

ARCHIVE

Zofia Moczarska and Kazimierz Moczarski married in July 1939. He was a thirty-two-year-old lawyer at the time, active in democratic circles, while she was a twenty year-old journalism student. From autumn 1939 they were both members of the anti-Nazi resistance in Warsaw. After the Warsaw Uprising was quelled in 1944, they abandoned the city alongside the civilian population with the intention of continuing their underground activities until Poland's liberation was secured. In January 1945, the commander of the underground Home Army (AK – Armia Krajowa) General Leopold Okulicki ordered its disbandment. After the NKVD arrested the leaders of the Polish underground through entrapment in March 1945, the Polish Government-in-Exile took the decision to create a new conspiratorial organization, the Armed Forces Delegation for Poland (Delegatura Sił Zbrojnych na Kraj). Moczarski remained a member, but by summer 1945 the underground was facing increasing invigilation with growing numbers of Polish soldiers and civilians filling the cells of the secret police. Kazimierz Moczarski was arrested on 11 August 1945 and sentenced to ten years in prison for his role in the Delegation that by then had been declared a criminal organization in legislation passed by the communist authorities in Poland.¹

Zofia divided her time between her studies, employment and visits to her husband. In 1948 she graduated with a degree in journalism and received a promotion at work.

In the wake of the falsified parliamentary elections in 1947, the authorities proclaimed a partial amnesty for prisoners. Moczarski's ten-year sentence was halved, but in spring 1947 he was unexpectedly moved from a penitentiary to a detention centre for those under investigation in Warsaw. A Stalinist model of rule was openly imposed in the People's Republic of Poland, with one aspect of it involving attacks on people associated with the democratic Polish Underground State that was active during the occupation period. In the course of numerous interrogations, Moczarski was shocked to learn that he had been accused of murdering communists in collaboration with the Germans during the occupation. He was subject to elaborate physical and psychological torture to force him into confessing

¹ Andrzej K. Kunert, *Oskarżony Kazimierz Moczarski* (Warszawa, 2006); Anna Machcewicz, *Kazimierz Moczarski. Biografia* (Kraków, 2018).

to his alleged guilt. During his time under investigation he spent a period of nine months sharing a cell with Jürgen Stroop, the SS-Officer responsible for crushing the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Moczarski was cut off from any news from home or his family, from the press and books, and forbidden from taking walks.

Another way of exerting pressure on him came with the arrest of his wife, who was taken away by being bundled off the street on 26 March 1949. Despite their efforts, the investigators could not force her into self-incrimination or providing false testimonies against anyone else. In spite of this, she was sentenced to six years in prison.

A second trial was launched against Moczarski at this time, resulting in him being sentenced to death. In March 1953 Stalin died and struggles over political succession ensued in the USSR. Changes took hold slowly but inevitably in Poland. In this changing political climate, the Supreme Court reduced Moczarski's death sentence to life imprisonment in October 1953. Packages from family members and books started reaching the prison. In February 1955, after eight years in the detention centre in Warsaw's Mokotów district, he was transferred to the penitentiary prison in Sztum.

Zofia Moczarska was released in March 1955. Lawyers made significant efforts to secure Moczarski's early release as he was falling into ill health and had been admitted to hospital. The courts rejected all their appeals.

In March 1956, public debate broke out in Poland over Nikita Khrushchev's 'secret speech' criticizing Stalinism that he gave as First Secretary of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) at the twentieth Party congress in Moscow the previous month. One of the subjects that the Polish press addressed were the injustices done to Polish Home Army soldiers. It was in this atmosphere that Moczarski's two-person team of lawyers prepared an open letter calling for fair trials for political prisoners. It was signed by numerous public figures. Moczarski was released. An amnesty was announced on 26 April 1956, reducing life sentences to twelve-year sentences albeit without rescinding the shameful verdicts.

Only after the October 1956 changes in Poland, were rehabilitation hearings held at Warsaw district court in December that year, resulting in Zofia and Kazimierz's good name being restored. In presenting its verdict, the court not only rescinded the false accusations but also stressed their dedicated sacrifices for an independent Poland.

Zofia Moczarska and Kazimierz Moczarski began their life together in summer 1939 before being forced to spend almost eleven years apart after

the end of the War. "Life brings people together, but prison is no life", wrote Moczarski bitterly in one of his letters. They had to rebuild their life. In 1958 their only daughter was born. Their house was again full of life. Kazimierz Moczarski was able to return to his profession and served for many years as editor of the daily newspaper *Kurier Polski*. As befitted his character, he was primarily engaged in social causes, including battling rampant alcoholism. His most important achievement was his description of his encounters with Jürgen Stroop in his prison cell. *Rozmowy z katem* (Conversations with an Executioner) offered an insightful portrait of this Nazi, becoming a global bestseller having been translated into many languages and published in countries including France, Germany, Israel, Russia and the United Kingdom.

Kazimierz Moczarski died on 27 September 1975. *Rozmowy z katem* was first published in Poland in 1977 as the authorities had for a long time resisted publishing a work that provoked the question: how did the author end up in the same cell as a war criminal?

Zofia Moczarska's time in prison was even more destructive in at least two ways: she lost her youth and her health in her cell. Her blossoming postwar career was irrevocably cut short following her arrest. With her health ruined, she could not return to regular work. Towards the end of her life, following her husband's death, she was closely involved in editing the manuscript of the first edition of *Rozmowy z katem*, seeing through the publication of the book before her death on 1 September 1977.

The collection presented in this volume of *Acta Poloniae Historica* consists of 39 prison letters currently archived at the National Library in Warsaw.² They were written over a period of ten years and document not only the fate of this married couple but of an entire generation of people who fought for a democratic Poland before being persecuted by the communist authorities.

The letters were written and received under conditions of prison censorship. The authors do not mention their painful experiences nor do the letters feature complaints about the difficult everyday conditions. The authors did not want to risk their letters being confiscated and their already limited contact being broken off. There was also another reason for their moderation, which Moczarski mentioned in a letter to his lawyer Władysław Winawer:

² The selected letters are based on Zofia i Kazimierz Moczarscy, *Życie tak nas głupio rozłącza...* Listy więzienne 1946–1956 (Wydawnictwo 'Więź', Warszawa, 2015), 176 pp.

“Once she returns, my wife can be told everything about me. But while she is in prison, she can be ‘justly’ deceived as far as anything that might worry her is concerned”.³

Despite censorship and self-censorship, the couple could nevertheless share information about their changing everyday fate. The first three letters were sent by Zofia while she was still free and describe her life as she went between work and visiting Kazimierz in prison. Her work in the Central Planning Office, where the three-year plan was conceived for rebuilding a country destroyed by war according to a modern, rational model that differed from Soviet visions, brought her professional satisfaction. In the first surviving letter to her husband, she proudly wrote: “There is a lot of responsibility and interesting work in the office, a whole Department is in my hands”. Being so active would certainly have made it easier to survive the difficult years apart from her husband.

Other letters come from the period once they had restored written correspondence after several years without any contact and knowing very little about each other’s fate. These letters, the most intimate, show just how much support knowing that a loved one was alive could bring a prisoner. The third set of letters are from the period following Zofia’s release having served her full sentence when she was, however, seriously ill. She spent her time contacting lawyers and preparing for her husband’s return. These letters offer a shocking depiction of Zofia’s attempts to return to normal life while her apathy grew, something that today would be diagnosed as depression or trauma relating to incarceration. She was surrounded by loved ones and close friends, people full of goodwill and sincerity who nevertheless could not understand her. Through everyday activities, Zofia sought to restore some semblance of internal order and a sense of the rhythms of life outside prison walls. Paradoxically, only her husband could help her, making desperate efforts through his letters, encouraging her to take up any kind of work.

These mutual relations show that loved ones could be both a source of support and a burden for prisoners. Zofia and Kazimierz had to face up not only to the regime of prison but also their mutual fears about each other’s wellbeing.

³ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance – AIPN), class. no. IPN GK 317/700, ‘List K. Moczarskiego do W. Winawera’, Sztum, 25 Feb.55, 161.

The letters describe not only loneliness but also the internal liberty of people whose imprisonment had forced them to accept their fate and develop survival strategies. “The thing about being in prison for many years in prison is that one becomes increasingly free mentally”, wrote Moczarski in one letter to his wife, adding that “this growing sense and understanding of genuine freedom is born in prison as the years pass, as the distance to material reality that is left behind as soon as one passes through the prison gates grows”.

Anna Machcewicz