid me of the feeling of helplessness and resolve everything. So I am resigned.

At the moment I am absolutely alone. I do not exchange notes with anyone in the corridor and I am cut off from the rest of the block. We now have a new chief warder, the other one, fortunately, has gone. He was an unbearably evil man. His successor, it seems, is not a bad fellow. At the moment, of course, I cannot say this for certain. Generally speaking the new gendarmes try not to irritate us. I have clashed only with one of them. I was reading late at night and every minute he would come to the cell door, brush against it, raise the flap of the peephole, glance in, let the flap fall with a bang and, without leaving the door, raise it again. I requested him not to do this. "If you must look do so but please don't bang and don't brush against the door." A minute later he deliberately began to knock. I protested. He reduced me to such a state of desperation that I was ready to jump at him but the warder on duty came along and ordered him to stop this nonsense.

#### **NOVEMBER 15**

I feel that I must write. For the past few days the silence of the grave has reigned in my corridor. There is only myself and somebody in the cell opposite. The other cells are empty. A few days ago all the inmates with the exception of us two were transferred elsewhere. I did not correspond with them, but I was conscious of their presence and I heard them. Now that I am alone, the solitude is most oppressive.

## DECEMBER 4

Today I want to return to the matter of our trial.

A week after the sentence was announced I was again taken to the Court of Justice where they read it to me in its final form. It turns out that I have been found guilty not only of belonging to the Party but also of all the things charged against me both in the indictment and in the Prosecutor's speech. For example, the sentence claims as a fact that I was in contact with the Agitation and Propaganda Committee of the Party solely on the basis that in a letter one of the accused referred to this committee, but the letter did not say a single word about my relationship to it. The Court has found that I travelled throughout Poland and Russia on Party business, although there wasn't the slightest proof or even the least indication that I had travelled anywhere. Moreover, the main evidence concerning my Party membership and my activity in Poland were letters written by me in Cracow and sent to Zürich in 1904. In passing, the Prosecutor mentioned these letters as being written in Warsaw; at the same time he emphasized that my activity in 1904 was not covered by the amnesty announced in the Manifesto of October 1905, since the amnesty referred to the first and not to the second part of Article 126. The eloquent speech by my defence counsel who pointed out that the letters had been sent from Cracow and that for this reason alone they did not involve any punishment, that the amnesty did extend to the given offences (at that time the cases against those charged with membership of the Social-Democratic Party and with the affair of its Warsaw printshop were dismissed), remained without an answer on the part of the Prosecutor, since the latter had every confidence in the judges, and the judges did not let him down. It is said that one of the judges replying to somebody who had commented on the severity of the sentence, replied:

“We are no longer afraid of these people!” The necessity of applying Part Two the Prosecutor derived not from the programme and principles of the Party, but from the facts of the murders committed by some organizations of the Party after the publication of the Manifesto; on the same grounds Part Two was applied for alleged Party membership before 1905, that is, at a time when there couldn't even be any talk about military organizations. In a word, defence against these charges was useless. I lodged an appeal. But it goes without saying that the point at issue is not in getting the sentence reduced.

Three days ago I received the indictment in the other case which will be tried under Part Two, Article 102. The mildest sentence under this article is exile. But I shall do all in my power to get Part Two waived in favour of Part One in view of the fact that the court will try a number of cases of this kind. In the event of my efforts being fruitless, this will show that the Court of Justice is motivated solely by revenge.

Presumably the hearing of the second charge against me will take place in two or three months' time. In all trials the Social-Democrats are now tried according to Article 102 and not Article 126 as was the case previously. Article 102 signifies much severer punishment. The instructions for its application came from St. Petersburg—the result, I think, of the insistence of Skalon and Zavarzin. In the first trial I was charged under Article 126 only because the indictment had been compiled a year earlier and because the Military Prosecutor refused to investigate the case. The second case against me was sent to the Court of Justice merely because the evidence was so flimsy that they were not sure how the officers would react to it.

A few days ago the Military Tribunal heard the case of 19 Social-Democrats who were arrested at a meeting.

They have received heavy sentences. Four got six years penal servitude, nine four years, while six were exiled. They were tried under Part One of Article 102. Thirteen members of the Bund from Kolo, Kalisz Gubernia, were tried yesterday. Most of them are fifteen-year-old boys. One was found not guilty, two got four years penal servitude, five got two years eight months and the remainder were exiled.

#### **DECEMBER 15**

Four days ago all writing appliances were taken away from me and my fellow prisoner. While we were on exercise the cell was subjected to a minute search. We returned from our walk at the very moment when the chief warder was throwing our things on the floor and, furious and blushing to the roots of his hair, swore at the gendarme for bringing us back too soon. The Governor was just about to enter the cell, but upon seeing us, he quickly turned about. We summoned him through the gendarme, demanding that he should come, but so far he has not deigned to do so and we have no idea as to the reason for the punishment. Two months ago one of my letters was found on somebody arrested outside. At that time the Governor warned me that he would take away all writing materials in the event of this happening again. Since then I have not sent a single letter outside. It is quite clear, however, that the search took place because of me and not through the fault of my comrade. Yesterday was the day when letters are usually written and we were ordered to write them in the presence of the gendarme so that we should not secrete any ink.

The man who occupied cell No. 29 on the floor above us was executed in the early hours of the morning. A week ago two others occupying the same cell were executed. From the window we can hear the soldiers

marching to the place of execution, then we hear people running from the office, hear how the condemned men are taken from the cells to the office and thence with arms bound to the prison tumbril. For days afterwards, whenever we hear soldiers on the march, we have the impression that they are again taking somebody to be executed.

I am now in cell No. 1—alongside the office. I was taken here four weeks ago along with another comrade, despite the fact that I had requested to be alone. Evidently they have done this to restrict my opportunities for talking with the gendarmes. The gendarmes are afraid to speak when there are two prisoners in the cell. True, on the next day, anxious to grant my request, they tried to remove my cell-mate, whereupon we ourselves protested. My cell-mate is a worker charged with belonging to the PSP. Although found not guilty by the Military Tribunal on August 3 he is still detained along with the two others tried in the case—Denel and Dr. Biednarz—and who likewise were found not guilty. The idea is to send them to Siberia for five years administrative exile and they are merely awaiting the decision from St. Petersburg.

The neighbouring cell is occupied by Maria Rudnicka. On Thursday for the second time the Military Court found her not guilty (she is now charged with taking part in killing a guard and with belonging to the Warsaw military organization of the PSP); she was taken to the Town Hall on Saturday. According to the grapevine she is now held in the "Serbia" (a women's prison) awaiting the order from St. Petersburg for administrative exile. Here in the block everybody liked her for her gaiety and her youth, while many fell in love with her, deriving therefrom a new lease of life, and spending their time writing letters to her and seeking ways and means of getting them delivered. Some of them spent

whole days standing on the table waiting to catch a glimpse of her on her way to exercise or returning from it. They were driven to despair when their letters were not answered or when they were unable to deliver them. A thousand times they decided that they would never write to her again and would try to forget her. It reminded me very much of Gorky's story: "Twenty-Six Men and a Girl." For a few days a police agent occupied the same cell as she did. This stooge was sent here by the secret police with a view to enticing prisoners to have a romance with her and in this way extract information from the unsuspecting. She received 15 rubles for her work. But, being a crude type, she gave herself away almost immediately. She passed under the name of Judycka, letters were addressed to her in the name of Zebrowska, while to the gendarmes she was Kondracka. We also had a police spy in No. 2 corridor. He described himself as Dr. Czaplicki from Starachowice, Radom Gubernia, but upon questioning him, we discovered that he knew nothing at all about this locality. Somebody who had kidney trouble approached him for medical advice. The pseudo doctor advised the patient to listen to his kidneys: "If the sound is clear and distinct, then they are quite healthy. If muffled, this is a sign that treatment is needed."

Concerning Ostrowska-Marczewska I have received information that she had nothing whatever to do with the arrest of those who got her out of the asylum in Tworki. I don't know how to reconcile this with her own story about the other Ostrowska at the time when I did not know that she herself was this very person. Incidentally I have informed the comrades of this. She has denied her treachery and has concocted the story that it was the work of another woman who, acting carelessly, mistook a police agent for a lawyer; but if that



is so, why did she tell me something entirely different when I asked her if she knew this Ostrowska.

After his hunger strike Waterlos spent a long time in the sick-bay where they removed his irons. He is now back in No. 10 Block because they fear that he might escape from the hospital. The doctor is alleged to have said that he will hardly live another month.

The ex-officer Avetisyants, who is serving his sentence here in the fortress, is also very ill, although he himself is not aware of this. He suffers from tuberculosis.

A week or ten days ago they arrested the soldier Lobanov who used to do our "shopping." He is now in No. 2 Cell. As to why he was arrested I do not know. The gendarmes are greatly alarmed and are afraid to talk with us; only by the eyes is it possible to know who sympathizes with us. And the Governor, while gentle, courteous and kind, is, nevertheless, a gendarme to the backbone. He is gradually tightening up the regime, making it more and more strict, sending people more frequently to the punishment cells and choosing more reliable gendarmes. When he fears that he might be "soft" he simply doesn't turn up and sends an order stipulating the punishment. It was he who ordered the searches to be carried out in the cells while the prisoners were on exercise. He, apparently, is conscious both of the baseness of his job and of the advantages deriving therefrom. Last week he ordered the sick Katz to the punishment cell. The prisoners in the No. 4 and 9 corridors protested and insisted on an explanation. The Governor, however, failed to appear and only at two o'clock in the morning did the chief warder lie to the prisoners saying that Katz had been taken back to his own cell. The officer Kalinin was sent to the punishment cell the next day. The officers' group was then broken up and the men sent individually to cells throughout the block despite the fact that only recently, upon the com-

pletion of the investigation of their case, nine of them were placed in adjacent cells and allowed to go on exercise together. Today Zapolski, one of the group, was placed in our cell after giving his word of honour that he would write letters to the outside world only through the office. (They had smuggled letters out and for this reason all writing materials had been taken away from them).

The investigation of their case was completed only a month ago. Wąsiacki managed by sleight of hand to transform the All-Russian officers Union into a military revolutionary organization of Social-Democrats on the grounds that some of the officers had been in contact with Social-Democrats. The chief witness for the prosecution is a certain Hogman, who formerly served as an officer in Brest-Litovsk. He had robbed the pay office, fled, was found and sentenced to 18 months in a punishment battalion. He was brought here by Wąsiacki and placed at different times in cell after cell among the officers involved in the case. They all knew that he was a spy, were cautious of him and never said a word in his presence, while he invented all kinds of fables and testified to all the things with which Wąsiacki had charged the officers. He went even further. He remained in the cell while the others were on exercise and in the absence of one or another of the officers dotted down in the prisoner's books things which implicated him. Against Kalinin, for example, he testified that while he, Hogman, was walking in the yard with two soldiers, Kalinin shouted from the window, "Comrades, that man is a scoundrel, a spy." Actually it was I who shouted this and Hogman saw me because he stared at me for a long time.

No. 2 Cell is now occupied by a man named Kilaczycki—one of nine transferred thither from the "Pawiak" after being handed over to the Russian authorities by

the Swiss. He was charged with the murder of a certain Ivanov, and although the motive of this murder was political, he was condemned as a criminal on February 1st this year and sentenced by the district court to 6 years penal servitude. They are keeping him here because if he had been sent to Siberia they would have to hand him over to the civil authorities on February 1, 1910, and remove his irons as early as February 1, 1909. It seems he will serve his sentence here. Here, too, serving their sentences are Grzeczmarowski, Szenia (from Radom), Vaterlos and several others.

### **DECEMBER 31**

This is the last day of 1908—the fifth time that I will have met the New Year in prison (1898, 1901, 1902, 1907); the first time was eleven years ago. In prison I came to manhood in the torments of loneliness, of longing for the world and for life. But never for a moment have I doubted the righteousness of our cause. And now when perhaps for long years all our hopes are buried in the streams of blood, when thousands of fighters for freedom are crucified, languish in dungeons or live as exiles in the snowy wastes of Siberia, I am proud. I visualize the vast masses now coming into action and shattering the old system; masses in the midst of which fresh forces are being prepared for the new struggle. I am proud that I, one of them, see, feel and understand them and that I and they have suffered much. Here in prison it is grim at times, and at times even terrible. . . . Yet if I had the choice of beginning life anew, I would do exactly as I have done. And not as a matter of duty or of obligation, but because for me this is an organic necessity.

All that prison has done for me is to make our cause something tangible and real, as the child is to the mother who feeds it with her flesh and blood. . . . Prison has

deprived me of many things, not only of the ordinary conditions of life without which man becomes the most unfortunate of unfortunates, but also of the means of utilizing these conditions, deprived me of the possibility of engaging in fruitful mental labour.... The long years in prison, mostly in solitary confinement, naturally, have left their traces. But when I weigh up what prison has taken from me and what it has given me, then, although I cannot say that I have weighed them objectively as an onlooker would, I do not curse either my fate or the long years behind bars because I know that these are necessary in order to destroy that other vast prison which exists beyond the walls of this monstrous Block. This is not idle speculation nor is it cold calculation; it is the result of an irrepressible striving for freedom and for a full life. And out there, comrades and friends are now drinking to our health, while I, alone in my cell, am with them in thought—let them live, forge arms and be worthy of the cause for which the struggle is being waged.

Today they informed me that my case would be heard within four weeks—on January 15(28), 1909. Penal servitude is now a certainty and I shall be confined here for another 4 or 6 years. Ugh! What a thought! Since yesterday I have been alone in the cell. At his own request my comrade was transferred to a cell in No. 2 corridor, nearer to those with whom he is charged so that he can get to know as much as possible about his case. He was restless all the time. Upon leaving, Maria Rudnicka told us that she had been sentenced to 5 years exile in Yakutsk District on the old charge together with K. (this is not correct; evidently she did not understand what the Governor said when he was sending her away); as for the wife of Denel (Comrade K.), she, upon returning from St. Petersburg, said at first that all the accused would be released and deport-

ed; later she said that she had received a telegram from St. Petersburg to the effect that no decision had yet been taken. The unfortunate man was so upset that he could not read or do anything; he walked up and down the cell, listening to the slightest noise in the corridor. Every knock on the office door whenever anybody went there aroused him, attracted his attention and made him irritable. Thoughts raced through his mind, meaningless thoughts, and he could not get rid of them.

This happens with practically all the prisoners. At times it is impossible to explain what evokes this alarming expectation, something unpleasant, a feeling which recalls waiting for a train somewhere in the countryside on a cold, raw, rainy day in autumn. But here this feeling taxes one's endurance. You run from corner to corner, try to read but fail to understand a single word, throw away the book and resume the walking backwards and forwards in the cell, listening to the knocking on the doors and feel deep down in you that somebody is just about to appear and tell you something very important. This feeling is experienced usually on visiting days, or when the prisoner awaits books, or when he should have an interview with the Governor or something else of that nature. In such cases, although the waiting is extremely hard to bear and the strain in no way corresponds to the anticipated result, one is fortified by the definite aim, and it is this that makes the feeling more bearable. But what is really terrible is the feeling of expectation when there are no grounds whatever for it.

Five people have been executed since my last entry. They were taken to cell No. 29 on the floor below us between 4 and 6 in the afternoon and hanged between midnight and 1 a.m.

Marczewska has been singing for the past two days. She now irritates me. She is in cell No. 20, having been

brought there, apparently, because of the ructions which she made.

They say that another provocateur, a member of the PSP, has been exposed. He has been here since February 1907. A young, beardless boy, he goes by the name of Rom.

Vaterlos has shocked his fellow prisoners. A soldier named Lobanov was arrested because of carelessness on his part. He maintained correspondence with him and did not destroy the letters which were found in his cell during a search. Now in cell No. 50, he is again in irons.

#### **FEBRUARY 18, 1909**

A sunny, quiet winter's day. It was wonderful at exercise and the cell is flooded with sunlight. But the prisoners, downhearted, are in the grip of silent despair. All that is left is the recollection of a happy life and, like a twinge of conscience, it constantly torments one. Not long ago I talked with one of the soldiers. He looked sad and downcast while guarding us. I asked him what was the matter and he replied that at home people were hungry and that in his village Cossacks had flogged to death a number of men and women, that conditions in the village were unbearable. On another occasion he said, "We suffer here, while at home our people are starving." The whole of Russia "is starving," and the swish of the lash resounds throughout the country. The groans of all Russia penetrate to us even behind the bars, smothering the groans in the prison. And these humiliated, downtrodden soldiers guard us, concealing deep in their heart a terrible hatred, and escort to the gallows those who fight for them. Each fears for himself and meekly bears the oppression. I feel that now the people have been abandoned in the same way as fields scorched by the burning sun, that it is precisely now they long for the words of love that would unite them

and give strength for action. Can we find those who will go among the people with these words? Where now are the columns of young people, where are those who until recent times marched with us in our ranks? All have scattered, each searching for that elusive personal happiness, mangling his soul and cramping it into narrow and, at times, disgusting limits. Do they hear the voice of the people? Let it reach them and be a terrible curse for them.

Two prisoners in the cell below mine are awaiting execution. They tap out no messages and make no sound. Among those executed last month were two men charged with killing the Deputy Governor-General Markgrafski.... They were executed despite the fact that they were innocent. One of the gendarmes who guarded us has been arrested and six of his fellows transferred to service elsewhere. A soldier named Lobanov has been sentenced to two and a half years in a punishment battalion merely for smuggling out letters. Practically all the soldier orderlies regarded as being unreliable have been replaced. The temporary gallows on the place of execution has been replaced by a permanent one.

The condemned men are now taken from here with their arms bound. They are executed three at a time. When there are more the first three are hanged, while the others are forced to stand by and watch the execution of their comrades.

It is now 11 p.m. There is the usual quiet beneath our cell, but we can hear loud talk coming from the death cell, although we cannot make out what is being said; there is considerable commotion on the stairway, similar to that which takes place on execution days.

We can hear the creaking of the office door, which means that somebody is going to the condemned men.

The victims are being led away. The soldiers are marching beneath the window.... Two prisoners have been taken to the place of execution.

## MARCH 4

On February 25 they hanged five of the sixteen bandits and the members of the military organization of the PSP who were condemned to death. One of the condemned men was told the day after the trial that his death sentence would not be commuted. The trial took place on the 22nd, and the execution fixed for the 25th; but he was not taken with the others and only a few days later did the defence lawyer come to him with the news that the death sentence had been reduced to ten years penal servitude.

Among the prisoners here is a man named Golebiowski. The death sentence passed on him has been changed to ten years hard labour. He found it hard to believe the news. When his parents came to visit him he refused to go out, being under the impression that they were taking him to the death cell. He was taken forcibly to the visit at the request of his relatives.

There are five lunatics among the prisoners. One of them, being violent, has been held for a long time in an empty cell. Its window, glassless, is stuffed with straw. At night-time he is without any light. He screams desperately, groans and bangs on the door and walls. They put him in handcuffs but he succeeded in breaking them.

Six weeks ago they transferred Marczevska to our corridor. She was in a cell along with other women but couldn't get on with them. After this she was alone. A few days ago her neighbour wanted to break with her. She made an extremely bad impression on him and he told her that he had no desire to hear anything about her or from her. After this conversation she sent him a farewell note in which she said that she was absolutely innocent and had swallowed 20 grammes of iodine. They managed to save her life but she suffered much pain. A



few days afterwards they took her away and put her in the cell with Ovcharek.

Avetisyants died two days ago. He had been here since 1905 and had only another month to serve.

### MARCH 8

I am now alone. For two weeks before this I had the company of officer B. and for about a week, that of officer Kalinin. B. came to me unexpectedly and I was very glad that he did. He literally fell from the heavens—in the evening the door of my cell was opened with a great deal of fuss, he was bundled in and the door locked once again with the same noise. A few days before their trial the officers were taken to the office where they were ordered to turn out their pockets. Meanwhile their cells were searched. This action was taken on the orders of General Uthof and two captains were sent specially for the job. The search was carried out rather superficially. Several papers were picked at random after which the officers were interrogated and the things found during the search investigated. Apparently all this fuss was created for the purpose of prejudicing the judges against these officers as dangerous elements. After the trial somebody said that the search had influenced the sentence, though no compromising material had been found. Even before the trial, which lasted five days, the "case" had been sensationalized. Altogether there were thirty-six persons in the dock—five officers, twenty-nine soldiers and two students from Biała. One of the officers, released on bail before the trial because of illness, did not appear. All were charged with belonging to the non-party Military-Revolutionary Organization and to the All-Russian Officers Union (Paragraph 102, Part One).

Judge Uversky, one of the bloodiest of judges, acted as President of the Court. They say that whenever he

feels that the accused may escape the gallows, he immediately becomes grumpy, unapproachable and bad tempered, and conversely, when he is sure that the accused will not escape, he rubs his hands in glee, engages in small talk with the lawyer and becomes smug and self-satisfied. Abdulov acted as Prosecutor and the examination was conducted by Wąsiacki—at present chief of the gendarmerie of the Radom Gubernia—a scoundrel notorious for his malpractices in Warsaw and in Latvia. By means of promises reinforced with pledges that he would release them, by means of intimidation and ceaseless interrogation, he managed to get practically all the accused to admit that they had attended meetings and implicated Kalinin, Pankov and others. He even managed to get Kalinin and Pankov to admit things and to say things about themselves that the gendarmes did not know and which greatly influenced the sentence. He played on the officers, saying that they were responsible for the soldiers being in jail, that if they admitted their offences he would release the soldiers. Hogman, the spy of whom I have spoken before, was the chief witness. He testified to all the things that Wąsiacki had ordered him to testify, saying that all of it had been told to him by the accused. The foul methods to which Wąsiacki had recourse were laid bare during the trial. It was proved that he himself had compiled a letter allegedly written by Kalinin and had commanded Kalinin's orderly, who had also been arrested, to deliver a letter to a lawyer in Lublin, an ex-officer, and to say that the letter was from Kalinin and that he, his orderly, had also been arrested but had been released and that Kalinin had requested the lawyer to undertake his defence. The lawyer threw the spy out. Agents had planted the illegal literature of the Military Revolutionary Organization of the Social-Democrats in Krakowicki's house. During the investigation it was

alleged that this literature had been found in his possession, but the protocol drawn up at the time of the search stated that "nothing suspicious had been found." The entire case was based on the testimony of two soldiers (Kaftynev and Serzhantov) who acted as provocateurs. Actually their testimony had been dictated by Wąsiacki. They themselves did not appear in court. The request made by the lawyers that they be summoned was rejected. Wąsiacki was present all the time during the trial and talked with the judges during the intervals.

The charge against Krakowecki was based on the testimony of Hogman and Lieutenant Bocharov of the 14th Olonets Infantry Regiment, and on the literature which had been planted in his house. During the trial Bocharov withdrew his testimony. This was a dramatic moment. Bocharov declared that not Krakowecki but he belonged (he was no longer a member) to the Military-Revolutionary Organization of the Social-Democrats, that upon being threatened by Wąsiacki that he would be arrested and sentenced to penal servitude, he gave false testimony and wrote all the things he had been told to write. At this juncture Judge Uversky interjected, "You are an officer!" Bocharov made no reply and remained with bowed head. This caused a sensation in the court. Wąsiacki rushed from his place, whispered with other gendarmes and ran from the hall in order to consult with the commander of the garrison. A few days later Bocharov was requested to submit his resignation. Krakowecki, despite his innocence, received the maximum sentence—eight years penal servitude. Wąsiacki was convinced that Krakowecki alone among the accused was a genuine revolutionary, an underground worker who never left any traces of his activity. Hence the vindictive sentence.

Kalinin and Pankov, while admitting that they had

taken part in the activity attributed to them, declared that the soldiers in the dock had been picked at random, and that with the same justification it would be possible to arrest the entire companies in which they served, the soldiers, they said, were not guilty and there was no organization among them....

One of the soldiers, a man named Korel, a born orator, spoke eloquently and convincingly for half an hour, saying that his activity had been exclusively of a cultural nature. For this he, too, received eight years penal servitude. The judges do not like soldiers who can speak for themselves.

There were three judges on the bench—General Uversky and two colonels; the latter, who sat like dummies throughout the trial, never uttered a single word.

Krakowecki and the soldier Korel received eight years penal servitude, Kalinin, Pankov, Zapolski and the soldiers Isayev and Sinitsin got six years each, the soldier Chemakov (a male nurse) received seven years, Temkin, Laufman and twelve soldiers were sentenced to exile, three were given one year in a punishment battalion, while one officer and nine soldiers were found not guilty. Skalon reduced the sentences only for Pankov and Sinitsin, exile being substituted for prison. The officers and soldiers were tried under Paragraphs 273 and 274 of the Rules of Military Procedure with the result that the sentences for all those on active service were increased by another two years. It turned out that for those officers who had already sent in their resignations, the court was unable to apply these articles (in keeping with a Senate interpretation), but the defence lawyers were too late in raising the point, they did so after the sentence had been confirmed by Skalon. They submitted an appeal to St. Petersburg. Pankov had his sentence reduced on the grounds that he had been influenced by Kalinin.

The trial had been sensationalized by Wasiacki who

was thirsting to get his colonel's epaulettes and it should be said that his endeavours were correspondingly rewarded. The accused were drawn from different places in the Kingdom of Poland (from Biała, Kielce, Warsaw, Zambrów). They had nothing in common with one another. The group of soldiers—nobody knew why it was this particular group—was linked with the unreliable officers for the purpose of giving the impression of a vast revolutionary organization of officers and soldiers capable of overthrowing the autocracy. But at this stage along comes the fearless knight Wąsiacki who smashes the conspiracy; and so he merits praise and reward!

My cell-mate B. was released and taken directly to the gates of the Citadel. For two days his sweetheart and aunt had been waiting for him—the aunt, a splendid woman, was ready to travel with him to Siberia. I was sure that he would be let off. He was charged not with sheltering people, but with belonging to the military organization solely on the grounds of letters sent by his sister which referred to his growing revolutionary sentiment. Apparently he had been held in prison for fourteen months only for the purpose of enabling the court to acquit him. "Our military court is not prejudiced, it is not a lackey of the secret police," so said a gendarme colonel to me at the time. Despite this, B., upon returning from the daily sessions of the court, was either animated and full of hope, or depressed, fearing a verdict of guilty. He was particularly convinced of this after the speech made by Prosecutor Abdulov. When he came back after the court had found him not guilty he was so exhausted that he was barely able to say, "You may congratulate me." But even after this he feared that, like many others, he would still be held for a long time in administrative detention. The case against Gorbunov, the police clerk, was dropped, but he has

not been released, although a month has passed. Three prisoners, Klim, Dr. Biednarz and Denel, found not guilty on August 4, are still detained and there are grounds for believing that they will be sent to Yakutsk (the other day Klim and Biednarz were deported beyond the frontier, while Denel awaits exile to Yakutsk; his wife travelled to St. Petersburg to intercede for him with a view to getting his exile substituted by deportation; he was scheduled to depart for exile—he expected the cart every minute—but the secret police ordered him to be detained here some time longer). I calmed him saying that he would be freed, that the police had nothing whatever against him, and advised him to demand from the Governor his immediate release. Although the Governor cannot detain a man after he has received the corresponding information from the court, he showed no desire to release Denel without first receiving permission from Uthof. Uthof, however, who refused to see him on Sunday, arranged to see him on Monday at 2 o'clock; he afterwards switched the time to 4 o'clock. The chief warder, a notorious liar, stated that even today, Monday, the Governor had not been able to see Uthof. Suddenly, at about half past five B. was ordered to pack his things and be ready to leave. "To the Town Hall?"—"No, straight to the gate." The news came as a thunderblast. He simply didn't know what to pack and take with him. I felt my heart missing a beat. What to do? All my calm vanished. I helped him to pack his belongings after which silence set in. I was glad for his sake, but now I find that my cell will again be lonely. These accursed walls. . . . Why isn't it I that's going out? When will my turn come? "Please do what I told you, don't forget," I said, coldly. He embraced me and we parted.

I am very fond of him. He is so young, pure, and the future lies before him. An hour later they brought Kali-

nin to my cell. He remained with me for one week. After a search of the cell, they parted him from his friend Pankov.

The Governor advised him to submit a written request to Uthof without whose sanction the prison authorities could not permit the two friends to be together. Uthof replied that now he had nothing against this (the trial was over and the comedy was no longer needed). So they are together again. Pankov's father is a retired Cossack colonel, while Kalinin's father is a serving lieutenant-colonel. Kalinin belongs to a purely military family. His parents came here immediately after the trial; they cannot become reconciled to the fact their son, who had such a splendid future (he was about to enter the Academy) is now a convict, a man deprived of rights. At first his mother wept all the time but afterwards managed to keep her tears back and began to calm her son. She just couldn't understand what had taken place. Whence this calamity? How did it happen? She was convinced that Skalon would annul the sentence. And when told that unless the condemned man himself petitioned Skalon to this effect nothing could be done, she came to her son and begged and pleaded with him until he and the others agreed (otherwise Skalon would refuse to act) to write a brief petition: "We request a reduction of the sentence." When Skalon turned down the petition, Kalinin and the others refused to take the matter farther by submitting a request to the Tsar; this, however, was done by their parents. Kalinin's mother was convinced that the Tsar would reduce the sentence. If this failed, then after three months she would intercede once more and would continue to do so all the time. Pankov's sentence was reduced, and the two friends were grieved that they would soon have to part. After the trial Kalinin's parents visited him daily for two and a half hours without being separated by the netted wire.

For him the visits were an ordeal—he felt as if he were attending his own funeral. Young and strong, he tried hard to conceal his suffering. He would not spend six years in prison—this was utterly absurd. It was unthinkable that he, intelligent, young and healthy, should cease to live and be completely cut off from the world. This was intolerable. Moreover he, perhaps unconsciously, believed in his superior intellect, in his will-power and in his ability to perform great and noble deeds. The people would follow him, not he the people. For this reason he was against the Party and Party membership. For him the human will was everything. He, handsome, young and clever, what could he not do? But these senseless walls. . . . Ugh! He wouldn't look at them. He knew only himself and he would bear the responsibility; he never gave a thought to public opinion; he hated vileness, nothing else. That is "vile," such was the beginning and end of his criticism. He had a single-track mind—what I have done I have done and for this reason I am at one with my conscience. His was the attitude that reflected the strength of youth, something of the poseur and, possibly, considerable doubt in himself. In any case as a type he was both curious and interesting. A man who could rise to very great heights, but who could also descend very low; should he encounter a moment of weakness, then he would say to himself, "This weakness is my weakness, this road is my road." As the proverb has it: "The human heart is a mystery." In the space of a week he had changed beyond recognition; I know him only a little from his own words.

Once again I am alone. I have not had a visit for the past three weeks, while two months have gone by since I've had a letter. Has anything happened? What? Maybe they are confiscating letters and postcards. I imagine all kinds of terrible things. They could happen and I would know nothing at all about them. Just four walls



... how alien I am here, how hateful are these walls! Surely I can leave this place for the whole day, and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. It is monstrous. The neighbouring cell is occupied and I want to tap a message to its inmate saying that I love him and that if it weren't for his presence here I could not live, that even through these walls it is possible to be sincere, to give all of one's self and not to be ashamed of doing so. And those far away. What to write to them? Again about my weariness? I am always with them, this they know, and their memory of me is my happiness.

#### **APRIL 23**

Spring has arrived, flooding the cell with sunlight. The weather is warm and we are caressed by the balmy air when on exercise. The buds of the chestnut-trees and the lilac bushes are bursting and the smiling leaves are forcing their way into the sunlight. The blades of grass in the yard, reaching upwards to the sun, are gaily absorbing the air and sunlight which are returning them to life. It is peaceful here. But spring is not for us, we are in prison. The cell doors are locked all the time; beyond them and beyond the windows the armed soldiers never quit their posts for a moment and, as usual, every two hours we hear how they are relieved, how they present arms and the words: "Handing over No. 1 Post" every time the guard is changed; as usual the gendarmes unlock the doors and escort us to exercise. As before, we hear the clanging of irons and the creaking of doors opening and shutting. From early morning columns of soldiers are on the march, singing, and at times we hear military music. The spring, the rattling of the chains, the creaking of the doors and the marching soldiers beneath the windows somehow evoke the thought of nails being driven into a coffin. There are so many of these nails in the living body of the prisoner

that he no longer wants anything, all he wants is to be numb and not feel anything, not to think, not to be tormented between the terrible necessity and the helplessness. All that remains in the heart is this feeling of helplessness, while all around from hour to hour, from day to day is the terrible necessity.

#### **APRIL 27**

I want to register a few facts. About a week ago in one of the corridors a revolver and several rounds of ammunition were found in the lavatory. Colonel Ostafyev, who was brought to the scene, summoned the gendarmes, threatened and scolded them saying that they were not looking after us properly, that they maintained contact with us and blustered that he would shoot them all, put them in irons and send them to penal servitude and that for the slightest misdemeanour they would be brought to trial. He even slapped some of their faces. The gendarmes never protested. They were reluctant to speak to us about this, for they felt humiliated. But they have drawn closer to us. Apropos of this one of the prisoners wrote to me: "I recall an event which was described to me by an eyewitness. You no doubt have heard that in 1907 prisoners were dreadfully ill-treated in Forty. Whenever the guards happened to be scoundrels the prisoners were brutally ill-treated. One of the methods used was to prevent them from going to the lavatory for hours on end. You can imagine how they suffered. One of the prisoners, who was unable to hold out, wanted to remove the excrement. When this was observed by the warder the latter swore at the unfortunate man, ordered him to eat what he had just defecated and punched him in the face. This action failed to evoke a murmur of protest among the prisoners, all they did was to make sure that this man left the cell in their company in order to avoid being beaten. When I ex-

pressed my indignation, the eyewitness, replying to my question said, "What could we do? If we had uttered a single word all of us would have been beaten on the pretext that we were mutinying."

In the year 1907 when I was a prisoner in the "Pawiak," the guard struck a prisoner for talking through the window. At this time about 40 men were on exercise. One of them wanted to rush at the soldier but was held back by the others. We insisted that this soldier should be replaced and our protest was backed up by the prison authorities. The captain of the guard, however, refused, and began to threaten us. When one of the prisoners answered back, a soldier lunged at him with his bayonet; he was saved only by the other prisoners coming to his aid. The result was that the prisoners were deprived of exercise. Shortly afterwards, when a soldier shot the prisoner Helwig for looking in one of the windows, Prosecutor Nabokov, who appeared on the scene at our insistence, merely shouted at us saying, "You have behaved outrageously, all of you should be shot." What is one to do in such circumstances? There is always the danger that the protest might lead to a slaughter. In such an atmosphere each is conscious only of his helplessness and bears the humiliation or, in despair, losing his head, deliberately seeks death.

My present cell-mate Michelman, sentenced to exile for belonging to the Social-Democratic Party, was arrested in Sosnowiec in December 1907. He told me about the following incident of which he was an eyewitness. At the end of December a warder accompanied by a soldier came to the prison in Będzin and summoned one of the prisoners to the office—a textile worker named Straszak from Schoen—looked him up and down and went away without saying a word. In the afternoon an investigator arrived, selected six tall prisoners including Straszak and, lining them up, summoned the soldier

and asked him if he recognized among them any who had taken part in the attempt on the life of a detective. The soldier pointed to Straszak. This Straszak had nothing whatever to do with the case and had never belonged to any political party. The soldier who "identified" him was the man who had accompanied the warder in the morning and who had been primed for the job. The prisoners lodged a complaint with the Prosecutor. This frightened the warder; still, he promised the prisoners that he would testify that the soldier was the same man who had come to the prison in the morning. Subsequently, while in prison in Piotrków, Michelman learned that Straszak had been hanged.

#### MAY 6

May Day has come and gone. It was not celebrated this year. Here in the prison they hanged somebody in the early hours of the morning of the 2nd. It was a wonderful moonlight night and for a long time I was unable to go to sleep. We did not know that a trial had taken place and that an execution was in the offing. Suddenly at 1 a.m. there was a commotion on the stairway leading to the office such as usually happens before an execution. Gendarmes, somebody from the office and a priest arrived; then, beyond the windows, we heard the soldiers marching in step. Everything was as usual. My cellmate was sleeping, so was my neighbour. I asked the gendarme the reason for the commotion. He replied that the Governor was fussing round the prison. I had the feeling that somebody was about to be executed. Later we heard that the victim was a worker, a tailor named Arnold.

That was how May 1st passed with us. It was a visiting day and we were told that there had been no demonstration in the city. The conditions of the masses are even worse—the same old grey, colourless life, the same poverty,

the same grinding labour, and the same dependence. It cannot be otherwise. But this thought and this attitude cannot console anyone except perhaps those for whom the struggle was merely the arena of casual action undertaken for effect. Some say that we should now go over exclusively to legal activity, which, in effect, means abandoning the struggle. Others, faint-hearted, unable to bear the present situation, take their own lives.

Personally I recoil from the idea of suicide. I want to find in myself the strength to endure this hell, and I am glad that I am sharing the suffering with others; I want to return, to continue the struggle and to understand those who this year have not responded to our call.

Once again I am alone. My comrade was taken today to a transit prison en route to exile. A mere boy, he was expelled from college for taking part in a protest action; he has been in prison three times since 1905. On the previous occasion he was held for 17 months, and he has been waiting two months to set out on exile. The place is now overcrowded. Thirteen people from the Dombrow basin were tried yesterday on the charge of belonging to the PSP and with taking part in raids. Three received the death sentence. A few days ago fourteen prisoners were brought here from Piotrków. The charge against them is that they knew about the attempt on the life of Zilberstein, a Lodz factory owner, and did not inform the authorities. Previously Kaznakov\* ordered eight people to be shot, without trial, on the same charge. The Military Tribunal in Lodz has sentenced the six innocent ones to terms of penal servitude ranging from 8 to 15 years; this case will now be heard a second time. All the prisoners have been in irons since September 1907.

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\* Kaznakov—Governor-General of Lodz, was notorious for his brutality.—*Ed.*

**MAY 10**

Two prisoners are scheduled for execution today—Grabowski and Potasiński. The latter, who occupies a cell on the floor below mine, is wholly unaware of his fate; he told us that they were sending a priest to hear his confession. He had no idea of what was meant and requested an interview with his lawyer; he is under the impression that his appeal has been sent to St. Petersburg. The two will be led away in an hour's time. One hour ago Frenzel learned that her sentence of four years had been reduced to eight months, while the two Czekajskas and Laskowski have had their hard labour sentence commuted to exile. Frenzel, unaware that executions will take place today, is laughing and chatting in the corridor. The four were tried on Saturday and sentenced to four years hard labour for belonging to the Left Socialist Party. Frenzel's sole guilt was that she had lived in the same house, though occupying a different room, as Grycendler who was exiled to Siberia and fled from there. Illegal literature was found in Grycendler's possession. Today a group from Lublin was tried—it consists of eight or nine prisoners; all, with the exception of one woman, were sentenced to death. She received fifteen years penal servitude.

**JUNE 2**

Our gendarmes have been in a state of panic for the past few days. Rumours are going around that smuggled letters were found in which somebody spoke about the sympathy displayed for the prisoners by the gendarmes. One of them has been arrested; a detective has arrived wearing the uniform of a captain of the gendarmes. He is looking for the "guilty" ones. All are threatened with dire consequences for the slightest misdemeanour. They are threatened with arrest for having extended the time allotted to the prisoners for exercise. The detective is

continually prying around No. 10 Block trying to catch a gendarme in conversation with a prisoner. A few weeks ago the warders were deprived of their stools so that they could watch us more closely. They are fearfully tired, having to stand four and sometimes twelve hours at a stretch for days in succession.

Vaterlos has had another accident. A few days ago he came to his cell window and held up his manacled hands. About a fortnight ago the Governor looked into his cell through the peephole and saw him hiding a note in his sleeve. The Governor immediately summoned the chief warder and the gendarme on duty and ordered them to seize the paper. Vaterlos broke from them, threw himself on the bed and swallowed the paper; the two men rushed at him, seized him by the throat but failed to retrieve the note. He is now alone in his cell, isolated and under strict surveillance. According to rumours this has been done on Uthof's orders on the pretext that Vaterlos had planned to escape. Laskowski has been taken ill and, fearing that they will poison him, has not eaten anything for a week. He has been transferred to the sick-bay. We are again two in the cell. I am no longer able to sit alone, and I must do something to disperse my thoughts. It is necessary mechanically to seek forgetfulness and drive away the thoughts; to force oneself to follow the trend of others' thoughts and share in them. My cell-mate has been telling me about his hunting adventures in Siberia; both of us enlarge our plans, how we will roam on foot with a gramophone through the villages, woods and hills of Galicia.\* We continually return to this project, always adding something and making new combinations.

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\* Galicia was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and political émigrés enjoyed the right of asylum there.—*Ed.*

**JUNE 3**

I simply couldn't get a wink of sleep last night. An hour ago they took our lamp away from us; it is now clear daylight, the birds are in chorus and from time to time I can hear the raucous cawing of a crow. My companion is sleeping fitfully. We have heard that two death sentences have been confirmed. The condemned men were not taken away yesterday, which means that they will be hanged tomorrow. Each of them in all likelihood has parents, friends and a sweetheart. Healthy, strong and yet powerless, they are now living their last minutes. The gaolers will come, bind their arms and take them away to the place of execution. The doomed men will see only the faces of enemies or cowards, will feel only the slimy touch of the hardened hangman, take a last look at the world, don the shrouds and then the end. The quicker it comes the less time there will be to think about it and the less one will feel it; and the parting words—long live the Revolution, farewell, farewell for ever.

But for those who survive the morrow will be just the same. How many have already trodden this path! It seems that the people no longer have any feeling, that they have become so accustomed to these things they make no impression. People? But then, I, too, am one of them. It is not for me to judge them; I judge them by myself. I am tranquil, do not rebel, and suffer no torment such as I did in the not so long ago. Outwardly all is quiet. The news comes and I shudder.... One more drop and peace follows. But beyond consciousness the soul experiences the same dreary process; how many times this has taken place, and the poison is accumulating, and when the day comes it will burn with revenge and will not allow the present hangmen-victors to experience the joy of victory. It may well be that this



seeming indifference conceals a terrible struggle for life and heroism. To live—surely this means having unquenchable faith in victory. Even those who dreamed of murder as a revenge for the crimes feel that this is no longer the answer to the crimes committed every day and that now nothing can erase from the mind the grim memory of these crimes. Such dreaming testifies only to inextinguishable faith in the victory of the people, to the vengeance which the executioners of today are preparing for themselves. Piling up in the hearts of our contemporaries and growing in intensity are the pain and the horrors with which our outward indifference is linked. This will continue until there erupts the terrible vengeance for those who, lacking the strength to be indifferent, deprived themselves of life, for the monsters who encroached on man's noblest instinct—the instinct of life, for all the horrors which the people have had to endure.

#### **JUNE 4**

It is now late. Piekarski and Rogov from Radom have been hanged. The soldiers have already returned from the place of execution. That which I wrote about yesterday—the heroism in life—quite possibly is not correct. We live because we want to live in spite of everything. Helplessness kills and putrifies the soul. Man clings to life because he is linked to it by a thousand threads—sadness, hope and endearment.

#### **JUNE 6**

Spring has already run its course and the warm weather is here. It is stuffy in the cell. They have not yet removed the winter frames from the windows. After repeated requests they have promised to do so sometime during the week. The frames are nailed down. The ventilator panes are covered with wire netting so dense

that one cannot even push a matchstick through the strands. There is not enough air in the cell. For the past few days our exercise has been extended to 20 minutes. Alas, it will soon be reduced again to 15 because many new arrivals are expected. Not long ago many of the prisoners in irons and all those sentenced to exile were transferred to Lomża. Frenzel and Wanda Czekajska have been taken to the "Serbia." Only very few of the old gendarmes are left now. The newcomers remind one of the Black Hundreds\* and have the appearance of being cowardly. At times they knock on the flaps of the peep-holes and look in to see what we are doing in the cells. The complaint which Vaterlos lodged with the Prosecutor about the gendarmes beating him has been ignored.

#### JUNE 20

Our gendarmes are completely terrorized. The chief warder keeps watch on them all the time and after duty hours tortures them with "training" and exercise so that they do not have a single free minute. They are afraid to speak with us because the Governor has promised the soldiers on guard in the corridor a substantial reward for any information about gendarmes talking with the prisoners. The arrested gendarme is still held in detention. Rumours are going around that the secret police have discovered plans for an escape. The prisoners are circulating all kinds of suppositions about traitors being in their midst.

It turns out that Rogov, executed two weeks ago with Piekarski, was absolutely innocent. He arrived in Radom a few days after the assassination of the gendarme Mikhailov. Despite this, he was arrested and hanged.

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\* The Black Hundreds were Monarchist gangs organized by the tsarist police to combat the revolutionary movement. They killed revolutionaries, attacked progressive intellectuals and indulged in Jewish pogroms.—*Ed.*

Piekarski ("Rydz") declared that many absolutely innocent people (Shenk and others) had also been condemned on this charge, that in all probability they would condemn Rogov too, and that he, Piekarski, alone was responsible for Mikhailov's death. Yet they have hanged Rogov. The President of the Court was the notorious scoundrel Kozelkin. Skalon confirmed the sentence. As a result of a request made by the parents and the defence counsel, the St. Petersburg authorities re-examined the case but confirmed the previous sentence. In this connection Kozelkin stated that the court had no doubt whatever about the innocence of Rogov, and, in reality, as the defence counsel were told by the colonels sitting on the bench, the latter had asked Kozelkin to request from Skalon that the sentence should be reduced, since they were not convinced of Rogov's guilt.

We are now in cell No. 11 which is much airier. The Vistula can be seen from the window and on the other side of the fortress walls are woods and low hills. But to see them one has to climb up on to the window. We do this quite frequently, clinging to the bars and looking out until our arms ache. At long last they have taken away the winter window-frames. Despite the promise made by the Governor, we had to remind the authorities of this over and over again. "Yes. Yes," replied the warder on duty as he went away and locked the cell door. After this we had to ask again but all we heard was: "Good, I will submit the request to the Governor." It would have been better not to have asked and not to have worried. Last Wednesday they came to us and suggested that we should return to cell No. 4, in the second corridor, which has no ventilator. We were told that that cell was assigned to the long-term prisoners and for those who were entitled to walk in the yard for half an hour. We refused to go, pointing out that from where we were they could easily take us for

exercise, that the first corridor was near by. So they have left us here and, as before, we continue to have our 20 minutes exercise daily. On Friday when my cell companion was on the way back from the lavatory he observed the Governor peeping into two cells, one of which was occupied by the woman prisoner Glucksohn.

## JUNE 25

I have received the following letter from a prisoner from Ostrowiec: "In May 1908 the notorious inquisitor Captain Alexandrov, chief of the Zemstvo guard in the Grójec District, was appointed chief of the secret police for the Ostrowiec District. He began his functions with gusto and almost every other day arrested a number of people. This continued throughout the first half of January this year. Among those arrested and detained for a month was Wincenty Kotwic, a PSP agitator who later became an agent. This provocateur denounced Staniszewski and Boleslaw Luciński as being members of the local committee of the Party. They were arrested and subjected to torture.

"Alexandrov's house is located on the outskirts of the town where he also has his office, while the prison is at the other end of the town. When the guards brought Staniszewski from the prison for interrogation they tied his hands behind his back. One of the guards held the end of the rope while the others surrounded the prisoner, hustled him through the town and beat him with rifle-butts, whips and fists. Finally, when he arrived before Alexandrov the latter persuaded him to admit his membership of the committee since such an admittance would have the effect of reducing his punishment. When Staniszewski replied with silence, Alexandrov ordered his thugs to give him 25 lashes, warning him that if after the 25th blow he did not admit his guilt he would get 250. The brutes threw themselves upon Staniszewski

with a view to stripping him. The latter spurned them, took off his clothes himself and lay down. One of the guards sat on his legs, another on his head. Staniszewski taunted his persecutors saying, 'If I move just once, you can give me not 25 but 100 lashes.' The punishment began, but after the fifth blow Alexandrov ordered them to stop. When the victim had put on his clothes he again was asked to confess; he persisted in his silence whereupon the guards were ordered to 'play blind man's buff' with him. In this 'game' the prisoner is placed in the centre of a ring of guards and is punched from one to the other. When this torture failed to produce results, Alexandrov confronted his victim with the provocateur Kotwic. The latter said, 'Why do you refuse to talk, did I not vote for you?'

"Luciński, subjected to similar torture, confessed that he was a member of the committee. Upon seeing that he offered better material than the other, Alexandrov resorted to different tactics. He expressed sympathy with Luciński's plight, saying that he was innocent and suffering for nothing, that he pitied him being so young and having a young wife, but he, Alexandrov, would show him the way to salvation; if he wanted to evade punishment for a crime that he had not committed he would have to betray those who recruited him to the Party. In the event of his doing so he would be released at once. Luciński, to save his skin, betrayed his comrades. Thanks to him and Kotwic all who had failed to go to cover were arrested. Many of them were people who had returned from exile and even from military service and were now re-arrested on the old charges. In addition to what they did to Staniszewski and Luciński the following took place. They took with us to No. 10 Block a young fellow named Szcześniak (there were eleven charges against him and he faced a death sentence). He had been betrayed by Kotwic. Szcześniak had no

desire to confess to the crimes attributed to him. Since Alexandrov's wife was unable to bear the screams of the man who was being flogged, Szczęśniak was taken late at night to a field on the outskirts of the town where he was stripped and beaten until he lost consciousness. Afterwards, while still unconscious, he was taken to the punishment cell and thrown on to the stone floor. The next day, when taken once more to Alexandrov, he persisted in his silence whereupon the flogging was repeated. Many others were subjected to the same torture. Adamski, a member of a local committee, was subjected to such maltreatment that he tried to smash his head against the wall but only succeeded in making his injuries worse. He was punished for this and handcuffed for three weeks...."

Wólczyński was hanged yesterday evening. He and others occupied the cell opposite us. He was a young, handsome boy. We saw him through a crack in the door. He left the cell quietly, asked if he should take his things with him and, without saying farewell to his comrades, was taken to the condemned cell at 9 o'clock. At one in the morning we heard the soldiers marching to the place of execution.

#### **JUNE 26**

There is a man named Schwarzenser in a cell in the first corridor. He was arrested five months ago in Hamburg charged with being in possession of Anarchist literature. The German authorities hastened to take him to the Russian border. The prisoner's request that he be deported to Austria was refused. He was sent to Russia as a Russian subject (he is a native of Włocławek). Despite his objections, the literature and two revolvers were sent with him. At the customs shed in Wierzbołowo the German police agent reported about the revolvers to the Russian authorities. So far no

charge has been preferred against Schwarzenser. According to rumour he is being detained because two gendarmes are arguing about him—one suggesting that he be extradited, while the other, equally insistent, wants him sent to the interior of Russia. Katz, deported from Germany a year ago, is still here. He has not been tried, but they are thinking of sending him to administrative exile. On the floor beneath us there is a man named Brozych, a worker from Wola,\* who was arrested in Vienna on October 30 and likewise deported to Russia. In the fourth corridor there is a police officer from Lodz who is charged with membership of the Socialist Party, with releasing political prisoners and with having taken part in the killing of a guard in Ostrowiec while serving as a junior officer. His name is Rabukhin.

My cell companion had a visit from the court investigator today. The investigation (he is charged with killing an agent named Kozer) has been completed. Apparently he alone will face the charge, the charge against the others involved in the case having been dropped. Detectives have sworn that they saw him at the scene of the murder a few minutes before it took place. They are lying shamelessly, but he is not in a position to submit an "alibi," and the authorities are now boasting that they always find their man. The Governor-General of Radom said this in his report. Consequently someone has to be condemned and the guilty one is he who falls into their clutches.

The gendarmes continue to be scared of us; besides not speaking, they are ashamed to look us in the face and they scowl as we pass them. Some of them have changed so much that, in their desire to get rid of the feeling of being blind weapons in the hands of others, they try to demonstrate their authority.

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\* Wola—a suburb of Warsaw.—*Ed.*

## JULY 1

Elaborating on his previous letter my neighbour wrote to me: "The names of Alexandrov's guards are: Pri-godich (chief warder), Aksenov, Lukaszuk, Jakimczuk and Freiman (the office clerk). The plain-clothes agents Wincenty Kotwic and Boleslaw Luciński, receive 30 rubles a month in wages and another ten as supplementary payment. Kotwic, arrested on August 16, 1908, was charged with being an agitator of the PSP; he was released, allegedly on bail, on April 30, and on the same day entered the service of the police. Luciński was arrested on January 30, 1909, and charged with being a member of the Ostrowiec committee of the Socialist Party. Released on May 11, he too began to work for the police. Now for some details about their victims. Stanisław Romanowski was arrested in the spring of 1908 and taken to the secret police; one evening the police took him to a field outside the town where they flogged him, his tormentors insisting the while that he confess to the charges levelled against him. When the flogging failed to produce results, he was bound to a tree and his persecutors, falling back ten or twelve steps, aimed revolvers at him threatening that unless he confessed he would be shot. Romanowski, however, refused to act the traitor, so he was taken to Sandomierz Prison where he remains to this day.

"Orlowski, arrested at the end of November 1908, was also taken to the outskirts of the town and beaten in the same way for refusing to admit to membership of the PSP. He was interrogated the next day but also without result. That evening the beating was repeated and Orlowski reduced to such a state that he was unable to move. The guards carried him back to the cell and threw him on to the floor. After the beatings Orlowski insisted on seeing the doctor. I do not know what the doctor said nor do I know if a protocol was drawn



up. A few days later the Prosecutor of the Radom district court, to whom Orłowski had complained, came to the prison. But apart from saying that he had looked at the victim he offered no comment. It appears, however, that he brought pressure to bear on Alexandrov, because the floggings stopped after his visit. Orłowski, too, is in Sandomierz Prison.

“Pająk, arrested in the autumn of 1908, was charged with the murder of a book-keeper named Chochulski on the Nietulisko estate. The circumstances of this case are as follows: Pająk’s mother, a farm worker, went to a field on the estate to gather the tops of beets. She was found there by Chochulski who maltreated her. The woman screamed at her tormentor: ‘Wait until my son comes back from America, he will not forgive this.’ A few days after her son’s return, Chochulski was killed. Pająk was arrested and beaten up by the guards who, in order to stop their victim from shouting, threw sand in his face. Some time later he was released.

“Adamski, arrested on March 9, 1909, was taken bound to Częstoczyce, where he had worked in a sugar refinery. All the way to the town he was whipped and punched and asked to tell the whereabouts of a store of arms. This he could not do, since he knew nothing whatever about the arms. At present he is in Sandomierz Prison.

“Dybiec, arrested in 1908, was taken in February 1909 from the Radom Prison to the house of detention in Ostrowiec on the basis of information supplied by Kotwic; he was charged with having fired at a man in Denków, near Ostrowiec, who was suspected of being a spy. Like the others, Dybiec was taken in the evening to the field and, after the beating, and upon being confronted with witnesses, admitted his guilt.

“Who the witnesses were I cannot say. Dybiec is now in the Radom Prison. Stanisław Bartos, arrested in August or September 1908 on the charge of belonging

to the military organization of the revolutionary faction, after being flogged in the office admitted his membership and, later, betrayed two others—Szczęśniak and Kacprowski. Bartos is detained in No. 10 Block. Szczęśniak and Kacprowski, arrested in the spring of 1908, were taken in November of the same year from Sandomierz Prison to the Ostrowiec house of detention and charged with membership of the military organization of the revolutionary faction. They were subjected to beating until they confessed. Afterwards Kacprowski, evidently anxious to whitewash himself, gave information about Szczęśniak, declaring he had committed eleven offences, while Szczęśniak by way of revenge and anxious to prevent Kacprowski being accepted as a police agent, supplied information about things which Kacprowski had concealed. At the moment both are in No. 10 Block. In the early hours of May 30 the secret police, together with the agents Kotwic and Luciński, arrested four young fellows in Częstoczyce—Banaś, Kowalski, Sitarski and Kwiatkowski. While being escorted to Ostrowiec (one and a half kilometres) they were beaten with batons. Kotwic and Luciński did most of the beating. Six bombs were found on the men—two of them assembled and four in parts. In all cases of people being arrested, the guards Jakimczuk, Lukaszuk and Aksenov did most of the beating, and more recently Kotwic and Luciński. There is no permanent head of the house of detention in Ostrowiec, this function is performed in turn by the guards.

“The functions of permanent orderlies are performed by two guards—Jan Gerada and Karol (I do not know his surname).”

Staniszewski who is in the next cell to ours was taken here three weeks ago. Although we have advised him to lodge a complaint, he has not done so. During these three months he has become grey and bald. A few days

ago he received a visit from Rzepinski, the Ostrowiec investigator, and the Radom Deputy Prosecutor who interrogated him from 12 noon until 9.30 in the evening.

## **JULY 11**

We are again hearing about further death sentences. It is expected that ten will be pronounced this evening in the Włocławek case, which has lasted for ten days. Five of the eleven sentences in the Lublin case have been confirmed. Wulczyński and Sliwiński were executed two weeks ago. There seems to be no end to the executions. We have now become accustomed to news of this kind. And yet we continue to live. The mind is no longer able to grasp the magnitude of the thing, one feels only a kind of disquiet, a weight on the mind, and indifference to everything grips us more and more. One lives because his physical powers are not yet exhausted. And one feels disgust for oneself for such a life.

How many times have I written about the joy of life and its power, about bright spring days, the magic of music and song, the dream of a land of fairy-tale and of the land of reality. Only today I discussed this with my cell-mate, and I wrote about it a few days ago to a comrade who, living abroad in a beautiful country, is sad, desolate and finds everything alien. And now as I write these words the thought, like an evil shadow, comes to mind: "You must die"—this would be the best thing. No! I will live, I will not deprive myself of life; I am attached to it both by the feelings of others and by my work, and maybe also by the longing and the hope that the time of song will return, an unconscious hope, a hope prompted by the longing.

The prison authorities now make a detailed record of the way in which the doomed men behave during execution. Their words are written down and their groans and death agony noted. This is done for "scientific" purposes.

**JULY 16**

The accused in the Lublin case were tried and executed not here but in Lublin. Six of the men in the Włocławek case have been sentenced to death. Skalon has departed. Uthof has commuted the death sentences to hard labour. Rogov left the following letter: "Dear comrades, only a few hours separate me from death, and among my thoughts are memories of the past which for me is still very recent since it was only yesterday I had hoped to return to you and rejoin your ranks. Now I want to devote my last minutes also to you and to the cause to which I have devoted my life. I fought to the best of my ability, spreading the good word and working as hard as I could. Comrades, I have been condemned for something which is utterly alien to me,\* for a thing which I have always opposed and with which I had nothing whatever to do. But does this matter to the government of butchers and hangmen? This is merely a repetition of what one meets at every step in the government practice of present-day Russia. Crime, crime and more crime. And the victims are the proletariat and its most class-conscious sons. This is a time of stagnation in our movement, and at this moment I want to address a few words to you from my tribune—the death cell: To work, comrades! The hour is now—it struck long ago! Let the crimes which they are committing spur you on to intensify the struggle, to fight on to the end.

"Comrades! To all of you resting after long and onerous labour, at home and abroad, surely you will not now be passive. No! With this faith I go to the common grave at the foot of the fortress wall. With ardent faith in our future, with faith in our victory and with the cry:

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\* Rogov was sentenced to death for the alleged crime of taking part in a terrorist act.—*Ed.*

'Long live the Revolution! Long live socialism! Farewell, farewell!'"

That was all! But in a notebook I read: "Hersz Rogov in his death agony." They have killed an innocent man. In point of fact Kozelkin has committed yet another murder. Approached twice by Skalon, Kozelkin each time declared that the court had no doubt whatever concerning Rogov's guilt.

The atmosphere in the block is one of tranquillity, melancholy and death. Songs are no longer heard; the exchange of notes has practically ceased; we do not know the names even of the prisoners in the corridor. Many have been transferred to other prisons, new people have arrived, and the older prisoners have become quiet and resigned. The banging on the doors has ceased. Glucksohn, one of the prisoners in our corridor, hardly ever goes out for exercise. The gendarmes are still scared. They never speak to us now, never give us a friendly look; they search for letters; the decent ones destroy the letters when they find them, the others, the more cowardly, take them to the office. They are nervous because they know that agents have been planted among us, and they are worried lest we mention them in letters which might be intercepted. One, a man who previously delighted in talking with us and who asked us to talk with him, escorted me from exercise on one occasion to the office. Upon parting with my comrades I waved my cap to them. He shouted angrily at me for doing so and when I said something in reply he said he would order the soldier to club me with his rifle-butt. This shocked me so much that when I met the Governor I complained to him.... The gendarme became furious and, justifying himself before the Governor, shouted, "It is forbidden to exchange greetings." Previously other gendarmes had said that this one was more stupid than

wicked. For the slightest misdemeanour the gendarmes are sent to the punishment cells or are compelled to stand immovable for two hours with sword in hand. On one occasion I saw how two gendarmes, standing to attention near the fortress wall, under the threat of punishment did not dare move. In the eyes of one I noticed a flash of hatred, in the eyes of the other an animal fear. Yes, we are indeed sad and silent. Only through the window from the fortress wall there come to us the sounds of shooting—soldiers practising with rifles. Sometimes on Saturday evenings and on Sundays we hear military music. We become animated only when on exercise. For the past three months I have been sharing the cell with Warden. We get on fairly well together, yet from time to time something will upset us, impelling us to say something caustic and spiteful to each other. At times even a word, a joke, a slight movement in the cell or even the very presence of the other makes us fret, and then angry words burst out and we are ready to fly at each other. But we manage to keep our tempers, control them and not let them get the upper hand. Possibly we are helped by the fact that we don't thrust ourselves on each other, that each of us can live in his own way without observing the other and that very often we are oblivious even to the presence of the other. What is bad is that at the moment our respective lots are not the same. Mine is somewhat lighter, I have the hope of speedy release, but Warden faces the prospect of long years of hard labour and he simply cannot become reconciled to this. What is more, he is all alone. He gets no letters. And this makes things doubly difficult. Comrades, remember the prisoners! Every manifestation of attention is a ray of sunshine and the hope of resurrection from the dead.

**JULY 17**

...It turns out that Marczewska had nothing whatever to do with the attempt on Skalon. When sharing the cell with Ovcharek she learned all the details of the attempt and falsely confessed her participation in it, evidently with a view to establishing a reputation for herself as an important revolutionary; in so confessing she had no fear of going to the gallows, because there were so many charges of banditry against her that it was simply impossible for her to evade the death sentence. We have learned about this from unimpeachable sources. She acted her role excellently. It is also indisputable that she betrayed the members of the organization in Pruzsków who arranged her escape. And she betrayed Glucksohn with whom she also shared a cell for a time, charging that Glucksohn had taken part in raids and "hold-ups,"\* offences chargeable under Article 279 of the criminal code, and that she had been agitating the gendarmes. Marczewska even betrayed one of the gendarmes, alleging that he had helped the prisoners.

**JULY 20**

Here is the farewell letter written by Piekarski ("Rydz") who was executed on the 4th: "It is hard to part with life especially when you feel that you still have the strength with which to serve the cause; but if in the lottery of life I have drawn this ticket, I have no complaint. Many have gone before me in this struggle. I have no claims on anyone or anything. I go to the gallows with the faith that the day will come when it will be brighter in our country, and when that day comes my spirit will help gladden the hearts of our brothers.

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\* Term used to signify expropriation of government money.  
—Ed.

Farewell all. I sincerely wish you success in the struggle. Good luck."

### JULY 23

One of the prisoners—a worker—who has been here for about a year sent me the following note: "I admit to you that after my experiences at liberty I have the feeling that it is only here I breathe deeply and feel happy, that I am able to add to my knowledge by reading. I become so engrossed in reading that the day seems too short and, were it not for the anxiety about my family, I would willingly stay here longer. Eager to compensate for what we were unable to do while at liberty, we read sometimes until daybreak, and although we get up at 7 or 8 in the morning still the day seems too short for our talks and recollections of the past."

I reproduce here extracts from the last letters left by Montwill (Mirecki) to one of the prisoners sentenced to death on October 5 for taking part in the attack on Lap station and who was hanged on the morning of the 9th.

"... 3.10.1908. I shall be tried on Tuesday. Plonson will act as the judge, Abdulov as prosecutor. I feel as if I had just received 'extreme unction'....

"4.10. Things are not so bad with me. Maybe this sounds strange to you, but I assure you that even if they hang me, and even though every execution evokes disgust, nevertheless the rope which they will put round my neck will have its own very important positive significance. I say this without any doubt whatever. I regard this as objectively as if the matter did not concern me personally. In our society there are many who say that the members of the military organization send others to face the bullets and the gallows, while they remain in the background and live a life of ease. These tales are spread by the secret police in order to get prisoners to act as traitors. The Russian Government has recognized



me as a member of the military organization; by hanging me, the police will not be able to use this argument. . . .

"I am in good spirits and my health is a little better. I look on this thing as if it did not concern me personally, I judge everything from the standpoint of the revolutionary.

"6.10. They sentenced me to the gallows today solely on the basis of the Prosecutor's speech. By tomorrow evening the sentence will have the force of law and in two or three days time I shall be where so many of our people have gone before me. . . .

"In my last minutes I shall be silent. I dislike scenes; and should a cry be wrung from me, it will be: 'Long live independent Poland!' The idea of independence has always been my guiding thought. Farewell comrades, good luck. . . .

"7.10. The sentence will not be annulled, of this I am sure—they have made up their minds to hang me. The Prosecutor ended his speech with the words: 'The sentence is ready, all you have to do is sign it.' The enclosed cross is not a memento, it is a precious article which even a convict is allowed to wear and which in penal servitude may be turned into money. It may be useful to you, it is no longer any good to me. Farewell."

#### **JULY 25**

In two of the cells, as far as I know those occupied by Shapiro and Rzeszotarski, the windows have been opened. Finding the Governor in a good mood they put it to him that the windows should be opened, while they on their part promised not to "misbehave." Next day they opened the window in Rzeszotarski's cell and, by mistake, in Marczewska's, but not in Shapiro's. When Shapiro complained, they opened his window and

then re-nailed Marczewska's. All the windows in the cells which look out on to the yard where we have our walks are closed; I do not know about the windows in the other corridors, but I doubt very much if they have been opened. Two months ago I submitted a request to the Governor that they should open mine. He said that if he did so he would have to open all the others. My reply was that this would be a good thing and that everyone would give an undertaking not to "misbehave." He then said that the request could not be granted. And yet he is fully aware of the importance of open windows. He himself said that Avetisyants was a strong man when he first came here and performed exercises with dumb-bells which other prisoners could raise only with the greatest effort.

Four days ago the warder on duty approached us and asked if we would object to having a third man in the cell—a prisoner who had just left the sick-bay and wanted to be with Warden. We agreed and asked him in return to request permission from the Governor to open the window. However, instead of bringing the man to our cell they put him in a cell with a madman, and our window still remains sealed. Yesterday we learned that the case of Mostowski, and, so rumour said, of Warden, on a charge of murder,\* had been dropped. Warden, suspicious of this news, was very anxious and sent a letter to the Governor: "Please inform me," etc., etc. Two days passed without any reply. Yet the Governor is not a bad fellow, he likes to talk and joke with the prisoners, behaves decently and even grants some privileges. But there is a big element of double-dealing in this and many suffer from it.

For more than a week now Warden has been on the

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\* Mostowski and Warden were charged with killing a provocateur.—*Ed.*

reduced diet on the grounds that he is charged with murder (the fact that he is charged according to § 102\* is ignored). The food ration is so meagre that the prisoner without money of his own is always hungry. True, they feed us a little better than they do in the Pawiak Prison, but the portions are much smaller. For those who have not much money or none at all this is excruciating. It is impossible to get rid of the feeling of hunger. The prisoners spend most of the time in a state of drowsiness, they are irritable and tend to be quarrelsome. They suffer dreadfully. But the chief warders do well out of this. The predecessor of the present chief was a fairly decent fellow who more than once exercised care for the prisoners. Yet, according to rumour, he managed to accumulate something like 10,000 rubles during his six years' service. The present incumbent traded in coal during the winter—the building was heated only every other day and even less frequently. At the moment he is making money out of the milk supply. A curious incident took place with Rzeszotarski who bought milk with his own money. The milk, it turned out, had been diluted. When Rzeszotarski discovered this he summoned the man in charge of the stores who said that the milk was supplied by the chief warder who kept a cow. This gentleman promised to supply better milk provided nothing was said about the discovery. The store-man—an old fellow—has held this post for many years. And although held to be decent enough, this does not prevent him from profiteering on our food and pilfering as much as possible. The officer, Kalinin, has calculated that he makes 11 kopeks on each of the prisoners receiving the improved diet. Kalinin, who had been the quartermaster of his battery, knows all about prices.

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\* That is with belonging to the Party.—*Ed.*

Silence has reigned in our cell during the past few days. We hardly ever speak with each other and my neighbour is in a bad way. Obviously I am beginning to get on his nerves and he feels the need for a change. He is still waiting to get the indictment and to stand trial.

### **AUGUST 8**

Three months ago (May 8) the Court of Justice finalized my sentence. It was dispatched to the Tsar for confirmation on June 9 and only the other day did it arrive from St. Petersburg. I think I shall be another three months here. At any rate I shall soon be parting company with No. 10 Block. I have spent sixteen months here and now it seems strange that I shall have to go away or, to be more precise, that I shall be taken away from this dreadful place. Siberia, whither I shall be exiled, seems to me to be a land of freedom, the fairyland of one's dreams.

At the same time I feel pangs of anxiety. I shall go away and the monstrous life here will continue. Strange and puzzling. Certainly it is not the horrors of this bleak house that attract me to it, but the attachment to comrades, friends and unknown neighbours—strangers, it is true, but yet near and dear to me. It was here that we felt and realized how necessary man is to man, what man means for man. It was here that we learned to love not only women and not to be ashamed of our feelings and of our desire to give people happiness. And I think if there are so many traitors, it may be because they are friendless and alone, nobody with whom they can embrace and speak words of tenderness. I think that the relations between people are complex, that feelings, even though inherent in man, have become the privilege only of the chosen. And if here we long for flowers, it is also here that we learned to love peo-

ple as we love flowers. It is precisely here where there is no desperate struggle for a crust of bread, there springs to the surface that which, of necessity, is concealed in the depths of the human soul. We love this place of our martyrdom because it was here we established for ourselves that the struggle which brought us hither is also a struggle for personal happiness and for emancipation from the coercion and the chains imposed on us.

## LETTERS TO RELATIVES

1898-1902\*

To A. E. Bulhak\*\*

[Kovno Prison] \*\*\*  
January 25 (13), 1898

Dear Aldona,

Thanks for writing to me. Really, when you have hardly anything to do, when you are completely isolated from life and work, receiving and sending letters can be a definite source of satisfaction. I am confined all the time to my "apartment" with the result that new impressions, so to speak, are totally absent, variety is non-existent. Consequently it is extremely important for me now to get letters bringing some kind of new impressions. But enough. You call me "an unfortunate." But you are profoundly mistaken. True, I cannot say that I am happy and contented, but this is not because I am confined in prison. I can assure you that I am far happier than those who live an aimless life in freedom. And if I were faced with the choice: prison or a life of liberty without purpose, I would choose the former, otherwise life would simply not be worth living. And so even in prison I have not lost heart. Prison is good

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\* For continuation of letters see p. 175.

\*\* Aldona E. Bulhak, Dzerzhinsky's sister.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* Dzerzhinsky was arrested in Kovno on July 29(17), 1897.—*Ed.*

in the sense that one has sufficient time critically to examine the past and I find this useful.... Prison is torture only for those with faint hearts....

It looks as if I shall have to spend another year here, which means that your wishes concerning 1898 will hardly be realized.

...Don't imagine for a moment that prison is unbearable. It isn't. Stan\* is so good and looks after me very well; I have books and I am studying, learning German and have everything I need, even more than I had at liberty....

How is your little Rudolf? He must be quite big now. Is he walking and talking? See that you bring him up in a way so that he places honesty above everything; such people will always be happy no matter what the circumstances may be. Of this I assure you. I read somewhere in a book that rocking a child to sleep is almost similar to the effect of opium, harms him physically and mentally and affects his moral growth. Forcing a child to sleep against his will, rocking him—these are artificial methods which directly affect the brain and, consequently, the entire organism. Cradle-rocking arose in olden times, not for the benefit of the child but for the convenience of the parents. In order not to waste time the mother span while rocking the cradle with her foot. Believe me, this is exceedingly injurious.

You ask about my health, well, it is so-so. My eye trouble is a little better.

I wish you all the best, be happy and contented. A hug for all three.

Your loving brother *Felix*.

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\* Dzerzhinsky's brother Stanisław.—*Ed.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Nolinsk]\*

September 19 (7), 1898

Dear Aldona,

I promised to write to you immediately after being released but kept putting it off until now.... I was released only on August 14. The journey was an exceedingly pleasant one, that is, if we can call the company of fleas, bugs, lice, etc., pleasant. Actually I spent more time in prisons than I did on the road. We travelled by steamer on the rivers Oka, Volga, Kama and Vyatka. This was an extremely arduous way of travelling because we were herded in a so-called "hold" like herrings in a barrel.

The lack of light, air and ventilation made the place so stuffy that although we were in nature's garb we felt as if we were in a steam path. We had plenty of other "conveniences" of a like nature. But enough of them. They are not worth thinking about because in view of my present situation I myself cannot find a way out. I was set free in the town of Vyatka and allowed to travel at my own expense to the district town of Nolinsk. In Vyatka, where they are building a new railway, there is a certain Zavisha. A friend of his loaned me 20 rubles and provided me with an outfit of clothing all of which, of course, must be repaid. All in all it cost 60 rubles. I am now in Nolinsk, where I am supposed to remain three years unless I am conscripted and sent to Siberia, to the Chinese border, on the River Amur or somewhere else. It is impossible to find work here, apart from the local tobacco factory where the wages are seven rubles a month. The population of the town is in the vicinity of five thousand.

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\* In the summer of 1898, after one year of preliminary detention, Dzerzhinsky was exiled for a period of three years to the district town of Nolinsk in the Vyatka Gubernia.—*Ed.*



There are a few exiles from Moscow and St. Petersburg, which means that at least there are people with whom one can gossip. The trouble is, however, that I dislike gossiping, and would much prefer to be doing something useful. I am trying to be useful indirectly, that is, I am studying. There are some books here and there is a Zemstvo library. I am making the acquaintance of the functions of the Zemstvo, which, as you know, we,\* as yet, do not have. I go for walks and forget about prison, to be precise, I have already forgotten it. Alas, I cannot forget the lack of freedom because in this place, too, I am not free. However, the day will come when I shall be free and then they will pay for everything. But I mustn't bore you.

I wrote these lines yesterday evening, that is, on September 6. Today upon reading over what I wrote, I sense that you will not be satisfied since I have written little about my life here. I have rented a room and take meals with a fellow exile, but I think I will have to give this up, since it entails going to his place every day and in autumn the mud is so deep that it is possible to get drowned in it. Food is relatively cheap, but manufactured goods, because of the distance from the railroad, are almost twice as dear as at home. There is a plan for building a railway from Vyatka through Nolinsk to Kazan and it seems that the plan will be shortly confirmed by the government. Let them build railways, and let the railways bring with them the development of capitalism, let them be good for their purses! But together with the railways there will come also the cry of freedom, as a spectre, as a curse terrible for them, the cry "bread and light!" and then we shall measure our forces. In the building of railways and the factory construction accompanying it, many here see

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\* That is, in Poland.—*Ed.*

only the negative aspects. They declare that the development will lead simply to centralization of wealth in the hands of rich people and to misery for the majority, that is, for the peasants and handicraftsmen. But there are two sides to this development. True, the factory building will contribute to the spread of misery (it exists already), but, on the other hand, it will unite the people and enable the worker to fight, will impart strength to him and bring him the light with which to change his downtrodden life. Let them build the railways, they need them, let them go ahead with the exploitation because by doing so they are digging their own graves! And we, the exiles, should now gather strength physically, mentally and morally in order to be ready when the day comes. True, not many will envy us, but we who see the bright future, who see and recognize its grandeur, who are aware that life has chosen us as fighters, we, in fighting for this future will never, never forsake our work for the Philistine comforts. The harsher aspects of life will certainly not make us downhearted, because our life consists in battling for a cause which transcends the humdrum details of everyday life. Ours is a young cause, but its development will be boundless because it is immortal. But why, you may ask, write to you about this? Don't be cross with me. Somehow the flow of my thoughts involuntarily travelled in this direction. Whenever I write to any of our family the thought always comes into my head: why is it that as yet I alone of our family have taken this path? How good it would be if all of us were to do the same thing! Then nothing would ever prevent us from living like brothers, of being even better and closer than brothers.... And now good-bye, don't be angry with me for my thoughts, I am outspoken and for this reason it is difficult to be angry with me.

Yours, *Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Nolinsk]  
November 17 (5), 1898

Yesterday and the day before yesterday I received letters from you. I see that you are very angry with me, the reason being that you simply do not understand and do not know me. You knew me as a child and as an adolescent, but now I think I can describe myself as a grown-up with fixed ideas, and life can but destroy me in the same way as the tempest uproots the centuries' old oak—but it cannot change me. I cannot change nor can I be changed. For me a return to the past is impossible. The conditions of life have given me such a direction that the tide in which I have been caught up has but left me high and dry for the time being on a barren shore\* so that afterwards it will carry me farther and farther with renewed strength, until such time as I am not completely used up by the struggle, which means that for me the end of the struggle can be only the grave.

But to get back to the matter at hand. I have said that you do not know me. You say: "You do not recognize the family, your feelings for people in general are stronger than they are for the individuals who constitute the family." And so according to you I do not recognize the family. Let me say at once you are profoundly mistaken. I speak only of the family in its present form, a form which often brings exceedingly bad results. For nearly all classes in society the family as constituted today signifies suffering, not comfort and happiness. First of all, an example from the life of the working class. I know a family—and there are thousands like it—in which the father and mother work in a tobacco factory (here in Nolinsk) from 6 in the morning till 8 in the evening. What can the children get

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\* Dzerzhinsky has in mind his imprisonment and exile.--Ed.

from a family placed in such conditions? They eat badly and there is no one to look after them; and the moment they grow a little they will go to work before they learn to read and write. I ask you, what can the family give these children?

Take another social group—the peasantry. Here the family has still partly preserved the soil under its feet, but as time goes on the ground slips away more and more from it. The majority of the peasantry is now forced to find work on the side, because in most cases the land cannot provide enough food and in the future the work on the side will feature more and more in their budget. The peasant must help the family, support it instead of the family helping him; clearly, in such conditions the peasant family, too, will gradually disintegrate.

Let us turn now to the wealthy classes. Here the thing that strikes the eye is that the family is based solely on a commercial basis; secondly, the woman who transgresses in the family is shamed in the most humiliating way, whereas the husband transgressor is the usual thing. The man can do everything, whereas the woman has no say at all. How is it possible to regard as models those families in which the woman slave is at the mercy of the despot husband, where commercial aims play the dominant role. And in these circumstances what can be the attitude of the children to the parents? Here a warmer relationship is possible, since the parents maintain their children, educate them, look after them and provide for them. But one cannot say that their views coincide completely. Life marches on, it changes and it is changing very rapidly at present. The children grow up in an entirely different atmosphere from that in which their parents grew up, with the result that they have other convictions, ideas, and so on, and this is the reason for the antagonisms between fathers and sons.

As constituted at present the family can satisfy and partly does satisfy only the propertied classes. For this reason they cannot nor do they want to understand any criticism of the family from the standpoint of the non-propertied. They live well, and they do so because others live badly. Their families can exist only by destroying others, namely, the workers' families.

So you see, Aldona, that my fight is not against the family in general, but against its present form. Life destroys the family, takes away from it all its positive sides and for the vast majority of humanity leaves only the negative features. The family of the wealthy classes with its prostitution is a disgusting phenomenon. But the point is not the family as such—what interests me is the welfare of the exploited classes on which the family, ethics, mental development, etc., are based. And with regard to feelings, I can tell you this. Our life is such that it demands we overcome our feelings and subordinate them to cold judgement. Life is such that it rules out sentiment, and woe to the man who lacks the strength to overcome his feelings. You say that our feelings largely concern humanity as a whole rather than man as an individual. Never believe that this is possible. Only hypocrites speak like that, and they deceive themselves and others. It is impossible to have feelings only for people in general. People in general is an abstract thing, the concrete is the sum of individual people. In reality feeling can be generated only in relation to something concrete, never in relation to an abstraction. One can sympathize with social misfortune only if he sympathizes with the misfortune suffered by each individual....

The society in which we live today is divided into different classes with opposed interests. The result is that happiness for one signifies misfortune for another. Take, for example, the famine which follows crop failure.

For the masses of the people this is misfortune. But there are those who utilize this misfortune in order to stuff their pockets with money (grain merchants). Or take the superfluous labour. For the worker this is a misfortune, since he is forced to yield and agree to work for low wages. But for the capitalist and the landlord this is a godsend, etc.

I have seen and see now that practically all workers suffer, and this suffering evokes in me a response which compels me to cast aside everything which was a hindrance to me and to fight together with the workers for their emancipation.

I have heard that arrests have taken place in Vilno in connection with the erection of the monument to the "hangman."\* Write and tell me all you know about this. Kisses for all four.

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Kaigorodskoye]\*\*  
January 13 (1), 1899

Dear Aldona,

...I had been (up to my departure from Nolinsk—*Ed.*) without a penny, or rather with only a penny in my pocket, but I didn't go hungry. My eyes, now real-

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\* This refers to the arrests which followed the protest against erecting a monument to Governor-General Muravyov who brutally suppressed the uprising in Lithuania in 1863, for which action he became known as the "hangman."—*Ed.*

\*\* Dzerzhinsky was deported to the village of Kaigorodskoye after four month's residence in Nolinsk. In the police archives it is stated that he behaved most unfavourably politically and during the brief period managed "to influence a number of people who formerly were quite reliable." Dzerzhinsky has given this reason: "For being unco-operative and causing scenes with the police, and also because I had become a worker in a tobacco factory they sent me 400 kilometres farther north."—*Ed.*

ly bad,\* are being treated because I want to live and one cannot live without sight.

I received your last letter in hospital where I had been for some time and I would have been there longer, I think, if it had not been for a recent event. Before this I lived in Nolinsk, a town with a relatively big population and not too remote. However, it entered into the Governor's head (probably he was pleased with himself after dinner and faced the prospect of a comfortable snooze) that it wasn't good for me to stay here any longer. I am wholly unaware as to the reason for his interest in my welfare. He has transferred me four hundred kilometres to the north, a region of forests and swamps, to a village 250 kilometres from the nearest district town. The same thing happened to one of my comrades. At least I have the good fortune to have somebody with whom I can converse. Kaigorodskoye is a fairly large place. Fifty years ago it was an administrative centre. It has 100 households and about 700 peasant inhabitants. Located on the bank of the River Kama, on the fringe of the Perm and Vologda gubernias, it is surrounded by forest. The place abounds in bears, reindeer, elk, wolves and game. In summertime the swarms of mosquitoes make it impossible to go anywhere without nets or to open windows. There are frosts of 40° in winter and 40° heat in summer. Apartments are hard to come by, and they are expensive. I am living with another exile. White bread is never seen here, and in autumn we eat frozen meat. The cost of living is, if anything, dearer than in the district town. Sugar, tea, tobacco, matches, flour and cereals are very expensive in view of transportation costs. We prepare our own meals and we have bought a samovar. Good hunting is to be had and it is possible to

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\* During his exile Dzerzhinsky contracted trachoma.—*Ed.*

make some money from it. Soon we hope to get guns and do some hunting. We have ordered skis and we have bought sheepskin coats.

Not long ago the Governor sent me the sum of 49 rubles 68 kopeks, whose money it is, I don't know. At first I thought that the government had remitted my allowance,\* and I signed the receipt. But I was mistaken, the sum was too big. Evidently it is money taken from some of our relatives. I completely forgot to warn you about one thing. I am sure that my letters will now be censured locally. They have tried to do this but we threatened them with court proceedings because without instructions from the Ministry of the Interior they are not empowered to do this. So at the moment we are waging a struggle with the local authorities who have refused to accept our letters.

I have received money from Stan and now have ample for my needs. That, it seems, is all there is to say. Just one thing more. Here in Kaigorodskoye there is a hospital with a doctor so one can boldly be ill and pour into oneself all kinds of mixtures and powders. Generally speaking I feel better now. According to the doctor my eyes will be all right after eighteen months' treatment.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Kaigorodskoye]  
March 13 (1), 1899

I have had two letters from you. Thanks for sending me the fifty rubles through the Governor. But you shouldn't do this. My letters are now being opened and for this reason I have not written for some time and will not write very often. A few days ago I returned

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\* Prisoners serving a term of administrative exile were entitled to a small government allowance.—*Ed.*



from the district town whither I had been summoned with regard to military service. Owing to the state of my lungs, however, I have been rejected for ever. It is impossible to get treatment here although there is a doctor. But only young doctors, those without a practice, come here. The climate is too grim. I have applied for a transfer to another place but I doubt very much if anything will come of it. I am studying pretty hard. How are the children? Hug them for me and tell little Rudolf that thanks to us life will be better for him, he will be able to breathe more freely, provided he endeavours to see that no one oppresses another or lives at his expense, to overturn the golden calf and put an end to the bartering of conscience and the darkness which weigh so heavily on mankind; in the future he will not have to conceal his work like a thief, since no one will persecute him. But, should this not find a response in his heart, should he live solely for himself and think in terms only of his own well-being, then woe to him. Don't be angry with me for wishing him that which I hold to be the greatest of happiness and which for me is sacred.\*

*Felix.*

To A. E. Buhak

[No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
March 21 (8), 1900

I feel fairly good.... Life has developed in me, if it is possible to say so, a fatalistic feeling. After the accomplished fact\*\* I am not bewailing my lot. Despair is a stranger to me.

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\* In August 1899 Dzerzhinsky escaped from exile and arrived in Warsaw in September.—*Ed.*

\*\* That is, his second arrest in Warsaw on February 4 (January 23), 1900.—*Ed.*

In Kaigorodskoye I spent the whole summer hunting. From morning till late at night sometimes walking and sometimes in a boat, I hunted game. I let nothing stand in my way. The forest thickets crippled my body. In the marshes I was often waist deep in water chasing swans. The mosquitoes and midges played havoc with my face and arms; at night-time, sleeping on the river-bank, the smoke burned my eyes. I shivered with cold and my teeth chattered in the chill of the evenings when breast-high in the water we hauled in the nets, or in autumn when I followed the bears in the forest. What, you ask, drove me to leave home? It was the longing for my native land, a longing which has cut so deep into my spirit that nothing can wrest it unless they wrest out my heart.

You think that this hunting life has soothed me somewhat? Not a bit! The longing to return became overpowering. I saw in my mind's eyes images of the past and a still clearer picture of the future, but I felt in myself a terrible emptiness which became more and more pronounced. I could hardly speak calmly with anybody. The life in Kaigorodskoye had poisoned me. . . . I gathered my last strength and fled. I lived, not very long, it is true, but I lived.\*

*Felix Dzerzhinsky*

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\* In these words Dzerzhinsky characterizes his tempestuous revolutionary activity in Warsaw at the end of 1899 and the beginning of 1900.—*Ed.*

To A. E. Bułhak

[Siedlce Prison]\*

July 16 (3), 1901

Dear Aldona,

I want to write you a few words but to tell the truth I don't know what to write. My life is so monotonous, there are so few new, fresh impressions that I cannot even think, and to live with one and the same thoughts all the time is boredom at its worst. I am forbidden to write about the things I would like to tell you. I have read your two letters and I see from them that you imagine me as some kind of unfortunate, such as I have never been and am not now. Materially speaking I am even too well-off, and as to the fact that I have neither freedom nor books and that I am in solitary confinement and that my dignity as a prisoner is subjected to all kinds of humiliations ... you should remember, my dear Aldona, that these sufferings are compensated a thousand times by the moral feeling that I am doing my duty. It is necessary to have this feeling in order to understand that we prisoners are happier than most of those at liberty because even though our bodies are fettered our spirits are free, whereas theirs are the spirits of slaves. Don't take this for an empty phrase or beautiful words. You will remember that after my first arrest and imprisonment I never abandoned my duty as I understood it and as I understand it now. But in order to reach the goal which people like myself have set, it is necessary to relinquish personal comforts and a life for oneself. I am saying this, dear Aldona, solely for the purpose that you should not regard me as a "sufferer" and you must not write to me in this strain.

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\* Dzerzhinsky had been transferred from the Warsaw Citadel to Siedlce Prison.—*Ed.*

You want to know how I look. Well, let me give you as exact a description as possible: I have become so much the man that many take me for 26, although as yet I have neither moustache nor beard; as usual I look somewhat grim and relax only during conversation, but when I forget things and when I begin to argue, and argue hotly for my views, then my eyes flash so that my opponents are unable to look me in the face; my features have become somewhat roughened so that now I am much more like a worker than the student of the recent past, generally speaking I look worse. I have three deep furrows on my brow; I walk as I have always done, with a stoop, with lips compressed, and I have become very nervous....

Your "*incorrigible*."

To A. E. Bulhak

[Siedlce Prison]

October 21 (8), 1901

Dear Aldona,

I received your letter a couple of days ago. I am delighted that at last there is a chance of you getting work. I perfectly understand your position—inability to find a place in life and having such wonderful children, which obliges their parents to work for them.

I am much younger than you, but I think that in the course of my brief life I have acquired such a multitude of impressions that any veteran would boast of them. In reality, he who lives as I do, cannot live very long. I can neither hate nor love by halves. I simply cannot give only half of my spirit. I either give all or nothing. I have drunk from the cup of life not only all the bitterness, but also all the sweetness, and if somebody should say to me—look at the furrows on your brow, at your emaciated body, at your present life, look and you will see that life has broken you, I should reply in

these words: No, life has not broken me, it is I who have broken life, it is not life that has taken everything from me, it is I who have taken everything, literally everything, from it. Yes, people have created riches for themselves, and these riches, these inanimate things, have fettered their creators so that people live for riches, not riches for people.

Dear Aldona, our paths in life have parted to a considerable degree but the memory of the precious and innocent days of my childhood, the memory of our mother—these are the things that, willy-nilly, have impelled me, and impel me now, not to break the threads which unite us, no matter how slender they may be. So don't be cross with me over my convictions, there is no place in them for hatred of people. I have hated wealth because I have loved people, because I see and feel with all my heart that today people worship the golden calf which has turned the human spirit into something animal-like, chasing all love from the heart. Remember that in the soul of such as myself there is a sacred flame which gives happiness even at the stake.

The tragedy of life is the suffering of children. I have seen children, puny, weak, and with the eyes and speech of aged people. And what a terrible sight this is! Poverty, no family warmth, motherless, brought up solely on the street, in the beerhouse—these are the things that martyrize the children; the poison, seeping into the young, small body, ruins it. I am passionately fond of children.... And when I see on the one hand fearful poverty, and on the other the excess of wealth which spoils and deforms the little ones, then I am glad for your children's sake that you are neither rich nor poor, that throughout their childhood they will become conscious of the need to work for a living, which means that they will become real people. After all, the

children are the future. They should be strong in spirit and they should be acquainted with the facts of life from their earliest years....

When your health improves you absolutely must write to me about the children. I want to know how they are growing, about their abilities, the things that interest them, the questions they ask, how you are bringing them up, whether you are giving them sufficient freedom or are strict with them, whether they are beautiful, with whom they play, whether they are noisy and quarrelsome—in a word, the very moment you feel like it, write to me about them. I am so anxious to know how their young minds are developing, minds which as yet know neither good nor evil.

As for me I hope that in about two months I will be sent to Yakutsk in Eastern Siberia. My health is not as good as it might be—my lungs are really beginning to cause me anxiety. Bouts of depression are followed by a feeling of being on top of the world. The solitary confinement has left its mark. But my mental strength will last me at least a thousand years.... Even here in prison I can see how the inextinguishable flame burns—the flame that is my heart and the heart of all my comrades now suffering here. I am powerless to do anything about my health in this place, because here it is the responsibility of others. They feed us just enough to keep us alive. They spend seven-and-a-half kopeks a day on our diet, but as for water we have barrels of it....

With regard to money I must say that, in general, I need it, because "I" am thousands and millions. But where to find the gold with which to feed so many? Such a miracle can be created only by the heart which takes millions into its love. So please don't send me any money whatever because you already reward me with your whole heart, you never forget me and write

me affectionate letters, though I am sure there is much you do not like about me.

Perhaps I shall soon have a visit from my friend from Vilno. As you see, I am alive, and people have not forgotten me. But believe me, to be in prison with heaps of gold but with no one to love you and think about you is a hundred times worse than being in prison without a penny. The main thing is the knowledge that in the outside world there are people who have not forgotten you. . . . That is why I am so grateful for your letters, for your kind heart and your memory of me.

You say in your letter that Jadwiga\* has a "heart of gold." You must never write such things to me. A heart of gold means not having a real heart, and it is only with a real heart that one can feel the throb and pulse of life; gold is but the symbol of one who stinks.

I hug you and your splendid children.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. and G. A. Bulhak\*\*

[Siedlce Prison]

Beginning of Nov. 1901

Dear Gedymin and Aldona,

Your letter and the photos of the children have arrived. I am greatly touched by the warmth of your words—the more so because for some time past our relations have suffered from misunderstanding. To be frank, I was displeased when I learned that you regard me as a "sheep that has returned to the fold"; you seem to think that my life, my thoughts and my actions will now take the "right road," that the "evil" will disappear and that henceforth "God will show me the way" . . . . No!! As I have been in the past, so I am now;

\* Dzerzhinsky's sister.—*Ed.*

\*\* G. A. Bulhak—Aldona's husband.—*Ed.*

that which embittered me then, embitters me now; the things I loved then, I love now; all that delighted me in the past years, continues to delight me; as I did then, so I do now; I think the same today as I thought yesterday; the sorrow and suffering which I experienced in the past will scarcely pass me by in the future; my way is the old way; just as I hated evil yesterday, so do I hate it today; as of old I loathe with every fibre all injustice, crime, drunkenness, depravity, excess, extravagance, brothels in which people sell their bodies or souls, or both; I detest oppression, fratricidal strife and national discord.... I want to see humanity surrounded with love, to warm it and cleanse it of the filth of modern life.... Why, then, do you speak to me about changing my way? You must never write to me about this. I want to love you as I have always loved you. But you, reluctant to understand me, try to tempt me, to get me to renounce my ideals, want my love for you to become a crime!....

I would like to write more about the power of love, but not today. Today I shall confine myself to answering your letter. I hope that its sharp tone will not offend you, because where there is faith in one's cause, there is always strength and sharpness, and no sloppiness. Of all evils, the worst, in my view, is falseness. It is much better to write what one really thinks and feels, unpleasant though it may be, than to write something pleasant but false....

As for my lungs, they are not as bad as you think. I no longer have a cough, and the fact that I have chest trouble—well, who can be in perfect health after nearly two years in a prison cell. I expect my sentence possibly within the next three months and, if I may say so, I dread the frost of Yakutsk less than a cold, egoistical spirit; consequently I prefer Siberia to spiritual slavery. And I hope that, in spite of everything, I shall



still see you and your children. But if fate decrees that I should not see you, the failure will not give me a headache, nor should it cause you any upset. Life is long, and since death is short there's nothing to fear.

Now for a few words about your children. Like all children, they are charming, innocent even when they are naughty, act in accordance with their desires and do as they like; as yet there is nothing false in them. The rod, excessive strictness and blind discipline are the bane of the child's life. The rod and excessive strictness tend to make him false, to be a hypocrite, to feel and desire one thing and, from fear, to say and do something entirely different. The rod can but cause the child pain, and if he is a sensitive child, if the pain compels him to act contrary to his wishes, then the rod will merely make him a slave of his own weakness, will be a millstone round his neck, always pressing on him; the result can only be a spiritless child, a child without a conscience and incapable of enduring any hardships. And his future life, since it will not be wanting in trials much more severe than the pain caused by the rod, will be a constant conflict between conscience and suffering, a conflict in which conscience will always give way. Look at yourself, at the life of the people whom you meet every day; you cannot fail to see the ceaseless conflict between conscience and life, compelling man to act contrary to his conscience, in which conflict conscience is mostly the loser. Why is this so? It is because the parents and teachers, while moulding the minds of the children and teaching them how to live, how to distinguish between good and evil, fail to inculcate the spiritual strength needed in order to do good, thrash them with the rod or slap them, shout at them and punish them in other ways; in this manner they sap the strength of the adults of tomorrow and, instead of building conscience, do the



F. E. Dzerzhinsky. 1905



No. 10 Block of the Warsaw Citadel where F. E. Dzerzhinsky was imprisoned. 1908-1909



House in the village of Taseyevka, Kansky Uyezd, Yenisei Gubernia, where F. E. Dzerzhinsky lived in exile. 1909

very opposite. The rod, excessive strictness and corporal punishment can never touch the heart and conscience of the child in the desired way, because in the child's mind they are symbolical of coercion on the part of the stronger and lead to either stubbornness, even when the child knows that he has done wrong, or to cowardice and falseness.... The sound corrective measures are those which compel the child who has misbehaved to admit his guilt, to say that he has done wrong, that it is necessary to live and behave differently.

He will then try to avoid evil; the rod is effective only for a brief period; and when the child grows up and is no longer afraid of it, conscience disappears together with the fear; the child, spoiled, becomes a liar, and every encounter makes him more and more depraved, now that he no longer fears the rod and corporal punishment, while his conscience is silent. I repeat, the rod and corporal punishment are the curse of humanity. Fear makes the child mean and vicious, turns him into a hypocrite, coward and careerist. Fear cannot teach the child to distinguish between good and evil; he who fears pain will always stoop to evil. Al-dona, I am sure that you have not forgotten my stubbornness when I was a child. It was thanks to this and also to the fact that I never was thrashed, that I now have the strength with which, in spite of everything, to combat evil. Never beat your children. Let your love for them restrain you from doing so, and remember that, though it is easier to use the rod than to display the care needed for their proper upbringing when they are still small and defenceless, if you do use it you will deny yourself their joy and love when they grow up, because the corporal punishment and the excessive strictness will have crippled them spiritually. Never, never hit them, because the child's mind and heart are

so impressionable and sensitive that even the slightest injury leaves its trace. And if it should happen that in a moment of irritation or in a fit of temper you lose control of yourself and punish them, shout at them or cuff them, you should immediately beg their forgiveness, express regret, take them in your arms, let them feel your maternal love in their little hearts, comfort them and soothe their pain in order to remove every trace of your anger which they feel so much. After all it is the mother that moulds the spirit of her children, not the reverse; they, naturally, being children, cannot understand you, and for this reason you should never be angry with them. I myself can recall how Mother once slapped me—her nerves were on edge with the burden of managing the house and looking after all of us;\* neither you nor Jadwiga was at home at the time (I think you were both in Vilno, though I cannot be sure); I had played some prank or other and Mother became so angry that she slapped my face; I screamed and cried bitterly, and after crying my fill I crept into a corner under the flower stand and remained there until it became dark; I distinctly remember how Mamma found me in the corner, picked me up and pressed me to her bosom, hugged and caressed me. I began to cry again, but this time the tears came quietly, they were pleasant tears, tears of happiness, soothing and joyful. I was in a transport of delight! Then I was given a bun and a lump of sugar, and my joy knew no bounds. I have forgotten how old I was—either six or seven. We were staying in Dzierzynowo at the time.

From this you will see, my dear, how love and punishment affect the child. Love penetrates into the spirit, makes it stronger, good and responsive, whereas fear, pain and shame cripple it. Love creates everything

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\* There were eight children in the family.—*Ed.*

good, lofty, strong, warm and bright. The child does not know, does not understand what is good and what is bad, he must be taught to distinguish between the two. As yet he does not possess the necessary will-power, consequently he should be forgiven his lapses, and his mother should not be cross with him. It is not enough to say, "Do this, don't do that," nor is it wise to punish him when he is disobedient. In the latter case only pain and fear are his conscience, and he will never learn to distinguish between good and evil. The child responds to the one who loves him. . . . And love is essential to his upbringing. Conscious of the love of his parents, the child tries to be obedient in order not to disappoint them. And should his vitality and liveliness lead him into pranks and mischief, he himself will be sorry for his misdemeanour. Then, as his will-power becomes stronger, and as he learns to behave better, his guide will be his own conscience, not the bad environment or the external conditions which so often lead to moral degradation. The child shares the sorrow of those who love him. His young mind is influenced by every, even the slightest, detail. Consequently, in the presence of children it is necessary to refrain from dissoluteness, angry scenes, quarrelling, swearing, gossiping and, worst of all, from not living up to one's words; the child is observant, and even if he does not remember everything he sees and hears, some traces remain, and it is from these traces and these impressions that his mind, conscience and moral fibre are moulded. Will-power, too, should be inculcated. Spoilt and pampered children, whose every whim is gratified by parents, grow up into degenerate, weak-willed egoists. Parental affection should not be blind. Nothing spoils the child more than giving in to his every desire, than pampering him with sweets and other dainties—this is the surest way to spoil him.

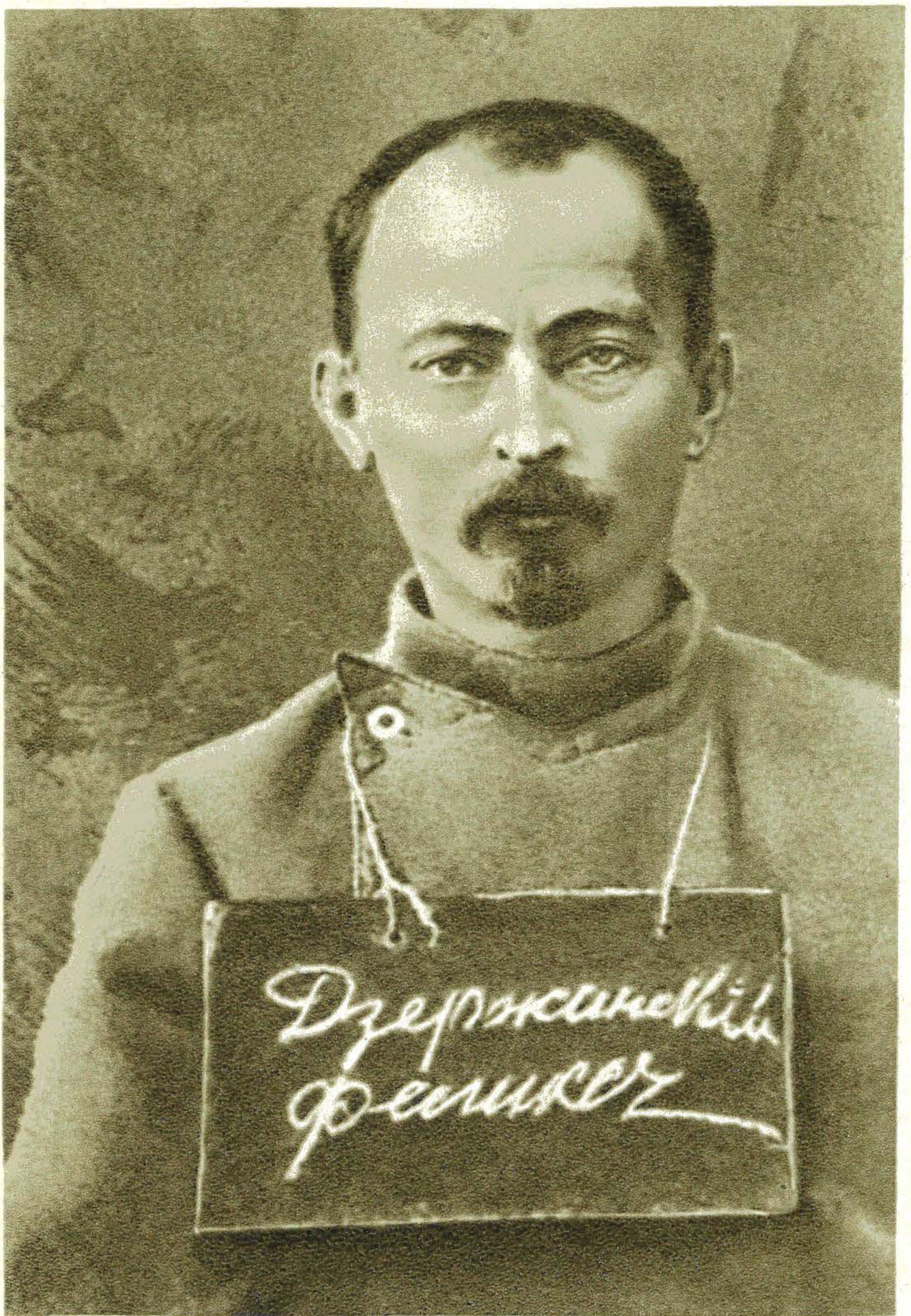
From the standpoint of upbringing, rational love and affection are a hundred times better than blind love. Take, for example, the case of a sick child who asks for a slice of bread, or the healthy one who insists on having sweet after sweet, who cries and screams and who until he gets his way refuses to listen to his mother. Tell me, whose love is greater—the mother who gives and satisfies the caprice of the child, or she who refuses? Again, tenderness is the required quality. And, if it at first fails to soothe, the child should be left alone to cry until he stops, until he quietens down a little; then he can be approached and told in a comforting way why he cannot get everything he asks for, and that his crying causes pain to his father and mother. . . . Your job, Aldona, that of moulding the character of your children, is not an easy one. It calls for the greatest care! For the merit of the children depends in large measure on the parents. I would like to write a lot more about children, but I am not sure how you will take my advice, maybe you will think I am meddling in things which do not concern me. Be that as it may, you can be sure that I am motivated only by love of your children. Give them a hug for me. . . . I hope they will grow up healthy and happy, filled with love for their parents and other people. I hope they will be courageous and strong in mind and in body, that they will never sell their conscience. I hope that they will have more happiness than we have had, and that they will live to see the triumph of freedom, brotherhood and love. I am tired, so I must finish. . . .

As to my strength of mind, it is, doubtlessly, fair enough, but not as strong, Aldona dear, as you imagine it. In my letters and here in prison I seem to be one-sided and very strong, but I have my defects, which, of course, cannot be known from letters. . . . I



F. E. Dzerzhinsky. Cracow. 1911





F. E. Dzerzhinsky in Gubernia Prison. Orel. 1914

mention this because I shouldn't like you to think that I am better than I really am—I abhor everything false, everything that smacks of hypocrisy.

I kiss all six of you.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Buthak

[Siedlce Prison]  
December 17 (4), 1901

My poor, dear Aldona,

I have just read your sad letter about Gedymin's illness and I feel now, more than ever before, how precious you are to me. Your pain and sadness, your fatigue and anxiety for the future of your little children to whom you have given body and soul—this makes me feel that you are doubly my sister because the common sadness unites us.

Be of good heart. Your children will gain from this. They will grow up and, if brave of spirit, they will be happy even in the most difficult moments. Be sure that you impart this spiritual strength to them, inculcate it and all their life they will be grateful to you, their parents, for having given them life even though life should not be wanting in suffering. After all, you love your children and your maternal love will calm your torments and your pain and relieve your tiredness. Being a mother you are already happy, and if your children will also love, if you kindle the flame of love in their hearts, then they, too, will be happy. Given love, no suffering will break a man. The real misfortune is egotism. If there is love only for self, then when severe trials come his way man will curse his fate and experience fearful torment. But where there is love and affection for others, there is no despair. You must be strong, my dear sister, and should tiredness get the upper hand and you begin to doubt your strength, then

remember those unfortunates who suffer a hundred times more torment than you, and remember that their number is legion. And keep a thought for me, too, who will suffer and languish in the distant Siberian taiga and will not curse his fate, who loves the cause for which he suffers and loves you. I bless my life and I feel in myself both our mother and all mankind. They have given me the strength to bear all the suffering. For us our mother is immortal. It was she who gave me my heart, who implanted love in it, who broadened it and who remains in it for ever. . . . Don't worry about the future. Happiness does not imply a life free from care and worry, happiness is a state of mind. Look at those gentry who do not want even to feed their child, who do not love him because he cries, because he is small and helpless. What do they regard as a misfortune? Pimples, say, appear on their lips or on their nose just as they are dressing for a ball, making it impossible for them to go. The result—hysterics. That, for them, is a misfortune. Let us look now at the poor mother who loves her children with all her heart: how happy she is despite all the poverty when her child rushes to her, smiles and whispers, "Mamma"; why, this one moment alone compensates for a million sorrows, because it is precisely for such moments that people live.

Dear Aldona, I cannot express to you all my feelings; don't think that this is mere talk, no, not at all. The point is that my conception of happiness through suffering derives directly from my life and from my feelings. This is not idle chatter—I feel myself happy in suffering, and I want to share this happiness with you, to make things a little easier for you and to take upon myself some of your burden. I think that you will derive solace from knowing you have so many loving people around you, I among them, that I think about

you and, together with you, love your children and suffer for them. . . .

I shall be leaving here in three weeks—on January 5 (New Style) but this is not quite definite. It may even be in five weeks, and for this reason I shall try to write you another farewell letter. Do not come to see me either here or in Minsk. What can a meeting of minutes give us? It would only upset us and to leave the sick Gedymin and the smaller children would not be wise and I would not like it. So don't do this. With regard to the sheepskin coat and felt boots, I fear that the buying of these would give you too much trouble, but if you wish, send them to me here in Siedlce; don't send them by post, it costs too much, they can be sent by rail freight—with a duplicate receipt addressed to the Governor of the prison. You are far too kind to me; after all, you have plenty of worries of your own and yet you never forget me. I am sending you a photo taken here a couple of months ago. Maybe it will replace the meeting which you must forget.

Hug and kiss Gedymin for me, let him, too, be brave!

A hug for the children.

All the best.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. and G. A. Bulhak

[Siedlce Prison]

January 2, 1902 (December 20, 1901)

Dear Aldona and Gedymin,

Thanks for the letter and the things which you sent me. You are spoiling me with your kindness and care, your words are too good and I greatly regret that I am unable to be with you so that we could get to know each other better. We have been separated for many years, and neither of us is the same today as he was yesterday. The past can be learned from the present,

but what a lot of new things we have discovered during this time! The past links us, but life separates us ever farther and farther.... And everything moves forward, by way of worry and suffering, by way of conflict of conscience, conflict of the old and the new, by way of death and the loss of individuals.... From this there grows a wonderful flower, the flower of joy, happiness, the light, the warmth and the beauty of life. I see its rich, heavenly colours, feel its delightful fragrance. I feel the warmth emanating from this flower, see its brightness and the brilliant play of hues. When I glance at this little flower I feel—feel with all my heart and not only understand with my mind—that this riot of colour, all this refreshing fragrance, this warmth and light and brilliance, all this is children's tears and suffering. These splendid visions, transient minutes, live long in my memory, I long for them, I thirst for their return and I see them again. This is the source of my strength; for this reason I have no regret, and the bitterness of the parting with people, with you and my friends does not distress nor poison me. And this is another reason, Aldona dear, why I think it is not worth your coming to see me. We would be very depressed, it would be difficult to combat the depression and it would sear our hearts. Just imagine a fifteen-minute meeting in the presence of the people who guard me here, a meeting after such a long separation, amid the gloomy prison walls, the iron bars, the padlocks, revolvers and sabres; we would hardly have the time to say a few words before being parted and prevented from speaking. No, don't come, dear sister, from here I can see you with the children and with Gedymin. I am conscious of your affection, of your worry, your sorrows and your joys. And surely you, too, must be conscious of my presence; in my letters I send you my heart, wondering if in them you can dis-

cern its beat. I know that you discern it. I know that even if my body should not return from Siberia, I shall live for ever because I have loved many.... Don't come, don't add unnecessarily to your suffering. From personal experience I know this only too well. I have had a few meetings here with one who is very dear to me; alas, these meetings are now a thing of the past, fate has separated us, perhaps for ever. As a result I have suffered very much.... And so once more I implore you, don't come, yes, and what is more, it is out of the question because they will take me away from here in a couple of days, and the train does not stop very long at Minsk. I shall be taken to Moscow and thence farther to the east and the north. I shall write to you as frequently as possible and for you the letters will take my place in the same way as your letters replace you. So don't be sad, Aldona, that we shall not be able to bid each other farewell.

In Poland the holidays\* are over, but with you they are just about to begin.... Be of good cheer, have confidence in your strength, courage in suffering, love in your mutual life, hope for the future and may you bring up your children to be real people, may you reap the fruits of your thorny life of work and worry. But no matter what hardships you may encounter don't be downhearted, because faith in your own strength and the desire to live for others is a powerful force. Dear Gedymin, your health is getting better and yet your letter reflects sadness. No, you must have faith in yourself, it is necessary to live and not to give in to the illness, don't think too much about it, you will get over it easier that way. I think that in my first letter from here I told you about a comrade of mine\*\* who had been

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\* That is, Christmas and New Year.—*Ed.*

\*\* The reference is to a young Social-Democrat Anton Rosol.—*Ed.*

seriously ill. He suffered from lung trouble and also from the complications of an unsuccessful operation. There were moments when I thought it was all over with him. But what happened? The desire to live and the thirst for life triumphed over the sickness and today he is at liberty and writes to me that his health, despite unemployment and poverty, is getting better and better. He is a worker, and for a worker unemployment means hunger and cold. Be stout of heart and strong in spirit. We shall see each other and it may be that I will visit you and we'll talk about our childhood days. . . . To me they seem so remote that I find the recollection of them fascinating; true, I feel a little sad when I recall my childhood, but not for anything would I deviate from my path, now that I have tasted of the tree of knowledge.

I am delighted at the thought that in a couple of months I will no longer be confined to prison. These walls have become so hateful that I can no longer look calmly at them, at our guards and the iron bars. I am sure that if they were to set me free altogether and if I were to come to you you would find me a morose creature. I would not be able to speak even a few sentences freely; the bustle of life would upset and irritate me. The gaolers know what they are doing in sending me for five years to Eastern Siberia (Yakutsk District) and freeing me there; in doing this they have in mind only my well-being—one needs time to come to after being immured for two years in a dungeon. The sudden change would be harmful, things must be done gradually and for this reason it is necessary to make the company of the bears, the swamps and the taiga, in a word, of nature, then a hamlet, a village, a small town and, finally, one's native place. I hope that I will live to see the end of it all. The journey will take approximately two months, in any case I hope to reach my destina-

tion by spring. I shall know more precisely whither I am being sent when I reach Irkutsk, that is, seven thousand kilometres from Siedlce.

Once again I thank you for everything, the best of health to you. I embrace and kiss all of you.

Your loving brother,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak      [Alexandrovsk Transit Prison]\*  
March 18 (5), 1902

Dear Aldona and Gedymin,

I am now in Eastern Siberia, more than six thousand kilometres from you and from home, but in the company of fellow prisoners. I am still in prison, waiting to be set free; with the arrival of spring and the opening of navigation on the rivers we shall be taken another three or four thousand kilometres to the north. In Moscow I saw Wladek and Ignaty\*\* only once, and I have hardly any idea of how they are getting on because quite suddenly the prison authorities cancelled any further meetings. What can I say to you? I am longing to be at home, this you already know. There is one thing they cannot do, that is kill the thoughts about our home, about the cause for which I am fighting and the faith in its ultimate triumph. With this faith and this longing I keep alive also here, and my thoughts fly to my brothers\*\*\* and I feel myself with them. True, there are difficult, even awful moments, when you feel your head bursting with pain, strangely enough it is the

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\* After nearly two years in Siedlce Prison, Dzerzhinsky, "at His Majesty's pleasure," was exiled for five years to the town of Vilyuisk (400 kilometres north of Yakutsk) in Eastern Siberia. En route to the place of exile he was detained in the Alexandrovsk Transit Prison near Irkutsk. With the opening of navigation on the river Lena he and his fellow exiles were sent to Vilyuisk, but on the way he managed to escape.—*Ed.*

\*\* Dzerzhinsky's brothers.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* His Party comrades.—*Ed.*



pain that makes us feel we are people, and we see the sunlight, although above us and all around are iron bars and prison walls. But enough. Briefly about our life. I am detained in the Alexandrovsk Prison, about 60 kilometres from Irkutsk. The cells are open all day long and we are allowed to walk in a fairly large yard;\* on the other side, separated by a palisade, is the women's prison. We have books and we read a little but spend most of our time gossiping, cracking jokes and amusing ourselves by parodying real life. Letters and news from home are our only source of joy. I have met many countrymen here—criminal offenders, not political prisoners—who long for their homes and families and who in most cases find themselves here solely as a result of the arbitrary action of the tsarist administration. I try to study these people, their lives and their offences, to find out what impelled them to take the way of crime and to find out how they live. . . . Believe it or not, there are people who have been here ten months waiting to be sent to the place where their passports will be issued. . . . Generally speaking, if about European Russia it is possible to speak and write much, about Siberia the least said the better, because there is so much foulness that one couldn't find the time to put it all on paper. With the building of the railway line the omnipotence hitherto enjoyed by the small leeches is steadily declining, but, as a rule, evil disappears only very slowly.

The journey from Siedlce, which took two months, was an exhausting experience. From Samara I travelled ten

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\* Administrative exiles had different conditions from ordinary prisoners and those sentenced to exile for life by the court. They were regarded as being semi-free. But at the time Dzerzhinsky was detained in the Alexandrovsk Prison these "privileges" were suddenly taken away. This arbitrary action of the local authorities caused a riot in the prison after which the privileges were restored.—*Ed.*

days without stopping and without rest. I simply must do something about my health—it is not quite sound at the moment. Fortunately, we are enjoying warm, sunny spring days and the air—mountain air—is good for those with weak lungs. The prison here is more or less bearable. The guard puts in an appearance only once a day and I spend all the time with my comrades in the open air. Write to me, tell me all your news, how you are getting on, about Gedymin and the children. Where are our brothers and what news is there of them? Is Kazimir\* at liberty or has he gone abroad? All the best! I embrace you.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. and G. A. Bulhak

[Alexandrovsk Transit Prison]

May 5 (April 22), 1902

Dear Aldona and Gedymin,

Thanks for your letter which I awaited with such impatience. No doubt you know that your letters are much more precious to me than mine are to you seeing that I am cut off from all that I love, with nothing left but this love the flame of which burns in my breast and sends my thoughts west and south. I cannot write very much now—somehow I am not in the mood for writing.

I think that we shall be leaving Alexandrovsk on May 12 (Old Style) and will be about six weeks on the road since I at any rate have to travel another 4,000 kilometres to Vilyuisk, my place of exile. This means that 10,000 kilometres will separate us, but unite.... The journey promises to be a fairly jolly one—there are a hundred of us. We shall travel by river and on the way I hope to see comrades whom I have not seen since

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\* His brother.—*Ed.*

1897. I hope that in Yakutsk they will allow me to take some treatment because my health has taken a turn for the worse. . . . Who told you that I had been ill in Krasnoyarsk? Let me have the address of Wladek and Ignaty. I get the journal *Glos*\* and I have a few books. I have been greatly disappointed to learn that you are still without work, but I know that you will not lose heart and this means that everything will come all right in the end. Embrace and kiss your children for me, maybe we shall meet again sometime, be healthy and brave. I warmly embrace you.

Yours,

*Felix Dzerzhinsky.*

P.S. Remember me to all.

To A. E. Bułhak

[Verkholensk]

June 4 (May 22), 1902

Dear Aldona,

Yesterday I was set free in Verkholensk in order to rest. The journey proved too exhausting for me. In a month or two I shall continue the journey and I think that by then I'll be considerably better since the climate is very healthy. Siberia is not a bad place for one's lungs. I am sending you a postcard because I somehow don't feel like writing a long letter. Don't scold me for this. What about your health, and how are the children? Any news about our brothers? I am somewhat surprised that despite their promises neither Ignaty nor Wladek has written a word. What about your job? I have met many comrades during my journeying here. . . .

Good health to you, I embrace all of you, kiss the children for me.

Yours,

*Felix.*

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\* *Glos*—Polish legal weekly of a Marxist trend.—*Ed.*

## ESCAPE FROM EXILE\*

The church bell tolled the hour of midnight. Two exiles extinguished the light in their room and quietly, so as not to awaken the landlady, climbed through the window into the yard. A long and dangerous journey lay ahead, they had said good-bye for ever to this beautiful but desolate place, with its atmosphere of death and prison. Like thieves in the night they crawled along the village street, flanked on either side by wooden cottages, carefully glancing back now and then to see if they had been observed or whether anyone was following them. All was silent, the village slumbered; apart from the night watchman rattling his clapper not a soul was astir. At last they reached the river, but were forced to turn back. A fisherman had put out his net, making it impossible to use the boat. They had no choice but to hide and bide their time.

The moment the fisherman left for home the exiles emerged from their cover and, making for the boat, eased it into the river. They were firmly resolved to es-

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\* On June 25(12), 1902, Dzerzhinsky and a fellow exile fled from Verkholsk on the River Lena and made their way abroad. There Dzerzhinsky wrote the story of the hazards and adventures which accompanied their flight.

The story was first published in *Czerwony Sztandar*, No. 1, 1902.—*Ed.*

cape and were confident that they would succeed. But their hearts were heavy when they thought of the comrades they were leaving behind, who would still have to suffer and endure, waiting for news of the struggle in the outside world whither the escaped prisoners were now bound, despite the Tsar's ban and the strict surveillance by the picked agents officially designated as supervisors in charge of the political exiles. This feeling, however, did not last very long. They still had to cross the wide and swift-flowing Lena, and to do so without being observed. They held their breath, their hearts filled with joy—they were on their way, the village receded and soon, when it disappeared in the darkness, the men in the boat, after the torment of more than two years in prison, shouted for joy. They wanted to embrace, to shout so that the whole world should know the joyful tidings that they, only five minutes ago captives, were now free men. They felt themselves really free, because they had thrown off their fetters and were no longer confined to a place of exile merely because the Tsar had decreed this.

They rowed with a will, taking turns at the oars. It was necessary to cover at least fifteen miles\* by nine in the morning. Their tiny boat, caught in the swift current, glided like a bird over the mirror-like surface of the river, which cut through a valley fringed by meadows, woods and hills. At night, bathed in the moonlight, the surroundings seemed awesome and mysterious. Fires burning here and there along the banks were reflected in the water. The fugitives avoided the banks, keeping to midstream, looking in the direction of the fires and smiling inwardly at those on the banks who had no idea of the "fish" they were missing.

But the feeling of joy and security was soon to give

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\* In tsarist Russia 1 mile equalled 7 1/2 kilometres.—*Ed.*

way to alarm. They suddenly heard ahead of them a noise resembling the roar of a waterfall. The night-time quiet carried the roar from afar, and the hills gave back echoes. It seemed as if some giant was at work there, but it was impossible to see him and decide whether or not to enter into combat with him. Fear gripped them, they had no knowledge of the river. They changed course, rowing in haste towards the bank in order to avoid the danger. The roar steadily increased in volume until it sounded like thunder. Clearly this was a struggle between two elements. A large island now came into view and to the left of it, blocking the river, rose rocks with which the water battled fiercely.

The runaways turned to the right and, the danger now averted, breathed freely. Soon, however, they came to the end of the island, and again they heard the roar. The current tried to take the boat over the rocks, downwards, where a mill came into view and where the river had been dammed from the bank to the island. The roaring water cascaded over the dam, the rowers, just in time, succeeded in bringing the boat to a stop at the bank. What to do now? Straight ahead were the mill, the rapids and the drop; on the left the island with its sheer cliffs; on the other side—the rocks. No murmur came from the mill where the people, evidently, were asleep; no dog barked and, apart from the nervous neighing of horses, no sound disturbed the silence of the night. One of the men set out to explore—perhaps they should beach the boat and haul it past the mill. Nothing came of the investigation. They would have to go back, row upstream and seek a passage through the rocks. There was no other way. They nosed the boat towards the island and, fringing the bank, pulled against the current. Clouds had now obscured the moon, and the mist, herald of the approaching dawn, which began to rise over the river, made things doubly

difficult. What with the darkness and the rapid flow, the job of finding a passage was not an easy one. But all things come to an end, and at last, after considerable expenditure of effort, they found a place and began to drag the boat slowly, inch by inch, through the scrub to the other side of the island. By the time they pushed it into the river again their strength had all but given out. After a brief rest, they again took to the oars, this time downstream. The dawn broke raw and cold, and they were grateful for their warm winter overcoats. Soon the dawn gave way to daylight, and the current carried them farther and farther. Enveloped in the dense, milky mist, they rowed silently and swiftly. Visibility was down to a noselength in this world of nothingness. They rowed on and on in a seemingly boundless expanse, all unconscious of the speed they were making, chilled to the bone, despite their strenuous labours. Neither river banks nor sky was visible, save when a breeze parted the coils of mist and for a brief moment they could see clear skies, woods and hills.

It was now six o'clock, and the mist still lay deep and heavy over the river. Suddenly, another terrifying roar broke on their ears. This, surely, signified the end, that all was over! No, not yet. They would still fight for their lives! They had almost run into another island, and a tree, bent low over the water, barred the way. All was obscured by the mist, and the boat, borne along by the current, collided with a thick bough. The man at the oars\* had barely time to shout before he went under. Instinctively his hands found a partly submerged branch and he managed to come to the surface. But the heavy winter overcoat, now thoroughly soaked, dragged him back again; the slender branch broke, he reached out for another, but it, too, broke under the strain.

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\* This was Dzerzhinsky.—*Ed.*

It was now clear that, unaided, he would never make the bank, and the boat was nowhere in sight. Fortunately his companion, who had succeeded in jumping clear, came to the rescue and hauled him out of the water. These were unpleasant minutes. The fugitives now found themselves on a barren island, with nothing to comfort them and, being all too close to their place of exile, again felt themselves imprisoned. But no, they would not give in. Looking at each other, they realized that they were both thinking the same thought—liberty or death, there could be no going back, they would fight on until the end. Still, the question was what to do now? A road was visible on the other side of the river, but people were driving carts on it, they could hear their voices and the rattle of wheels; soon, perhaps, the drivers would spot them. The mist was now rising, and wisps of cloud were gathering in the sky. The carters, possibly, were men from the village which they had just abandoned and might recognize them.... Make a raft, cross the river, and then continue on foot; maybe they would find another boat and continue the journey downstream. But this was daydreaming. How could they make a raft without timber and tools? No, they would have to call for help and run the risk of being caught.... There was always the chance that they could escape to the hills and the taiga....

And so, having decided on what they would say if questioned about their predicament, the man who was more or less dry took up a position to see if he could attract the attention of someone on the bank. His companion, who had fallen into the river, kindled a fire, stripped and began to dry his clothes. No sooner had he dried his things and got his circulation back than a boat put off from the neighbouring village in the direction of the island. Its occupants were peasants, one



of whom sported a medal with the Tsar's eagle. They rowed the outcasts to the bank, for which service they were rewarded with five rubles. The sight of the money raised their prestige in the eyes of the rescuers. Looking gloomily at the fast-flowing river, one of the fugitives, in the hearing of the peasants, muttered:

"Our money and our belongings have gone to the bottom. Instead of a few hundred rubles we're left with only sixty. We're stranded. What shall we do?"

"Don't worry, you'll manage somehow," said one of the peasants, who wanted to know whence they had come and whither they were going. The peasants were quite sympathetic (the result of the five rubles) and, with an eye to further gain, were ready to help.

The fugitives did not answer at once. With downcast faces, they walked to and fro along the edge of the water.

"What about horses?"

"They'll be here in a jiffy."

"My father is a merchant," said one of the runaways, "and my friend here is a shopkeeper. We were on our way to Zhigalovo where we intended boarding the steamer for Yakutsk. We were going there for mammoth bones—and then this thing happened."

"Don't take it so badly," said one of the peasants. "God has saved your lives (at this the "merchants" made the sign of the cross). We will drive you to Z. From there you can telegraph for money."

"What a capital idea," the two exclaimed in one voice. Then they fell silent, puzzling their brains for a way out of the situation. Once again they began walking up and down, deep in thought, without paying any attention to what the peasants were saying.

A cart arrived from the village and the runaways and their rescuers tumbled into it. It never dawned on the latter that they could have earned considerably

more if they had insisted on the "merchants" producing their identity papers. Meanwhile the "merchants" exchanged glances with one another and smiled quietly when the driver wasn't looking. They couldn't have been more fortunate. They were going exactly in the direction they wanted and, instead of having to row, they were being carried thither by horses.

After covering ten kilometres they arrived at the village where they were immediately surrounded by a crowd of curious peasants; the news of their disaster had preceded them. The local clerk informed them that some of their things had been salvaged from the river in the vicinity of the village, and advised them to defer their departure for a few days to give the villagers time to recover the lost money. The greediness of the would-be salvagers saved the fugitives from further complications. The people assured them that, with the river being in spate, the water was too muddy for salvaging operations, but, if the "merchants" would authorize some of their number to search for the money, and if they would leave their address, they would undertake to find the money and return every penny of it. In the meantime they could send off a telegram asking for money to be sent to them. The suggestion delighted the "merchants" who at once wrote out the authorization to search for the lost money and paid three rubles in advance. The peasants were equally delighted, since they now had the price of a drink. The runaways now had to find a good excuse for not sending the telegram.

"You know in our situation," began one of them, "one must be very careful about sending for money. My father might refuse to believe the news of our misfortune. He would say that we had gambled away our money. 'Let them go to the devil, they'll get no money from me.' But Mother, what will she say when she learns about our disaster!"

And the "merchant," greatly moved, made the sign of the cross.

"The Lord have mercy on us," he sighed, a prayer in which he was joined by some of the onlookers.

No, there was nothing to do but return home at once, and not by the main road, but by taking a short cut to the nearest railway station.

They were invited to go into one of the cottages where they found a steaming samovar and a table laid for them. The cottage was crowded with chattering men and women filled with curiosity about the two strangers. The latter sipped their tea in silence, mumbling an answer now and again to the questions, and sighing. At last one of the peasants plucked up the courage to say that he had collected five pounds of mammoth bones which he would let the "merchants" have at a cheap price.

What fools you are, muzhiks! Have you ever seen such an unlikely pair of merchants as the two men sitting in front of you? What fools! It never even enters into your heads that these are the kind of people you catch, bind and for whose heads more than one of you has already earned a reward.

At last the "merchants" departed, having promised to return in a week or two to buy the bones. They travelled non-stop, day and night through the taiga, a virgin forest, the relay of drivers regaling them with stories about the robbers and tramps who have their hide-outs in the depths of the forest, about the escaped convicts and exiles and the manhunts for them. And listening to these stories it seemed that the dark, brooding, eternally rustling taiga was alive, that in a moment would appear from behind the trees the shades of those who had been killed and never buried, the shades of those who had died of hunger, of people who in their death agony had cursed the day they were born, the

shades of people who had got lost and who had plumbed the depths of hopeless despair. It seemed that just over there the ghost of a robber, keeping watch on passing merchants, had flitted behind the trees; after the robber came the shade of a convict, pursued like a wild beast, running, gathering his last strength to find sanctuary in the dense undergrowth; but in vain, a bullet has already found him, and he falls, covered with blood....

And the "merchants" travel on and on, meditating on the strange destiny of man, on the mysterious, boundless, living taiga. Only yesterday they themselves, prisoners, surrounded by soldiers and strictly guarded, had been dragged thousands and thousands of kilometres from their homes to the other end of the world, to Asia and to the Far North. But now they were free, travelling backwards across the taiga, gazing at the sky studded with stars, and it smiled back at them, promising success.

The murmuring of the taiga never ceased.

They changed drivers and horses every six or ten hours. They made good progress, drawing nearer and nearer to their destination. A legend had already taken shape about them and, in the telling and re-telling, it grew in snowball fashion. Every time they changed horses, the driver related their tale of woe to his successor, always, of course, with additional colouring. The "merchants" heard it all and sighed sadly, but when no one was looking they exchanged smiles. To tell the truth they had had the devil's own luck. Soon they would be out of the taiga, only another twenty kilometres lay between them and the next village—the tough Siberian horses had taken them 80 kilometres without stopping. Suddenly, they heard in the distance the tinkling of bells, a troika\* was racing towards them.

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\* Carriage driven by three horses.—*Ed.*

The passengers were tsarist officials bound on some errand or other. All of a sudden the "merchants" were overcome with the desire to sleep. They stretched out in the cart, covering themselves with their overcoats. The troika and its passengers—the district police officer and the district elder on a road inspection journey—continued on their way, while the recumbent "merchants" complained that the jolting made it impossible for them to get a wink of sleep.

Towards nightfall they emerged from the taiga and entered the village. The horses, keen to get to the stable, ran faster, while the "merchants" had but one thought—would fresh horses be available. Right ahead, blocking the road, they saw a group of peasants, bare-headed and, in front of the crowd, a white-haired, aged man on his knees. The peasants apparently had taken the travellers for tsarist officials. In a moment, however, when they realized their mistake, the scene changed. Not seeing epaulettes and the Royal eagle, their attitude underwent transformation. Not a trace remained of their meek and humble attitude to authority.

"Who are you?"

"Stop!"

They seized the bridles, stopped the cart and surrounded it. They were as drunk as lords. Together with the headman of the village they had squandered some of the communal funds on vodka and, under the impression that the travellers were local officials, had gathered to beg forgiveness for their misdemeanour. But since the men in the cart were not officials, the peasants were curious to know who they were, whither they were bound and whence they had come.

"Get out of the way, robbers, how dare you hold up merchants on their way home? We'll show you who you are! Get out of the way!"

"Go ahead, driver. Don't pay any attention to these drunkards! Let them have the whip!"

The "merchants," though trembling inwardly, threatened the crowd in loud voices. "Can it be that the muzhiks have been alerted," they thought. "No, surely not, we've still got a chance." Now, if ever, coolness was needed. The driver, his face a ghastly white, let go of the reins without saying a word. It was hopeless to think of forcing a way through the crowd. The drunken elder shouted, "Who are you, where are you going?"

A barrage of words followed. The "merchants" had only one passport which, after a long argument, they presented to the elder. Then, one of them, taking paper and pencil from his pocket and, uttering every word aloud, began to write a complaint to the Governor-General that they, the personal friends of His Excellency, had been held up on the road by a gang of footpads. And this insult to the Governor-General was the handiwork of people wearing official badges, evidently for the sake of getting money for vodka. Having written his complaint, the "merchant" turned to some of the peasants with the request that they, having witnessed the insulting behaviour of the elder, should sign their names to the document. The subterfuge worked. The peasants moved aside, and the elder began to apologize and invited the pair to step indoors. "Please," he said, "come in."

Fresh horses would be forthcoming at once, he added, and he pleaded forgiveness for his action.

That's better!

The "merchants" gladly accepted his invitation to step inside.

But now another unpleasantness awaited them.

They learned that the district police officer was expected to return at any moment, and there was the dan-

ger that he might detain them. The elder, however, saved the situation.

The moment he entered the cottage the "merchants" again simulated indignation.

"What audacity, to hold up honest merchants and demand to see their documents. You've treated us as if we were highwaymen. You have not heard the last of this," they said, looking at him ominously.

The angry and insulted "merchants" had no desire to spend a single minute under the same roof as this embezzler, drunkard and idler. They ordered their things to be taken back to the cart and went out to hire another pair of horses and continue on their way.

This episode brought their trials to an end. After acting the part of gentlemen who had had their feelings hurt, they laughed uproariously every time they recalled the incident. They had been gentlemen for a few days. But the people would forgive them their subterfuge, would hardly hold it against them.

Nor did luck desert them as they crossed the Buryat steppe—a few days later found them safely in a Trans-Siberian express speeding westward to their destination. The journey, which when they were being convoyed eastward had taken all of four months, was now completed in seventeen days.

## LETTERS TO RELATIVES

1902-26

To A. E. Bułhak

[Leizen, Switzerland]  
August 26 (13), 1902

Dear Aldona and Gedymin,

It is a long time since I've had the opportunity of having a word with you. I am now abroad, in Switzerland, high above the earth on a mountain one and one-third kilometres above the level of the sea. Mist blotted out everything today and the place immediately became gloomy, damp and raw; it is raining and one doesn't know where it comes from, whether from above or below. As a rule it is nice and dry here. All around are snow-clad mountains, green valleys, cliffs and tiny villages. The landscape is constantly changing colour and shape, depending on the light, and it seems that everything within range of the eye is alive and moving slowly. The clouds, enveloping the mountains, descend lower and then rise again. It is all very pleasant and beautiful, but a kind of a weight presses on one—the air, rarefied, needs getting used to; everywhere the view encounters obstacles—there is no broad horizon, hills and yet more hills, and a feeling of being cut off from life, cut off from one's native land and brothers,\* from the world. One of my friends is recuperating here in a sanatorium, and this is the only thing which keeps me here. I arrived only a few days ago. What is your news? Maybe we will be able to meet. What about your

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\* His comrades in the revolutionary struggle.—*Ed.*



health? And the children? Now that autumn is approaching they will be indoors more, which will bore them and give you more work and worry. When shall we go mushrooming in the woods again? I shall never forget the brief time which I spent with you, and I hope the children will remember it too. Give them a hug for their uncle who never liked having his hand kissed. Do they ever speak about me? Aldona dearest, send me their photographs.

*Felix.*

To A. E. Buthak

[Geneva]

October 6 (September 23), 1902

Dear Aldona,

I received your second letter today. Don't be cross with me for not replying to yours. Somehow I feel out of sorts. As you see I am now in Geneva.

I have been walking in the hills and valleys near Lake Geneva. But the boredom of idleness is too much for me, so I have taken a job with a view to acquiring a trade, and I am studying; it will all be useful in good time and I'll soon be able to earn something. I am taking it easy, working not more than 6 or 8 hours a day, which leaves me with ample time for reading, resting and walking. I feel much better when working. True, I had to remain indoors for a few days as a result of a cold and doctor's orders. I have a nice room, reasonably cheap, but I don't intend to stay very long. It's a windy place, and now that the rainy season has set in I will leave for less blustery surroundings. Geneva, built on the banks of the lake, is a beautiful city, but, unfortunately, not too healthy in autumn.

I am glad that you now have a job in sight and hope that things will turn out all right. What about your health, and how is Gedymin? Does he find his work tir-

ing? It is good that the man for whom you will work is a decent sort. It is a thousand times better to work for less wages for a good man than to sweat for scoundrels who suck not only all your blood but also ruin your nerves, your health and your life. They want to buy not only the labour but the man as a whole. They turn man into a mere commodity, which is the worst thing of all. . . . But enough, I find myself again riding my hobbyhorse and boring you. For you all this may be just empty words. Some speak about "love"—a meaningless word—because they speak but do not feel (nowadays everyone says he loves his dear ones), this is Pharisaism, the venom which has poisoned all our lives since childhood. Others also speak about "love" and they find a response in human hearts because behind this word stands a man of feeling, a man with love.

Consequently, in order to understand each other let us speak about what we both love. You write so little about the children. How are they? I suppose they are extremely bored now that autumn has come and, of course, causing you much more worry. I would like to see them, to hug them, to see how they are developing, listen to their crying and their laughter, to see them at play. I don't know why it is that I love children more than anyone else. In their company my bad mood immediately disappears. I have never been able to love a woman in the way I love children, and I doubt if I could love my *own* children better than those of others. At times when I am despondent I dream that I have taken charge of a child abandoned on a doorstep, that I devote myself wholly to him and we are both happy. I live for him, feel him near me, feel that he loves me with that child love in which there is nothing false, I feel the warmth of his love and I passionately want to have him near me. But this is only a dream. I cannot afford to do this, I am forced to be on the go all the time and I

could not do so if I had charge of a child. Often, very often, it seems to me, that not even a mother loves children as ardently as I do.

In your first letter you again write about the "return of the prodigal"; no, this will never happen. I am perfectly happy here on earth, I understand both the human soul and myself, and I don't need to be soothed by faith in one's soul and conscience, as some do, or to find in this the purpose of life as others do. I have found happiness here on earth. . . . The more unhappy people are, the more wicked and egotistical, the less they believe in their own conscience and the more trust they repose in confessions, prayers and priests. I detest priests, I hate them. They have cloaked the whole world in their black soutanes in which is concentrated all evil—crime, filth and prostitution; they spread darkness and preach submission. I am engaged in a life and death struggle with them, and for this reason you must never write to me about religion, about catholicism because if you do all you will get from me is blasphemy. The ignorant and unlettered mother who puts a cross around her child's neck thinks that by doing so she is protecting him from evil. She does not know that the future happiness of the child depends in large measure on the parents, on their ability to bring up the child, their ability to nip in the bud all his bad habits and cultivate good ones. And this comes not from religion. . . . It is necessary to train the children to have love for other people and not for themselves alone, but to do this the parents themselves must love people.

Yours as ever, [*Felix*].

To A. E. Bulhak

[Zakopane]

December 27 (14), 1902

My dear Aldona,

I am most grateful for the way in which you have remembered me. I am surprised that you did not get the postcard with the view of the Carpathians which I sent you a long time ago; I can only suppose that some of the post-office officials decided to keep it. Soon you will be celebrating Christmas and the thought that I cannot be with you makes me sad. I would go at the wave of a wand. But this is impossible. How many years have passed since we supped together on Christmas Eve. I remember travelling in a train to Warsaw on Christmas night 1895 and 1896, after this we never sat at the Christmas table together. Eighteen ninety-four was the last year I spent Christmas with Mother. You, I think, were not in Jod at the time. The recollection brought up the past and the days at Dzierżynowo. Do you remember how you taught me French and how once you unjustly wanted to make me stand in the corner? I remember this as if it were today; I had to translate something from Russian into French. You thought that I had turned over the leaves and had copied some word or other, and you ordered me to the corner. But I, being stubborn, refused, because I knew that you were wrong. Mamma came along and with her kindness convinced me that I should go and stand in the corner. I remember, too, the summer evenings when we sat on the verandah. . . . Mother was teaching me to read and I, with hand under my jaw, lay on the floor reading out the syllables. I remember the evenings when we shouted and the echoes came back to us. . . . Who does not love to recall his youth and years as a child without worry and without any thought of the morrow.

I have just dined and my recollections have vanished. I do not know when I shall be able to post this letter.

For two days now Zakopane has been snowbound. The snow is still falling and the wind is howling in the mountains. Rail traffic is at a standstill and is likely to remain so for another four or five days. Everything is blanketed in white, the snow is piled high on the streets, but the weather is warm and one tends to dream, to be sad about something or other.

Life in the mountains is conducive to dreaming, but for me dreaming is out of the question. I am leaving Zakopane. The two months' treatment has helped me considerably, I have recuperated and I am coughing less. I am drawn to the city. Even in Cracow I could live quite well on this money. It is now winter and the climate there is unhealthy only in summer and in spring; one can eat there cheaper than in Zakopane even with the "Fraternal Aid."\* I shall leave for Cracow on the 30th or the 31st, but I would ask you to write to me at my Zakopane address until I send you a new one. . . .

I embrace all of you.

*Yours.*

P. S. Please send me photos of the children if you have any to spare.

To A. E. Bulhak

[Switzerland, Claran]  
May 8 (April 25), 1903

My dear Aldona,

I humbly beg your pardon for not letting you know about myself, all the more so since my previous letter was not a particularly cheerful one. I am now in Switzerland. I wanted to leave the countryside and return

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\* The hostel run by the students Fraternal Aid Association.  
—Ed.

to the city but acquaintances argued me into remaining and I shall probably be here for the whole of May. I am, then, once again in the hills above Lake Geneva breathing the pure mountain air and enjoying good food. What is bad is that I am the carrier of an enemy\* who is constantly on the go, who may relinquish his attacks for a moment only to renew them later. The doctors say that it is possible, given the correct treatment, good food and a strict regime, to get rid of him. I think that by the end of the month I will be feeling fine. I kiss all of you.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

P. S. The children I suppose have grown tremendously. I would like to embrace each one of you.

To A. E. Bulhak

[Berlin]\*\*

December 12 (November 29), 1903

My dear Aldona,

I have just received your letter dated November 22. For more than half a year we have not written to each other. I have been roaming all over Europe,\*\*\* unable to give myself wholly to my favourite work or to find a steady job. This has poisoned my life. I didn't write because I did not want to complain....

Yours,  
*Felix.*

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\* Tuberculosis.—*Ed.*

\*\* At that time the leading figures of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, headed by Rosa Luxemburg, were in Berlin.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* Acting on the instructions of the Party, Dzerzhinsky visited the groups of Polish Social-Democrats abroad.—*Ed.*

To A. E. Bułhak

[Cracow]

December 31 (18), 1903

My dear Aldona,

Forgive me, dearest, for not writing to you for more than half a year and causing you alarm. Obviously the letters which you addressed to Claran got lost. Had they been delivered I would most certainly have replied to them, you know how I love you. Your letters got lost and I on my part had no desire to complain in letters about my life. And the letters would be full of complaints since I cannot write about everything\* in them and to confine myself to personal life would be sad. And when after the long interval your letter arrived with the photo of the children and the note from little Rudolf I was boundlessly happy. Thank you very much, Aldona, for the photo. With us Christmas is all over—for me it was just an ordinary day. But soon you will all be gathered around the festive table. The children will laugh and play.... It will be noisy and merry. How I would like to be with you, to have a heart-to-heart talk with everybody. I simply must pay you another visit. This will not be soon, perhaps in a year or even two, but take place it must. Often, very often, I think of you, think of you with all my heart. I recall our home, when I was still a child, when we sat on the verandah and I laid my head on your knees and was happy. It was peaceful, dark, and the sky was studded with stars; the frogs were croaking by the river.... I am delighted with the photo of the children. Why don't you write about your health and about Gedymin and the children? Let me have your news. You write so little about yourself.... A big hug for all of you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

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\* The reference is to his Party work.—*Ed.*

To A. E. Bułhak

[Cracow]

March 12 (February 28), 1904

My dear Aldona,

Forgive me for not writing to you sooner but you know that the reason does not lie in my forgetfulness. The thing is I have been so busy that I just haven't had a moment to spare. Even now I am in a hurry and for this reason I send you these few words and some pictures for the children. . . . I heartily embrace all of you.

Yours,

*Josef.*

To A. E. Bułhak

[Berlin]

March 19 (6), 1904

Dear Aldona,

Just a couple of words because I am very busy. I am keeping fairly well, feel a little tired but this will soon pass. I have met Wladek and Ignaty, I suppose they have told you about this. Wladek intended paying you a visit. They have a nice house here in a very pleasant district.\* They have asked me to visit them in summer. . . . I heartily kiss all of you.

*Your brother.*

To A. E. Bułhak

[Cracow]

June 16 (3), 1904

Dear Aldona,

Your last April letter arrived. I did not reply because I had to leave for Switzerland again. Julia\*\* died on June 4. I was unable to leave her bedside. She was in

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\* These words show that Dzerzhinsky, being engaged in underground work in the Russian part of Poland, visited his brother in the Lublin district.—*Ed.*

\*\* Julia Goldman, Dzerzhinsky's sweetheart.—*Ed.*



agony the week before she died. Yet she retained consciousness until the last.

I arrived back in Cracow yesterday and in all likelihood will be here for a long time. I am living at the old address. Yesterday's post also brought me a letter from Ignaty.

It is fearfully hot here at the moment and it is most unpleasant being in town. I am glad that you are in the country having a rest and that the children will be able to play to their heart's content.

I am sending you a postcard only, I haven't time to write any more. I hug you and the children.

Yours,  
*Josef.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Cracow]

July 7 (June 24), 1904

Dear Aldona,

Only now am I replying to your letter of June 8. Thanks for your warm words. It is true that at the moment I feel pretty bad and for this there are many reasons. First there is the heat wave, the dust and the smells which make it impossible to breathe. But these are minor details. What is worse is I feel so listless that I have no desire to do anything. . . . I dream only of one thing and that is to go away somewhere into the countryside. Alas, this is only a dream, I must remain here and continue my work. Nobody, of course, compels me to do this. This is my own inner requirement. Life has taken from me in the struggle one after another all that I brought with me from home, from the family and from the school bench, leaving with me only the will-power which drives me on relentlessly. . . . Possibly this bad mood will soon pass. Kiss all the children for me. I kiss you too. What would I not give to

be in our woods and meadows, in the house, among the pines in the courtyard, in the garden and to visit our old haunts. But even if I should return they will not be the same, and, of course, I too have changed. How many years have gone by. How many years of suffering, joy and sorrow.... Good luck to you. I hug you.

*Yours ever.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Cracow]

October 3 (September 20), 1904

My dear Aldona,

Your sad letter has grieved\* me very much. I will not try to comfort you. You must overcome the pain. Life has made me tired. The colossus,\*\* my tormentor, though now shaking on his feet of clay, still has sufficient strength to poison my life. My dear Aldona, your sorrow is my sorrow, and your tears are my tears. Away in the distance I see the sunlit uplands of my dreams. For you and me they are different but we should always remember them and then our pain shall be soothed and warmth fill our hearts because we shall find a purpose and aim in our suffering. I embrace you and warmly kiss you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Cracow]

December 18 (5), 1904

My dear,

I thank you with all my heart for your letter. If only I could be with you, to embrace you and see the chil-

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\* His sister had written about the death of a child.—*Ed.*

\*\* The tsarist autocracy.—*Ed.*

dren, to play with them and recall the days of long ago. I am uneasy at the thought of my previous postcard causing you so much worry. You should not have worried, because knowing me, it should have dawned on you that I would manage somehow. True, this constant struggle for existence is exhausting, it torments me and affects my work. But then I have no children, I am alone, so don't put yourself out for me. I am not writing a long letter and would ask you to believe that I have nothing interesting to say. I live from day to day and, as usual, look far ahead and my dreams take me all over the world.\* But the struggle for daily bread has taken much out of me. Physically I feel not too bad. The worst thing is I don't get enough sleep. I can never close my eyes until 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and this for days on end.

I wish you good health and warmly embrace and kiss all of you.

Yours,  
*Josef.*

To A. E. Bulhak

No. 10 Block [Warsaw Citadel]  
September 18 (5), 1905

My dear,

Thanks for your letter—I received it after I had written to you.

At the moment I am in reasonably good fettle. After all it was only seven weeks ago that I was arrested.\*\* My health is good and I have books.

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\* Dzerzhinsky is referring to his journeys to Berlin, Munich and Switzerland on Party business and his illegal crossing of the frontier to engage in underground work in the Kingdom of Poland which formed part of the Russian Empire.—*Ed.*

\*\* On July 30 (17), 1905, Dzerzhinsky was arrested for the third time.—*Ed.*

I see from your letter that you are anxious about me, but, knowing me as you do, you should be consoled by the thought that even in prison, where I live with my thoughts, dreams and ideas, I can say that I am happy. What I miss, and miss badly, is the beauty of nature. I have become an ardent lover of nature. In the past I often dreamed that I would go somewhere into the countryside, and now in prison I say to myself that, when I am again free and no longer need to go into hiding or leave my native country, I will revisit our own little corner.\* I rather think I shall not be held very long this time. The charge is not all that serious and the sentences are now less severe. I expect a court sentence, not the previous administrative punishment, which means I will be able to defend myself. And you, my dear Aldona, forget about coming to see me in prison. I hate visits when we are separated by netted wire and have to speak in the presence of guards who follow every movement of the muscles of the face. In such circumstances the visits are a torment, humiliation, so it's really not worth coming. We shall meet in different circumstances.

Give the children a hug and kiss for me. I would like to know how they are growing up. Write to me with your news. Have no fears for me, really, because even from suffering it is possible to snatch a little happiness. I hug and kiss all of you.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

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\* Dzierzynowo, Oszmiany District, formerly Vilno Gubernia, now the Ivenets District, Molodechno Region, Byelorussia.—*Ed.*

To I. E. Dzerzhinsky\* No. 10 Block [Warsaw Citadel]  
September 25 (12), 1905

My dear,

So you have seen the animal in the cage. When you entered the room I noticed the astonishment on your face as you looked around for me. Then in the corner of the grim cage with its double row of netted wire you saw your brother. A soldier armed with a rifle stood at the entrance to the cage. How brief was our meeting, we had barely time to exchange a few words. That is why I am writing to you, and you in turn send me postcards now and again with views and some words of greeting. I gaze on these postcards (they stand on my table) and my eyes are gladdened, my heart beats faster, my breast expands and I visualize the senders smiling at me and I no longer feel sad, lonely and weary. My thoughts travel far away beyond the walls and I relive more than one happy moment.

This was not so long ago. It was spring, the wonderful springtime. Alas it has passed, and I am now sitting quietly in my cell. But when I come out, the meadows, the woods and Łazienki\*\* will be green again, the flowers will be in bloom, the pine-trees will murmur to me; once again in the moonlight nights of summer I shall roam the country lanes, returning from the excursions,\*\*\* in the twilight I will listen to the mysterious whispering of nature, watch the play of light and shade, the colours of the sunset, and spring will come again.

But just now I am resting; the solitary confinement and inactivity do not worry me as yet, time flies, I am studying hard and sleeping my fill; and so the days

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\* His brother, Ignaty.—*Ed.*

\*\* Łazienki—public park in Warsaw.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* The revolutionary outings.—*Ed.*

pass away. True, only eight weeks have passed since my arrest, and I have many years before me. But the thought of this no longer wearies me. I am depressed only when I think that my friends may be worrying about me; but time and life, which for them never stop for a single minute, will quickly cure them, bringing fresh sorrows and joys.

As for me I have burned my bridges more than once. Maybe this was not because of strength—*c'était la fatalité!* (Apropos of this kindly send me an elementary French grammar because I have difficulty with the declensions.)

I received your letter; you ask about my cell, etc. Well, here, briefly, are the details: It is quite a big one—five yards by seven; it has a large window with frosted glass, food not bad and supplemented with small quantities of milk which I buy myself. I spend 15 minutes every day on exercise. There is a library, and I buy things twice a week in the prison store. I am allowed to write one half-page letter once a week. I bathe [once a month]. At the moment I am alone. It would be wrong to speak about "prison" silence. Through the ventilator window come the sounds of the soldiers talking and singing, the rattle of carts, military music, the whistle of locomotives and trains, the chattering of sparrows, the rustle of the leaves, the crowing of the cocks, the barking of the dogs, and a variety of other sounds and voices pleasant and otherwise.

As you see, brother mine, I am faring not too badly. I have ample time for thinking, I gaze at my postcards and at the faces smiling at me. . . . And being in prison, and having long, dreary years ahead of me, I want to live. Good luck to you. I embrace you and your wife and all.

Yours,

*Felix*

To I. E. Dzerzhinsky No. 10 Block [Warsaw Citadel]  
October 3 (September 20), 1905

My dear brother,

I take it that you have received my letter dated September 25. I am sending you another because I find writing a source of relaxation. I was expecting you on Saturday. Immediately after our meeting I remembered that once you resumed work you would not be able to visit me. But don't let this upset you because in reality meetings of this kind only irritate one.

Last week I received a postcard depicting a beautiful girl (somebody had spoiled it), and the parcel with overcoat and shirt. Thanks a lot. My position is much the same. The time drags monotonously. I read, study, walk up and down my cell and try not to think either of the present or about the immediate future. Worst of all is the anticipation of something, which evokes a feeling of emptiness, not unlike what one experiences on a wet day in the countryside when forced to shelter in a dilapidated shed waiting for a train, the difference being that here one has to wait months and years.

And when you see the white walls, yellow doors, windows with their iron bars, when you hear somebody tramping in the corridor, the opening and closing of doors, and beyond the windows voices and laughter—sometimes the voices of children at play—then this feeling of anticipation returns with overwhelming force: my door will open in a moment, someone will come in . . . and words fail me to express that which will then take place. This is the longing for life and freedom.

It is difficult to combat this feeling. I say to myself a thousand times: after all this is your room, your abode, but when I look at these bare walls the self-suggestion is of no avail. Then I sit at the table, pick up a book and begin to read, or I look at my postcards and

when I no longer see the whole cell but just this corner the feeling of anticipation vanishes.

I feel much better in the evenings. I read late into the night and get up late. When the [oil] lamp is lit the cell changes completely and becomes less hateful. It is in semi-darkness (I've made myself a lampshade), and thanks to this the white walls and the dark yellow of the door lose their expressiveness and the shadows of the table, the books, the coat and cap hanging on the pegs, the bed, chair, and, lastly, my own moving shadow, are reflected on the floor and the walls filling the empty cell and imparting life to it. In this atmosphere the greatest attention is attracted by the table; it stands alone, brightly lit, dominating and filling the cell. (In the daytime, being small, it fits under the window.) The postcards, illuminated by the lamp, seem to fix their gaze on me—beautiful trees growing beside a pond, the graceful, smiling girl, clumps of heather, reminding me of our woods and my childhood, a curly-headed child, almost naked ("bath-time, darling" as Janka,\* my favourite, used to say when her mother was getting her ready for the bath), then the sturdy old man in a fur hat, who by a strange association of thought reminds me of a scene in the woods: we were lying in a pine woods interspersed in places with leaf trees and shrubs; it was late at night and pitch dark, the only visible sight being the summer sky studded with stars; we lay on our backs gazing at the millions of brilliant, multi-coloured sparkling stars, silent, deep in thought and overcome with immeasurable sadness. The scene, changing, is replaced by a view of a lake with a sailing boat; the sun peeps through the dark clouds and the boat with billowing sails flies before the wind with the

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\* Janka—the daughter of his friend Adolf Warski-Warszawski.  
—Ed.



speed of a bird on the wing; then I see not the postcard but a painting depicting a Yakut bard with the beautiful and expressive face of a youth (I cut this picture from the book *Twelve Years*).\*

And so I am able to visualize the whole world. The peace that prevails in the evenings—there is hardly any movement inside or outside the Block—enables me to visit this world of mine.

I would like to write a longer letter, but as you see I have run out of paper—we are only allowed half a page. Incidentally I intend writing to you once a week. I remember the look of astonishment on your face when I said during your visit that I would write weekly. You thought that because of the solitary confinement there would be nothing to write about; but, then, a drop of water reflects the whole world and an understanding of this world can be gained by studying the drop minutely. I think that from these prison letters you, too, will acquire something, namely, a deeper love of life.

Good health to you, I embrace all of you.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

P. S. Please send me a copy of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*. Saturday marked the beginning of my third month in jail.

To I. E. Dzerzhinsky      No. 10 Block [Warsaw Citadel]  
October 9 (September 26), 1905

My dear brother,

Again I am writing to you. I have a bunch of roses on my table. One, pink-coloured, has withered, but two

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\* The book *Twelve Years in the Country of the Yakuts*, by the Polish writer Sieroszewski, published in Polish in 1900. It first appeared in a Russian edition in 1886 under the title *The Yakuts*.  
—Ed.

others, whitish-yellow with a touch of green, and another, bright red, are still fresh beautiful, and oh how pleasing to the eye. I gaze on them and they give me great joy. And the postcards, too, as ever, look kindly at me. I now have another one showing lovely birch-trees with regular but wistful-looking branches.

I am most grateful to you, my friends, for the wonderful moments which the postcards afford me; your thought for me has soothed my spirit, has extended the spring for me, bringing it in secret to the inside of these prison walls. I feel strong and young. My thoughts always flow out to you, a feeling of tenderness takes possession of me, and I would like to embrace you as heartily as I love you all.

I feel as if I have shed all the lies and falseness which prevail in human relations, and which hang like a millstone around the neck, poisoning life in the world outside, distorting feeling, making life an unbearable prison and turning man into a snail. Instead of warmth, bliss and happiness there are cold, sharp words as deadly as an axe, instead of the logic of life and the human spirit there is the logic of words and thinking. And even in the summer night in the woods when the stars twinkle from the dark skies the words triumph. Maybe this is a necessity, but it is a necessity against which my spirit revolts, although I myself am subordinated to it. I am weary to death of this life. Were it not for the Argus-eyed guardians of public order who shadowed, detained and immured me in prison, I think, that like Maxim Gorky, I would go away for a time from this cultured life, go somewhere into the wilderness, into the steppe, to our woods and to the quiet of the countryside. But I sit here and bless you for not forgetting me.

To continue my previous letters, I want to tell you about the impressions which I get here, about the way

I live. The quarter of an hour spent on exercise is our main daily recreation. I thoroughly enjoy pacing up and down the path and breathing the life-giving air into the lungs longing to receive it, I gaze on the expanse of the skies and at the remains of the yellowing leaves in the prison yard. Then I forget all about the soldier with the rifle, and the gendarme with his sabre and revolver, who stand at either end of the path, and become oblivious to them. I look at the sky with my head held back (I am sure I look ridiculous in this pose especially with my goatee, my long neck and elongated features). Sometimes it is absolutely cloudless, dark-blue in the east, brighter in the west. There are days when it is grey, monotonous and sad looking; at times fantastically-shaped banks of clouds chase to and fro, brilliant as silver, then grey, then dark, sometimes light and, on occasions, an evil-looking monster is borne from afar, sometimes high and sometimes low; they follow one another with the most variegated shadings of light and colour. Beyond is the soft, gentle, azure sky. But now the blue skies are seen less frequently, the blustery autumn winds, having come into their own, blot out the heavens with leaden clouds. And the leaves, faded, float sadly downwards, withered and lifeless. The sun, sinking lower and lower, and appearing rarely, has lost its former warmth. The only time I see it is during exercise—my window faces the north. At rare moments I catch a glimpse of the sunset, and when I do I am as happy as a child. Through the ventilator window I can see a particle of the sky—dimmed by the netted wire—and follow the wonderful sunset and the constantly changing play of colour, blood-red and purple, the struggle between light and darkness. How beautiful at these moments is this tiny particle of sky! Golden clouds against a background of azure blue, followed by an opaque monster with violet shadings which rapidly

change into the crimson of fire, then become pink, until gradually the entire sky pales and twilight falls. The spectacle lasts only a matter of minutes and is seen all too rarely. Wondrously beautiful, it is but a reflection of the sunset, the sunset itself not being visible from the aperture. The feeling of beauty grips me. I burn with the thirst for knowledge and (strange but true) I gain it here in prison. I feel as if I want to embrace life in all its fulness, in all its entirety.

Be of good health. I embrace you and send you greetings.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bułhak                      [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
October 22 (9), 1905

Aldona dearest,

I received your letter a few days ago and I am able to reply today. You give me such warmth and heart that whenever I become sad I turn to you, to your words, so simple, sincere, kind and so soothing. For this I am boundlessly grateful to you. Life would be too much of a burden were it not for the many hearts that love me. And your heart is all the dearer to me because it reminds me of the past, of the far away but unforgettable, fascinating days of my childhood to which my weary mind returns, and my heart seeks a heart in which it would find a response and which would resurrect the past. That is why I always turn to you, and I have never been disappointed. After all, both of us live terrible lives, and yet life could be so wonderful and so beautiful. I long for this, long to live the life of a human being in all its breadth and variety. I want to know all the beauty of nature, of people, of their work, to admire them, to perfect myself because beauty and

good are twin sisters. The asceticism which has fallen to my lot is utterly alien to me. I would like to be a father, to instil everything good into the spirit of a tiny existence, everything good in the world, to see how under the rays of my love its spirit would open up like a flower in full bloom. Sometimes dreams torment me with their pictures, so fascinating, alive and clear. Alas, alas! The pathways of the human spirit have taken me on to another road, the road which I am traversing. He who loves life as I do will sacrifice everything for it. Without loving hearts and without dreams I could not live. But I have no cause to complain, for I have both the one and the other. Dearest, don't have any fears for me, all I ask is that you love me. I have sufficient money for my needs. For a prisoner my conditions are not too bad. True, being entombed, the absence of impressions and the complete isolation from life are bad, but what is to be done? I read a lot, I am learning French and making the acquaintance of Polish literature. It is not worth your coming here for a meeting of five minutes, unless you want to settle your affairs. We couldn't even embrace each other. You would see me in a cage through a double row of netted wire. After such a long parting I would not like to see you in such conditions. I kiss you and the children.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bułhak

Warsaw\*

February 9 (January 27), 1906

My dear Aldona,

Forgive me for the delay in writing. You know this is not because of forgetfulness. I am now in Warsaw. The

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\* Dzerzhinsky was released under the Amnesty of October 1905.  
—Ed.

weather is beautiful and the breath of spring is in the air. Yesterday, walking in the countryside, I became very sad for our woods, the meadows and the flowers. Do you remember how we broke off oak branches and you wove wreaths for the grave in the cemetery at Derevnaya.\* I recall, too, the huge oak on the bank of the river Usa, and the one near the bridge over the Vodnichanka.

I warmly kiss you and the children.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Berlin]

May 10 (April 27), 1906

Dear Aldona,

I have been travelling in Europe\*\* and today I depart for home. Did you get the postcard I sent you a few days ago? I am sending you another, showing Van Dyck's *The Children of Charles I.* It is lovely, isn't it? I would dearly like to visit you, but I fear that I will not be able to do so for some time. I embrace you and Gedymin.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

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\* Dzerzhinsky's father was buried in Derevnaya, now the Ivenets District, Molodechno Region, Byelorussia.—*Ed.*

\*\* His visit to Stockholm for the Fourth Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.—*Ed.*

To A. E. Bułhak

Vilno\*

July 17 (4), 1906

My dear,

I have been here in Vilno since yesterday. Today after four years I have seen Stan. I shall be here for a few days. I heartily embrace all of you and regret being unable to pay you even a flying visit.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bułhak

Radom\*

July 31 (18), 1906

Dearest,

It is already late and I am at the station waiting for the train. Soon the summer will be all over and yet I am unable to find time to visit you. I was in Mikhany not long ago and saw Stan and Jadwiga. I hug you and your family.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bułhak

St. Petersburg

September 16 (3), 1906

My dear,

It is a long time since I have had any news from you or about you. Please write to me at the following address: *Vestnik Zhizni*, No. 102, Nevsky Prospekt, Apartment 37, St. Petersburg. I want to know how you and the family are faring. My health is fine. For the time being I shall be in residence here.\*\* I heartily embrace all of you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

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\* Dzerzhinsky visited Vilno and Radom on Party business.—*Ed.*

\*\* Between August and October 1906 Dzerzhinsky worked in St. Petersburg as a member of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.—*Ed.*

To S. E. Dzerzhinsky\*

[Warsaw]

June 12 (30), 1907

Dear Stan,

I have left the "guest-house"\*\* and you can imagine my joy. I am planning to go to the countryside for a rest. What I shall do afterwards I don't know.\*\*\* I warmly embrace you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Berlin]

March 14 (1), 1910

Dearest,

It is a long time since I have written you. I have been on a kind of world tour. After leaving Capri a month ago I spent some time in the Italian and French Riviera and even managed to win 10 francs in Monte Carlo; I have roamed in the Swiss Alps, admiring the mighty Jungfrau and other snow-capped giants aglow with flame at sunset. Truly, the world is a wonderful place! And precisely because of this my heart is heavy when I think of the horrors of everyday life, compelling me

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\* His brother.—*Ed.*

\*\* That is, the Warsaw Investigation Prison, Pawiak, where he had been confined from the end of 1906 (after his fourth arrest). He was released on bail because of bad health.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* After a brief rest Dzerzhinsky resumed underground work which he continued until 1908 when he was arrested once more (the fifth time) and detained in No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel. It was here he wrote his prison diary. Exiled for life to Siberia, he was deported to the village of Taseyevka in the Yenisei Gubernia. A bare seven days after his arrival at the place of exile, he escaped (at the end of 1909) and went abroad. While there he worked as secretary of the Board of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania and visited the Russian part of Poland.—*Ed.*



to descend from the peaks into the valleys, into the holes. I expect to reach Cracow in a couple of days and shall take up permanent residence. I will send you my address. Kisses to all of you.

Your brother *Felix*.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Cracow

April 13 (March 31), 1911\*

My dearest Zosia,

...The idea was that I should leave Cracow for permanent work in Berlin. . . . But as a result of a change in the plans I am leaving for Berlin today for a brief stay only, after which I shall return and, I think, settle down here for some time. Having paid dearly for my unexpected visit to "mammy," I will not make any excursions of this kind in the future.\*\*

But don't be cross with me, Zosia, about this visit. Although I recognize that it is necessary to stay here,\*\*\* I find the greatest difficulty in doing so. I am passionately fond of movement and I would like to get away from the monotony of Cracow. . . . This, however, is a trifle, the main thing is that you should be strong and able to bear the burden. Often, when I think of you and the child then, in spite of everything\*\*\*\* I experience a feeling of wonderful elation. . . .

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\* This letter, transmitted secretly, was addressed to Dzerzhinsky's wife then detained in No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel.—*Ed.*

\*\* Dzerzhinsky left Cracow secretly, then within the boundaries of Austro-Hungary, to visit Warsaw and Lodz. The visit nearly ended in his arrest. Visiting "mammy" signified visiting Warsaw.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* In emigration.—*Ed.*

\*\*\*\* That is, despite the fact that the child would be born in prison.—*Ed.*

And something tells me that our sun has not yet set.  
I embrace you warmly.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Cracow]

November 28 (15), 1911

Aldona dearest,

The reason why I haven't written for such a long time is that misfortune has again befallen me. I have been having an extremely difficult time. My wife, Zosia, also a revolutionary, got caught. She has now been in jail for a year. In June she gave birth to our child Jasiek. It is difficult to imagine what she must have suffered. Her trial has now ended and she has been sentenced to exile for life in Siberia. She will be leaving for her destination in a few months, perhaps earlier. So far the child has been with her—she is feeding it herself. But she will not be able to take it with her because the infant would never survive the journey. I just don't know what to do about the child. I would dearly like to have it with me, but I fear that I will not be able to give it the necessary care and attention. Zosia's parents, an invalid father and a stepmother, cannot take it. The best thing would be to send it to the country for a few months, provided it could be in reliable and experienced hands. Aldona, dearest, what can you advise? I could pay about 15 rubles a month for someone to look after the child. Maybe you know somebody in whom you have complete confidence. The last thing I want is to give trouble to anyone, but you may know of a suitable person, a person whom one could trust. I have not seen the child yet, I haven't even a photo of it, but I love it and it is precious to me. Zosia has been wonderfully brave. Write and tell me if you know of

anybody. It is quite possible I will be able to make other arrangements—take charge of it myself and have the wife of one of my comrades look after it. But I would prefer a choice of variants. I want Jasiek to be well placed and to give the least worry to my friends. . . .

All this time I have been travelling in Europe,\* as ever, a restless soul. But my nerves are in a bad way. Life abroad when one's thoughts are on the other side of the frontier, when one's soul longs for the future and lives only for it, such a life is at times worse than exile when man is cut off from everything and lives only with his thoughts and his dreams. And if I have not written to you it is because I cannot bear the thought of writing about my own life when it is so unbearable. But in my heart I always love you, a love which I have preserved since childhood. Write to me about yourself and the children. I hug you and the children.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bułhak

Berlin

December 15 (2), 1911

Dearest,

I thank you warmly for the letter. It never entered my head and indeed it could not enter it because knowing how you are situated I knew that you couldn't possibly take Jasiek. I wrote thinking that you might know someone who could take care of the child and in whom one could repose confidence. Although I still do not know what to do with it, the situation is far from hope-

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\* His visits abroad to Party meetings and conferences, including the Paris meeting of Central Committee members of the R.S.D.L.P. At the beginning of 1912 he returned to the Russian part of Poland for underground Party work.—*Ed.*

less because I have any number of friends who are ready to help me and who will take good care of the child. I am hoping that its mother will return in a few months. When I see how other people live I feel ashamed that I sometimes allow personal worries to rob me of so much strength and energy. But times are different now, and much strength is needed in order to hold out until better days come. I gather from your letter that you are terribly tired. I would like to embrace and hug you. Evil casts its shadow on all and what you say about the young people is not confined to them only. Such are the times. The sun is so low that evil casts long shadows, blotting out the lighter hues. But the day will come and then even those who now know only the torment of egoism will discover the bigger world and learn that there is a broader life and a deeper happiness. Kisses to all three.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Cracow  
August 14 (1), 1912

My dear Zosia,

...Love calls to action, to struggle. . . . From morning till night I am absorbed with others in work which takes up every minute.\* In a day or two I hope to write you a longer letter. I received your collective open letter together with your note. On important matters you can send registered letters to my Cracow address. Have you read *Sila (Strength)*. It is worth reading carefully

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\* The reference is to the conference of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania.—*Ea'*

because in it you will find thoughts which will raise your spirits and give you real strength.\* I warmly embrace you.

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]\*\*  
January 20 (7), 1913

Dear Zosia,

I am greatly worried. How are you getting on without Jasiek.\*\*\* You must be terribly lonely. I am desperately anxious about you.

What can I say about myself? About my life in No. 10 Block, with which you are only too well acquainted, there is little worth recording. Day follows day, week succeeds week and already four months have gone by since my arrest. But all things have their end, although I have still got many long months ahead. I am taking

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\* These words signify that a passport in another name was concealed in the cover of the book *Sila* which Dzerzhinsky sent to his wife in Siberia. This passport fulfilled its purpose and Zosia Dzerzhinska escaped from her exile in the village of Orlingi in the Irkutsk Gubernia and made her way to Cracow. But before reaching the border she learned of the latest arrest of her husband. Upon arriving in Cracow, in September 1912, she found the following open letter written by Dzerzhinsky with a fictitious address and a fictitious signature:

"Zosia Wilecka, Cracow, Starzyca No. 3.

"Dearest, misfortune has befallen me. I am seriously ill (that is, arrested—*Ed.*). I fear that I won't see you for some time. With all my heart I kiss you and little Jasiek. Yours, Leopold." Warsaw, September 1 (Old Style), 1912.—*Ed.*

\*\* On September 14 (1), 1912, Dzerzhinsky was arrested for the sixth time and detained in No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel. From this time until the overthrow of the autocracy he never succeeded in getting out of prison.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* Dzerzhinsky's son was with relatives in the Minsk Gubernia; his wife was living abroad in emigration.—*Ed.*

things in my stride, even though these walls no longer speak to me as they did before—the times are different. It is necessary to await the resurrection, a miracle, meanwhile I keep on dreaming.

I spend most of the time reading. My health is good and I think that I am now cured.\* I am expecting a visit from my brother. I am not in want of anything and if only I were not anxious about you and Jasiek, if I knew that you are as well as circumstances permit, everything would be all right.

Having no writing materials, I am forced to write this under the supervision of the gendarme and because of the haste everything is chaotic.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
February 24 (11), 1913

Zosia dearest,

... You must be careful to preserve your strength. Much energy is lost in vain by irrational living which causes only exhaustion and is most unsatisfying. Now that I am again in prison I realize how much energy I could have conserved and how little productive its expenditure was\*\* merely because I did not keep a grip on myself. It may sound ridiculous sending you advice which I have never been able to practise myself. Still, I am sending it because I can feel how tired and exhausted you are. Normalcy can be restored not by walk-

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\* Before his arrest Dzerzhinsky was in a state of extreme exhaustion caused by overwork and the difficult conditions of underground life.—*Ed.*

\*\* Dzerzhinsky always had the feeling that he had never done enough.—*Ed.*

ing in the mountains or by an idle life, but by work, by merging with the world at large and by leading a regular life plus an hour's walk every day in the countryside. While it is difficult for one person to regulate his life, it is possible for us both to agree to follow this advice. Mutual obligation will make it easier, and much strength and nervous energy will be saved. Then, the work will be more fruitful and one will be able to cope with things.

I am waiting impatiently for the photo of Jasiiek. Send me the earlier photographs too. I long for every detail about him and I badly want to see him, but fear the visit would upset him; it would be terrible to see our little one through the netted wire and not be able to take him in my arms and caress him. Better forget it, far better not to see him, unless, of course, without the barrier of the netted wire. Alas, it will not be an easy matter to get permission for this. I had a visit from Stasya and her children on Saturday. The prison authorities objected to the presence of the children, although the Prosecutor had given his consent—and only after much worrying on the part of Stasya was permission obtained. I will write to you next about my "life" here. I am most grateful for the collective letter and send hearty greetings to all.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bułhak

[No 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]

June 16 (3), 1913

My dear Aldona,

I received your letter a month ago and I thank you very much. Although I have not written for a long time I often think of you. Believe me this is not because of forgetfulness. It is in prison that the memory of those

one loves is especially fresh, it flies to them and recalls the far-off years when we were together; how many smiles and how much love surrounded our childhood and early years. The village in the country, the forest, meadows, fields, the nearby river, the croaking of the frogs and the calling of the storks. The stillness and the wonderful music of nature in the evenings, the morning dew and all our noisy crowd of children and Mother's voice, calling to us from afar, from the woods and the river, to come to dinner; then the family table, the samovar, the house and the verandah where we gathered, and our tears and Mamma's care.... All this has departed irretrievably into the past, and though time marches on, the memory, the love and the endearment remain and will live in our minds until the very twilight of our lives. The smiles and the delights and the tears and the sorrows which we once shared together live in the recesses of the heart, bringing gladness even when one is unconscious of it. The human soul, like a flower, unconsciously absorbs the sunlight and eternally longs for it; the soul wilts and withers when evil casts its shadow on the light. On this striving of the human spirit towards the light of the sun depends our optimism and our faith in a better future, and for this reason there must never be any feeling of hopelessness.... Hypocrisy is man's evil genius—in words love, and in practice a merciless struggle for existence, for a so-called happiness, for pelf and place.... To be a bright torch for others, to be able to shed light—that is the supreme happiness which man can achieve. He who achieves this, fears neither suffering, pain, sorrow nor need. Death no longer holds terrors for him, although it is only then that he learns really to love life. Only in this way will man be able to make his way through the world with open eyes and see and hear everything, only in this way will he emerge from his



own narrow shell into the light and be able to feel both the joys and the sorrows of humanity, only in this way will he become a real man.

Forgive me for writing so much about this, but your sad letter has impelled these thoughts. I am not offering you a prescription for melancholy. Melancholy and sadness are vitally necessary to man, but, provided he understands others as well as himself, his heart will radiate bright sunlight and will not know despair. What is more, he will be able to awaken in the people who are dear to him loftier strivings and show them the way to real happiness.

What can I say about myself? I am here in prison, where I have been many times before; ten months have passed since the day of my arrest. Time flies. A week ago I was joined by a cell-mate, so I feel better. The confinement has gravely affected my memory and my ability to work. . . . I spend most of the time reading. We have 20 minutes exercise every day. The cell is roomy and airy. We are fed reasonably well and generally speaking I have no wants. The trial will hardly take place for some time and this, I fear, means a long wait. But if the outlook is not a happy one, I possess the happy knack of not seeing things in a tragic light, and I think I will be able to endure the difficulties and the sufferings which have fallen to the lot of so many. I can associate myself in spirit with the external necessity which brought me here, with my free will. You must not even think of coming to see me here. In such circumstances and after such a long parting the visit would simply be torment both for you and for me. All I ask is that you send me letters, I do not need anything else. I warmly kiss and embrace you and the children.

Your brother, *Felix*.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
July 28 (15), 1913

My dear Zosia,

I am so grateful to you for every letter and for every bit of news about Jasiek. In recent times I have received your letter dated July 2 and 3 with the photos of Jasiek and the postcard about Jasiek. I am so glad to know that he is now with you. The last photo with his smile signifies happiness for me, it floods the cell with light and I smile back at him, caress and embrace him and am glad that his smiles and tenderness are yours, that he gives you strength to bear everything.

For the last six weeks I have had a cell-mate\* and I feel comparatively better. We get on quite well. He is young, and for me this is a big plus. We read and study and the time seems to fly. The investigation of my case will take some time. Recently I have had three visits from Jadwiga who came here from Vilno.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
December 15 (2), 1913

My dearest Zosia,

I have been greatly heartened by your last open letter of November 28, with the notes from our friends from which it is clear that Jasiek is already better and that you are surrounded by comrades. I think about Jasiek all the time and imagine that I have him on my knees, fondling him and hearing his laughter. I think that he, too, knows me, and that we are bound by an unbreak-

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\* Dzerzhinsky shared a cell with Edward Próchniak, member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, later one of the leaders of the Polish Communist Party.—*Ed.*

able thread. It is you and my friends that have done this and I am so grateful for their kindness, now that they are moulding his mind and implanting in it jewels from which he when he grows up will generously share with others. Love of Jasiek fills my soul almost as if the whole of my life were concentrated in it. He is my longing, my thought, my hope, and when I visualize him, I have the feeling that I am listening to the murmur of the sea, of field and forest, to the music of my own soul, I see the star-spangled sky, hear the whispering of something pleasant and mysterious, see the future and become conscious of the aspirations of the millions. He is lucky in having both you and the hearts of our friends. But the moment he is able to understand, you must let him know all about our joys, our hopes, our sufferings and the beauty of life. Tenderness should give him the strength and ability to suffer so that (in the future) nothing will be able to break him. He should know these things so that he will appreciate the reason for the suffering and together with you be able to endure it and thus learn to love and understand and not only to be loved and understood. Moreover, he should know that your gladness derives not only from his own life but also from your life apart from him. . . . Love for a child, like any great love, is creative and can impart lasting and genuine happiness when it broadens his life, makes him a man in the real sense, and not some kind of idol. A love which is concentrated on a single person, which showers on him all the joy of life and turns everything else into a burden and torment merely poisons the life of the people concerned. . . .

About your collective letter. An idea coming from the very depths of the soul unites the people. It opens their hearts, telling them to help one another. . . . Working for this idea broadens the horizons, enables man to grasp the world in its entirety. My thoughts, flying out from

these walls and joining up with yours, speak to me about the immortal strength linking human thoughts and hearts, about the victory of life. And once again all that these walls and my sufferings have buried deep in my soul comes to the surface and, together with my feeling for Jasiiek, for you and our friends, acquires flesh and blood and fills my soul, and I become conscious of your love and of the great meaning of life.

I am looking at the photos of Jasiiek and his playmate. How splendid that these children of the same age are being brought up together, that they are able to play together, love, quarrel, fight even and get to know each other. They are now at a happy age. Soon, alas, the venom of life will in greater or lesser degree seep into them and, things being what they are, it is impossible to insulate them. I am convinced that among the workers—that is thinking workers—this venom is felt the least of all, that in this milieu it is easier to protect and enrich the mind, the milieu in which the only thing lacking is the external form—good manners. The world of the working class is the world of life and ideals, the world of suffering and of immense joy. Far be it from me to idealize this life—I know only too well all its horrors. But one finds in it a real striving towards light and beauty and in this environment it is easier to inculcate this striving in the child.... These thoughts, which never leave me, derive not from any fanaticism or dogmatism on my part, but from concern for the richness of the spirit of our little Jasiiek, from the desire that he should be capable of grand and noble things. Perhaps the reason why my thoughts seek a solution in this direction is that I myself was brought up differently. And if we have managed to preserve at least a bit of our souls the reason should be sought in the specific conditions of life which, fortunately, Jasiiek will not experience. The young people of today drawn

from the ranks of the so-called intelligentsia are completely different, they are poorer mentally, precisely because of the changed conditions. I am not speaking, of course, about the exceptions. Jasiak's mind will be moulded not by our views and beliefs, but by his own life and by the environment in which he will grow up, by the sufferings and the joys which his friends and comrades will experience with him.

To preserve and enrich his mind he must be taught to see and to hear everything so that he will be capable of seeing and hearing, that his love for you grows into deep friendship and boundless confidence....

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
December 15 (2), 1913

My dearest Aldona,

I beg your forgiveness for not having written for so many months. The fact is that my life here is so monotonous and so joyless that I can hardly write even a couple of words.... If only I could do something to relieve the sadness which breaks through in your letters! Fortunately for me, I possess a quality which enables me to be tranquil even when melancholy overcomes me. And this quality, which is not simply a feature of my character, is unshakeable belief in the people.

Conditions will change, evil will no longer predominate, and man will be to man a close friend and brother, not the wolf that he is today....

The child that does not love its mother suffers a terrible misfortune, that is if there really is no love. Of course, it is difficult to affirm this categorically, because the love, for a variety of reasons, may not be manifested. But if such be the case it is necessary to estab-

lish the reasons and to eliminate them, because love of the mother is one of the greatest blessings. . . . As a rule the discord that sets in between parents and children is the result of different convictions, opinions and beliefs. The evil arising therefrom can be eliminated fairly easily. One may not agree with the convictions or beliefs held by others, but one should respect them and not impose his point of view merely by virtue of parental authority. Children tend to regard this imposition as compulsion; they will always have the feeling that they are being dictated to, and the dictating is resented. And if viewpoints imposed by virtue of parental authority are docilely accepted, how will the children be able to cope with the difficulties encountered when their parents are no longer alive or when they are confronted with questions to which the parents are unable to supply the answers. Such people will never be independent and, unless saved by some happy accident, will always be scorned by others. Not only will they be scorned, they will lack even that moral fibre which is a necessity for each. Moral strength is needed to protect their minds against the foulness of modern society which dons an attractive mask in order to entangle its victim with the least effort! Parents fail to understand the harm they do to their children when they use authority to impose their particular convictions and views. Should this be the reason for the family discord it can easily be eliminated. But if the reason lies elsewhere—in bad character or in bad behaviour—the sole treatment should be the love of the mother who, as one comrade to another, explains to the child the original cause of the evil and its results, and who, knowing the child's mind, tries to penetrate into it. In the event of the child not responding to the maternal love, experience will teach it, punish it, whereupon it will recall its mother, her words and her love and it will abandon the bad

ways and realize that, without the mother's love for it and its for Mother, it is lost for ever....

As a father I find myself worrying and thinking about the future of my Jasiiek, hoping that he will grow up strong in body and in mind. He is now in Cracow with his mother, while I am immured in this place. I have asked Zosia to send you his photograph. She writes so much about him that I almost seem to see him and imagine myself with him. Fortunately, he has come through the scarlatina all right, evidently he is very strong. His mother writes that he is so gentle, and very popular with my friends. He is growing up in the company of a boy of his own age, the son of friends with whom Zosia is living. Not long ago when Jasiiek learned that he is a Dzerzhinsky, he became fascinated with this word which for him is so mysterious that he now prattles: "I am not sonny and not a kitten, I am Asik Dzerlinsky." He is an amusing child. I have with me in the cell three photos of him taken in the countryside in Galicia last summer. He really is a fine boy, and not only in his father's loving eyes.

Zosia is now giving lessons and good friends are helping her with the upbringing of the boy.

As for me I am still sitting here and lack only my freedom. I am now in a better cell, facing south, and the sun does not forget me.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
January 19 (6), 1914

Zosia dearest,

I am greatly alarmed at not having received a reply to my letter of December 1. The other day I received your letter dated January 4, with the "note" from Jasiiek

and the postcard of the 9th. This means that my letter of December 1st got lost, that you received only my last letter. I was particularly anxious that the letter of the 1st should reach you....\*

I don't think there is any danger of your bad nerves spoiling Jasiiek because he knows and feels that you love him. When he sees you sad and upset he feels this and will say to himself: "What has happened to Mamma?" He will tell himself that something is worrying her. He will learn to understand you, and that is the main thing. Where there is love there is bound to be confidence. Especially is this the case at an older age when the attitude of the child is not determined by right of authority and ownership. This is the best way to combat the harmful influence of environment.

I see from your letter that you are over-tired. If there is any possibility of arranging things so that you can rest you simply must do so. Your brain will function better after the rest. Unfortunately I cannot enlarge on this theme. I know how difficult it is for you and how hard it is to find the opportunity to rest. As for me, entombed in this place, I am absolutely powerless, having nothing to offer but words. This has its effect, making it impossible for me to write about myself. I try to banish the thoughts about my helplessness by thinking about Jasiiek and other things, by recalling the life of people deprived of everything and visualizing their hopes for a better future. Another thing is that my capacity for work has declined sharply. More than once the thought has come into my mind of my inability to live and be useful. But then I say to myself: he who has an idea and who is alive cannot but be useful, provided, of course, he does not rat on his idea. Only death when

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\* The letter of December 1st was transmitted secretly, not through the censor.--*Ed.*



it comes will say its word about uselessness. But as long as I feel the warmth of life, as long as my cause lives, I will wield pick and shovel, perform the most humdrum task and do my very best. And this thought assuages me and enables me to endure the torment. I shall do my duty, shall go right on to the end of the road. And even when the eyes become blind and no longer see the beauty of the world, the mind, knowing this beauty, will remain its servant. The torment of the blindness will remain, but there is something higher than this torment, namely, faith in life, in people, freedom and the awareness of duty.

I will not bother you with the details of my prison life—you know the pain of it only too well. Sometimes, especially at night, the silence is such that, broken and intensified only by the sudden rattle of lock or bolt, it seems like the graveyard; it is such that all my recent life and all this remote world seem but an illusion. In the daytime there is the anticipation that something will happen and, of course, there is nervous tension....

I have no idea when the investigation will be completed; they did say it would be finished this month. In any case the trial will not take place for a long time. Despite the long years of imprisonment which now face me, I am determined to hold out.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
January 21 (8), 1914

Dear Zosia,

...Much strength is needed here because in all likelihood I will get an eight years' sentence. Edek,\* I fear, will get the same, because his present three-year sen-

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\* The reference is to Edward Próchniak.—*Ed.*

tence is but the beginning and they are sure to give him more.

I am using this opportunity to ask you to arrange for a few rubles to be sent regularly to Martin Pakosz\* who has been here since March 16, 1913. He hasn't got a farthing. The fifty rubles which he had at the time of his arrest were confiscated and he is always hungry. He has no relatives, and a letter which he sent to friends in Galicia has not been answered.

Unfortunately I cannot help him and cannot even contact him.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
February 15 (2), 1914

Dearest Zosia,

Today, having received the collective postcard and your letter of January 31, I feel happy. Not for a long time have I smiled a smile from the depths of my heart and illuminating life and the whole world. So once more my thoughts reach out to the joy of life, of our life. The only thing that worries me is Jasiek's health, but a voice whispers to me saying that he will be healthy because he has you and our friends. And again I believe that the day will come when I will be able to press him to my heart, let him feel my love for him and my faith in life and my confidence. Today looking at the latest photos I can see how he has grown and I dream of the time when I will be able to see him and hug him.

I am determined to return and return I will despite everything. Whenever I experience such happy moments

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\* Martin Pakosz—an active member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania and afterwards a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.—*Ed.*

as these, I feel sure that I will never fall into despair and will preserve my mind to the very last. Despair or tragedy is ruled out as long as my mind is still able to feel, as long as there is strength and living thought and as long as the heart still continues to throb. And so it is that life again becomes something which should be approached simply, something constantly in motion and developing in contradictions, but always affording an outlet for the human mind provided there is the desire to be free. Prison torments and exhausts one, but then that is the price of life, the price of the right to the greatest happiness. This is possible now only for free people, whereas the torment is transient, is nothing, while the happiness, ever present, is, of all things, the most precious....

It is hard to believe that seventeen months have already passed since my arrest and only my mood shows that these months have left their mark. I fear that I shall have to stay a long time here, probably the whole of 1914.

Write to me with your news. Let me know whether things are better with the press censorship and whether any new publications have come out in Poland and in Russia.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
February 16 (3), 1914

My dear Aldona,

I have received everything—the postcard with the view and the letter with your warm wishes.... In prison a man becomes a little sentimental and thinks and speaks about things which in the outside world are hardly mentioned. In the outside world one's life and actions are guided by faith in one's cause. Action re-

places words. But here, where there can be no action whatever, it is replaced with feelings, words and thoughts. There is not much to write about. Outwardly things are just the same. I still do not know when the investigation will be completed and when, at last, the trial will begin. The days pass and as is usual in such conditions when one glances backward the impression is that the time has passed with the greatest rapidity. It is when you turn to the present and the future that it crawls along in tortoise fashion. The senseless existence, which is capable of driving one to insanity, were it not for the broader thoughts, recognition of the inevitability and the necessity of this existence, the recognition that it is the price paid for the bright future which is drawing nearer to us in the hell of contemporary life.

My spirits have improved, and although all my life has been such that I am forced to be the source of suffering for many people near and dear to me, I am at one with myself and with the commands of my conscience, no matter what torment this may bring upon me and my near ones. I have, therefore, no qualms, although my pain and agony have not declined and are hardly likely to do so.

I don't suppose there is a single man, with the exception of the handful of rich, who could say that he has never known suffering. And your suffering, like that of so many others, is great indeed. However, if thinking and feeling make it possible to understand life and one's own mind, strivings and dreams, then the suffering can and does become a source of faith in life, showing the way out and the very purpose of life. And peace of mind can be restored, and by this I do not mean the peace of the graveyard or of the corpse, but confidence and faith in the joy of life despite the pain and contrary to it. It is from this suffering that man

can reach, quicker than ever before, the kingdom of love and universal justice—the cherished dream of his bitter struggle. Even pain, provided it opens the eyes to the suffering of others, provided it leads to the search for the sources of evil, provided it links the heart with the hearts of other sufferers, and provided it gives man ideas and firm convictions, can be fruitful. . . .

I would like these words of mine to convey to you that which a person placed as I am can convey, words prompted by my personal longing, by my struggle against the evil of present-day life and by my sufferings, and by the evil which is present in me too. The absolutely good people do not exist, and I certainly do not belong to that category. I simply am conscious of my aspirations and dreams, the aspirations and dreams of a man who knows life, and for this reason pain for me is not only a torment, it is joy, tranquillity, love of life and belief in a better future for all mankind. . . .

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
March 9 (Feb. 24), 1914

My dearest Zosia,

Again it is bright and cheery in my cell and all because yesterday I received your letter of February 27 together with the "note" from the frolicsome Jasiek. I would like to write to you oftener to tell you about the things I preserve in my mind about you, about all that makes up my song and which I feel deep within me, namely that life is so desirable and so powerful. Alas, I lack the words, for this life, like these walls, has dried me up, the words no longer come. . . . That is why I write so rarely. The solitude and the dead-house atmosphere of cell life put the stamp of silence on the mind, its greyness tends to make the mind, too, grey



Orel Tsentral Prison where F. E. Dzerzhinsky served  
penal servitude. 1915-1916



Butyrki Prison. Here F. E. Dzerzhinsky served penal servitude  
in 1916-1917



F. E. Dzerzhinsky and his wife Z. Z. Dzerzhinska and son Jasiek in Lugano, Switzerland. October 1918

and superficial, the monotony is such that the mind becomes stagnant and immobile, reverting all the time to the same thoughts and feelings. When I sit at the table I always have the feeling that I am about to repeat the same things and almost the same words. This is because I am chained here, whereas I long for life, for action and for movement, so much so that I sometimes say to myself that now freedom has no attraction for me whatever, seeing that I cannot think about it without being conscious of the shackles. As to thinking about my life here, both in its details and as a whole, that I cannot do, just as the living person is incapable of grasping the meaning of death. It is precisely because man has such love for the world of reality that he creates a world of abstract generalizations which for him acquires a real form. To a degree this takes place also in the outside world where there is so much that is hellish. Love of life leads to its denial, to the creation of a world of fantasy. And this world of fantasy constantly fuses with the real things in life, those which I love most of all. All the time I gaze on the infinitely dear face of our little Jasiiek. I never tire of doing so, and I smile at his photo, in the same way as he, perhaps, gazes at mine, and I keep repeating: Jasiiek, darling! In the last photos which you sent me Jasiiek seemed to me to be different, but with every minute I got to know him better and better. When I look at him my gloomy thoughts and the apathy disappear. He is a splendid little chap, a source of strength and confidence, renewing my faith in the battle for life. The abstract, general ideas acquire flesh and blood and link me still more closely with the common stream of life. Being immured here, so far away and forced to sit in solitary immobility, I can do nothing to help you in battling for his body and soul, for his life as man.



I must put up with this—nothing can be done about it. Fate has so ordained that I am not here fortuitously. But when the thought troubles me that the burden may be too much for you, I feel bad. You, however, must not worry about me. I know, darling, that I can always rely on you. Your greatest help is that you write to me and keep me in touch with all I hold dear. In the material sense I am well off. I get everything that is allowed by the regulations. Often when I think of those who lack even the prime necessities I feel ashamed and become angry with myself and those who remember my needs and forget about the needs of others. To sit and eat can be a pleasure, but what comfort or consolation can there be in feasting, eating separately from your brother, your neighbour, with whom you are not allowed to fraternize, although you know that he is next door and has hardly anything to eat.\* It is exactly the same outside where there are no walls, yet these walls exist and divide, and everyone is conscious of this in one way or another. Not being a sectarian, I know that it would be impossible to live and work without building these dividing walls, but anyone taking our name\*\* should, in order not to have any feeling of shame, try to make the walls as few as possible and not absolutely impenetrable. All too frequently the feeling of brotherhood is confined to exclusive circles; this is done by people who deceive themselves and who live in the past. This brings me back to the conditions of working-class life. Among the workers one is conscious at every step of the feeling of brotherhood (not the philanthropic Christian brotherhood which played its part in the Middle Ages but which is now disgusting and hypocritical), a living, creative brotherhood.

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\* The prisoners in No. 10 Block, being completely isolated, could not help one another.—*Ed.*

\*\* This refers to the name Social-Democrat.—*Ed.*

Physically I am in good condition, but spiritually I find it harder to smile although I have never lost faith in life. . . . It is livelier in the cell—my companion was presented with the charges against him the other day and his trial will take place in a month or two. So far I have not heard anything about the investigation in my case; I suppose I will have to wait another year for the trial.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Jasiek Dzerzhinsky [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
March 9 (Feb. 24), 1914

My dear son,

Papa cannot come to his darling Jasiek to hug his beloved boy and tell him the stories that he likes to hear. So Papa is writing to Jasiek enclosing a picture\* and kisses and thanks him for his notes. He wants Jasiek to be good, healthy and obedient and to kiss his dear mother for Felek and to hug her with all his might. Let Jasiek kiss little Janek, Marilka and Papa Janek,\*\* say to them that Felek is healthy and that he *will* return.

*Your Papa.*

To A. E. Bulhak [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
March 16(3), 1914

Dearest Aldona,

After four years' separation we again saw each other. To me it seemed like a dream, a nightmarish dream.

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\* The "picture" was a silhouette of Dzerzhinsky drawn by his comrade in the cell.—*Ed.*

\*\* Janek—the son of Stefan Bratmann-Brodowski, a prominent leader of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, later a member of the C.P.S.U.(B.) and Soviet diplomat; Marilka—Maria Bratmann, Janek's mother.—*Ed.*

They refused to let us embrace. The double row of netted wire and behind it the cage with me in the role of wild beast! I was unable even to give any sign of the gladness which you brought to me. I was sleepy and indifferent, ghostlike. But only real sleep brings balm and gladness, whereas our real life is a nightmare. Then, a few days later, came the blessed dream which enabled me to see you and embrace you without the netted wire. All around us were flowers and meadows, the whispering of the oak-trees and the murmuring of the pine woods. We were, I think, in Dzierzynowo and Jasiek was with us. I lay on my back, looking at the sky through the gently waving pine branches, at the clouds racing far into the distance like crowds of people chasing after happiness, impelled by the eternal longing for a better life. The movement of the clouds, and the feeling that I had you and Jasiek at my side set me dreaming. The dream, imparting flesh and blood to my thoughts, gave me renewed strength so that upon awakening I felt able to withstand this atmosphere of wearisome boredom, the isolation and the horrible vegetative existence.

I am greatly worried about Wanda's\* health. I have not received any news about her since your visit. It is terrible to know that she really is in danger. When I think about all the misfortunes that befall man, about the fact that man is so often deprived of the things to which he is most attached, my mind tells me again that one should love with all one's heart and soul that which is not transient and which cannot be taken away from man and thanks to which he can become attached both to individuals and to things. To a degree that is how it has been up to the present: people have sought consolation and refuge from misfortune in thinking

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\* Dzerzhinsky's niece who died shortly afterwards.—*Ed.*

about a life in the hereafter, about justice beyond the grave. But for everyday purposes this is a sterile thought, because it cannot advance life and merely sanctifies and perpetuates the misfortunes, covering the earth in a mantle of mourning. This is the thought of the prisoner serving a life sentence and entombed in a foul dungeon until the end of his days. But there is another thought, a thought which arises not from any false denial of life here on earth, but from love and attachment to it, the thought of victory on earth and not of punishment for sins, of eternal torment beyond the grave. Love for the suffering and oppressed humanity and the longing in the breast of everyone for beauty, happiness, strength and harmony impel us to seek an outlet and salvation right here on earth and show us the way. Love opens the heart of man not only to his near ones, it opens his eyes and ears and gives him boundless strength and confidence in victory. In such circumstances misfortune becomes a source of happiness and strength because it brings with it clarity of thought and illuminates the life hitherto wrapped in gloom. Thereafter any subsequent misfortune no longer leads to abnegation, apathy and moral degradation, again and again it awakens man to life, to struggle and to love. So that when the time to die comes one departs in peace, knowing no despair or fear of death.

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
March 30 (17), 1914

My dear Zosia,

...For the past two weeks I have been alone. This is the result of my own efforts and at the moment I am perfectly satisfied with my solitude. . . . Now I am really

buried in the prison silence; my cell is away from a communicating corridor and I rarely hear footsteps or the banging of doors. My neighbours do not tap and the cell below is empty. Beyond the window, quite near and yet so far away, is the Vistula. From time to time I hear the whistle of locomotives and the sounds of the Wawerski suburban railway on the other side of the river. This is all so near that I can hear these echoes of life exactly as in a dream, through some kind of a dense and distant mist. On my table, covered with a large white towel instead of a tablecloth, stand the photographs of Jasiek in white frames; he smiles at me from all sides. On the walls, like dabs of colour, are the postcards with the views. In the intense, sepulchral stillness I feel as if I myself and all around have been suddenly rooted to the spot by some kind of diabolical witchcraft. And listening, I have the premonition that I am about to hear bad tidings, but the only sound is the gnawing of a beetle in one of the planks of my bed, a gnawing that never leaves off. When I weary of the silence I break it by walking up and down the stone floor. And my steps echo and re-echo in the large empty cell, filling it and, it seems to me, the entire block....

At last, when fatigue compels me to stop, I waken up, so to speak, and return to my world of solitude. Now that I am alone I am doing more study and, I think, getting better results, and the days pass quickly. I tend to sleep too much, sometimes 11 and 12 hours at a stretch. Every night I have dreams—dreams that are rarely pleasant and all too often unpleasant—usually of a fantastic nature and certainly not healthy.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
April 21 (8), 1914

Zosia dearest,

My thoughts continually take flight from here, from the cell.... I have the uncanny feeling that, with you there, in contrast to me here, something important is taking place. I am keyed up with the expectation of hearing some kind of news.

For the past twelve days I have had a companion. He is a young worker, a nice fellow and, as far as I can judge, quite friendly. We get on fine. It may be that, as so often happens here, this will last only until we get to know each other better. However, I think that we will get on. I am always at my best among children and workers, and only an extremely nervous state could make this company, in which I feel perfectly at ease, wearisome. There is more simplicity and sincerity, fewer conventions and the interests and cares of this circle are more in tune with my own. In such company my thoughts cease to be something in the nature of abstractions, they become flesh and blood and acquire strength. Often, especially when dwelling on my recent years—and how long these seem—when prevented from living the everyday life\* of the workers, I realize how much health and strength I have lost in consequence. Naturally, I am not blaming myself nor anyone else—fate and necessity have ordained my way of life. Still, I dream and believe that the day will come when I will be able to realize my aspirations and again draw health and vigour from this source. I have no regrets for the years that are gone, nor do I worry about the years ahead.\*\* That my youth and its vigour

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\* The years spent in prison, exile and emigration when he was unable to live among the workers.—*Ed.*

\*\* That is, about the years already spent in prison and the forthcoming term of penal servitude.—*Ed.*

will be restored, of this I am certain. Such is will, the will that impels life forward and imparts strength. Now that I am sharing a cell with a youth almost young enough to be my own son, I hate the feeling of growing old. In fact I have forgotten about having passed the stage of youth, about the difference in age and feel that I will step out together with the young people.

You will gather, then, that I am in fairly good trim. (Physically I am healthy.) Only in recent times have I been somewhat upset. The investigation involving charges under Article 102, so I have been informed, will be completed in about a month; then begins the second, much longer, period (about 6 months) of waiting for the indictment and trial before I finally get the sentence and begin to serve it....

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
May 16-18 (3-5), 1914

Zosia dearest,

This has been a week of impressions. The day before yesterday I received your letters of April 22 and May 8, and today the two postcards, the collective one dated May 3 and yours of May 11. I am so grateful to you—for everything, and especially for the postcard written in the evening at Jasiek's bedside. At the moment I am convinced, perhaps more so than ever before, that I shall return to life. I feel the vibrancy of my cherished dreams and aspirations, as if I myself were living in and through those who are dear to me and who are always in my heart. Your letters and your words speak to me of these things and they hearten me so much that I can see years of creative work ahead.

On Tuesday, May 12 (New Style), I appeared in the district court to answer the charge concerning my escape.\* I did not write last week because I wanted to tell you about the trial, although you will know all about it before this letter reaches you. The indictment was handed to me a week before I appeared in court. The trial itself lasted no more than 20 or 30 minutes, including the time taken by the judges and the reading of the sentence. They read one and a half pages of the indictment, asked if I pleaded guilty to "running away," to which I said "Yes." The Prosecutor then uttered the words: "Pleads guilty," my defence council spoke for a few minutes about my long imprisonment, and about the Manifesto of 1905. I declined the opportunity to have a last say, the judges returned and read the harsh sentence: "The prisoner who escaped from exile is sentenced to three years hard labour...." The sentence will be read in its final form within two weeks and that will be the end. I was hustled out of the dock because they were in a hurry to try the next case—a case of robbery.

I glanced round the hall in the hope of seeing somebody I knew—the trial was held in public. But in vain. All were strangers. They had come not to see me but others. Their faces reflected merely the curiosity of idlers. The absence of a friendly face, naturally, was a disappointment, although I had been prepared for it. I knew that none of my relatives could have come at such short notice. For this reason the bitterness of the moment did not evoke unjust thoughts.

I listened calmly to the sentence. I had an inkling of what it would be, gave no thought to it, and I am ready

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\* The reference is to Dzerzhinsky's escape from exile in Taseyevka (Siberia) whither he had been sent to exile for life.—*Ed.*



to bear it. My thoughts were elsewhere. Life seemed to me to be so attractive, I saw it with the mind's eye, felt its fulness and heard its eternal hymn. My lawyer smiled politely, looked at his watch and hastened into the court for another, more serious case. He assured me that I looked much better than I did in 1909 when he last defended me. And looking him in the eyes I, for the life of me, cannot say why, suddenly remembered that the dog-skin boots which I wore on my winter flight from Siberia were also nice and warm. I mentioned this and he laughed. He thought to himself: what a queer fellow, and I divined his smile, the smug smile of a man with a position in life, and I felt relaxed. After all, I did come back in a dog's skin!

The journey itself, or rather the two journeys—first to hear the indictment and then for the trial—after twenty months in prison, the act of being in motion although I was handcuffed; the street life seen through the grating of the prison cart, the shop windows (one a florist's with the signboard: "Bordighera"—not so long ago I had been in Bordighera during a moonlight walk along the Mediterranean coast shortly after my escape); the restaurants and cafés, the tramcars (how much money I spent on them covering my traces and how many times I travelled on them before this solemn journey), the faces of the children (Jasiek, darling, what are you doing at this moment, are you as big as these boys, do you have their smiling eyes and are you as playful as they are?)—all brought tears to my eyes and evoked memories. I felt like a child, as if I were in a dream. So many recollections, so many colours, sounds, light and movement—all somehow merged into recollections of music I had listened to in days long past. The experience brought back the joy of life. . . . Poetry penetrates the grim and at times ter-

rible life through one's thoughts. Gloom absorbs light in the same way as dry sand absorbs moisture, and the light, breaking through the dark and the cold, warms and illuminates. And at the very moment when the words of poetry reflect that which is now dead, which is false, there arises a new poetry, the poetry of action, the bounden duty of human souls denying all tragedy, hopeless situations and the blackness of despair. This new poetry takes away the tragedy even from death and unbearable suffering and surrounds life not with the aureole of torment, but of boundless happiness.

I am back in my cell once more and it will be a long, long time before I leave it again, for the investigation of the charge under Article 102 is being dragged out and I calculate on being here at least for another year before all the formalities will be completed. This time, however, if my lawyer is not mistaken, the waiting will not matter very much, because the serving of the sentence will date from May 12, that is the day it was pronounced. And I have become so attuned to the tranquillity here that I think, not without dread, about the Arsenal....\*

In 1909 when I was first taken there I never closed my eyes for three nights and almost went out of my mind. Through the cell window came the nerve-racking noise of the streets, the rattle of carts and the endless clanging of the tramcars. Only later, when they transferred me to another part of the building, away from the street, was I able to sleep.

Zosia, you write so much to me about Jasiek, and I read and re-read your words, that I return to him, again and again, gaze on his photograph and close my eyes

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\* The Arsenal was a transit prison in Warsaw for persons sentenced to hard labour and exile.—*Ed.*

in order to see him in my imagination. Now and then I catch something—a smile, a look, and see him as he is, but the image vanishes instantaneously and I find myself unable to imagine his voice, size, mental development or to see him as a whole. I know, of course, that this is labour in vain. But when I read your words, when I think about him, I have the impression that he is beside me and I live minutes of happiness; so I have nothing whatever to complain about and nothing pains me. I again long for your words about him, for more and more of them. But, whatever you do, don't take hours off your sleep writing long letters. A few words about him on postcards and about yourself will give me a lot, they will banish the anxiety and I will be happy, knowing that he is well and how things are generally. I would dearly like to see Jasiiek, to feel him in my arms, in my eyes, lips and heart, to listen to his prattle and even to see his tears, his smiling eyes, his cheeks and lips. After receiving the sentence according to Article 102, or after getting the indictment, I will apply for permission to see him without the barrier of the netted wire. I know that in the Arsenal or in the Mokotow\* it is easier to get permission. But I fear he would be upset by seeing me in convict clothes and fetters. The sight might fill him with a feeling of loathing that would remain with him for life, and, who knows, might turn him against me. A man in convict clothes is not easily discernible. Jasiiek mine, be patient, the day will come when your Felek will embrace, caress and hug you. Papa will write to you whenever possible, when you grow up a little, when you are so big that you will no longer ask to be carried in arms, but be a boy with firm legs. Meanwhile I am writing to Mummy, and

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\* A convict prison in Warsaw.—*Ed.*

you, our dear one, I think of you and love you. A big, big hug for you, my darling boy.

I was taken to another cell today (May 16). I miss the old one. Although it was fairly cold—it faced north—and only at twilight did the sun send us its farewell rays, nevertheless, in the evenings (an hour or an hour and a half before 8.30) when the window was opened to air the cell, I could see the Vistula and the sunset. My eyes gazed afar, they at least are free. I used to stand at the window, oblivious of the bars separating me from the world, gazing at the wide and free expanse of the sky and the Vistula, at the lightning flight of the swallows and the pigeons, travelling in thought from here, contemplating on life and reliving the years of my youth that have gone for ever. There, too, I could think about a comrade,\* but now not even to you can I pour out my soul as I did in my letters of January 21 and April 21.\*\* There silence reigned supreme, here there is much more movement. Here in front of my window is a row of chestnut-trees. I listen to their rustling and I have the sun from one o'clock in the afternoon until sunset, screened, it is true, by the leaves. The cell is both dry and warm, so I have had no difficulty in getting used to it. As a rule when I am transferred from cell to cell I always feel a kind of attachment to the old one. But the new "apartment" is my old residence of 1909 and it reminds me of many past experiences; you, too, are acquainted with it.\*\*\* Please convey warm greetings to all comrades, write a

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\* That is, he could maintain contact to some degree with his comrade confined in the same corridor.—*Ed.*

\*\* He could no longer transmit letters secretly, evading censorship, as was the case with the letters of January 21 and April 21.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* Dzerzhinsky is referring to the experiences described in his prison diary.—*Ed.*

nice letter to Wesołowski.\* When shall we be able to embrace each other? I kiss you warmly.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]

June 2 (May 20), 1914

My dearest Aldona,

Thank you for the postcards (the last dated May 2) with the views of Vilno which remind me so much of my childhood and youth. Three weeks ago I was sentenced on the first charge—the flight from Siberia. As I anticipated, they have given me three years hard labour. Since I expected this, the sentence has not oppressed me very much, the more so because on the second charge the sentence will be more severe (about 5 years) and only the more severe sentence will be applied, not, however, from the day of my arrest, but from May 12, that is, the date of the first trial. This means that I am now serving my sentence. I am still confined in No. 10 Block and will remain here until the second trial, which means about another year. I shall then be transferred to another prison. But who in my position does not dream of something happening, of being released earlier. Incidentally I give very little thought to the immediate years, just as everyone knows that death is inevitable but never gives it a thought and lives as if he were immortal. Such is the law of life. In the meantime I have had a break. Peering through the grating of the prison cart I saw the movement on the

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\* Bronislaw Wesołowski—a member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania and later of the Russian Communist Party. He was then serving a hard labour sentence. In December 1918, when acting as head of the Soviet Red Cross mission to Poland, he was murdered by Polish reactionaries.—*Ed.*

streets, listened to the noise of city life, glanced at the shop windows, saw the undertaker's where they sold coffins and, next door, a florist's with flowers from the Riviera advertized as "Bordighera." I have been in Bordighera.... I walked in the moonlight from Bordighera along the Mediterranean coast road and crossed the Italo-French border into Monte Carlo. I can visualize this road, the sea, silvery in the moonlight, the mountains and the palms. I remember the air, fragrant with the aroma of flowers and mimosa.

Alas, this belongs to the past. Still, I experienced it, and it remains in my mind which is filled with the songs of our woods and meadows, with the mists, the morning dew, and our sands. It is filled, too, with love and faith (in a better future for man), with our sorrows and all the subsequent happenings. And the more terrible the hell of our present life, the clearer and louder I hear the eternal hymn of life, the hymn of truth, beauty and happiness, and I no longer know despair. Life can be joyful even when one is in chains. So no matter what happens, you must not be downhearted—such is life. I have forgotten to convey to you warm greetings from my cell-mate for the wishes which you sent to him when you came to see me.

My new companion, a young worker, has been with me since April 10 and we are getting on fine. This cell faces the west and although I can no longer see the Vistula, we get sunlight from 2 o'clock onward. I have recently had very good news about Jasiek. He is healthy and coming along nicely. He was so delighted with the spring that when his mother took him to the countryside he became intoxicated with impressions.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska\* [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
June 24 (11), 1914

My dearest Zosia,

I don't know whether you received my letters of May 22 and June 21 and whether I made myself sufficiently clear. If there is anything not clear I can repeat the points, but I must know whether the letters reached you.\*\* Don't be angry with me, Zosia, for not having written for such a long time. My thoughts are constantly with you. The one thing which has sustained my moral strength is the thought of our common work. I want to be worthy of the ideas which we both share. Any manifestation of weakness on my part, any longing for the end and quiet, any saying that "I cannot endure this any longer" would be tantamount to treachery and abandonment of my feelings for you and for that hymn of life which I always hear....

Whenever I think of our beloved Jasiek I am overcome with happiness. Yet I am demented by the thought that all the burden of his upbringing has been borne by you alone, that it takes up much if not all your time, while I am powerless to do anything. You, I am sure, will transmit these feelings and thoughts to him, he knows of me from you, and the world of our thoughts, yours and mine, are one and the same. The fact that at present I am confined here, where you were with him, and the purpose of this will not be lost on him. He now feels, and soon he will understand and imbibe our thoughts. And the memory of the place where he was born,\*\* and the understanding of the reasons for this will remain with him for ever, deepening the purpose

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\* This letter was sent illegally.—*Ed.*

\*\* The letters on Party questions, in double cipher, were written in invisible ink.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* Dzerzhinsky's son was born in prison.—*Ed.*

of his life. It may well be that this memory will be decisive for him and determine his path in life, provided his character is not spoiled and that he does not become one of our typical intellectuals for whom words and thoughts are for the most part merely the "poetry" of life, a decoration, having nothing whatever in common with his actions and with his real life.

In the modern intellectual we see two different worlds—the world of thought and the world of action, refined idealism and vulgar materialism. The modern intellectual completely fails to see both the reality of the life around him and his own life. This is because he has no desire to see it. He can shed tears when he sees something acted on the stage and yet be completely indifferent and, what is more, use the mailed fist in practice, in daily life. That is why it is so important to inculcate in Jasiek a loathing and disgust for the lies and the affection which are so widespread among children who take their examples from our society.... But the lies, the sources of which are the social conditions, cannot be eliminated, and Jasiek should not be cut off from these conditions. He should get to know them and become conscious of them in order to become imbued with the feeling of disgust for lies, or to understand the necessity for and the inevitability of lying when prompted by pure and social aspirations, when the lie is necessary in the struggle for a deeper and nobler life. Jasiek should not be a hothouse plant. He should possess all the dialectic of feeling so that in life he will be able to fight for truth and for our idea. He should cherish a broader and stronger feeling than the sacred feeling for his mother or for the loved ones near and dear to him. He should be able to cherish the idea, that which unites him with the masses, that which for him will be a torch throughout life. He should understand that with you and with all the people to whom



he is attached, whom he loves, there is something stronger than love of the child, love of him, that the source of this something is both he and the love and the attachment to him. This sacred feeling is stronger than all others, stronger by virtue of its moral commandment: "That is how you should live, that is what you should be." Consciousness of this duty cannot be inculcated by reason alone. . . . I remember an evening in our little cottage in the country when Mother was telling us stories in the lamp-light, with the murmuring of the woods coming to us through the windows. I remember her telling us about the persecution of the Uniates,\* about how the people in the chapels were forced to pray in Russian. She told us about the indemnities imposed on the population, about the persecution to which they were subjected, how they were made to pay heavy taxes, etc. Her stories taught me to hate every act of injustice. Their influence was such that they helped to make me a revolutionary. Ever afterwards I regarded the acts of violence which came to my knowledge (for example, in Kroży,\*\* the cases of people being forced to speak Russian, to go to church on holidays, the system of spying in the schools, etc.), as violence against me personally. The result was that I and a group of boys of my own age pledged (in 1894) to fight against evil until the last breath. I reacted at once to every injustice and every humiliation suffered by the people, and I developed a loathing for evil. But

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\* The Uniates—Byelorussians and Ukrainians who advocated the union of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches under the Pope and who for this reason were persecuted by tsarism, which, by violence and shootings, sought to get them to submit to the Greek Orthodox Church.—*Ed.*

\*\* Kroży, a village in Lithuania where in 1893 the tsarist police and Cossacks slaughtered people for refusing to recognize the Greek Orthodox Church.—*Ed.*

I had to grope my way blindly, without any guidance or instruction, and in doing so I wasted much time and energy. Jasiiek, fortunately, has you and all of us, to guide him; instead of groping in the dark, he will inherit our cause. But the heart alone is not sufficient. Needed too are the social conditions which will make it possible for him to become conscious of this inheritance and to take it over. These conditions exert a stronger influence than the heart.... It is only among the oppressed that one finds no disharmony between the older and younger generations. It is only in this environment that our idea grows, gains strength, spreads and becomes an indomitable force, without hypocrisy and without any contradiction between words and deeds. Time and again I revert to the thought that when Jasiiek grows up he will derive much from this environment. While it may be premature to speak about this just now, the idea, nevertheless, is always in my mind. I very much want him to be an intellectual, but without the bad features of the intelligentsia. Because, as things are, the environment of the intellectuals is fatal for the mind. This environment attracts people and, like vodka, intoxicates them with its outward glitter and poetical forms and words, with its individual feeling of being superior. Moreover, it makes people so attached to the outward manifestations of "culture," to a definite "cultural level" that the moment a conflict sets in between the level of material life and the level of spiritual life, the requirements of the former predominate, with the result that man becomes nihilistic, a cynic, drunkard or hypocrite. And this inner conflict is never resolved.

Some may say that all this is nothing but barbarism. It may be argued that relinquishing the good things of life in order to fight for them jointly with those who are denied them is something in the nature of asceticism.

Be that as it may, it is a thought that is always in my mind and I am sharing it with you. I, of course, am not an ascetic. This is simply the dialectic of feeling, the source of which is found in everyday life and, in my view, in the life of the proletariat. The point is that this dialectic should complete its cycle in order to arrive at the synthesis—the solution of the contradictions. And this synthesis, being proletarian, should simultaneously be “my” truth, the truth of “my” mind. It is necessary to have the conviction of the need to suffer death for the sake of life, to go to prison for the sake of freedom, and to have the strength to experience with open eyes all the horrors of life, feeling in one’s mind the grand, ennobling hymn of beauty, truth and happiness taken from this life. When you tell me that Jasiiek goes into raptures when he gazes on the green of the fields and the woods, when he hears the warbling of the birds, sees the flowers and all living things, I realize at once that he has in him that which will enable him to raise the future edifice of this grand hymn, provided the conditions of life impart this feeling for beauty, and the conviction that one must fight to make human life equally beautiful and splendid. . . . Speaking for myself I can hardly remember an occasion when the grandeur of nature (lying at the edge of the forest on a starry night in summer listening to the gentle whispering and gazing at the stars; lying in a pine woods on a summer’s day peeping through the gently waving branches at the clouds chasing across the sky; being in a boat on a moonlight night, rowing out to the middle of the pond and taking in the solitude, undisturbed by the slightest rustle, and oh how many of these pictures), did not remind me of our idea. . . . One should never reject the grandeur and loveliness of nature. Nature is the temple of the wanderers who lack the cosy “little homesteads” which lull and soothe the more enthusiastic spirits. And

those who at the present time lose their own firesides will gain the whole world provided they step out along with the proletariat. And should Jasiek be able to forego the "homestead comforts"—the supreme idea of our intelligentsia—and be able to preserve the feeling and understanding of beauty, then the "my" concept will coincide with the "dear" concept, provided, of course, that the beauty is not regarded in the purely commercial sense, but in the sense of taking in the whole of this wonderful world as his own. In this case he will be the happiest of mortals and, what is more, one of the most useful. My dream is that he should be able to see, hear and feel, so that later on, when he grows up, his environment will make eye and ear keener and broaden the feeling of love for people, enabling him to become one of the millions, to understand them, so that their hymn becomes his hymn, to penetrate into the music of this hymn and in this way grasp and become conscious of the genuine beauty and happiness of man. Should this be so, he will not be a poet living at the expense of poetry, but, living the life of the millions, will compose his own song. It is also my hope that he will become not a crippled intellectual but a real man. Dreams, you may say. But which is better: to be a crippled intellectual or a crippled worker. . . . True, the worker is indeed crippled, but with the passing of the years his crippled state diminishes, while that of the intellectual increases. . . . I am convinced that the hour of victory is drawing near. But even now in his crippled state, the worker is entirely different. Being crippled by the oppression and violence, he fights against it. As to the intellectual, he regards his crippled state as a sign of his superiority, with the result that it is incurable.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]  
June 29 (16), 1914

Zosia dearest,

I will be brief today—I am still without your new address and I fear that the letter may not reach you. Moreover, I am somewhat off balance again. After the long confinement the slightest upset knocks my knees from under me, leaving me distraught. At long last the investigation of the second charge—under Article 102—has been completed and the investigation materials read to us. The reading lasted from Friday until today, five hours daily during the past four days. That is why I am listless, to say nothing about other reasons connected with the investigation materials.\*

Soon, however, I will be myself again. The trial will not take place before January. Generally speaking, I am in reasonably good trim. But the prolonged inactivity and the fact that I am prevented from doing anything useful get me down. Alas, nothing can be done about it, the very thought of it is unbearable. Iron necessity, with which it is impossible to become reconciled, is not a lump of wood. I am waiting to hear from you as to what you are doing for the summer and about your arrangements.

I am so glad that Jasiiek is such a lover of nature, that he has a keen ear and that he is fascinated by the forests, flowers and all the bounty of nature. The person with an instinct for beauty can grasp and understand the essence of life. After all, Jasiiek is barely three and already he is absorbing the rays which throughout his life will impart gladness and which he will pass on to others. I myself recall those moments of inexpressible joy when, as a child, resting my head on Aldona's

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\* Here he implies that the reading of the investigation materials had confirmed his suspicions of a provocation.—*Ed.*

knees, I listened in the evenings to the murmuring of the woods, the croaking of the frogs, the corncrake calling to its mate and gazed long at the twinkling stars. . . . Recollection of my childhood brings back those moments of real happiness when nature so absorbed me that I hardly believed that I existed and imagined myself a particle of nature, organically linked with it, as if I were a cloud, a tree or a bird. Has Jasiiek seen how the stars twinkle and sparkle?

He is still an infant and I suppose that by the time the stars come out he is already asleep, but each year the world will open before him more and more of its bounty.

Whenever I think about my years at school, which instead of enriching my mind impoverished it, I begin to hate this training and its aim of turning out a so-called intellectual. Actually my happiest recollections are of childhood and, skipping the school years, of more recent times when, although I encountered so much suffering, my mind became infinitely much richer. . . .

It is now late. I am finishing—correspondence must be handed in tomorrow morning. If this letter is so chaotic it is because I am tired and cannot concentrate. But when writing my thoughts are with you and I forget the things which upset me during the reading of the investigation materials; I will give my mind a rest and strength will come with the relaxation.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]

July 20 (7), 1914

My dear Zosia,

I have nothing new to report. It is stuffy and hot in the cell and difficult not only to do anything but even to think about anything.

Last week my cell-mate was told that he would be released on 200 rubles' bail. Naturally he was delighted with the news, but he is still here. Every minute is an eternity for him and the whole day from morning till night is spent in the anticipation that at any moment they will come and say, "Pack your things." I try to calm him and ask jokingly whether it will really be better for him out there or whether he is not better off behind bars, whence freedom seems so exciting and attractive; that when he goes out he will again be enmeshed in the yoke which, closing the world to him, may make him long for the solitude and tranquillity of our stone cell. This, of course, is make-believe, because I myself am sensible of his anticipation, though it is painful to think how far removed is the hour of freedom for me. I think only about this, and I drive away the pictures I see in my imagination, because they bring on a terrible longing for freedom, and yet I am powerless to break my chains. But what will be when at long last this moment arrives? I think about it not without misgivings. Always when in prison I have the feeling that I simply cannot endure life any longer, cannot smile or do anything. The unbearable heat has upset me today. Actually prison bars do more than sap one's strength, they sharpen vision and feeling, and whenever I think about life outside my impression is of some kind of a madhouse, and yet it could be so beautiful, simple and easy. Alas, how naive is this "could be."

I am writing after a rest of half an hour. They have just come for my cell-mate and taken him away. His relatives were waiting for him at the gates. He is now among his own after nearly eighteen months in prison.

At the moment I am alone and will not bother, at least not for a while, to ask for another companion. But

I don't want to be solitary too long. When alone I think too much about myself, whereas my sole desire is to forget all about myself. Usually I am saved by thinking about our little Jasiek and about our work. Consequently, every word and every bit of news from you means everything. Because of repairs I have been taken to a cell on the lower floor and sometimes I can see children playing. Longing and anger overcome me at the sight, because I am unable to see and embrace Jasiek. I have asked for permission to take farewell of him before getting the final sentence. They have agreed, although it is still not certain whether I shall be able to see him without the barrier. I imagine the sentence will not be delivered before January. When Jasiek grows up he will remember this moment which for me will be the greatest happiness of all the years of my imprisonment. I will write to you in detail about this; meanwhile a hug for my beloved son.

How are the youngsters getting on with each other? Give Janka's\* father a hearty embrace for me. What about Leo's\*\* health?

I have heard that Julian has had scarlatina.\*\*\* Are there any complications?

Yours,  
*Felix.*

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\* Janka's father, Adolf Warski-Warszawski, was a prominent member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, and later of the Communist Party of Poland.—*Ed.*

\*\* Leon Jogiches—one of the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania; he was murdered in 1919 by German reactionaries.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* The reference is to the arrest of Julian Marchlewski, one of the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania. He was arrested in Germany.—*Ed.*



To A. E. Bułhak

[Mtsensk, Orel Gubernia]\*

September 7 (August 25), 1914

My dear Aldona,

Forgive me for not writing to you for so long, but, as you see, I am now in the heart of Russia, having spent much time en route to the prison in this town of which I had heard only once or twice previously. But, let me tell you everything in chronological order. At the end of July, Old Style, when war was already in the air, we were told in No. 10 Block that we would be transferred to another prison, and that possibly we, the political prisoners, would be set free. All visits were stopped and no parcels were delivered. On July 26, the prisoners under investigation, myself included, were transferred to the Mokotow Prison with all our belongings; these, in view of our long confinement, were quite bulky. We were issued with prison clothes and on July 28 entrained for Orel. The journey, an exceedingly tiring one of which I will not write, took three days. In Orel all of us from No. 10 Block were put into a large common cell. We were told that we could wear our own clothes, but it turned out that all our things had got lost on the journey and so we found ourselves without our own linen, suits, pillows, blankets and books. We were told that we would not be very long in Orel. Actually after three weeks we were transferred to the Mtsensk Prison where, it seems, I shall remain until my fate is finally decided. It is difficult without books and without news.

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\* In connection with the outbreak of the imperialist war of 1914-18 the political prisoners in Warsaw and other Polish towns were transferred to Russia. Dzerzhinsky, who had been sentenced to three years hard labour was sent to the Orel Convict Prison. Previously he had spent some time in the Mtsensk Prison, not far from Orel and afterwards in the Orel Prison. Dzerzhinsky's letters from Russia were written in Russian with the exception of those smuggled out.—*Ed.*

of one's relatives; however, the desire to live, to bear everything and to see you and my little Jasiak, to be together in Dzierzynowo is so strong that I think I can cope with the difficulties and return once more to freedom. Now I have no doubt that soon, very soon, I shall be free.\*

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Mtsensk, Orel Gubernia]  
October 20 (7), 1914

Aldona dearest,

I received the counterfoil\*\* with your letter three days ago and ten days ago the sum of 25 rubles.

I am most grateful to you. But why, dearest, have you not written anything about yourself and the children? I suppose that you are still as busy as ever and, possibly, have more worries and woes. Write lots about yourself the moment you get any time. How are you managing during this terrible war. Have many of our relatives and near ones been called to the army, how are things generally? It is dreadful to think what Poland must now face—suffering, sorrow and devastation. I shall try not to think about these things. True, man can get used to everything, loses the capacity to feel, see and hear and becomes accustomed to any madness and horror. Reality signifies experiencing every moment, each separately and each prepared by the preceding one; but, grasping all this at once and seeing it in its entirety, one is filled with horror and, in order to retain his sanity, ceases to think. The senselessness of my present life, the powerlessness of my thoughts and

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\* Dzerzhinsky was convinced that the war would accelerate revolution and his liberation.—*Ed.*

\*\* Money order.—*Ed.*

feelings and the fact that they are superfluous are having a bad effect on me. It is hard to get away from oneself. You stew in your own juice and feel that the eternal strain will make it impossible to think and work; one hates oneself and evil ferments in the mind. Forgive me, Aldona, for these sentiments but behind them are concealed both my hopes and my strength, the passionate desire to live, and I cannot become reconciled to an existence which not only enmeshes the body but which wants to destroy the mind as well. Despair, as you know, is utterly alien to me, and you, when thinking about me, should remember this. Man has so much vitality and life has imparted so much that is bright and joyful, so much that is rational, that he can endure anything, even the horrors of death. He can understand everything and always see the good and hate the evil, can understand both the suffering and the pain, his own and that of others and take everything in his stride. The greatest happiness is the feeling which you impart to people and which people impart to you—your relations and non-relations—people like yourself. My dearest, I am grateful to you for your warm words, always when I am weary they give me strength and the desire to bear everything and to hold out. I have no idea how long I shall be in this place, presumably until the end of the war, which, I think, cannot continue very long. . . .

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]

My dearest Aldona,

October 29 (16), 1914

I presume that you received the telegram which I sent from Mtsensk. The sentence for my flight from Siberia has entered into force and it may be that I will be

sent to another prison. In any case I expect to be here for at least three weeks and I rather think that your letter will still find me here. I have also received a postcard from Warsaw, but have not heard anything about Jasiek and Zosia. Don't worry about me, dearest, I will endure this and return.

Yours,  
*Felix*

To A. E. Bulhak

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
November 15 (2), 1914

Aldona, my dearest,

A week ago I received your registered letter with the photo of Jasiek and was very glad—a ray of light penetrated into my cell and smiles reappeared on my face. A letter came from Warsaw a couple of days ago. Zosia and Jasiek, now in Zakopane, are quite well. Zosia has not written because of the ban on letters from abroad. Please ask Stan to take out a subscription for me from November 1 (Russian style), for *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* (*Government Herald*). Now, in wartime, we are allowed to subscribe to this paper. . . . I have a hunch that I will not have to spend as long in jail as I thought. My health is good and it may be that I will soon return and be able to see you, without having to hide, and pay a brief visit to our beloved Dzierzynowo. . . . Write to me, dearest, about how the war has affected life in Vilno. We are hungering for news. Fortunately, there is a fairly good library here (no need to send books) and I recently read a very touching book about the Franco-Prussian war. Reading it my thoughts travelled to Poland and to that part of Lithuania now enveloped in the flames of war, where men are bleeding and women weeping. Out there nothing but the horror and the insanity which we here experience in thought, and at times the thought is even worse than

the reality. I expect to spend another month or six weeks in this place before being sent to the convict prison, although I am not sure whether they will do this in view of the fact that there has been no hearing of the second charge. I have written about this to the Inspector of Prisons but so far have not had any reply. Conditions here are worse and the regime more strict than in No. 10 Block. But one gets used to everything, and there are much worse things in the world just now than those which we are forced to endure here. This thought makes me ashamed for my weakness and lack of spirits and imparts the feeling that sometime, when I get out of this place, I will be able to do something useful.

Your brother *Felix*

To A. E. Bułhak

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
November 30 (17), 1914

My dearest Aldona,

I wrote to you a fortnight ago but don't know whether or not you received my letter. I sent it without a stamp—it was impossible to get one. So I am writing again in case the previous letter didn't reach you and so that you should not be worried. I am as well as it is possible to be in such conditions. Zosia's father has written to me from Lublin saying that Zosia and Jasiek are now in Zakopane, that they are quite well and that she had sufficient money when she left. I had been very anxious about them. I imagined her in Warsaw and was upset at not hearing from her. Because of the war, letters from Zakopane do not reach us, which explains why I have had no word from Zosia. Now, however, I am getting letters from Warsaw. We are always on the wait for news about the war, anxious to know how soon this horror will end. My own inactivity makes me de-

pressed. My first sentence, as I had anticipated, will not become effective until the sentence is delivered on the second charge under Article 102. I shall just have to wait in patience until the end of the war. Sometimes I have the impression that I have been turned into patience itself, being utterly listless and envying those who suffer and have real feelings, even the most tormenting ones. I shall wait; it may be that these terrible times will bring consolation. In a year or two the tears will be forgotten and life will again flower in the places where blood is now flowing in streams. It is my firm belief that I will soon be free and will avail myself of Stan's help. Meanwhile, let him forgive me for the worry I am causing him and for the expenditure. I have had a letter from Stasia—I replied a couple of weeks ago, addressing it to Dzierzynowo; no doubt she will be bored there alone with the children during the winter. I have no recollection at all of Dzierzynowo in winter time; whenever I think about it my thoughts are always of summer. I wrote to you earlier, confirming receipt of your letter of October 16 and the photo of Jasiek. Many thanks.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Bulhak\*

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
December 31 (18), 1914

My dear Aldona,

Your welcome letter with the photographs of my little Jasiek arrived today. I am answering at once, taking advantage of the opportunity to send you this letter. This has been a sad Christmas for all of us. The only thing which gives us strength is the warm feeling

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\* This letter was sent illegally.—*Ed.*

linking us with each other and with those with whom we were once together. When you feel a friendly hand, when you recall the joyful moments, when you are consoled with sympathetic words, the pain is taken out of the suffering and the longing for life and faith in oneself returns. The real festive spirit is a merging of human feelings. Today, with hatred all around, with so many people hurled against one another, it may be that in the heart of more than one person, turning in thought (during Christmas) to his dear ones, the longing for love and brotherhood will reawaken. To sit here now, useless and inactive, when outside things are so much worse, is doubly difficult, because it is my belief that soon evil will be vanquished and use found for my strength and thoughts. War will be declared on war, eliminating for ever the sources of hatred. Today my thoughts are with those whom I love, with those to whom I want to give happiness, and who have the conviction that love will triumph and be master of the earth. We are living in times when hatred, having been thoroughly discredited, will drown in its own blood. What can be more monstrous than this war? I think about it all the time, and I would like to send New Year wishes to the millions sent to the slaughter against their will. It would be hopeless to live either here in prison or at freedom without the conviction that the kingdom of truth, love and happiness will come. All my thoughts are with you today. I am writing to you lying on my bed, because I must get the letter off in the morning. Have no fears for me, Aldona dear, I am quite well and I hope to return healthy, with the strength to live as my conscience tells me. I cannot say how long I shall be here. The place is buzzing with rumours, but, apart from the desire for liberty, all of them lack foundation. I, too, entertain this desire, and live in the hope that

the year 1915 will see me at liberty. Meanwhile, time is on the wing. Five months have passed since I left Warsaw.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Buhak

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
January 17 (4), 1915

Aldona, my dearest,

Your letter with the photo of my little Jasiiek, as always, made me happy. Once again I have tender recollections of the distant and so utterly different past. The present, if only for a time, yields somehow to the past. I was slightly ill for a few days. The fever, however, has passed and I have been discharged from the hospital. It is dreary here in the cell where there are so many of us, each with his own burden of sorrow. It is awful having to sit here without knowing how long one will have to wait. Yet it is in a place like this that one really appreciates the vast spiritual strength stored up in man. I am writing in this way because I know what is taking place in the outside world. I am getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* and I am approaching Stan with the request that he should renew the subscription for another two months—it is a link with the outside world. I have not had any letters from Warsaw for a long time.

I fear I have written a very sad letter and am worried lest you take it too much to heart. But then you know me, you know my love of life and how I look at it, that there is always in my heart so much love that I eternally hear the music of the fields and woods and of the blue sky, and that I am capable of forgetting about the burden which I am called upon to bear. Always



when I think of you, when writing to you, I feel uplifted, as if you were alongside me and that I was telling you about my experiences. So, darling, don't have any fears for me. I hug you tenderly, my dearest.

Your brother *Felix*.

To Z. G. Muszkat\*

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
January 29 (16), 1915

...I am greatly worried at not having news for such a long time about Zosia and Jasiek. With my transfer to Orel all contact was suddenly broken. Then, after a long interval, I got your letter and a little later a postcard. Please write to me, tell me all you know about Jasiek and Zosia. Things cannot be well with them, that I know, for who can be well nowadays when horror has become "daily bread."

Zosia, I know, is not afraid of trouble, she will courageously bear everything, nevertheless I am most anxious about our little Jasiek and I would like news of him every day. This, I know, is a dream. My sister Aldona sent me photos of him, so that I now have him with me in my cell. I am not sure whether you know that we lost our things on the way to Orel, including all the photos. I am relatively well off here, getting everything that one is allowed to have and so far my health has not let me down. The life, as you can imagine, is none too easy. At the moment I am in a large cell with 70 other prisoners—all from Warsaw. Nerves are on edge, the result of the senseless incarceration far from one's relatives, the constant anxiety about them and the daily expectancy of something important about to take place in our lives. The diet is inadequate and

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\* Zygmunt Muszkat, Dzerzhinsky's father-in-law.—*Ed.*

there are all kinds of other privations. By reading and studying we try to give sense to our lives. We are allowed pencils and notebooks and many are learning to read and write and are mastering the rudiments of mathematics. Fortunately we have a reasonably good library. Time flies and I hope that soon the day will come when we can say good-bye to prison. Write to me, dear, about yourself and about life in Lublin, about how the war has affected you. I am getting the *Pravitel-stvenny Vestnik*—my brother having taken out a subscription for me. Thanks to this we are not completely cut off from the outside world.

To A. E. Bulhak

[Gubernia Prison], Orel  
February 16 (3), 1915

My dearest Aldona,

I have received your warm letter of January 11. There is no need to be anxious about me. True, I had a slight bout of illness, but who is not ill these days! Zosia has written to me from Zurich with news of Jasiek. The letter took only 24 days, which is not so bad. Jasiek gained strength in Zakopane, she wrote, but the long journey to Vienna tired him and he caught cold. He has now recovered, and the place is ringing with his merry laughter. The news, naturally, has calmed me; they have their difficulties, but these are hard times for everybody, at least they have the happiness of being together. My things have been found, but what state they are in I do not know. I expect to get them in a week or two; their loss would have been a blow. Have no fears about me, dear. Send me postcards with views of Vilno—it doesn't matter about the captions—they can be in Chinese for all I care. I love Vilno, of which I have happy recol-

lections, and relive the time I spent there and dream of returning to it. I warmly embrace you and the children.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To A. E. Buřhak\*

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
March 28(15), 1915

Aldona dearest,

I am hastening to write since there is the opportunity of getting a letter to you. I received your postcard dated February 19, with the view of the cathedral. Thanks very much for it. Please convey my gratitude to Stan for the *Pravitelstvoenny Vestnik* which I will receive up to May. In all probability I shall be here for a long time, but just how long I cannot say.

My case is now with the Court of Justice and I rather think the trial will take place shortly. This means that I may be sent to Warsaw. The uncertainty is most annoying, but, having become used to these "comforts" I am now indifferent to them. It is so sunny and warm outside that I have no desire to think about anything. The sunlight is pouring into our cell, and through the window I can see the expanse of sky, the town and, in the distance, the snow-covered fields. Beneath the window I can hear the jangling of fetters as the convicts take their exercise. In a week's time it will be Easter, an Easter of universal suffering, onerous labour and want. The only bright things are our feelings, our dreams and the conviction that a better day will come. I send you my heartiest wishes and embrace you. Come what may, I am convinced that we shall meet in other conditions, when I shall no longer need to conceal

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\* This letter was sent illegally.—*Ed.*



F. E. Dzerzhinsky. 1919



F. E. Dzerzhinsky during a trip to Siberia. 1922

myself and when the work and the torment suffered by myself and millions of others will yield their fruit. . . .

I am fit and well despite the unbearable conditions. At the moment enteric fever is raging here and they say that many political prisoners have succumbed to it. We don't know exactly how many because the sick are taken from here to the former women's prison, which is near by. The conditions for treatment are indescribable. The doctor, Rychliński by name, is known among the prisoners as the executioner. . . . Apart from powders, there is no medicine of any kind for the sick. It is difficult even to see or to summon the male nurse. A man with a high temperature remains in his cell days on end without any medical help. It is not surprising that so many of our people are dying, especially those from Częstochowa, Lodz and Dąbrowa Basin, that is, those who cannot get any help from home. Already six of our comrades have died—five of them from consumption. . . . My cell gets a certain amount of sunshine and we have formed a group of comrades with whom I associate. I help the others with their studies and the time passes quickly. There is no need to worry about me. We can buy bacon, salt meat, a little cheese and pickled herring, so we have enough. After all a man doesn't need so very much. So no anxiety, please. I am now getting letters and news from Warsaw, from Zosia, too, and I have had two new photos of Jasiek. Jasiek is growing normally and he is a very gentle boy; this news has cheered me. We are still waiting for our things. The railway authorities, because of certain formalities, do not want to part with them, possibly they are insisting on payment from the prison administration for the eight months' storage. We shall lodge another complaint, meanwhile most of us are walking about without any soles to our shoes because there is no leather in the prison and we have been told that there is none outside either. Most of us are

coughing and only a few are able to go out for the daily exercise. Everyone looks green or yellow. No attention is paid to our complaints. An inspector who visited us said that the soldiers at the front had worse boots. Dearest, in the event of me being transferred to another prison I will try to send you my personal correspondence, I want you to keep it for me because in travelling from prison to prison things get lost and I am most anxious to preserve some of the letters.

P.S. Rumours are going the rounds here that cholera has broken out in Warsaw. Have you heard anything about this? Write to me without mentioning the illness, otherwise the letter may be confiscated. Many of the prisoners have their families there and they are greatly alarmed. Once again I hug you.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. G. Muszkat\*

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
March 1915

I have had two letters from Zosia, one dated January 15 and the other February 5, with two photos of Jasiek. I am delighted that I am at last getting letters again from my dear ones.

I write rarely now because the monotony lends too grey a tone to my mood. When I think about the hell in which all of you are living now my own hell seems to be such a petty affair that I don't want to write about it although it weighs heavily, very heavily at times.

That which you have learned of our conditions is perfectly true—they are simply unbearable. Men are carried to their graves nearly every day.... Of our

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\* This letter was smuggled out of prison.—*Ed.*

category\* five have died from consumption in the past six weeks. Three had long been waiting to go to their place of exile but had been detained because it took more than seven months to "clear" their documents. All had been transferred thither from Piotrków, which meant that they could not get any help from home since their families were on the other side of the border,\*\* and the conditions here are too awful for words. Because of the abominable conditions, many prisoners have contracted enteric and spotted fever. It is said that there are two or three burials every day and that thirty died between February 5 (Old Style) and March 4. The fever patients are taken from our "sanctuary" to the former women's prison—now used as a so-called hospital for the typhus cases. They wait four or five days for someone to come and diagnose the illness and they lie with the other prisoners in an overcrowded cell, with high temperatures. It is difficult to summon even the male nurse, to say nothing about the doctor, who only comes to see the dying and even then only those dying from non-infectious illness. The doctor, Rychliński, a Pole, mimics the Polish speech of the Polish "pensioners" who cannot speak Russian and curses them in the vilest language. He is known as the executioner and his brutal treatment of the sick prisoners in the Orel Convict Prison is recounted. I have just learned about the death of one of the prisoners who took ill in our cell two weeks ago; after lying for four days with a high temperature, unable to move, he was taken to the "hospital." The doctor never bothers to look at the patients there, leaving them to the mercy of the male nurse who regards us as being worse than dogs. Nearly all the

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\* That is, political prisoners and prisoners waiting to be sent to their place of exile.—*Ed.*

\*\* Piotrków was then occupied by Austro-German troops.—*Ed.*



prisoners are ill. The food is disgusting, an eternal diet of tasteless cabbage soup five times a week and something which we call pea soup twice a week; we get from one to two spoonfuls of watery porridge every day. The only food available to those who do not get money from home is one and a half pounds of black bread (often containing sand) or one pound of white bread. Who can live on such a diet? All are pale, green or yellow and anaemic. Linen is changed once a fortnight, and verminous, soiled linen is given in return. The overcrowding makes it impossible to keep clear of vermin. For example, there are sixty prisoners in my cell (two weeks ago we were seventy-one) which can accommodate thirty-seven. We, the hard-labour prisoners, are in a somewhat privileged situation, because in cells of the same size there are up to 150 transit prisoners and men charged with evading military service. Hence the typhus and the large number of victims. My cell is dry, whereas most of the others are so damp that water drips from ceiling and walls.

I am living with a group in a kind of commune; we study together and I am helping some of the others so that time flies. It is difficult to believe that eight months have passed since they took us from Warsaw. I am still getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* and we know everything that it is possible to know from the brief press cables about the war. We live in our own intimate circle, because we have in the cell those who are utterly alien to us, even enemies—some of these, arrested for espionage and banditry, are a disgusting lot. But among the others there are different types. Nothing so brings out the real man as this common life. The experience of it, while it makes one long, long ardently, to change the way of life, has a healing effect, being an antidote to pessimism and disappointment. Were I in a position to write about the things in my

mind I would say nothing about the typhus, cabbage and lice; I would write about our dreams which, although today an abstract idea, are in reality our daily bread.... Pondering over what is now taking place in the world, over the alleged collapse of all hope, I have come to the firm conclusion that the more complete the collapse, the quicker and the more complete will be the triumph of life. For this reason I try not to think about the present war or its results, I look farther and I see that about which I cannot speak today....

My health is fair and I have no wants....

How long I shall remain here I cannot say. Two months ago a number of prisoners left here to stand trial in Warsaw. Soon, I hope, I shall receive the indictment—the documents have been in the Court of Justice for a month; it may be that I will be taken to Warsaw. For the time being, because of the typhus, prisoners are not taken from here.

I wrote to Zosia immediately after getting her first letter from Switzerland; whether or not she got it I still do not know. I am glad that she is in Zurich and that Jasiek is coming along finely.

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska\*

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
May 3 (April 20), 1915

My dearest Zosia,

I have just been told that I shall be transferred today to the convict prison (also here in Orel). This is not as calamitous as it sounds.\*\* Conditions there, at least so I am told, are not too bad. My only regret is that I will not be able to bid farewell to my comrades. Ever

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\* This letter was smuggled out of prison.—*Ed.*

\*\* The convict prison in Orel was notorious for brutal treatment.—*Ed.*

a wanderer, I have no fears of any kind. Incidentally they are taking me there solely because of a misunderstanding, and I think that in a couple of weeks I will be brought back because the prisoners charged with me received the indictment today and I expect to get it in a day or two. Perhaps they will soon take us to Warsaw. Physically and morally I feel good and the latest news, provided it is true, heralds freedom for me as well.

I have had two letters from you; I sent you one but apparently it did not reach you. Maybe you have heard about me from your father. I wrote him a pretty detailed letter. He told me that Jasiek had another attack of tonsillitis and the news caused me no little anxiety.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Convict Prison, Orel]  
August 14 (1), 1915

My dearest Zosia,

I think I have received all your letters and the postcards—the last being a postcard dated July 25. Every letter from you is a big event in my life, since I get to know something about you and Jasiek. At times I long for him, but, let the heart be silent. The day will come, of this I am sure, when I shall be with you.... At the moment I am in a kind of torpor, a state of mental immobility as in a dream....

Don't be anxious about me, I am quite well, having plenty of strength and everything I need. My cell-mate is a good companion and time flies.

This is a better place than the Gubernia Prison. It is quiet, there is no dust, no vermin, we bathe every ten days, get clean linen and half an hour exercise every day. I do not know when the second case will be tried. I received the indictment two months ago; my current

three-year sentence should, according to my calculations, expire on February 29, 1916, Old Style; then, I imagine I shall be taken back to the Gubernia Prison.

I know about the war as much as one can learn from the press telegrams. Permission has been granted to subscribe to the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik*, which I shall get from today onward. While in the Gubernia Prison I wrote to your father about Julian\* in the hope that he would inform his wife. Julian died, in January I think, from consumption. From the moment of his arrival in Orel he looked awful, although he never complained; he died in the hospital where he lay for several weeks among strangers; he passed away without even knowing that he was dying. The exact date I do not remember. His wife should write about this to the prison administration.

I have not heard from Aldona for a long time and am worried; I wrote to her a month ago in reply to her letter of June 10, but have not heard from her. I have sent all my photos of Jasiek to my brother for safe-keeping—I am not allowed to have them here. But I remember them and often, lying on the bed with my eyes closed, I visualize the photos and suffer much pain when I fail to evoke the image of Jasiek himself. My dear little boy, my happiness, I kiss and embrace you; I will come to you, we will see each other, only be patient, the time will come. Keep well and be a good boy. Write to me, darling, whenever you get the opportunity.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

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\* Julian Kahn, a miner from the Dąbrowa Basin, member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania.—*Ed.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Central Convict Prison, Orel]  
September 14 (1), 1915

Zosia, my dearest,

I am sending a postcard this time to make sure of it reaching you. Don't fret about me, I am quite well and lack nothing. True, the boredom is pretty awful, but that, after all, is my lot and will be until this thing is ended. I keep on waiting and the days run into weeks and the weeks into months. I have now been confined exactly three years. I am tranquil, not upset in any way, just as if I had shed my last strength and been left completely numb, as if my entire existence were one continual nightmare.

Awaiting the awakening, my mind is at ease, because I know that it is bound to come. And you, dearest, write to me, let me have all your news—the sad and the glad—your letters are practically my sole contact with the world. . . . How are you managing now that your lessons are finished, have you found other work?

How I long for Jasiek, to hear his voice, to see his little hands and to take him into my arms; at times the longing is so overwhelming that it is almost impossible to believe that things are as they are—you there, and me here. I embrace and hug him. When, at last, will the day come?

But we must not give way. . . . All that life sends to us we shall bear. . . . Write to me, Zosia, whenever you feel the desire to do so, whenever you get a minute to spare.

How are things with our family, will they be able to return to Warsaw?\* What about your father? Please convey to him my warm greetings. I have had a post-

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\* The "family" refers to the Polish Social-Democratic émigrés in Germany and Austria. Warsaw was occupied by the Germans at the time.—*Ed.*

card from Aldona saying that she has remained in Vilno. Alas, my letter did not reach her. I am now getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* again. I have money and books and the time passes quickly. When Rosa returns from her holiday\* convey to her and to her family\*\* my warmest greetings.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Central Convict Prison, Orel]  
October 15 (2), 1915

Zosia dearest,

Don't have any fears for me—my health is reasonably good and the food is not too bad. According to my calculations, in four months' time (March 13, 1916) my sentence will expire\*\*\* and then, I daresay, I shall be transferred to the Gubernia Prison where I shall have to wait until the end of the war. It is hardly likely that the trial will take place earlier. Conditions here are better than in the Gubernia Prison, but it will be a welcome change because I find the monotony and the boredom exceedingly wearisome. I have not had any news from my brothers and sisters. Aldona is staying on in Vilno but the children have been sent away. Ignaty is in Warsaw. I know something about the progress of the war thanks to the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik*, but because of my nerves I just scan the pages. I kill the time by reading books. My nerves are shattered.

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\* The reference is to Rosa Luxemburg who at this time was in prison in Germany.—*Ed.*

\*\* Dzerzhinsky has in mind the leaders of Polish Social-Democracy.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* The sentence for the first charge—the flight from Siberian exile.—*Ed.*

What is more, I have aged and I fear that in another year I shall not have a single hair on my head. In the daytime I am in a state of apathy. The only thing that rouses me is your letters. I dream every night and the dreams are so expressive as to be almost real....

Jasiek, my darling boy. I gaze at you, at your photos and hug and kiss you. When we meet we will laugh and be glad, play and listen to Mamma when she sits at the piano. We shall walk hand in hand in the countryside and pick flowers and listen to the birds and to the rustle of the leaves. We shall chase one another and, embracing, will sit down and tell each other stories. This will be a great day for us. Meanwhile, forced to remain here in Orel and unable to be with you, I shall think of you and you will think of me, and I know that you will be glad when my words come to you, telling you how glad I was to get your letter and how precious your words are to me.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Central Convict Prison, Orel]  
January 17 (4), 1916

Zosia, my dearest,

Two months ago, on November 15, I wrote a long letter to you and Jasiek and since then have received a postcard dated December 6 and a fine photo. This means that you did not get my letter, although I registered it; now I am rebuking myself for not sending you at least a postcard in December. You must forgive me for writing so rarely.... This is a lifeless existence and there is really nothing to write about.... I am now in my fourth year in prison, no good to anyone and powerless to do anything for anybody. Meanwhile,

thanks to your care, Jasiiek has become a big boy. When, at long last, shall we meet, when shall I press him to my heart? I live with this thought and at the same time the reality of everyday life is so remote from this hope that it seems that this wonderful moment will never come....

I have little new to report. For the past two months I have been alone in the cell and am quite satisfied. The sentence for my flight from exile expires on February 29 (Old Style), that is, in two months, and I rather think I will then be taken back to the Gubernia Prison for the duration of the war. There is little chance of the trial taking place earlier. I shorten the time by reading. Warm greetings to your family and our acquaintances.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Central Convict Prison, Orel]  
February 17 (4), 1916

My dear Zosia,

A month ago I sent you a very sad letter and just as I was handing it in I received simultaneously two letters from you and the note from Jasiiek. It was too late to send another letter. Forgive me for this. Your subsequent silence, for which I was unable to find any explanation, so upset me that I imagined all kinds of horrors. But all's well that ends well. Your two post-cards of the 4th and 7th of January have reassured me. You, dearest, should not fret when you think about me and when you read my letters. Whatever fate may have in store for me, no matter how low my spirits, you know that it would never enter my mind to make groundless complaints. Even when overcome with weariness, deep in my heart I am calm and preserve my



love of life and understanding of it, of you and of others. I love life exactly as it is, in its reality, in its eternal movement, in its harmony and in its terrible contradictions. My eyes still see, my ears still hear, my mind receives and my heart has not yet become hardened. The song of life lives in my heart.... And he who hears this song in his heart, never, no matter what torment he may be called upon to endure, never curses his lot and would never exchange it for the normal and peaceful existence. To me this song is everything, the only thing left, the song of love of life. Both in prison and in the outside world where there is now so much horror, it lives on, eternal as the stars; the stars and all the loveliness of nature give birth to it and it finds its way to the human heart; the heart sings, eternally seeking resurrection. In the daytime when the sky is cloudless, and at night when the stars peep at me through the bars as if whispering something, I, dreamy and oblivious, visualize the smile on Jasiak's lips, and his eyes filled only with love and truth, vividly recall the faces and the names of friends, of my loved ones. At such moments I experience a wonderful spiritual peace and contentment as if I myself were a child, pure and unsullied, so much so that I forget all about myself and my torments....

In a postscript to my last letter I suggested that if at all possible you should return home.\* Should this cause difficulties with our correspondence or cause it to cease altogether,\*\* don't worry. The main thing is that all should be well with you.

Have no fears for me. I am well, the cough no longer troubles me, it is warm in the cell (the winter has been

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\* That is, to return to Warsaw from abroad.—*Ed.*

\*\* In view of the German occupation it was impossible to send letters from Warsaw to Russia.—*Ed.*

an extremely mild one) and the food is reasonably good. In a little more than three weeks they will transfer me, as I told you, to the Gubernia Prison.

Before ending, a few words and all my heart and all my caresses to our little Jasiiek, buy for him half a dozen buns—after all, I won't be seeing him for a while. My darling boy, my own Jasiiek, warm kisses from your daddy. When they let me out I will come to you at once, the train will take me nearer and nearer to you and you and Mamma will be at the station to meet me. I will be seeing you for the first time. I will carry you on my shoulders and hug and kiss my own dear Jasiiek. Keep well, be good and grow up. From your daddy Felek.

How is Aunt Levicka,\* or have you parted with her again?

Your,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]  
March 26 (13), 1916

Dearest Zosia,

I was taken to the Gubernia Prison a fortnight ago. According to a decision of the Senate, the charge against myself and the others has been handed over to the Moscow Court of Justice. This is because the trial is likely to take place before the end of the war. I impatiently await news from you and, not feeling like writing myself, I am sending a postcard. You know about my life here—there are twenty-eight of us in the cell.... We do

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\* Code name for the Left Polish Socialist Party. During the 1914-18 war the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania and the Left Polish Socialist Party drew closer.—*Ed.*

a little studying and the time passes. My health is good. I kiss Jasiek and embrace you. Hearty greetings to our relatives and acquaintances.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]

April 2 (March 20), 1916

...I feel at ease and I am quite well. The time passes quickly. I spend practically the whole day teaching comrades to read and write. We expect to be transferred to the Gubernia Prison in Moscow (not the Butyrki) sometime this week because the Moscow Court of Justice is now preparing to hear the charge against us....\*

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison, Moscow]

April 27 (14), 1916

Dear Zosia,

I have been at this address for the past three weeks and hope that one of these days I shall get news from you. My case will be reviewed in the very near future, but I have not yet been told of the date. You, I presume, will learn of the sentence from the newspapers; they say that the sentences for political charges are milder now, but I am not thinking very much about this and will not engage in any guesswork. Although I am sup-

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\* Dzerzhinsky was tried on the second charge—that of revolutionary activity during 1910-12. In April 1916, he was transferred to Moscow where on May 17(4), 1916, the Moscow Court of Justice sentenced him to another six years of hard labour. He began to serve this sentence in the Moscow transit prison (Butyrki), whence he was released by the February Revolution of 1917.—*Ed.*

posed to be in solitary confinement there are two of us in the cell. Actually I would prefer being alone, the more so because my cell-mate is not to my liking.... I read all the time and the time passes and the end, at last, is approaching. Conditions here are bearable, I am not as isolated as in Orel. I have learned that my sister Jadwiga is living here; she left Vilno before the occupation but does not know that I am in Moscow. I have written to her and if she has not left the city, we will be able to meet.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison, Moscow]  
May 14 (1), 1916

Zosia, my dearest,

Only yesterday evening did your letters of February 27 and March 15 with the flowers from Jasiek reach me. I am sending a postcard and after the trial will write to you at greater length. The silence worried me, but I knew that my letters were being held up because of the transfer to Moscow, so I waited patiently, and the patience brought its reward. There is much that is sad and sorrowful in your letters, relieved, it is true, by the gladness of Jasiek. How I envy you. With what joy I would bury myself deep in the countryside, alone with Jasiek and you—a complete world of our own—in the warm rays of the sun, the cool shade of the trees, the eternally flowing stream, the tender flowers, meadows and skies....

My trial begins in three days from now. I have briefed counsel. I had a postcard yesterday from a lawyer named Kozlovsky in Petrograd to the effect that you had approached him with a view to defending me. But I do not need him, and will inform him accordingly. Zosia,

have no fears for me, I give you my honest word that I have everything I need for the entire period of my imprisonment. . . .

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison, Moscow]

May 26 (13), 1916

Zosia dearest,

I imagine that you already know from the newspapers of the sentence: six years (hard labour), but three years have been taken into account, which means another three to go. The main thing is that I will not be in irons—the period of wearing fetters being part of the three years already served.\* The sentence will enter into force in seventeen days and I will soon (possibly within a month) be transferred to the convict prison. I will make every effort to be allowed to serve the sentence in the Butyrki Prison in Moscow.

We are still two in the cell but during exercise ten of us walk together so that I am not quite so lonely. I shall be glad of the transfer—I have had my fill of solitary confinement. I am hoping that I will be allowed to work. If so, the time will pass more quickly and I will strengthen my muscles somewhat. It is astonishing how time flies. Jasiek is now quite a big boy, in a month he will be celebrating his fifth birthday. My own darling boy. When I think of the pain, sorrow and torment which his upbringing has cost you, I think also about the happiness which he gives and I envy you and am glad for your sake and long to see him. . . . One must have moments of happiness in order to live and to be a bright torch in life, to be the bearer of joy,

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\* Nevertheless Dzerzhinsky was kept in irons for a long time after the trial.

to be able to suffer and to come through unscathed, be the trials what they may. . . . The memory of his mother's love will remain with him for life. . . . Jasiiek dear, when will my eyes rest on you? When will you be at my side so that all my troubles and all my bitterness will fly away? When shall I, like you, be able to laugh and play? That day will come, it is coming and, perhaps, is not so very far away. . . .

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Jasiiek Dzerzhinsky [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]  
June 6 (May 24), 1916

My darling Jasiiek,

I received your words (of April 11) which you sent to me from Hubel, from the mountains. Like little birds, they flew to me and are now with me in the cell. I am so glad that my Jasiiek remembers me and that he is in good health. Yes, my dear boy, when I return we will climb still higher mountains, climb to the clouds, to the snow-capped peaks where the eagle builds its nest. We will look down on the lakes and meadows, on the villages and towns, on the green woods and the rugged cliffs and the whole world will appear before our eyes. I will tell you stories about myself, of places visited and things seen, of my joys and sorrows and of how I love you, my son; we shall talk about you, about the things you love and the people you love, about what you will be and about the joy you will be for Mamma, for myself and for all people.

Your flowers are with me here, and when I look at them and at your photo I think about you. We shall roam among the wild flowers—white and red, yellow and blue and all the other colours, watch the bees settle on them and see how they gather the honey. We shall

listen to the sounds of the bees, flowers, trees and birds, to the ringing of the bells; at home, listening to Mamma playing the piano, we shall be quiet and silent so as not to interfere.

But now good-bye, my wonderful boy. A great big hug and embrace from your daddy.

Your *Papa Felek*.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison, Moscow]

June 29 (16), 1916

Dearest Zosia,

I have just received your letter of June 5 and the photo of Jasiiek. You are worrying needlessly about me. After all, the sentence could hardly have been milder. I, having expected a more severe one, am not the least bit upset. Another three years, this time, I think, in Moscow in the Butyrki Prison, whither I shall be transferred in the coming weeks. I cannot complain about my health. The food, considering the present hard times, is not bad, money I have, and there was no need whatever for you to send me any. I know only too well how things are with you, so please don't send any more money. My chief worry is that I am powerless to do anything to help you, and the thought of being a burden to you is too much.

So once again, dearest, have no fears for me, and if it would be better for you to go home,\* by all means do so, after all, the war is bound to end some time. At any rate we shall be together in thought. So good-bye, and kisses to both of you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

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\* That is, to Poland, which was then occupied by the Germans. The German authorities refused Z. Z. Dzerzhinska permission to travel to Poland.—*Ed.*

P.S. Jasiak is now in his sixth year. What a big boy we have!

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]  
July 24 (11), 1916

Zosia dearest,

I have not written for a long time although I had intended writing a long letter. I have been waiting for the transfer to the Butyrki Prison. It now looks as if I will stay here for some time to learn the art of tailoring, that is to sew on a machine and, when proficient, go to the Butyrki for work. The prospect of serving the remainder of my sentence in Moscow gladdens me. . . . My cell-mate is a companionable fellow. That is all the news. I am not short of anything, I'm in good health, time is passing and the day of my return to freedom is drawing near. . . . On no account must you fret for me—there is nothing accidental in my being here. This is my fate. I feel fit and indeed my lot is better than that of many others. Now that I have the prospect of work time will fly even more quickly.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]  
August 2 (July 20), 1916

My dear Zosia,

I have not heard from you for a long time and in your last letter, dated June 14, you wrote about Jasiak being ill. Perhaps you addressed your letters to the Butyrki Prison. The likelihood is that I shall remain in the Gubernia Prison at least for some months until I learn to handle the machine. Write to me here, because even if I am transferred, the correspondence will



be sent on. Your silence worries me, and your letters bring so much gladness into my cell.

Any news of Julian? Without his support it will be exceedingly difficult for you. What have you decided about returning to your father? Not long ago I saw Jasiek in a dream, just as if he were alongside me, and the longing gnaws at my heart. When, when shall we see each other and be together? Sometimes I think it would be better if I were to harden my heart, to become numb and insensible to all feeling. I want to live, but I must quench the longing and silence my heart.... I see nothing but these cold, grim walls.... But, when through the bars I catch a glimpse of the floating clouds, the swallows and the pigeons, and see the western sky ablaze with colour, tranquillity and hope return. Life is indeed grand and invincible.

*Felix.*

P.S. August 3. I am being transferred today to the Butyrki Prison. Write to me there.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison Hospital, Moscow]

August 30 (17), 1916

Zosia dear, my beloved,

[ This finds me in the prison hospital suffering from a not very serious complaint. I have strained a tendon in the leg;\*\* it will soon disappear and in a few days I will return to the Butyrki Prison. Write to me there. Honestly, there is no need whatever to worry about

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\* Julian Marchlewski was confined in a concentration camp in Hafelburg, Germany.—*Ed.*

\*\* In addition to the strained tendon Dzerzhinsky suffered from sores caused by the fetters and was in danger of blood poisoning.—*Ed.*



F. E. Dzerzhinsky in his office. 1921



F. E. Dzerzhinsky and Z. Z. Dzerzhinska at a summer resort near Moscow. 1923



F. E. Dzerzhinsky. 1926

me. Jadwiga, my sister, comes to see me. The other day I had a visit from Wladek's wife\*.... I hug and embrace you and Jasiek.

*Felix.*

To W. E. Dzierzhinsky\*\*

[Gubernia Prison Hospital, Moscow]

September 11 (August 29), 1916

...Always when I recall our years in Dzierżynowo I am overcome with emotion and relive the joys of our childhood.... The longing comes over me to revisit the woods and hear the murmuring of the trees, the croaking of the frogs and all the music of nature. It may well be that I derived my spirit from this music of the woods, the music of my childhood years which, unceasingly, plays in my heart the hymn of life. You ask, have I changed? I don't know. My youth has passed. Life has left me with many furrows and not only on my brow. Apart from the alien torment I have no regrets whatever; because of my desire for truth I have brought much pain upon my beloved ones. I have lived a rich and deep life, without any show of sentimentality, without despondency. And my public life? I have grown up not only with my thoughts, but also with the masses, and together with them I must experience the entire struggle, the torment and the hopes. I have never lived with closed eyes, engrossed solely in my thoughts. I have never been an idealist. I have learnt to know the human heart and it seems to me that I feel its every throb.... I have lived in order to fulfil my mission and to be myself. So now you know the conditions of my life: In a few days it will be four years since I have been forced to live without life. I think and I feel, it is

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\* Zosia, the wife of his brother Wladyslaw.—*Ed.*

\*\* This letter was smuggled out of prison.—*Ed.*

true, but these are the thoughts and the feelings of the dead, as if one were held fast in a swamp, as if dreaming without being asleep.... I am powerless and useless. But my brain counsels me not to give in. I must carry on to the very end. It cannot be otherwise. I have no qualms. And although I do not know what fate has in store for me, in my mind I am always tracing the contours of the future with which the struggle will be crowned. I am, as you see, an optimist.

More than anything I long for Jasiek. He was five last June. He has been ill a little—he has a weak throat. He is a fine boy, intelligent, but somewhat nervous. I have always loved children. In their company I feel myself a carefree child, I can be myself with them. Zosia tells me all about him and these letters take his place for me. After Jasiek, my greatest longing is to be with nature. These grey stones, these iron bars numb the spirit and make everything colourless. Zosia\* has told you about visiting me in Moscow. Please convey hearty greetings to her and kiss little Zosia\*\* for her uncle. I see her in my mind's eye just as she was in Wylęgi.\*\*\* I am taking advantage of the opportunity to send you this letter and for this reason I am writing in Polish. Tomorrow I shall be discharged from the hospital, so write to me at the transit prison.... Send a postcard confirming receipt of this letter.

*Felix.*

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\* Zosia, Wladyslaw's wife.—*Ed.*

\*\* Dzerzhinsky's niece.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* The farm near Lublin where Dzerzhinsky often hid from the police.—*Ed.*

To W. E. Dzerzhinsky [Central Transit Prison, Moscow]  
September 15 (2), 1916

My dear brother,

I am now an "apprentice" in a workshop making military uniforms.\* After four years, nearly all of them in solitary confinement, I have become tired of inactivity and time drags especially when I think of my isolation and uselessness.... In a way the work on the machine is healing me physically. Alone it would soon become tedious, but I am working with others and time flies. I can no longer think about the things which torment me. Life is monotonous and empty, but such is fate and I am not complaining. This is my lot. In my mind there is still the same song of life, the same music of grandeur and beauty and the same dreams of a better world. Yes, I have remained the same although my teeth are not as sound and as sharp as they were. After all, I am now nearing forty, my youth has gone irrevocably and with it the ability to be as receptive and responsive as was the case earlier.... When will we be able to have a heart to heart talk? During visits this is impossible. For me the visits are agony. Many people meet at the same time and, being forced to shout in order to hear one another, the result is that nothing at all can be heard because of the din. I would like to meet you in other circumstances, and I hope the time will come when it will be possible for us to meet in our village, to listen once again to the sounds of our woods and open up our hearts. For me Dzierzynowo is a kind of fairyland. I always dream that if only I could go there I would regain my strength and my youth. I was last there in 1892, and in my dreams I often see the house, the pine-trees, the sand-hills and the ditches—everything down to the most minute detail.

*Felix.*

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\* In Butyrki Prison.—*Ed.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]

September 16 (3), 1916

Zosia dearest,

I am now a workman. The day before yesterday I began to work. Already I feel better mentally and I am sure it will be better for my health. A commission has decreed me unfit for heavy manual labour and I am now an "apprentice" to a tailor. In a couple of months I shall begin to sew on the machine and should soon be able to earn enough to maintain myself and thus relieve my relatives of any expenditure. I am still in irons, but I am hoping that my two-year period in the chain-gang will be calculated as part of the three years already served. The chains in themselves are not the bugbear, the real trouble is the eternal clanging. But then one gets used to everything. I am writing to you candidly, and you, dearest, should not be worried. I really feel fine and I am telling you this without any shade of complaint or sorrow. I am confident that we shall meet again, that we shall both caress our little Jasiek and tell each other about all that has happened.

Today, after a long absence, the sun reappeared, peeped into our cell and warmed us with its tender rays. And my heart, lighter, feels as one does on a balmy day in autumn. How many years have gone by, how much suffering and torment, and yet the heart is able to forget it all and be blithe at the thought of a smile, the smile of a child, our little Jasiek, at the thought of his eyes, free from guile, clear and deep. I am relaxing at the moment, thinking about the day when I shall see him. This will be the day of days, a day such as we have never known before, and I am confident that it will restore to me my youth and springtime.

I am now in a common cell, which is all to the good. We all go out to work and the cell is quite an airy one.

I am sleeping better and my appetite has returned. I am sewing and my only regret is that, having mastered the art, I cannot make anything for Jasiek. Tell him that I am working, but that I cannot send him any of the things I make, since this is not permitted and because you are so far away from Moscow.

What have you decided about going home? I know what it means to be so far away from all that one holds dear, and I am gladdened by the thought that maybe you will succeed in returning to your friends and home.

In future I shall be able to write only once or at most twice a month, but don't let this alarm you. . . . I am reasonably fit—my illness was purely accidental, and I would hate to think that anxiety about me should be a source of worry to those whom I love. And Jasiek's love for you and me should be the kind that liberates rather than fetters, enriching the life of the loved one, enabling him to live with all the fulness of heart and soul.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]

October 29 (16), 1916

My dear Zosia,

Your postcard dated September 23 reached me only the other day. It is awful having to wait so long for letters. How are things with you? The parting from Jasiek must have been heartbreaking for you, and Jasiek, how is he? I impatiently await news from you. Nothing has changed with me. I wrote to you while in hospital and again when I was discharged. I have been working for the past six weeks and the days pass quickly. Each evening I say to myself: one day less, a day nearer to



freedom and our reunion. My health is good, I find the work beneficial and my apathy is on the wane. Generally speaking, the conditions here are bearable. Jadwiga visits me once a month. True, the life is pretty monotonous and boring as is always the case in prison. But what with working, sleeping and reading there is no time to be blue. My dreams are mostly of walking in freedom. When I retire I close my eyes and see clearly the faces of those dear to me and the Jasiiek of my imagination; the faces are always in movement, changing as in a kaleidoscope, one succeeded by another.... I haven't written to Jasiiek for a long time. But he is never out of my thoughts and I am happy about him. Give him a big hug for me. Return I will and great will be our gladness.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]  
November 19 (6), 1916

Zosia dearest,

I am so glad that Jasiiek is now with you, being together is much better. I can thoroughly understand the tears of joy shed by our little fellow. The news that he had remained behind and that you were travelling alone upset me every bit as much as if I had been with you and that we had been forced to part. I dream of that wonderful day when I, too, will return and embrace you both. That this day will come, I have no doubt, although I have become so used to this repulsive and nerve-racking atmosphere that at times I feel as if it had swallowed me for ever, as if our reunion were a joy never to be realized. But our dream will come true. Meanwhile you must live as deep and full a life as possible and

think of me as a close friend for whom the thought of you is his mainstay and joy. Jasiiek dear, often during work and when on exercise I think of you and send you a glad smile. Have a good time and be good yourself. I want you to grow up healthy and strong and to be a good worker. I embrace and hug you.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Moscow, Central Transit Prison]  
December 3 (November 20), 1916

Dearest Zosia,

Your last letter dated October 15. reached me and, as usual, your words brought me joy and comfort. The hope of returning has never left me and I live with this conviction. Your words tell me about the things dearest to my heart and somehow I feel your nearness and our kinship. Reading them, the feeling of being alone disappears and with it the bitter thoughts of helplessness and the isolation; I feel an infusion of new strength and awareness of the necessity not to be downhearted, to hold out until the end. How much of me remains I do not know, or whether when at last I leave this place I will be able to live a real life again. These bitter thoughts poison my mind. But I have a good antidote in Jasiiek. Love tells me that he is my son, that my youth lives on in him, that I will see him, that if I have conserved my strength, he will awaken it and summon it to action. And I am comforted. What is to be will be. Even if my strength should not be the same, the world will not cease to be beautiful and the hymn of life, the hymn of love will never cease to swell out in my heart. Our suffering will be a mere detail, because our persecutors are powerless to turn us into people

with petty minds. Man's sole happiness is his ability to love and, thanks to this, to grasp the idea of life in its eternal motion. And I bless my fate and the fate of all those dear to me that it has given us this most precious of jewels.

I have become so used to prison life that I find it easier to experience it than to think about somebody else having to endure it. It is exactly the same when one thinks about war, about its insanity and horrors, to use the words of Andreyev. The mere thought of it is terrifying and one finds it hard to understand why it is permitted. In everyday life people, step by step, experience all the horrors, yet many preserve their minds and see, precisely because of the horrors, the immortal substance of life and its wonderful beauty. But our trials, bad as they are, are not so very terrible and one feels ashamed for thinking of them at this time of slaughter and devastation.

In a few days from now they will take off my fetters; incidentally, since recovering from my illness the irons have not troubled me greatly. Like everything else, one gets used to them. My work is not too tiring, the hours are few because the days are short and the workshop—the corridor—is badly lit. At the moment I am a helper to two comrades working on the machines. I do all the handwork. It is a friendly atmosphere and we enjoy each other's company. During October and November I earned a ration\* worth nine rubles and some odd kopeks. Don't send me any money. I really don't need it and in any case prisoners allocated to work draw rations only to the amount of their earnings. Moreover I get a parcel once a month when my sister visits me, thus I have all the food I need. The work is also good for my nerves, so all in all I have nothing to com-

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\* A ration of food products.—*Ed.*

plain about. I am glad that I now have more people in the cell. It is much worse when there are only two. I find it easier to be alone when there are more people, and it is easier to find sympathetic souls. Although Edward\* is here I have not been able to meet him. Those who have seen him say that he looks well. What about his wife? Please convey greetings from me. Is she still in Paris? And what about our family? \*\* Is it possible to maintain contact with them? Samuel\*\*\* promised to write via his sister but so far there has been no letter from him.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]

December 31 (18), 1916

My dearest Zosia,

This is the last day of 1916 and although there is still no sign of the war coming to an end, the day of our reunion, the day of our joy, is drawing nearer and nearer. Of this I am absolutely convinced. . . . What 1917 has in store for us we do not know, but we shall be stout of heart and that is the main thing. It depresses me having to go through this alone without Jasiek, without seeing how he is growing up and how his character is being moulded. I am with you in thought and so strong is the conviction that I shall return that the yearning no longer causes me any pain. Jasiek is grow-

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\* Edward Próchniak.—*Ed.*

\*\* Here Dzerzhinsky is referring to Party comrades in Poland.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* Samuel Lazowert, member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania and later of the C.P.S.U.(B.)—*Ed.*

ing and soon he will be going to school. All I want is that our darling boy should be healthy.

Things here are much the same. The irons have been taken off in order to make it more convenient to work. The work is not too heavy nor does it fatigue me, in fact, it has even strengthened both my muscles and my nerves. Jadwiga visits me once a month, which means that I am not completely cut off from my relatives, while the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* and the *Russky Invalid* keep me posted with the news. The food is adequate, so don't have any fears whatever about me. Apparently it is now possible to send and receive letters from home,\* maybe you have had news about your relatives.\*\* Is it true that they too are now in a bad plight?...

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]  
January 14 (1), 1917

My dear Zosia,

I have before me your letter of November 24 and Jasiek's cuttings. When I look at them and think that they were in his hands, that he himself cut them out, playing and smiling and studying at the same time, a wave of love for him fills my heart and I speak to him in the tenderest words and wish him to grow up strong and good, to be a torch, able to love and to be loved. We must hold ourselves in patience for the great day of our reunion. The time will pass quickly and Jasiek will be quite a big boy, a real man. It may be that we

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\* The reference here is to Warsaw which was then under German occupation.—*Ed.*

\*\* Dzerzhinsky has in mind the life of the Social-Democratic organization in Poland.—*Ed.*

will never have to part again, that we will be able to lead a normal life. This, at any rate, is my dream, and it is for this I wait. I want to feel that I am still alive, that my strength has not departed. Eight months have already gone by since my last trial. You must not be anxious about me, I am no longer in irons, the food is bearable, the cell is heated and I am warmly clad. Remember that your joy, and Jasiek's, is my joy, that it gives me the strength and the will to wait until at long last our spring comes.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]

March 4 (February 19), 1917

My dear Zosia,

Last time I sent you a registered letter dated January 14(1). Since then I have received a letter and postcard dated December 4 and 26 respectively, and a postcard from Jasiek sent on Christmas day. I have not yet got the photos of Jasiek, although I signed for a packet two weeks ago (I think this was the photos). I am so glad at the prospect of being able to see my little son again even on paper and for such a short time. One is not allowed to keep a photo in the cell, not even of one's son, but I am hoping that they will allow me to keep it at least for one day. On my table is the postcard from Jasiek coloured by him, his words to me, his thoughts, feelings and smiles. How I would love to be with you, my little boy, to blow bubbles so that they should swell and glide through the air, we would watch them and keep blowing to stop them from falling. I think that when you grow up, when you are big and strong, we will learn to pilot an airplane and fly like birds over

the hills and above the clouds, and look down on the villages and towns, the fields and forests, valleys and rivers, lakes and seas, taking in the whole world in all its beauty. The sun will be above us and we will fly on and on. Jasiiek dearest, don't be upset that I am not able to be with you. It cannot be otherwise, I love you, my little one, you are my heart's delight, although I see you only in dreams and in thoughts. You are everything to me. Be good, happy and healthy so that Mamma and Papa and all people will be proud of you, so that when you grow up and begin to work you will derive pleasure from your work and give pleasure to others and be an example. I kiss you and give you a big hug, my little one.

I write so rarely now because my life here is unutterably grey and monotonous. I am immured here, but man, like everything living, is always in motion, something in him is always dying and always being born, every moment is a new life, the manifestation of latent energy and possibilities; life is in flux and this is the source of its beauty. Any desire or any attempt to halt it, to perpetuate the moment of happiness or misfortune signifies slavery and the end of life. Consequently I recoil from this prison life, which is nothing but a stagnant swamp and have no desire to write about it or to describe it. At the moment I am dozing, like a bear in his winter den, all that remains is the thought that spring will come and I will cease to suck my paw and all the strength that still remains in my mind and body will manifest itself. Live I will. I am still sharing the cell with a comrade and am quite satisfied. I work about five hours a day on the machine. I am doing more reading and I am getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* again. The diet is ample. In fact I do not eat all the bread. You dearest, should have no fears for me, and remember I am writing this not just to reassure you.

Such reassurance is not to my liking—it is insulting. If you, for instance, were to conceal any misfortune from me I would take it badly. We must live in truth and know everything. There is no need to send me anything and in any case it is almost impossible to do so. Only bacon, sugar and bread are allowed, and these we have. As for the chocolate, grapes and sweets which Jasiek wants to send me, I am most grateful, but we shall eat them together one day. We will arrange a feast, invite Janek and his friends and recall the past, but at the moment we can do this only in our imagination. Unfortunately I cannot write to Marylka, please convey hearty greetings from me, a kiss for Janek and Stefan. Greetings to our friends and relatives. Have you had any news of your father? How are things with him? Embrace him for me. Is it now possible to correspond freely with Warsaw? How are our relatives\* there? All my thoughts are with them. I must end. I embrace and kiss you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Moscow

March 31(18), 1917

My dearest Zosia and Jasiek,

Did you get the telegram and postcard which I sent immediately after my release?

For the past few days I have been resting in the outskirts of the city, in Sokolniki, because the impressions and the bustle of the first days of freedom and of the Revolution were too much for me. My nerves, weakened by the long years of confinement, failed to stand up to the burden of work. I became slightly ill but now after

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\* This refers to his Party comrades.—*Ed.*



a few days rest the fever has passed completely and I feel perfectly all right. The doctor did not find anything seriously wrong and in all probability I'll be back at work in a week's time.

At the moment I am using the time in order to fill the gap in my knowledge (about Party and political life) and to put my thoughts in order....

I am up to my ears in activity.\*

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Moscow

May 27, 1918

Dearest,

I am in the very thick of the struggle, leading the life of a soldier for whom there is no rest because it is necessary to save our house. There is no time to think about one's relatives or oneself. The work and the struggle are hellish. But in this fight my heart remains just exactly as it was in the past. All my time is eaten up with work....

My purpose compels me to be merciless and I am firmly resolved to pursue it to the end....

The ring of enemies is steadily closing in on us, approaching nearer to the heart.... Each day compels us to resort to ever more resolute measures. At the moment we are confronted with a mortal enemy—famine. In order to get bread it is necessary to take the grain from those who have it and share it with those who have not. The Civil War is bound to develop on a vast scale. Having been appointed to a post in the front line, I am determined to fight and to look with open eyes at all

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\* In the ranks of the Communist Party.—*Ed.*



We are witnessing the dance of life or death, a moment of truly bloody struggle, of titanic effort....

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Berlin]\*

October 28, 1918

Dearest,

Today at noon we shall continue our journey. Yesterday there was a number of meetings here at which Liebknecht spoke, and after the speeches a demonstration. The demonstrators were dispersed by the police who used their batons and some people were seriously injured. Groups of demonstrators broke through the police cordon to the Soviet Embassy where they shouted greetings, waved hats and cried, "*Hoch!*" The movement is only beginning. The masses await the revolution. What is needed is a group of pioneers with the necessary will-power and prestige.

Rosa\*\* is still in prison and we do not know when she will be released. We think, however, that it will be very soon. Liebknecht is in complete solidarity with us. In the bigger sections of the Party there is still lack of faith in their own strength, and this is the source of the purely "defeatist" sentiments.

Over us (Russia), apparently, the clouds are gathering not only on the part of the Entente but also of Germany. It looks as if we shall be faced with an exceedingly grim struggle.

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\* Dzerzhinsky broke his journey in Berlin on the way back from Switzerland whither he had gone for a few days to see his wife and son after being parted for eight years.—*Ed.*

\*\* At this time Rosa Luxemburg was in prison in Germany.—*Ed.*

Karsky,\* refused permission by the Austrians to enter the country, left for Moscow yesterday. He will now go to Warsaw to act as our Consul.

Greetings to Marylka, Stefan and Janek.

I embrace and hug you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To A. E. Buthak

Moscow

April 15, 1919

Dear Aldona,

After the long separation I don't know what to write about or how to begin....

If only we could meet you would realize that I have not changed a bit since the days when I was nearer to you not only by kinship. It is hard to write—especially in the lifeless words of a brief letter—about the things I would like to tell you. To explain everything in a letter is impossible—people see things in a different light and, what is more, not everyone has the gift of being able to turn over in his mind all that the soul has suffered in the long and excruciating years of wandering. But this I can say: I have remained true to myself, I have not changed, although I know that for many there is no name more terrifying than mine.

Today, as yesterday, love is everything for me, I hear and feel its song in my heart, the song that calls to struggle, for unbending will and tireless work. Now, as in the past, the sole determinant of my actions is my ideas, my striving for justice. I find it difficult to write.... I, the eternal wanderer, find myself in the

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\* Karsky—Julian Marchlewski—was en route to Vienna as diplomatic representative of the R.S.F.S.R.—*Ed.*

thick of the movement, of the Revolution, helping to build a new life. I see the future and I want to be a party to its shaping, to be in the thick of things, like a stone discharged from a sling, until the end comes and I find eternal peace. Have you ever given a thought to what war really means? You have shut out from your mind the thought of human bodies torn to pieces by shells, the wounded on the battle-fields and the vultures plucking the eyes of the dying. You have turned away from the ghastly sights which confront us every day. How can you understand me, a soldier of the Revolution fighting to banish injustice from the world, so that this war should not hand over millions and millions of people to those drunk with victory—the rich. War is a fearful calamity. The world of the rich and wealthy is advancing against us. The most unfortunate and the most downtrodden people, the first to rise in defence of their rights, are hurling back the armies of the world. Would you have me remain aloof from this struggle? Aldona, dear, you do not understand me and that is why I find it hard to write to you. If you could see how I live, if you could look me in the eyes, you would realize, or to be more precise, you would feel that I have not changed one iota.

Alas, I never got to Vilno, I had intended going there for the sole purpose of seeing you. But I just couldn't find the time. I am sending you the things from Dzierzynowo. In accordance with our laws most of the family valuables have been confiscated. . . . I know that the news will pain you, but it had to be done. Such is our law in relation to gold. I enclose a list of the articles I am sending on to you. Zosia and Jasiiek arrived in Moscow in February. I hug you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Kharkov\*

Before June 13, 1920

My dear Zosia and Jasiek,

...Summer has come to Kharkov where everything is in blossom and where at the moment we are having a heatwave. Kharkov is a city of gardens.... The profiteering here is incredible. We shall have to work hard and long in order to really win the support of the country. As for me I am unable to act the role of onlooker. It would be worth my staying here for some time, but I don't know what the all-powerful Central Committee will say about this. In any case we'll be seeing each other so I finish without sentiments. All the best. I kiss you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Kharkov

June 13, 1920

Zosia dearest,

...I am not satisfied with myself. I have the feeling that I could give more than I am actually giving. Could give.... But my nerves are in such a state that I cannot concentrate and take myself in hand in order to conserve my strength in a way that it would give better results with the least expenditure of effort. One should so work that every day the brain and the nerves get a rest. But, while I write about this and give much thought to it, for me it is simply wishful thinking. I am not made that way.

Generally speaking, my stay in the Ukraine has en-

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\* At this time Dzerzhinsky was in Kharkov in charge of the rear lines of the South-Western Front.—*Ed.*

livened and broadened the work and is yielding results. I rather think I shall have to stay here for some considerable time, at least until the Central Committee recalls me to Moscow. . . . I like the work, and would have nothing against staying on. I have no desire to return to Moscow until we render the Makhno gangs harmless. It is not easy to cope with them because they have cavalry, and I haven't. However, should we succeed in smashing Makhno, I will return to Moscow for a few days for further instructions and settle matters on the spot. I kiss you both.

F. D.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Vilno

July 30, 1920

Dear Zosia,

In half an hour we shall be continuing our journey to Grodno and thence to Białystok.\* Since there is no time for sentiment I will be brief. So far things are going well. Bring pressure to bear on Sever\*\* to send people here. We and the army of the Polish Front need help because we ourselves cannot take over the entire line. Unschlicht is leaving for Minsk. He is anxious to work there but I have doubts whether he has the strength for this or whether the doctor will give him permission. I kiss you and Jasiek.

Yours,

Felix.

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\* On July 30, 1920, a Provisional Revolutionary Committee for Poland was set up in Białystok and consisted of Julian Marchlewski (Chairman), Felix Dzerzhinsky, Felix Kohn, Edward Próchniak and Josef Unschlicht.—*Ed.*

\*\* Sever—Edward Próchniak.—*Ed.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Białystok

August 17, 1920

Zosia dearest,

Yesterday we were at Wyszkw, some fifty odd kilometres from Warsaw, and returned to Białystok. We had anticipated being in Warsaw yesterday but now I think this will not be for some time.

Now that we are in the vicinity of the city I am uneasy, having the impression that it may not be the old Warsaw, that it may not greet us in the way we would like. The thing is that our Warsaw, terrorized and crushed, is silent. We do not hear its ringing voice. Evidently our Central Committee [Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party] has not succeeded in winning over the masses or in getting control of the political situation. There is a shortage of leaders, no Lenin, no Marxist politician. But of one thing I am certain: we are at the turning point; the struggle in Russia is developing into an international struggle that will decide the destiny of the world....

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Minsk

August 25, 1920

My dear Zosia,

The fear that catastrophe would overtake us\* had long been troubling me, but military matters were not my sphere and it was clear that the political situation necessitated taking risks. We did our bit and learned of the scale of the defeat only when the whiteguard forces were within thirty kilometres of us, not from the west

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\* This refers to the unsuccessful offensive of the Soviet troops at Warsaw.—*Ed.*



but already from the south. Cool heads were needed in order to extricate some units without panic, while others prepared to repel the enemy and cover the retreat. As far as I know, we have not lost any of our Białystok workers.

We reached Minsk the day before yesterday. The military situation is still not clear, but what is obvious is the need for a tremendous effort in order to achieve a balance and then superiority....

It may be that I will be taking part in the work of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Front.

Things are in a bad way in Poland. The Party, apparently, has been smashed and has lost its bearings. The working class, paralyzed, submits passively to the repressions. We were welcomed everywhere by the people. Even the rank and file of the Polish Socialist Party aligned themselves with us, but, lacking faith in their strength, failed to conduct active revolutionary work and expected us to do the main job for them.

I should emphasize, however, that our Red Army (with very few exceptions) acted as a Red Army should and, thanks to its behaviour, could have been a revolutionary factor. Generally speaking, there was no looting, the soldiers knew that they were fighting only against the gentry, that they had come not to conquer Poland but to liberate it. I am convinced that the fruits of the work done by our army will soon be reaped.

Our defeat was the result not of an uprising of the Poles against an "invasion,"\* it was caused by the ex-

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\* When the Red Army, having thrown out the Polish whiteguards from the Soviet Ukraine and Byelorussia and pursuing them, entered Poland, the Polish landlords and capitalists and also their stooges in the Right wing of the Polish Socialist Party, for the purpose of deceiving the masses and compelling them to defend the bourgeois-landlord rule in Poland, screamed about a Soviet "invasion" of Poland.—*Ed.*

treme exhaustion of our troops and by the frantic activity of the Polish whiteguards.

The Polish Socialist Party did not give any real support. It paralyzed the working class and stood idly by while the Communists were being smashed. It opposed any class struggle in Poland and, by so doing, enabled the whiteguards to rally and strike at the exhausted Red Army.

The most important task for you in Moscow at the moment is work among the prisoners of war. They should be won over, won to our principles, so that they return to Poland convinced Communists. They should be treated in a comradely way, drawn into work so that they feel the spirit of the new Russia, the pulse of its life and so that they should regard all the shortcomings as things that are being overcome and will be overcome. Let us have a detailed report about all the work, about the people, committees, programme, funds, etc.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Novonikolayevsk\*

January 22, 1922\*\*

Dear Zosia,

...There is plenty to be done here and it is being done with great difficulty. The work is not yielding the results that we anticipated and for which we are striv-

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\* Novonikolayevsk—now Novosibirsk.—*Ed.*

\*\* At the end of 1921 Dzerzhinsky was appointed a member of the commission set up by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party to supervise deliveries of food and seed grain from Siberia, the Ukraine and abroad. At the beginning of January 1922, he travelled to Siberia as the special representative of

ing. I have the feeling that Moscow is not satisfied with us. We found things in such a state that much time will be needed to get the work going, but the Republic cannot afford to wait. So we are working grimly, straining every nerve in order to hold out and to overcome the new difficulties which are continually arising. The fault, of course, lies with us—the People's Commissariat of Railways. We failed to foresee things, failed to devote attention to matters three or four months ago. True, Yemshanov\* was on the spot, but he did absolutely nothing. I am exceedingly angry with him. I realize now that in order to be a Commissar of Railways good intentions alone are not enough. It is only now, in winter, that I clearly understand how essential it is to prepare for winter in summer. But in summer I was still a greenhorn and my assistants were unable to foresee things.

I am not, therefore, in the best of tempers, and this, I think, affects my work and makes it impossible for me to rest and recover from the fatigue. Compared with Moscow I have less work, yet I feel utterly exhausted. How long I shall remain here I can't say, perhaps until March. If summoned to Moscow or if I succeed in delivering the necessary quantity of food, my departure may be speeded up. However, my presence is needed here, and though the direct results are not evident, we are, nevertheless, doing an important job and, in time, it will yield fruit. The rot has been stopped, we are concentrating all efforts in a single direction, and I am certain that

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the All-Russian Executive Committee and the Council of Labour and Defence of the R.S.F.S.R. in order to take emergency measures for the delivery of food to Moscow, Petrograd and the famine-stricken regions of the Volga.—*Ed.*

\* A. Yemshanov, special representative of the People's Commissariat of Railways.—*Ed.*

the difficulties will be overcome. This faith keeps me going, gives me the strength to carry on in spite of everything. . . . I embrace you.

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Omsk,

February 7, 1922

Zosia dearest,

You are worried by the thought of my long stay here. It is quite on the cards that I may be able to leave at the beginning of March, but I am not sure. In any case I am working with redoubled energy to complete the job entrusted to me and for which I am responsible. A hellishly hard job, it calls for terrific will-power in order not to retreat, to hold out and not to let the Republic down. Siberian bread and seed for the spring sowing are our salvation and our bulwark in Genoa.\*

I have been reduced to such a state that I can hardly sleep, and impotent anger wells up, driving me to think in terms of revenge against the loafers and fools sitting

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\* The reference is to the Genoa Conference (World Economic Conference). It was held over April 10-May 19, 1922, in Genoa with representatives from Soviet Russia, Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Japan, Germany and other countries taking part. The United States was represented by an observer.

The imperialist powers represented at the conference tried to use the economic difficulties experienced by Soviet Russia to dictate an extortionate agreement. They insisted on payment of all the tsarist debts, including the prewar debt, compensation to foreigners for the nationalized enterprises, etc. The Soviet delegation, rejecting the claims of the imperialists, submitted proposals for universal disarmament and the annulment of all war debts. The talks in Genoa, which were resumed at the Hague in June and July 1922, did not yield any results.—*Ed.*

in their office chairs.\* They completely deceived us, the place was in chaos when we arrived. Among the masses, and even among Party people, there was indifference and no appreciation of the dangerous times in which we are now living. We ourselves had to do everything to ensure normal functioning of the railroads, had to follow up every order to see that it did not remain on paper, and had to hustle everybody to get things done. As for me I had to restrain my anger in order not to ruin the organization completely.

Politically, too, things are not what they should be. Sabotage by the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Japanese agents makes itself felt. This, then, is the atmosphere in which I have to work. Fortunately I have with me some good assistants—Party comrades and specialists, and I hope that in the long run we shall complete the job. You will appreciate that I cannot leave until this is done, although personally I would like to return as quickly as possible.

If I were to leave now, I would never be able to look anybody in the eyes and for me this would be the worst thing that could happen; what is more, it would poison life for us. Today Gerson\*\* in great secrecy from me, acting on instructions from Lenin, asked Belenky\*\*\* about the state of my health, as to whether I could remain in Siberia without further injury to it. True enough, the work here is not good for my health. In the mirror I see an angry, sullen, care-worn face with puffy eyes. But I doubt if my health would gain were I recalled before I am able to say that my mission has been carried out in the main. I should be recalled only in the

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\* The local railway officials.—*Ed.*

\*\* Dzerzhinsky's secretary in the Cheka and later in the O.G.P.U.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* State security worker who accompanied Dzerzhinsky on his journey to Siberia.—*Ed.*

event of my stay here being regarded as useless, as not having yielded the desired results, or if I as People's Commissar for Railways, am held responsible for the state of the railways of which I was wholly unaware until I came here. My month's work in Siberia has taught me more than all the previous years, and I have submitted a number of proposals to the Central Committee.

If as a result of the hellish work we succeed in doing the job, in delivering the necessary supplies of food, I will be glad, because both myself and the Republic will make use of the lesson; we will simplify our managerial system, abolish the centralization which is killing everything, get rid of the superfluous and indeed harmful apparatus of railway commissars and devote more attention to the localities, to better methods of work by switching personnel from their Moscow offices to practical work in the localities. . . . A kiss for you both.

Yours,  
*Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Omsk-Novonikolayevsk

February 20, 1922

Zosia dearest,

The mail for the past two weeks has just been brought to me here in the train. Although it is now past midnight I have only finished reading the correspondence from Moscow. I am writing to you now because I won't have time in the morning. I shall spend one day in Novonikolayevsk, where we shall discuss matters with the Revolutionary Committee. The difficulties here are stupendous. Just as the work of the railways was getting into its stride blizzards and snowstorms disorganized everything. Soon we shall be confronted with a new threat—

the food supplies are considerably less than we believed them to be. I cannot cut myself into pieces and foresee everything, and energy alone is no substitute for knowledge and experience. I simply must learn. Nor is the correspondence from Moscow any too happy. Serebryakov,\* it seems, is on his last legs.

He, too, is anxious that I should return as quickly as possible, but I cannot do so until we clear up the situation. Bread from Siberia means salvation for the Republic. Moreover, when I return I have no desire to get engrossed in the current work, to be a prisoner to it. The Siberian experience has enabled me to see the basic shortcomings in our system of management, has revealed the necessity of eliminating them. This, however, will be a long struggle. I fear, alas, that nobody will want to listen to me on the subject because in Moscow, too, there is plenty to be done, and, being beset with difficulties, the time, as is often the case, simply won't be found. I have come to the definite conclusion that the main work lies not in Moscow but in the localities, that two-thirds of the responsible comrades and specialists of all Party organizations (including the Central Committee), Soviets and trade-union bodies should be transferred from Moscow to the localities. There is no need to fear that the central establishments will go to pieces. All forces should be concentrated in the factories, in the mills and in the countryside in order really to raise labour productivity; these are not times for pen-pushing in offices. Unless this is done we will not pull through. Even the best plans and instructions from Moscow get stuck on the way and remain suspended in mid-air. It is only now that I have really delved deeply into life and I am determined to battle for it. The chances

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\* L. Serebryakov—Deputy People's Commissar for Railways. He subsequently became a Trotskyite.—*Ed.*

are that I shall return to Moscow in the first half of March—about the fifteenth. My fellow workers are also anxious to return as quickly as possible. They are worn out by the endless toil and the isolation from their families. I was forced to remind them that Moscow expects not us, but bread from us. And I must say that they have responded magnificently, and are working selflessly. Even the “specialists” are working like Trojans. We are getting along fine—team spirit is wonderful. . . . The specialists have become different people altogether—even without any help from the commissars. The institute of commissars in the People’s Commissariat for Railways has outlived itself, it should be abolished at once.

But enough.

You will gather that my life is an extremely busy one. I sleep badly, keep thinking all the time and seek an outlet in working to get the job done. Luckily, my health is all right. . . .

Yours,

*Felix.*

To Jasiek Dzerzhinsky

Omsk-Novonikolayevsk

February 20, 1922

My dear Jasiek,

The train on which I am travelling from Omsk to Novonikolayevsk is a rather bumpy one with the result that my writing is like yours—lines all slanted. Still, I send you kisses and greetings. I am well and have lots to do. The railway car in which I live is quite warm, although outside there are forty degrees of frost. Belenky sends you greetings. . . . I still don’t know when I shall return to Moscow, in any case not before I have completed the work entrusted to me. And you, what are you doing? Are you busy with lessons, and what about



play? Greetings to Chesek.\* Kiss Mamma for me fourteen and a half times and keep well. I kiss you warmly. Good-bye.

Your *Papa*.

P. S. I am sending you a copy of the *Siberian Gudok*. On page 4 you will find a puzzle,\*\* see if you can solve it. If you cannot do it yourself, ask Mamma, she will help you. Kisses.

Yours,  
*F. D.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Kharkov

May 20, 1926

My dearest,

I have been in Kharkov for two days now and feel fine, in fact better than when I was here before.\*\*\*

In a week or so I shall leave for Yekaterinoslav and the Donets Coal Basin. New people have developed here, the problems are much more concrete. People listen willingly to what I have to say and respond accordingly.... I would gladly remain in the provinces for permanent work....

Yours,  
*Felix.*

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\* Chesek, Jasiek's school-mate.—*Ed.*

\*\* The reference is to a satirical article ridiculing the shortcomings of the Soviet apparatus. The copy of the newspaper has not been preserved.—*Ed.*

\*\*\* Beginning of May 1926.—*Ed.*

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