By the end of the 1940s, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the elites in power had not only accepted the Cold War, but they had turned it into a philosophy of rule.1 Only a few years after the end of the Second World War, the idea of the enemy had become a key element of propaganda in the states of the newly divided world. Stalin condemned ‘imperialism’, whose main representative was the USA, and mixed the rhetoric of the pre-war left-wing pacifist movement with wartime patriotic agitation. In this way, the ideology of anti-fascism survived the fall of Hitler and Nazi Germany. Anti-communist ideologists in the West reciprocated in kind: a key component of the Truman doctrine was the belief that the mistakes of the Munich Agreement (1938) should not be repeated, and the Soviet Union was now accused of having taken the place of Nazi Germany on the political map of Europe. At the same time, the logic of the Cold War began significantly to affect social and economic relations within the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

In the propaganda of the communist authorities in Poland, the memory of the bygone war and the fear of another ensuing conflict were integrated into a narrative that propounded the absolute necessity of communist power. This chapter shows that the rhetoric of Cold War agitation, with its two principal metaphors of ‘the fight for peace’ and the ‘national front’, were combined with the myth of victory over fascism, the foundational myth for the entire Soviet system as well as communist Poland. This was a myth that invoked power and glory, sought to legitimize the new political order at both national and international levels, and also demanded constant mobilization, on the grounds that full victory had not yet been achieved. The myth was embodied in the symbolism of death and blood, in ritual commemorations performed at former camps and sites of battle, and in published histories of the war. It was also, importantly, a mechanism for the organization of social reality. As increasing emphasis was placed on the propaganda of permanent struggle, practical initiatives undertaken by ZBoWiD, such as social support schemes, were abolished. The title of a ‘fighter’ (bojownik), as featured in the

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organization’s name, became a symbol for an as-yet unfinished war in service of a great cause: freedom and peace. The intensification of Cold War propaganda heralded the onset of unfinished time: fulfilment could only be brought by the future.

Setting the Stage

The Unification Congress

Veterans and former prisoners were necessary as living symbols of war, as evidence that supported the version of history being told by the authorities. The Unification Congress at which ZBoWiD was founded was held on 1–2 September 1949, to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the Nazi invasion of Poland. The Congress was organized by the department of mass propaganda of the Party Central Committee, and orchestrated as a large-scale demonstration of ‘peace and patriotism’. It was designed to cement a dominant narrative of the Second World War, and show the strength of the communist movement and of the left-wing parties of Western Europe. These aims were expressed in the symbolic apparatus of the event, as well as in speeches by state and party officials and foreign delegates representing a range of bodies united under the banner of FIAPP.3

On the day before the start of the Congress, the assemblies of several associations were held in Warsaw, where each of these organizations declared their willingness to be brought together as a new, unified body. A rally was held in the evening on Victory Square (in the inter-war and today, Piłsudski Square) in the centre of Warsaw, during which wreaths were placed at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier by representatives of the Congress’s presidium, FIAPP and delegates of the ‘fighters for freedom and democracy’ from the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, Italy, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Romania and Yugoslavia. After honouring the dead and marking the occasion with the Polish national anthem, the delegates set off on a march to the Brotherhood in Arms monument,4 across

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4 The Brotherhood in Arms monument (see figure 3.1), designed by a group of Polish and Soviet artists, was unveiled twice: in 1945 (gypsum version) and 1947 (bronze version). The main group presents three Red Army soldiers in fighting poses, beneath which are the figures of two Polish and two Soviet soldiers jointly keeping symbolic guard. The
the Vistula River. There, the Polish and Soviet anthems were heard. Guards of honour were held at numerous sites of grave loss of life, next to monuments and plaques.\footnote{AAN, PZPR KC, VII, 2672, p. 43.} Foreign guests gave speeches at mass meetings organized at ten selected factories in Warsaw. Józef Cyrankiewicz, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, organized a reception for the delegates, and President Bolesław Bierut personally greeted each of them.

The Unification Congress was held in the main building of the Warsaw University of Technology, where almost 1,500 people gathered. The presidium table was decorated with two unsheathed swords, the symbol of the Battle of Grunwald (1410) and of victory over the Germans (see figure 3.3). The honorary chair of the proceedings was Colonel Frédéric-Henry Manhès, a member of the French resistance, former prisoner of Buchenwald, and the chairman of FIAPP. The sessions were chaired by Józef Cyrankiewicz. An address was given by Franciszek Jóźwiak, who accented the unique historicity of the occasion: ‘we are living on the threshold of two eras in the development of humankind: the epoch of degenerate capitalism which is suffering ever greater defeats, and the new epoch which is fast emerging, driven by the power of the working people.’\footnote{Cited in: W. Garncarczyk, ‘Byliśmy pierwsi w walce o Nową Polskę – będziemy pierwsi w szeregach Jej budowniczych’, \emph{Za Wolność i Lud} 2 (1949), p. 23.} Over the course of two days, several dozen speakers took to the floor: representatives of the Polish state, members of veterans’ and victims’ organizations, and delegates whose wide variety of backgrounds was held to reflect the breadth of social support for communist power. Amongst the speakers were: a priest who recalled the ‘Gehenna of Catholic priests in German death camps’; mothers ‘speaking out against war’; a university professor; a miner from Silesia who represented the ‘prisoners of Bereza Kartuska’\footnote{See footnote 118 in Chapter 2.} and the victims of the Sanacja regime’; Wanda Jakubowska, the director of the film ‘The Last Stage’ (\emph{Ostatni etap}; 1947) about Auschwitz; a textile worker who had been a ‘prisoner of the Hitlerite death camps’; a ‘smallholder peasant’ (and also a ‘former soldier of the AK’); a seven-person delegation from the General Karol Świerczewski Corpus of Internal Security Cadets; and also a ‘representative of bloodied, fighting Greece.’\footnote{\emph{Za Wolność i Lud} 2 (1949), p. 24.}

monument has been mockingly referred to as the ‘four sleepers and three fighters’ by residents of Warsaw, a name that has an additional irony considering the Red Army’s lack of assistance to Polish forces during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. In 2011 the monument was removed in connection with major building works in the square where it was located. Heated debates continue to this day about whether it should be returned.
3.1 Ceremony at the Monument to Brotherhood in Arms, on the fourth anniversary of the liberation of Warsaw’s Praga district. September, 1948, Warsaw. Photo credits unknown, Polish Press Agency.
The participants of the Congress received a special inaugural issue of a new veterans’ journal, tellingly named *Za Wolność i Lud* (‘For Freedom and the People’). The journal presented, in shortened form and with illustrations, arguments for the historical legitimacy of the rule of the Polish communists. Authors described the pre-war political make-up of Poland using dark undertones: nearly all members of the pre-war ruling classes had allegedly supported fascism, the logical and final outcome of capitalism. The oppressed class, a large majority of pre-war Polish society, had gained its self-consciousness during the Second World War, which was presented as part of the revolutionary narrative. The Polish Workers’ Party had taken up the struggle of ‘miners and steelworkers, textile workers and railroad workers, teachers and artists, peasants and the working intelligentsia.’ However, the victory over fascism – and with it, the birth of a new Poland – would have been impossible without the participation of the Red Army; only thanks to its exceptional assistance and the ‘bonds of brotherly kinship’ between the Polish and Soviet soldier was it possible that in May 1945, ‘the [Polish] white-and-red flag flew over Berlin next to the red of the Soviet Union.’ Blood sacrifice and victory gave legitimacy to the rule of the Polish communists, who had gained their authority through the declaration of the July Manifesto of the pro-Moscow Polish Committee for National Liberation (1944). Under a large photograph of Bolesław Bierut, placed on one of the opening pages of *Za Wolność i Lud*, were printed fragments of his speech ‘to the Polish Nation on the occasion of the Day of Poland’s Rebirth, July 22, 1949.’ The name of this holiday as the day of ‘Rebirth’, on the anniversary of the declaration of the July Manifesto, shows the specific ways in which Communist rhetoric was mixed with Christian, messianic, and nationalist elements.

Participants of the Congress were made to understand that – with the exception of the country’s ‘rebirth’ – the final goals towards which they had fought during the Second World War had not yet been achieved. Although the ‘wheels of history’ had already been set in motion and could no longer be stopped, further effort was required to fulfil the laws of history: both in Communist Poland and throughout the world, work was needed to ‘build socialism and peace.’ ‘Building’ was equated to the ‘fight’ against the relics of capitalism – now represented by American imperialism and its allies – and the struggle against capitalism was also a fight for peace, which could only prevail in a socialist system.

9 Ibid., p. 13.
10 See footnote 34 in Chapter 2.
11 Ibid., p. 3.
3.3 Decorated backdrop in the hall of the University of Technology during the Unification Congress. The two swords symbolize the victory over the Knights of the Cross in the Battle of Grunwald (1410) and, by extension, over Germany. The caption between the swords runs: ‘We stand united guarding Democracy and Independence of People’s Poland’, Warsaw, September 1949. Photo by Wojciech Konradzki, National Digital Archives/Polish Press Agency.
The slogan of a ‘fight for peace’ became one of the ideological foundations of the new organization. ‘We unite at a time when the battle is escalating between the forces of peace and democracy, led by the Soviet Union, and the forces of imperialism, which are planning to unleash a new war of conquest,’ declared the ideological manifesto of ZBoWiD. The Congress sent out four communiqués. Two of these were addressed, respectively, to the Soviet Committee for the Defence of Peace and the chairman of the World Peace Council, Professor Frédéric Joliot-Curie. The other two, sent to Bierut and Stalin, contained assurances of the organization’s readiness to defend the freedom and peace. Similar formulations were present in the majority of speeches and texts.

What role was the Unification Congress designed to play, according to the intentions of its organizers? Undoubtedly, its role was instrumental: the Congress dealt with formalities such as the new union’s statute and power structure. The Congress


13 The presidium of the Supreme Council, a 100-person body with de jure authority over the Main Directorate, was composed of: Józef Cyrankiewicz as chairman, alongside Zygmunt Balicki, Józef Niećko, Eugeniusz Szyr and Jan Grubecki. The presidium of the
also brought to an end the process of subordinating all of the veterans and former political prisoners to the state, which had begun in 1948 with the merger of ZOW and ZUWZoNiD. Additionally, it was an attempt to ‘manage culture’, organized in accordance with Soviet models. It offered a single language in which Poles could talk about their experiences of the Second World War in public.

The vision of history presented at the Congress provided a black-and-white image of allies and enemies, as well as interpretations of the aims of war and the meaning of wartime suffering. The struggle against ‘fascism’, broadly defined, was the only purpose of war. Martyrdom and heroism were conceptualized only in terms of class interest. Amongst the many symbols used during the Congress, the commemorative date that provided the pretext for the meeting is of particular interest: the tenth anniversary of the Nazi invasion of Poland, an event that was presented as a sign of the betrayal of the pre-war ruling elites and their ‘collaboration’ with the Third Reich. The choice of this date for a congress of war veterans could, arguably, be seen as somewhat perverse. It is unclear whether it was chosen specifically, or as a result of circumstance, e.g. because it was the only date with Second World War resonance available to the Central Committee officials who were hurrying to fulfil the directives of the Political Bureau. No matter what the motivation was, the interpretation of this anniversary served to delegitimize the pre-war Polish authorities and the efforts of all groups who were identified with them, including the Home Army and Polish Underground State. The vision of history provided by the communists made it unambiguously clear that communist rule was legitimate. Celebrating the fall of the pre-war state, the Congress also celebrated the pre-history of the birth of People’s Poland.

Above all, however, the Congress was a mechanism for bringing about increased indoctrination in the new political order. It projected a model of social relations that was demanded by the ruling authorities, both at the international and domestic levels. The route of the march from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to the Brothers in Arms monument was a demonstration of Poland’s dependence on the USSR. The crowds that gathered at the event and the individuals who gave speeches did not so much convey the size and significance of the wartime leftist resistance movement as express support for the communist authorities. In this model, all other sources of political authority were deemed to be redundant, including the Polish government-in-exile, the Catholic Church, and the anti-communist underground movement.

Main Directorate, which – as subsequent years showed – wielded de facto power over ZBoWiD, was composed of: Franciszek Jóźwiak (chairman), Wacław Rózga (first deputy chairman), Wilhelm Garnarczyk (second deputy chairman), Józef Passini (secretary) and Jerzy Jodłowski (treasurer).


Chapter 3

Fighters for peace

The propaganda of the Cold War formed the most important context for the functioning of ZBoWiD in subsequent years. The oxymoron of a fight for peace was connected to the concept of a ‘fighter’, as enshrined in the name of the organization. A fighter was different from a veteran, who was merely a former soldier. Franciszek Jóźwiak, in line with the spirit of the military propaganda of the day, warned union members against ‘resting on the laurels of past deeds.’ In his notes for the editors of Za Wolność i Lud, he emphasized that ‘our magazine should be filled with references to the fight for peace, but not in a pacifist manner – the fight for peace must always be underlined – the fight for peace is a way of assuring the defensive readiness of the country. Peace must be won, it does not come by itself.’

He stated that fighters for freedom were destined to ‘expose false American propaganda’, precisely because they had participated in the war and had been prisoners of the camps. In a different speech, he appealed:

Colleagues and friends in the fight for peace, former partisans and prisoners of the Hitlerite camps, wherever you are today, continue the fight for a better and happier peaceful life! No matter where you are – in Bombay or Barcelona, Hamburg or Rome, London or Washington – we are all together in this struggle against imperialism, in this fight for peace. We are with you.

In dozens of articles and published speeches, the magazine Za Wolność i Lud presented a polarized, Manichean vision of a primordial battle between two forces – good and evil:

Two sides are in conflict throughout the entire planet, of which one, composed of hundreds of millions of people, thirsts for peace, for the freedom of peoples and the welfare of the working individual. The second side – a league of exploiters and their servants – desires world domination for the dollar, the perpetuation of exploitation, and new, ever-increasing profits for the merchants of death.

The hegemon of the world of evil was the USA, or to be more precise, the American ruling classes – ‘the leaders of Wall Street’, the ‘idolators of the atom bomb’, who were ready to plunge mankind into a ‘sea of blood, destruction, ruin and crime.’ Franciszek Jóźwiak made references to the Second World War in his address to

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15 ‘Protokół z rozszerzonego Plenum ZG ZBoWiD, 24 lutego 1951’, AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 29, p. 58; see also ‘Protokół z rozszerzonego Plenum ZG ZBoWiD’, 1 September 1951 [a speech by Stanisław Kiryluk], AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 30, p. 18.
17 ‘Deklaracja ideowa’ in Kongres Związku Bojowników, p. 16.
the plenum of the Main Directorate of ZBoWiD in February 1951, comparing the brutality of the USA with Nazi wartime atrocities. Meanwhile, he presented the threat of the outbreak of a new war as a logical consequence of the striving of imperialism towards world domination:

> Never mind that tears have not dried after the sufferings and tortures of the war; that the ash of the victims burned in crematoria and gas chambers has still not cooled; that the wounds received from Hitlerite fascism have still not healed. A new occupier, this time American, is sharpening its wolf-like claws for the conquest of the world.18

Western Europe and Asia were likewise presented as being on the receiving end of American deceit. The theme of Korea, then at war with the USA, was especially prominent:

> Can you imagine what this country would look like if peace and freedom had been achieved in Asia? It would be one giant recreational park for the Far East. There would be a house of workers’ health here, a children’s colony there, and high up in the mountains, a retreat for writers and scholars ... Miners from Manchuria and metal-workers from Pyongyang would sunbathe here, and in this little gulf would be a swimming area.19

This vision, according to the editors of *Za Wolność i Lud*, came from the French left-wing journalist Yves Farge, speaking to a travel companion whilst on a visit to Korea. Eight years after the end of the Second World War, a magazine aimed at Polish veterans devoted more attention to conflicts in Asia than to the situation in Poland, presenting not only oriental fantasies such as that by Farge, but also, frequently, more brutal pictures. In January 1953 the editors cited a statement by Kim Yen Sun at the Congress of Peoples in Vienna:

> In all places where the foot of the American soldier leaves a trace, there will be mass graves as a testament to his crimes. American soldiers forced one of our mothers to eat the eyeball of her own child. A pregnant woman had her arm and leg cut off, then they ripped apart her midriff, pulled out the child from inside her, and quartered the foetus.20

At the same time, ZBoWiD stoked the flames of anti-German sentiment by organizing rallies against the ‘remilitarization and fascization of West Germany.’ Protesting communiqués were also sent to the representatives of Western nations and the UN. Arguments revolved around the experience of the Second World War. Franciszek Jóźwiak stated:

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20 Anon., ‘Na nowym etapie’, *Za Wolność i Lud* 1 (1953), p. 3.
Hitler’s officers have been released from prison to head newly founded divisions. The criminals of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek have once again found themselves at the same table as the power-wielders of yesterday and today. Moreover, in West Germany, the fascization of political and economic life is under way clearly and without any scruples, whereas the supporters of peace and the democratic unification of Germany, youth organizations and political groups who disagree with Adenauer’s politics are subject to brutal terror.\footnote{Przemówienie tow. “Witolda” na posiedzeniu plenarnym ZG ZBoWiD’, 24 February 1951, AZGZKRpiBWP 3, 29, p. 23, 24.}

The other side of this Manichean division of the world was the USSR – the ‘fatherland of the proletariat’ and ‘guarantor of world peace’.\footnote{Zadania ZBoWiD na obecnym etapie wygłoszone na Plenum ZG ZBoWiD 1 września 1951 przez S[tanisława] Kiryłuka’, AZGZKRpiBWP 3, 30, p. 25, 26.} Months dedicated to the deepening of Polish-Soviet friendship played an important role in the ZBoWiD calendar: the anniversary of the October Revolution (1917) was celebrated ritually, as was the anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad (1942–43), a symbol of the glory of the Red Army. A constant motif of propaganda – the USSR as the guarantor of Poland’s western border – was expanded to embrace the necessity of cooperation with the GDR, a buffer against West Germany. The citizens of the GDR were recognized as being of correct class origin, and they were relieved of the odium associated with Nazi crimes – as a result, the word ‘German’ was avoided in references to the Nazis, the words ‘fascist’ and ‘Hitlerite’ being preferred instead. The guidelines for the ZBoWiD badge design competition included an important formulation: ‘the badge should have an anti-fascist message, not an anti-German one.’\footnote{Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD, 10 listopada 1949’, AZGZKRpiBWP 3, 69, p. 21.} (See figure 3.5). Representatives of ZBoWiD frequently met with representatives of the GDR’s counterpart, the Association of Persons Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (VVN).\footnote{In 1953, VVN was dissolved and turned into the Committee of Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters (Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer, KdAW). This transformation was accompanied by an ideological and anti-Semitic purge. See: Jeffrey Herf, Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies, Cambridge, MA 1997, pp. 106–161.} These meetings took place at various events, for example at anniversary commemorations held at former camps, or at the border town of Gubin-Guben.

The guiding principle of a fight for peace was visible in the majority of the activities of ZBoWiD. The organization participated in the gathering of signatures in support of the Stockholm Appeal (1950), which called for a ban on nuclear weapons, and collected gifts for Korean children. Henryk Matysiak, speaking at a meeting in February 1951, gave detailed recommendations concerning the representation of history: ‘we must organize meetings with the former fighters of the Dąbrowski...
brigade, so that they can explain to the youth how, by fighting in Spain [in the Civil War, 1936–39], they were also fighting for our freedom, and how the Koreans and Chinese today are fighting against imperialism also to protect our interests.25

3.5 Conceptualisations of ZBoWiD member’s badge submitted to the design contest of 1950, illustrating the ruling ideas of the time. The explanation under the last one runs: ‘The Polish sword (Polish nation) cuts the chains of fascism and capitalism thereby securing world peace.’ AZGZKRPiBWP 3,7.

In the ranks of the national front

The ‘national front’ was a concept twinned to the idea of the fight for peace. Its connotations included both force (a front is formed against something, or in defence of something) and social consolidation (a front is formed by units coming together in cooperation). The idea of the front had a chequered history. It started out as a modification of a message sent out by the Communist International, formulated by its secretary general Georgi Dimitrov in the 1930s.26 At this time, the ‘popular front’ replaced the previous guiding slogan of ‘class against class’, endowing Communist ideology with a drive for integration. The great-power politics of Stalin, in particular the necessity of defending the USSR from the Third Reich, led to the addition of a patriotic accent to the idea of the front. An idea of the front that was complete with a nationalist phraseology was also present in the wartime credo of the Polish Workers’ Party in Poland and the Union of Polish Patriots in the Soviet Union.27 The first programmatic appeal of the PPR (1943) advocated uniting all forces for the struggle against the occupier, and forming a ‘national front for the fight for a free and independent Poland’ without ‘traitors and capitulators’.28 After the war, the idea of the front defined the character and boundaries of the political collective; the PPR used the idea to represent itself as a democratic and all-national party which best expressed the interests of the country, and which had grown from the roots of the Polish working movement and reflected its profoundly patriotic character.29 Towards the end of the 1940s, in conjunction with the struggle against nationalist right deviation, the patriotic accent of the concept was tempered and the scope of its meaning was reduced.

The idea of the national front was reprised in February 1951 by Bolesław Bierut at the Sixth Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee. Bierut’s aim in employing patriotic rhetoric was to try to legitimize his authority and mobilize Polish society to increase its efforts to fulfil the Six Year Plan.30 Bierut, however,

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26 See the discussion in: Zaremba, Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm, pp. 192–209.
27 The Union of Polish Patriots (Związek Patriotów Polskich; 1943–46) was created and controlled by Stalin, and its political role grew in significance after the Soviet Union broke off relations with the Polish government-in-exile in London. It functioned as a quasi-Polish political representation and was responsible, inter alia, for propaganda concerning the Polish Armed Forces in the East. Krzysztof Tyszka, Nacjonalizm w komunizmie. Ideologia narodowa w Związku Radzieckim i Polsce Ludowej, Warszawa 2004, pp. 131–135; Zaremba, Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm, pp. 121–173.
29 Tyszka, pp. 132f.
30 Zaremba, Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm, pp. 192–209.
also emphasized the class dimension of the national front, combining slogans of social (national) integration with messages typical of communist ideology—internationalism and revolution.31 Thus, the idea of the national front served not only to consolidate support for the government, but also to create an image of an enemy; it played both mobilizing and exclusionary roles.

The pronouncements made by Bolesław Bierut at the plenum of the PZPR Central Committee in February 1951 set all the agendas of the party and state. A speech made by Franciszek Jóźwiak at the plenary meeting of ZBoWiD six days later (at which the necessity of the fight for peace was also expounded) echoed Bierut almost exactly:

Our Party put forward the slogan of the national front fighting against the Hitlerite occupiers, and built up this victorious front around the KRN [Krajowa Rada Narodowa, Homeland National Council]32, simultaneously observing that the leader of this front would be the working class—only a national front of that nature could serve its purpose.33

The chairman of the veterans’ union presented a pantheon of heroes of communist Poland, going back to nineteenth century revolutionaries, and prescribed ‘the education of the members in their traditions’.34 The idea of the national front was therefore connected to the dominant interpretation of the history of Poland, which combined a nationalist pathos with legends of the workers’ movement and peasant themes.35 It was worked into a narrative that accentuated social relations, the legitimacy of the ruling authorities and the tasks facing contemporary Polish society. After Jóźwiak’s speech, ZBoWiD repeated these ideas frequently, encouraging its members to join the ranks of the national front.

The ideas of the fight for peace and the national front defined the schemes for interpreting the events of the Second World War, as well as the commemorative practices undertaken by ZBoWiD. Above all, they served in the construction of meaning at the principal sites of memory of the Second World War: Nazi camps, battlefields, forests of partisan warfare, and places of urban resistance.

31 Tyszka, p. 138.
32 The Homeland National Council was established at the end of 1943 by communists in Poland as a quasi-parliament in conspiracy; it was one of the communist alternatives to the Polish Underground State (see footnote 6 in Chapter 2).
34 Ibid.
Sites of Memory and the Myth of Victory

Concentration camps

As the propaganda of the Cold War intensified and the manipulation of the image of the ideological enemy (and the atrocities they committed) increasingly became a priority, the former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps and death camps became the emblematic collective heroes for the official historical narrative. Similarly, ZBoWiD’s membership in international camp survivors’ organizations such as FIAPP, subsequently the International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR), became the most important aspect of its ideological activity. Re-narrating the past for use in the conflicts of the present day, these organizations turned concentration camp sites into theatres of the Cold War: they emphasized that the crimes against humanity committed on these territories were the unavoidable consequence of the capitalist system.36

FIAPP, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was an organization that commemorated left-wing martyrdom and brought together several different associations from both sides of the Iron Curtain. It was transformed into FIR in 1951, and the main office was moved from Warsaw to Vienna. FIR emphasized the heroism of camp prisoners to an even greater degree than its predecessor; it also welcomed individuals who had not been inmates of a camp, but could provide evidence of their participation in the left-wing armed conspiracy during the war. The membership of ZBoWiD in FIAPP/FIR was a basis for the ‘strengthening of bonds of international solidarity with the former participants of the resistance movement and former political prisoners – today’s fighters for peace.’37 The Polish representatives in these organizations (Edward Kowalski, a former prisoner at Auschwitz, and Aleksander Szurek, a fighter in the Dąbrowski brigade during the Spanish Civil War) took part in the most important meetings of ZBoWiD. Za Wolność i Lud had a regular section dedicated to the activities of FIR. The guiding message of FIR was both universalist and internationalist, but national issues were also accented: in 1953, a report on the activity of FIR featured many patriotic formulations, such as ‘national independence’, ‘patriotic consciousness’, ‘national dignity’, and ‘the sovereignty of the fatherland’.38

The member organizations of FIR, like Polish ZBoWiD or East German VVN, waged a propaganda struggle against colonial wars, West Germany, the ratification

36 Huener, p. 79.
of the Bonn Treaty (1952) and any other actions that contributed towards the unification of Western Europe. In January 1956, General Secretary of FIR, André Leroy, condemned the European Coal and Steel Community, emphasizing that ‘the shadow of Nazism, militarism and pan-Germanism is peeking out from behind the idea of Europe.’

The main ideological enemy of FIR was the Free International Federation of Deportees and Internees of the Resistance, which was active in France from 1952. FILDIR drew on Christian values and human rights, defending the idea of the ‘free West’ and advocating the unification of Germany and also of Europe. One of the speeches printed in the journal Déportation et Liberté, published by FILDIR, bore the title: ‘From the Europe of Dachau to the Europe of Strasbourg.’

Pieter Lagrou argues that the aggressive propaganda of FIR was also the result of debates in Western Europe about the Gulag, and that they were responding to accusations of crimes against humanity in the USSR. (American funds supported, inter alia, the establishment of an international committee in Brussels, led by David Rousset, which in the years 1949–59 publicized crimes committed in the Soviet camp system). Communists in the West, including former prisoners of Nazi camps (who were affiliated with FIR), denied the existence of the Gulag. Anti- and pro-Soviet groups sparked conflicts within various associations of war victims.

Organizations associated with FIAPP/FIR insisted that the idea of a communist concentration camp was a historical nonsense: only fascism was responsible for the death of millions, and the fascist threat was still real. Edward Kowalski stated at the plenum of the ZBoWiD Central Committee:

The crimes, the atrocities, mass murder, and similar deeds of Hitlerism were not something that resulted from any specific traits of the German people. They are rather the inseparable companion of every imperialism in the epoch of its decay, of its transition into direct aggression, aimed at salvaging the bankrupt capitalist regime at any price, even at the price of murdering millions of people.

The majority of events organized at former concentration camp sites by ZBoWiD were held under the auspices of FIR. Every year, usually in April on the anniversary

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39 Lagrou, p. 277.
40 Ibid., p. 279.
41 These conflicts affected organizations that worked with FIR, including: the National Confederation of Political Prisoners (Confédération Nationale des Prisonniers Politiques) in Belgium, the National Union of Former Political Prisoners (Nationale Vereniging der Ex-Politieke Gevangenen) in Holland, and the French National Federation of Deportees, Internees and Patriots (Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Internés Résistants et Patriotes) and the National Federation of Deportees and Internees of the Resistance (Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Interné de la Résistance), ibid., pp. 270f.
42 ‘Przemówienie Edwarda Kowalskiego na Plenum ZG ZBoWiD’, 24 February 1951, AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 29, p. 73.
of the liberation of Buchenwald, the International Week of the Fight against Fascism and War was organized (also known as the Week of International Solidarity). Foreign delegates visited Poland, and Poles travelled abroad. Commemorative events were held in the GDR – in Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück – and also in Poland – at Auschwitz and Majdanek. The leadership of FIR also tried to gain control of commemorative events at former camps located in Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), specifically Mauthausen and Dachau, which led to arguments with the authorities of those states and also with non-communist victims’ organizations.

Buchenwald and Auschwitz became the most important sites where the socialist bloc demonstrated its power. Buchenwald symbolized the communist resistance movement in the camps: the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) cultivated a myth of the liberation of the camp by imprisoned communists, silencing the fact of its liberation by the American military. The first major exhibition at the site was organized in late 1951 by former inmates who had been members of the communist underground. The authors of the exhibition, however, soon became victims of purges within the SED, for example Ernst Busse (a member of the leadership of the German Communist Party, Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, KPD) who was sent to the Soviet forced labour camp at Vorkuta, where he died. In 1954, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the death of Ernst Thälmann (leader of the KPD, executed at Buchenwald), a new exhibition was opened that simultaneously accentuated the ‘patriotic character’ of the German ‘anti-fascist resistance movement’ and also strived to maintain the image of unity within the oppressed classes during the war.

The organizers of the exhibition requested that ZBoWiD prepare the Polish component. The organization’s records give some indication of the nature of this process: a major feature was the top-down ‘designation’ of martyrs, whereby it was unimportant whether individuals who would be commemorated at the German exhibition had actually died at Buchenwald. At a session of the presidium of the Main Directorate, ‘outstanding, deceased Polish representatives of the Resistance Movement [were] chosen, whose names could be inserted into the memorial plaque at the museum in Buchenwald,’ and the ‘decision [was] made to propose a list to the Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee, comprising the following names: Nowotko or Finder, Fornalska, Bishop Kozal.’

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43 Lagrou, p. 275, 276.
45 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD’, 30 July 1954. AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 81, p. 19. Marceli Nowotko (1893–1942) was the first secretary of Polish Workers’ Party.
the presidium, clearly afraid of making a politically incorrect decision, noted that ‘the candidature of comrades from the former PPS [Polish Socialist Party] will be confirmed by the Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee.’

The State Museum at Auschwitz (Oświęcim) was another important site for Cold War propaganda. The image of the enemy, as commemorated at this museum, played a particularly significant role. In 1949 the Ministry of Culture ordered the rearrangement of the exhibition established two years earlier. The guidelines for the new display stipulated that a variety of forms of fascism would be included (i.e. not only Hitlerism), and that the fascist tendencies of the USA and West Germany would also be given sufficient attention. The exhibition was ready towards the end of 1950 and featured, for example, photographs of ‘released criminals formerly of IG Farben’, with inscriptions claiming that the American imperialists had opened factories for the manufacture of Zyklon B. One of the added sections of the exhibition was entitled ‘Sources of Genocide’, and presented British colonial policy and camps for the Boers in Africa, which were depicted as a prototype of the Nazi concentration camps, as well as black ghettos in the USA, which supposedly were the model for the Jewish ghettos of the Third Reich. Another part of the display bore the title ‘The Fight for Peace’, and presented the following motifs: the destruction of Hiroshima; concentration camps in Greece, Spain and Yugoslavia; the success of the Six Year Plan; wars in Asia. The theme of the ‘liberation struggle’ in Korea was particularly prominent.

A ZBoWiD commission, headed by Henryk Matysiak, took part in the creation of the Auschwitz exhibition, suggesting modifications to the content of the exhibit named ‘Along the Party Line’. Like in Buchenwald, the final decisions on the form of the exhibition were taken by the party leadership, including Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz himself.

In 1955, as part of the preparations for the tenth anniversary commemorations of the liberation of Auschwitz, a new permanent exhibition opened (a large part of which is still on display today). The Thaw had a considerable influence on its content, and it was at this time that the most aggressive motifs of Cold War

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His death in Warsaw in 1942 from bullet wounds has never been entirely explained. Paweł Finder (1904–44) succeeded him as first secretary; he was captured, tortured by the Gestapo and shot in Warsaw in 1944, together with Małgorzata Fornalska (1902–44), a female communist who at the time was one of the main editors of party propaganda materials. Finally, Michał Kozal (1893–1943) was a Polish Catholic priest killed at Dachau concentration camp.

47 Huener, pp. 101f. See also Wóycicka, Die Kanalisierung, p. 187.
48 Huener, pp. 99f.
49 Ibid., p. 95.
propaganda disappeared from the museum (although the revanchism of the FRG remained a key theme), and messages of Polish martyrdom appeared. The absence of the Holocaust narrative in both displays is well-documented. Jonathan Huener argues that this practice of erasure was the product of the internationalist message of Stalinist discourse, with its anti-Semitism camouflaged under the slogan ‘the struggle against cosmopolitanism’, and of the dominance of Polish martyrlogy in later times. It is important to note, however, that the tendency not to view the Holocaust as a site of memory but to heroize the victims was present in the entire Eastern Bloc in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as in Israel/Palestine and in several countries of Western Europe.

ZBoWiD replaced the Polish Union of Former Political Prisoners as the principal organizer of commemorative events at the former site of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The scenarios of these commemorations and demonstrations were similar to other communist festivities. Foreign guests and local activists paraded against a background of portraits, flags and wreaths. Crowds composed of party representatives, regional and national government figures, social organizations and trade unions participated by listening to long speeches. The first major event organized jointly by ZBoWiD and FIAPP took place in April 1950, and was held in conjunction with a collection of signatures in support of the Stockholm Appeal. Franciszek Jóźwiak emphasized during the process of preparation that ‘when the campaign begins on April 11 ... the Union must express its support for the fight for peace through radio broadcasts, press exposure, posters, closed regional rallies and one open rally at Oświęcim.’ Over 30,000 people took part in this demonstration, including many foreign delegates. In Warsaw voivodeship alone, forty organized rallies and commemorative meetings were held to coincide with the Auschwitz event.

Patriot-priests who were members of ZBoWiD also took part in the internationalist demonstrations held at the former camp. Jan Żaryn argues that the convocation of the Main Committee of Priests (and its regional subsidiaries) by ZBoWiD at the beginning of 1950 was intended by the party authorities as a

50 For a detailed description of the display see ibid., pp. 121–143.
51 Ibid., p. 96.
54 See the description in: Huener, p. 97.
55 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia ZO ZBoWiD w Warszawie’, 26 April 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 380, p. 207f.
way to facilitate the capture of the possessions of the Polish branch of Caritas, and that public orations by priests harmonized with official propaganda against the Vatican and the Catholic Church in Poland, whilst also being anti-German in tone. Some of these patriot-priests had survived Nazi camps; according to Żaryn, these were the individuals who were supposed to be most easily convinced by the arguments about a new war and German revanchism. The involvement of the clergy, however, had the consequence that Catholic religious practices became a part of official commemoration. In June 1950, a group of more than forty priests went on a pilgrimage to Auschwitz, where they celebrated mass, read out a letter from Józef Cyrankiewicz and prayed for the well-being of Bolesław Bierut. The press presented this event as a ‘spontaneous’ demonstration by the priests in support of peace.

ZBoWiD also applied emphasis to its participation in ceremonies commemorating the female victims of medical experiments at the concentration camp at Ravensbrück, whom they invariably described as having been treated as ‘guinea pigs’ (króliki doświadczalne). Among the various groups who had been victimized in the camps, young women bearing visible physical injuries became the supreme symbol of this crime. In February 1951, representatives of the Main Directorate proposed that such women speak out at meetings of the Women’s League in order to ‘voice the aim and significance of the fight for peace, based on their own experiences during the occupation.’ They appealed primarily for former ‘guinea pigs’ to speak ‘at mass meetings and de-mask the perfidy of the Bonn government. They should deplore [the West German] government’s disgraceful treatment of Polish women, who are consigned to living off charity.’ The ‘charity’ in this phrase is a reference to discussions then taking place in the FRG and the UN on the issue of German reparation law, which at this time did not provide for claims from victims of the Third Reich not living in the FRG. In July 1951, as a result of international pressure and political debates, the West German government passed a law stipulating that compensation for war crimes could be offered to citizens of countries with which the FRG had diplomatic relations. This decision excluded the citizens of Poland (against the expectations of Polish victims). It was only on the threshold of the 1950s and 1960s that the

57 Żaryn, ‘Księża patrioci’, p. 139.
58 Huener, pp. 98f.
West German government made provisions for some financial compensation to the Polish inmates of Ravensbrück.  

In January 1952, on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, ZBoWiD organized an International Meeting of Former Prisoners of Auschwitz, declaring its aim to be: ‘the discussion of current political problems concerning the regeneration of the Wehrmacht, the amnestying of former camp torturers and collaborationists, the profanation of the patriotic ideals of the Resistance Movement, and the persecution of former participants of this movement for their patriotic deeds during the occupation.’ Delegates from eighteen European countries took part in this event, more than half of whom represented associations and committees of former prisoners that were not affiliated to FIR. The programme was announced in the press and on the radio. In addition to a tour of the former camp and a conference in Warsaw, the programme included meetings of delegates with ‘the Polish populace’.  

International concentration camp committees were established under the auspices of FIR in 1954, for Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen, Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen. Representatives of ZBoWiD participated in the sessions of the International Auschwitz Committee (IAC) from the outset. ZBoWiD also financed a significant portion of IAC’s activity and was involved in its initiatives, including searching for war criminals and making compensation claims to the FRG on behalf of former prisoners. In 1954, ZBoWiD and the IAC jointly organized, inter alia, a conference for doctors that documented the extent of the physical exhaustion of prisoners. The IAC and ZBoWiD also jointly prepared


62 Ibid.

63 The headquarters of the IAC, like FIR’s, were in Vienna. The general secretary of the IAC was Hermann Langbein, a member of the Austrian Communist Party. He left the party in 1956 in protest against the suppression of demonstrations in Hungary that year. He was also known for critical statements concerning the GDR. In 1960 Langbein was expelled from the IAC leadership, and in 1962 the headquarters were moved to Warsaw. See: Lagrou, p. 274, 275; Huener, pp. 147–150; Zofia Wóycicka, ‘Zur Internationalität der Gedenkkultur: Die Gedenkstätte Auschwitz-Birkenau im Spannungsfeld zwischen Ost und West 1954–1978’, Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 45 (2005), pp. 269–292.
what was then the largest-scale commemorative event to have taken place at the site of Auschwitz: the tenth-anniversary ceremony of the liberation of the camp. In 1955, thousands of people from all around Poland took part in the event, as well as many foreign delegates. The most important part of the ceremony took place at Birkenau. The main speakers were Marie Normand, head of the French Auschwitz Committee, and Józef Cyrankiewicz, who was always present on such occasions. The Polish speakers by this stage avoided direct accusations linking American imperialism with fascism, but instead underlined the threat emerging from the remilitarization of the FRG.64

Much can also be learned about the forms of historical imagination that were dominant in the Cold War period from reading articles about the concentration camps in Za Wolność i Lud. Their defining characteristic was presentism: articles had a didactic tone and offered a simplified interpretation of history. They described a space in which ruthless oppressors persecuted communists, who in turn were martyrs in service of a good cause. However, ‘inhuman conditions’, ‘famine-inducing food rations’, ‘slave labour’, and ‘the bestial atrocities of the SS’ did not break the revolutionary spirit. Prisoners being led to their deaths sang the Internationale.65 ‘I have served people and for them I die’, Hanka Sawicka is supposed to have proclaimed as she was about to die at Pawiak prison in Warsaw.66 According to journalist Krystyna Gust, ‘there were communists among the many thousands of people who arrived in Mauthausen in the transports from various countries – and they were the best patriots, resolute in their fight against fascism, brave and devoted fighters for the freedom of peoples.’ The members of the international resistance organization ‘shared their piece of bread with colleagues, despite their hunger.’ They distributed medicine, took on leadership roles among the prisoners, assisted those in need, attended to the sick and those on the verge of death, obtained weapons and taught the prisoners to fight.67 The Soviet prisoners of war were noted for their particular heroism and cunning: ‘when they realized the difficulty of their situation, they immediately set about devising an escape plan,’ wrote Gust.68 Za Wolność i Lud also featured stories of escapes from Auschwitz and the Jewish uprisings at Treblinka and Sobibór, presenting them in terms of revolutionary progress and emphasizing that communists played leading roles. The

64 Huener, p. 116, 117.
65 Tadeusz Kowzan, ‘Mój wyrok na was zapadł już dawno. W 10 rocznicę śmierci Juliusza Fucika’, Za Wolność i Lud 9 (1953), p. 17.
68 Ibid., p. 16, 17. See also: Pierre Daix ‘Dzień, jakich w Mauthausen było wiele’, Za Wolność i Lud 5 (1953), p. 11.
only notable exception to this monolithic narrative of communist endeavour was
the recognition of the martyrdom of Polish priests imprisoned at Dachau, whereby
care was taken to point out that they were sympathetic to the revolutionary idea;
in this way, the image of the progressive patriot-priests was upheld.69

Propagandistic manipulation was also achieved by means of applying similar
categories to describe both Nazi and non-Nazi concentration camps. The pre-war
Polish authorities were presented as having collaborated with the Third Reich,
and thus, the prisoners of the Polish Sanacja regime and the inmates of German
concentration camps were seen as equivalent. The anonymous author of a text
dedicated to the anniversary of the German invasion of Poland wrote:

The future tormentor of Poland, the tormentor of Auschwitz and Majdanek, the head of
the Gestapo Himmler was graciously received in Poland. [President Ignacy] Mościcki
would go on hunting expeditions with Goering. At Bereza Kartuska, people were
beaten in ways tried and tested at Dachau and Buchenwald. [Foreign Minister Józef]
Beck waited on Ribbentrop like a butler and prostrated himself in front of Hitler at
Berchtesgaden.70

Authors publishing in Za Wolność i Lud employed images of workers’ rallies in
the inter-war period that were violently dispersed, making implicit comparisons
with the Second World War. Thus, Monika Warneńska sought to show that at
a workers’ strike in Kraków in 1923, heavily armed police dealt with women
in a brutal and bestial manner, sparing neither the sick nor the pregnant.71
Another author compared the forms of torture used against communists to Nazi
methods of persecution: ‘men had their testicles beaten with truncheons, women
were raped, water was poured into people’s noses, heels were beaten with
truncheons.’72 Such torture, however, did not quash the rebellion, but rather
stiffened the will to resist, which reappeared during the Second World War as
anti-Nazi resistance. Za Wolność i Lud underlined repeatedly that communists
were the only true defenders of the country. In September 1939, they set out
for the front straight from the prisons of the Sanacja regime: ‘the commune of
political prisoners spontaneously formed four marching columns and set out
to do battle in defence of the threatened fatherland; they were ready to join
the struggle immediately, despite their tribulations as prison inmates, in order
to defeat the Hitlerite enemy.’ Marian Buczek, who died at the time, became a

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70 ‘Z perspektywy czternastu lat’, Za Wolność i Lud 10 (1953), pp. 3–5.
72 Mieczysław Bibrowski, ‘Obrońca prawdy. W 10 rocznicę śmierci Teodora Duracza’, Za
Wolność i Lud 6 (1953), p. 10, 11.
symbol of this fight: ‘a model communist, a patriot fighting for independence, freedom, democracy and socialism.’

The revolutionary interpretation of the concentration camps even enabled authors to draw a connection with the nineteenth-century Siberian exile camps (the Gulag, needless to say, was never mentioned); this analogy appeared in several narratives about the lives of Polish and Russian revolutionaries. In his story about the radical activist Jan Hłasko (1855–1881), Józef Kozłowski cited fragments of a poem by Bolesław Czerwieński (1851–1888), in which the exiled hero dies of a heart attack when he sees a transport of prisoners being taken to their execution:

Here they are – comrades in one great cause,
Followers of the same mace.
Though they are in chains, they are free, great though tormented,
Their spirits are forged in the same flames.
They are an eternal threat of revenge to the tyrant,
They are the future which must be won!

The Romantic motifs present in the Siberian stories were also strongly featured in the centenary commemorations of the death of poet Adam Mickiewicz (the ‘Year of Mickiewicz’, 1955). These ceremonies also became one of the symptoms of the Thaw. A former prisoner of a sub-camp of Mauthausen, Gusen II, found solace in the reading of the third part of Mickiewicz’s dramatic poem Dziady:

Kibitki carriages [which transported prisoners in Tsarist Russia] have merged in my memory with the cattle wagons in which we were hurriedly shuttled from camp to camp as the Red Army approached ... My impressions from reading intertwine with my personal experiences: I read and I compare, read and argue with the great poet.
I read and remember, I read and make associations, I read and reproach myself for my lack of humility, because sometimes it seems to me that I suffered more than the characters of the drama.

The camp narratives featured in many issues of Za Wolność i Lud often ended with accusations that the Americans and their allies were continuing the crimes of Nazism. At the time of the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the newspaper referred to ‘FBI torture houses.’ When the Rosenbergs’ execution was carried out, Teofil Witek noted that: ‘nightmarish experience from Buchenwald were revived

75 Zaremba, Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm, pp. 169–171, 224.
in my memory.’78 The author of a text about a Greek prison on the island of Jura in the Aegean Sea stated that ‘the American imperialists and their Greek monarchist-fascist puppets’ had set up a concentration camp which was ‘the continuation and perfection of the Hitlerite camps such as Dachau.’79 Likewise, in Yugoslavia, ‘an unfortunate country, a land of horror, a land of prisons, concentration camps, GestapO torture and gallows’, the prison island of Goli otok80 was identified as a ‘symbol of the monstrosity of the Titoist-fascist regime’, where convicts were subjected to sophisticated forms of torture. The camp guards were sadists and murderers, and were descendants of ‘the Gestapo, Mussolini’s political police, all forms of collaborationists, Chetniks and Ustashe’; ‘whilst beaten by the guards’ Made in USA cudgels, the prisoners move enormous boulders with their bare hands, building military premises on the island.’ The author reassured the reader, however, that the prisoners ‘do not bow their heads, their belief in a better tomorrow is as hard as steel and stronger than death.’81

Thus, the martyrology of the camps acquired a supra-historical dimension in the ideology of the Cold War era. The camp was a space where the heroes of the communist cause suffered. It was also a place that represented the worst crimes of fascism in its various embodiments: the Sanacja regime, Nazi Germany and American imperialism, among others. Only the ultimate victory of the forces of peace and social justice, centred in Moscow, could bring an end to people’s suffering.

**Fields of battle**

The history of camp martyrdom was embellished with a narrative of soldiers’ experience, in descriptions of the glorious march and crushing victories of the Red Army as they liberated the Polish territories from German occupation. The Polish Armed Forces in the East were also prominent heroes of this narrative.82 The former war correspondent and a political commissar in the Polish Armed Forces and now a prominent communist poet Jerzy Putrament paid tribute to the deceased Stalin in 1953 with the words: ‘the prisoner of Auschwitz will not

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80 An island in the northern Adriatic Sea, today part of Croatia. In 1949 it was transformed into a harsh prison and labour camp for political opponents of Josip Broz Tito’s regime in Yugoslavia.
82 See footnote 13 in Chapter 2.
forget the One who rescued him from death. The name of Stalin will live in his soul.’

Tales about soldiers combined internationalist messages with patriotic ones. They employed motifs drawn from Polish history: the Polish Army, fighting alongside the Red Army, was ascribed a genealogy not only encompassing medieval battles against the Teutonic Knights, wars with Sweden in the early modern era, nineteenth-century popular uprisings, but also culminating in ‘proletarian internationalism’. Figures such as Wanda Wasilewska and Alfred Lampe (the founders of the Union of Polish Patriots, the Stalin-sponsored political organization that operated within the Polish Armed Forces in the East) or Karol Świerczewski (a communist, participant of the International Brigades, and Red Army general) were presented as heirs of the emancipatory tradition embodied by individuals such as Stefan Czarniecki, hetman of the Polish armed forces in the seventeenth century, Tadeusz Kościuszko, leader of the 1794 insurrection against the partitions of Poland, Jarosław Dąbrowski, one of the leaders of the January Uprising (1863) and Józef Bem, nineteenth-century Polish and Hungarian independence activist.

These accounts also fused ideological content with narrative devices typical of tales of military heroism. *Za Wolność i Lud* carried articles that described friendship and loyalty amongst comrades-in-arms, heroic and wise leaders, youthful energy, the will for revenge, and the shared tribulations of military life. The image of the war was black-and-white, the enemy always evil and ‘our’ hero a beacon of morality with no discernible faults. The senior officers acted as experienced teachers who led by example: they mitigated and avoided rash decisions, and were always the last to leave the field of battle.

These tales heavily accented the theme of blood, a symbol of the brotherhood-in-arms of Polish and Soviet soldiers. Their shared death and common places of burial were the ultimate proof of unity. Similarly to the camp histories, inspiration was taken from nineteenth-century Polish literature and the tradition of messianism. To give a characteristic example, a story based on the motif of a senior officer’s death emphasizes Polish-Soviet friendship by employing the Romantic image of the commander’s body being interred in the forest, as the soldiers mourn over the grave:

Col. Krasnov lay in his Soviet uniform, which was decorated with numerous medals awarded for his military achievements: at the Battle of Kursk and Orel, by the Dnieper, near Chisinau and Iași. The Polish soldiers loved him like a father. Tears glistened in their eyes. And when the dug-out had become completely quiet, when after a couple of hours the mourners had all gone, returning to their battle positions, a young artillerist came to bid farewell to his colonel ... He removed his head covering and knelt by

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the corpse. He held this position for a while, and then got up, kissed the dead man’s hand, and unfurled a rolled-up object. It was a red-and-white flag. He must have taken it from the dug-out where the division’s political department’s equipment was kept. He assiduously, as if putting on a scarf, wrapped the Polish flag around the body. The white-and-red banner engirdled the Soviet uniform dark-scarlet with blood.84

The theme of Polish-Soviet friendship and the symbolism of blood also feature in Eugeniusz Kuszko’s story Nad Nysą i pod Budziszynem (‘Battles of the Nysa [Neisse] River and of Bautzen [a town in eastern Germany]’). In Christ-like fashion, the blood shed by Soviet officers displays reviving properties: it portends the rebirth of the Polish nation. A Red Army officer leading a Polish company dies and becomes an example to his men:

Only the last mine finished him off. It blew off his legs and tore his chest. But the company was already beyond the field of treacherous mines. Next to the leader lay a young Polish soldier, a boy of hardly eighteen years of age, hit by a bullet from a heavy machine gun. His young face looked as if it was smiling at the bright sunlit spring sky. A scarlet streak of blood tinted the soil ... From this blood was born a wonderful life and the eternal fraternity of combat.85

The heroic fight of the Polish soldier alongside the Soviet one also had a compensatory character: it atoned for the ‘betrayal’ of General Władysław Anders, i.e. the fact that he had led some Polish troops out of the USSR to the West.86 The Polish Armed Forces in the East underwent their military baptism with honour, thereby eradicating the disgrace of Anders’s actions:

At the same time as the Hitlerite hordes approached the walls of impregnable Stalingrad, the band of fascist ringleaders with Anders at its front disgracefully deserted the field of battle, leading Polish soldiers into the wilderness. For the second time after the defeat of September [1939], the Polish bourgeoisie betrayed and sold out the interests of the Polish people. This disgraceful deed of a degenerate fascist, of a traitor to the Polish people in a general’s uniform, filled the hearts of the entire Soviet emigration with a feeling of deep pain and shame, as they waged armed battle against the occupier.87

ZBoWiD participated in the ceremonies of the Day of the Polish Armed Forces, which took place on the anniversary of the Battle of Lenino (1943),88 and also commemorated the anniversaries of other battles in 1945 that symbolized important breakthroughs at the front, such as in Warsaw, at Wał Pomerński, the Battle of the

86 See footnote 13 in Chapter 2.
88 See footnote 39 in Chapter 2.
Oder-Neisse, as well as the conquest of Berlin. The Union’s leadership ordered that emphasis be placed on the image of the individual proletarian soldier, thus a former soldier promised to carry out these instructions with ‘Bolshevik obstinacy’: ‘Just as the heroes of Stalingrad sang songs throughout their victorious march, so let us be led by that proletarian song in our union work.’ The Red Army, with its advanced technology, brilliant officers ‘trained by the Stalinist military school’ and soldiers with ‘exceptional resourcefulness and orientation’, was held to be a source of strength, a model for everyday behaviour, and a guarantor of the security and ultimate victory of the forces of peace.

The forest and the urban resistance

The image of the camps and the prisons, where the ‘progressive portions of humanity’ suffered and fought, and of the Red Army rushing to the rescue, was supplemented by descriptions of anti-German resistance. ‘Not all the lads let themselves be locked up behind the barbed wire of the concentration camps. Some settled in distant villages, others went into hiding in the forest. Partisan divisions were formed.’ Forests and the workers’ districts of cities were primary sites of memory cultivated by the propaganda of the period, places where the resistance movement was commemorated. The anti-German conspiracy was predominantly identified with the People’s Guard. Among approximately one hundred accounts of armed resistance in the Second World War (narrated as biographies/hagiographies or as short stories) that appeared in Za Wolność i Lud between 1949 and 1955, more than half described the deeds of the GL/AL or the military dramas of the PPR. Fictionalized accounts of fighting originated primarily in the Lublin, Kielce, or Warsaw regions, i.e. in central parts of Poland that were part of the General Government under German occupation. In reality, most partisan activity was concentrated in the eastern parts of pre-war Poland, but descriptions from these parts were censored due to circumstances such as the wartime struggle against the Ukrainian partisans, the role of the Home Army in the anti-Soviet Operation Tempest, and the fact that these eastern provinces became part of the USSR after 1945.

Tales about partisans contained, as a rule, a well-defined idea of the enemy: the Germans and their alleged ‘collaborators’ amongst the leaders of the AK, the

89 ‘Protokół z rozszerzonego Plenum ZG ZBoWiD’, 1 września 1951, AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 30, p. 9.
92 See footnote 20 in Chapter 2.
93 See footnote 17 in Chapter 2.
government in London, the NSZ and the ‘reactionary clergy’. The bravery, devotion and compassion of the communist underground fighters stood in opposition to the cowardice, treachery and lack of honour of the AK. In this picture, the perfidy of the AK commandership was added to by its incompetence, infighting within the middle ranks and the needless deaths of ordinary soldiers. This propaganda presented an ambivalent image of the Peasants’ Battalions, which were traditionally linked to the pre-war peasants’ party, the Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL). During the war years, grassroots divisions formed by peasants, often by people hiding in order to avoid deportation to Germany for forced labour, were a real force in the countryside and provided competition to communist agitation. Moreover, the border between affiliation with the Peasants’ Battalions and the Home Army was often very blurred. However, authors of articles in Za Wolność i Lud presented the fighters of the BCh as being torn between the GL/AL and AK, thereby depriving them of their own political identity: it was only the GL/AL that defended the village against deportations, forced labour and food requisitions. The anonymous author of a story about ‘the birth of popular power in Kielce region’ describes smallholder peasants deliberating at a secret meeting in a barn guarded by AL partisans. Their ‘long conversations, which ran away into the future and which sought reckoning with both the past and the present’, were symbolically contrasted with the background of the black legend of AK and NSZ:

In the cities and towns with a majority-Jewish population, capitalist speculators, degenerate NSZ-ites and the police prey like hyenas on the extermination and tragedy of the Jews; they plunder in league with the Hitlerites and hand people over to the enemy. The village councils, ruled by rich men kowtowing to London, assign the entire burden of the requisitions ordered by the Germans not to the kulaks but to the small- and medium-holders; instead of the sons of the kulaks they send the sons and daughters of poor villagers into forced labour in Germany… AK and NSZ divisions, created in the courtyard and then stationed there, led by Sanacja officers, guard the harvest against the GL and BCh.94

Similarly to the discourse of the camps and the soldiers’ tales, authors writing about partisans in Za Wolność i Lud employed familiar tropes from nineteenth-century Polish literature. The forest became a specific and magical setting for the narration of war stories. It was a space of freedom, acting as both shelter and as a theatre of battle. Here, experienced leaders trained young fighters. The partisans repaired their weapons on the forest floor, planned ambushes, treated the wounded, wrote letters to their loved ones, discussed politics, and made friendships.95

95 See e.g.: Maria Castellatti, ‘Bitwa pod Kochanami’, Za Wolność i Lud 10 (1953), p. 10, 11; Ryszard Nazarewicz, ‘Stefan. Jak walczyła brygada AL im. gen Bema’, Za Wolność
The Soviet partisan movement was the point of reference and the ideal for discussing the activities of the Polish partisans. *Za Wolność i Lud* reprinted excerpts from Soviet accounts, thereby intertwining the stories of Soviet partisans with the fates of members of the GL. Narratives about the Polish, Russian and Belarusian underground resistance and partisan movements were complemented with accounts of the left-wing resistance in other countries. Just as in the stories of the camps and the regular armed forces, the authors of partisan narratives emphasized the positive aspects of the interpersonal bonds formed during the war, drawing particular attention to an internationalist brotherhood. In the divisions of the GL and AL, every individual should be able to find his place, irrespective of his background: ‘the Polish Marszałek brothers, the Jew Rubin, and the Soviet partisans “Kolka the Paramedic” and “Shaggy Vasil” all fought together.’ It was also claimed that soldiers from the Union of Armed Struggle (Związek Walki Zbrojnej, ZWZ; the predecessor of the AK) and from the Home Army joined the GL partisans, when they realized the righteousness of the cause and the necessity of immediate armed struggle:

Should we let ourselves be picked out one by one? No. Everyone in the division was of this opinion, even ‘Luby’, who after all had been a member of the ZWZ not long ago, and had nothing to lose from more waiting. The Hitlerites had caught him and were about to execute him when the Guard set him free. He did not return to his old base; he preferred to join the GL.

Such stories made references to workers’ holidays, employing presentist fallacies for rhetorical effect. A history written for the May 1 celebration, for example, suggested this holiday was observed by AL partisans in forests during the war. According to the author, ‘the partisans were able to step up their military activity thanks to the duties they undertook on May 1.’ After a successful skirmish with Germans in the Parczew area, they returned to camp ‘with no casualties.’ Meanwhile, the Guard helped small- and medium-holder peasants in the fields,
provided military assistance to the partisans of the AK, who thanked them ‘with tears in their eyes’, and also invited Soviet partisans stationed nearby to their field academy in the forest.¹⁰⁰

The motif of Polish-Soviet friendship was also employed by Maria Castellati in her short story ‘A Common Fight for a Common Cause’ (Wspólna walka o wspólną sprawę). Her protagonists Aleksei and Ivan are Russians who have escaped from a PoW camp and joined the AL. Together, ‘they tirelessly organized assaults, gave battle, and victoriously faced up to the enemy’, and ‘on peaceful evenings, when nothing disturbed the troops, they gathered in the forest or in a village they had secured. They organized meetings, conversations, and talks. They spoke about the political situation, the fighting at the front, socialism and the rural economy.’¹⁰¹

In nearly all accounts, authors emphasized the social support enjoyed by the AL. They described the routes of the local girls who acted as distributors and messengers. Another major theme was the devotion of wives and mothers to the cause of their husbands and sons:

Without this universal support, where would the GL partisan be able to rest his head on a long winter night? Who would feed and nurse him, if not the common Polish peasant-women and female workers? A moment of quiet under the pleasant roofs of their houses was also to be found for the PPR activist being hunted by the Gestapo, the democrat under persecution by reactionaries among his own countrymen, the Soviet PoW who had escaped from a death camp, and the Jew being chased by racists.¹⁰²

Stories about the urban resistance were usually set in the workers’ districts of Warsaw.¹⁰³ Za Wolność i Lud devoted a significant amount of space to stylized biographies of the ‘Fourths’ (Czwartaki), the participants of a storm division of the AL formed towards the end of 1943. Articles claimed that ‘life in the collective nurtured [the soldiers’] most valuable character traits. None of them ever left a comrade in a state of need.’¹⁰⁴ The activity of this group was represented in such a way as to overshadow the legend of the AK and the Warsaw Uprising. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, meanwhile, was commemorated selectively. Grand ceremonies co-organized by ZBoWiD marked the tenth anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising in 1953. On this occasion, a Jewish communist, Colonel Gustaw Alef-Bolkowiak (who had spent the war outside of the ghetto), published an article in Za Wolność

¹⁰⁰ Anon., ‘1 Maja w lasach parczewskich’, Za Wolność i Lud 5 (1953), p. 6, 7.
¹⁰⁴ Maria Castellati, ‘Czwartacy’, Za Wolność i Lud 6 (1953), p. 6, 7.
in which he depicted the uprising as a ‘conscious act of fighting for the freedom and independence of Poland, an act of struggle which had its origins in the Polish Workers’ Party, in the first ranks of the People’s Guard in the Warsaw Ghetto.’ He portrayed the class background of the ghetto, contrasting the general poverty and the Jewish formations of the GL to the ‘traitors’, i.e. the ‘bourgeois’ Judenräte, the auxiliary police, and ‘fascist-Zionist’ organizations.105

The messages of stories about partisans usually stretched to the present day: ‘and just as the partisans of the Parczew forests with their armed struggle against the occupier tightened the ranks of the national front for the freedom and independence of Poland, so today in our liberated homeland must we strengthen her with redoubled effort and work in the National Front for Struggle and Peace and the Six Year Plan,’ wrote Ryszard Nazarewicz, a former member of the AL, party historian and member of ZBoWiD. Former partisans, as well as high officials of the communist party, strived to ascribe a special significance to the anniversaries of partisan skirmishes and battles, attempting to separate them from the ceremonies of the most important celebration day connected to the memory of the war – the International Week of Solidarity (i.e. the commemoration of the liberation of the camps). However, only the next decade would bring significant changes in this respect (see Chapter 5). In the 1950s, no matter how important the legend of the communist partisan movement was for the PPR, it remained in the shadow of the narrative of the concentration camps and soldiers’ triumphs.

**Behind the Scenes: Organization as Illusion**

**Unity and exclusion**

Stories of camp prisoners, soldiers, and partisans were written to bear witness to the unity of the fight against the fascist enemy. Unity also demanded unified symbols – membership cards and fees were a basic requirement of every mass organization in a communist state.106 A representative of the regional directorate in Warsaw, drawing attention to the low intake of fees, emphasized that ‘divisions must understand that the membership fees are not only a source of income, they are also a measure of the political and social consciousness of a member of ZBoWiD

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106 According to historian Marcin Kula, a party member’s card (*legitymacja*) was ‘something between a holy relic and an important cult symbol’. See Marcin Kula, *Religiopodobny komunizm*, Kraków 2003, p. 88.
as well as of his sense of belonging to the Union.”

The official standard was also a sign of the unity of the ranks. According to the instructions of the regional directorate, the standard ‘should be carried not only by actual military personnel, but also by civilians, former prisoners, partisans and veterans of 1905.” The standard’s design was decided upon at a session of the presidium of the Main Directorate in July 1950. The Union’s leaders then ordered that all of the flags of the organizations that preceded ZBoWiD be re-done so as to be identical.

The idea of unity was also connected to a belief in large numbers, as the number of members within an organization was an important indicator of the political system’s authority and strength. ZBoWiD was intended as a mass organization, even a giant one. The propaganda documents distributed during the Unification Congress spoke of 400–500,000 individuals brought together under the aegis of ZBoWiD; this figure was repeated in numerous publications about the Union throughout the communist period. However, these data were far from reliable. The presidium of the Main Directorate admitted as much in 1950: ‘the number of members given after the Congress was not correct – they said 400,000, but checks have shown that there are 200,000.’ According to a report of the Supreme Audit Office (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli) in 1951: ‘the data concerning the number of members of the Union, given by the Department of Propaganda and Organization, are not reflected in the data of the Personnel Department.’

Whatever the actual number of members, it was constantly dwindling during the times of Stalinism: towards the end of 1956, the Main Directorate attempted once again to establish the Union’s membership count, and found that there were 50,000 people at most. The idea of unity was, at that time, an idea that excluded others. As seen in the war stories above, the idea of the enemy was the other side of the coin. The ‘fight for peace’ demanded opposition to sabotage attempts from within the ‘forces of peace’. The ‘national front’ served as a filter: only the chosen could march within its ranks. Traitors of the national-class interest were people who had been active in anti-communist resistance, as well as almost

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107 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia ZO ZBoWiD w Warszawie’, 26 July 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 380, p. 257.
108 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZO ZBoWiD w Lublinie’, 23 May 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 210, p. 31.
112 ‘Wynik kontroli NIK z działalności ZBoWiD’, 9 January 1951, AZGZKRPiBWP 8, 5, n.pag.
anyone of officer rank or higher who had fought in the 1939 defensive war (i.e. the German-Soviet invasion of Poland) or in the Polish Armed Forces in the West or the Home Army. In September 1951, during the Trial of the Generals, the Main Directorate of ZBoWiD signed a resolution ‘on the expulsion of the spy and traitor Jerzy Kirchmayer.’ The deputy chairman Stanisław Kiryluk stated that ‘the band of [Stanisław] Tatar and Kirchmayer, recruited from the former officer ranks of the Sanacja [inter-war] armed forces, wanted during the trial to conceal its identity as American and English servants by attempting to construct a superstructure, an ideology that was supposed to guide them in their fight against People’s Poland.’ Kiryluk embellished his speech, in which he condemned the ‘Judas-like mercenaries’ and ‘venal hirelings of the American genocidal imperialists’, with references to the losses of the Warsaw Uprising, which had supposedly begun because of the trickery of the treacherous elites who sought the bloodshed of the Polish people. It is of note that, at this time, a number of prominent communists were also counted among the traitors of the people – supporters, alleged or real, of the ‘right nationalist deviation’ such as Władysław Gomułka and Marian Spychalski, who were also expelled from ZBoWiD. A number of former fighters of the Dąbrowski brigade of Jewish descent were also imprisoned during anti-Semitic purges of Stalinism in the 1950s.

For middle-ranking officials of the Union, the contradiction between the pressure to increase the numbers of the organization and the expulsion of members with inappropriate biographies caused great difficulty. In the years 1949–52, ZBoWiD was almost permanently carrying out verification measures whose formal criteria, which were wide-ranging and loosely defined, were established at the beginning of 1950. According to the instructions distributed to local verification commissions, eligible members included: veterans of the

113 The Trial of the Generals (proces generałów) was a show trial aimed at cleansing the army of officers who had served in the armed forces of inter-war Poland or in the anti-Nazi resistance during war. The trial was also used as a tool in the internal political struggle among Polish communists. The arrested generals and officers were falsely accused of conspiracy against the Polish state and of collaboration with the British and American intelligence services.

114 ‘Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego ZBoWiD w sprawie wykluczenia z szeregów związkowych szpiega i zdrajcy narodu Jerzego Kirchmayera’, 1 September 1951, AZGZKRPIBW 3, 30, p. 30. Jerzy Kirchmayer (1895–1959) was an officer of the inter-war Polish army, who during the war joined the Home Army, and after the war continued his career in the army as a high-ranking military historian. In the Trial of the Generals he was sentenced to life imprisonment; he was released in 1955.

115 ‘Zadania ZBoWiD na obecnym etapie wygłoszone na Plenum ZG ZBoWiD’, 1 September 1951, ibid., p. 21.

116 Ibid.
revolutionary struggles of the years 1905–18 and of the Uprisings of Silesia (1919–21) and Wielkopolska (1918–19); former members of the International Brigades in Spain; former prisoners of the Sanacja regime; soldiers who fought for the defence of the country in 1939; partisans and members of the resistance movement who fought against the Nazi occupation; persons kept in Nazi prisons and camps ‘for a minimum of three months, for political activity related to one’s ethnic or national belonging’; ‘re-emigrants deported from capitalist countries for anti-fascist activity’; former soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the East; and other ‘soldiers of allied militaries who fought outside the borders of Poland’. The deciding factor, however, was one’s attitude to People’s Poland. In January 1950 in Lublin, it was openly admitted that this was the only criterion.

At first, the verification process was hindered by bureaucratic inefficiency – the regulation document had not been delivered from the Main Directorate to the regional chapters, so local activists did not know who was eligible to be a member of the Union or what the verification commissions were supposed to do. The situation began to improve in the first quarter of 1950. In March of that year, at a plenary session of the Main Directorate, it was emphasized that ‘we are removing foreign elements, anti-communist spies, policemen [i.e. members of the Nazi auxiliary police], former guards of Sanacja prisons, speculators, etc.’ Henryk Matysiak stated, however, that ‘purification’ was not yet complete, and drew attention to the need for ‘scrupulous checks.’ The verification commission summoned in Warsaw that year was called the ‘cleansing commission [komisja czyszcząca].’ According to a representative, the commission in Warsaw had the task of ‘permanently assessing the morality of members.’ In February 1951, the removal of ‘wreckers and enemies of the

117 ‘Instrukcja nr 10 dla komisji weryfikacyjnych’, 1 January 1950, AZGZKRiBPWP 11, 9, p. 4, 5. In March 1950, after the establishment of the Main Commission of Patriot Priests within ZBoWiD, all priests (and not only those who had been in the camps) were encouraged to apply for membership in the Union. See: Żaryn, Kościół a władza, p. 296.
118 ‘Sprawozdanie za styczeń 1950 z działalności referatu organizacyjno-propagandowego Zarządu Okręgu w Lublinie’, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 210, p. 62.
119 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Zarządu Okręgu w Warszawie’, 19 October 1949, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 380, pp. 23f.
120 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Plenum ZG ZBoWiD’, 18 March 1950, AZGZKRiBPWP 3, 28, p. 5.
121 Ibid., p. 14.
system from our members’ ranks’ was made a priority in the framework plan outlining the organization’s agenda.124

It is clear that the verification carried out under ideological auspices led to the gradual thinning of the Union, and that it was especially concerned with the Home Army, the largest armed formation of the anti-Nazi conspiracy. In June 1950, the regional directorate in Lublin explained that ‘Radzyń county will not have a lot of members because this area did not have organizations like the AL or the BCh, there was only the AK, but they were openly hostile to the young socialist democracy.’125

Communist propaganda directives are, however, difficult to interpret à la lettre – every so often, overactive representatives of local chapters were tempered, at least rhetorically. In September 1951, during the session of the Main Directorate at which the ‘traitor and spy’ Jerzy Kirchmayer was expelled from the Union, it was recommended that meetings be held to ‘explain our relationship to the AK.’126 The deputy chairman Wilhelm Garnarczyk then criticized the Union for their weak opposition to the ‘internal enemy’ and insufficient reaction to ‘panicked whisperings and other forms of struggle by the class enemy.’127 At the same time, regular soldiers of the AK were praised, in a propaganda tactic that treated them as victims of their superiors. Józef Passini, the secretary of the Main Directorate, emphasized that:

The verification process in our organization is not just a formal process, it is also a matter of vigilance in our ranks. However, it is necessary not to overdo the verification and not to drift into sectarianism ... Our members have passed through three or four rounds of verification and this alienates them from the Union.128

Similarly, Stanisław Kiryluk stated that ‘we must overcome all sectarian views and sectarian politics.’129 A representative of the regional directorate in Warsaw characterized the relationship between the AK on the one hand, and ZBoWiD and the state on the other:

Resentment is the dominant feeling shared by Union members and former Home Army fighters in Warsaw voivodeship, resulting from the fact that the latter are being dismissed from their jobs because of their former affiliation. It is our duty to inform members at our meetings of the reasons behind such treatment of former AK members. It is well-

124 ‘Ramowy plan pracy ZBoWiD na rok 1951’, AZGZKR PiBWP 3, 29, p. 65
125 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZO ZBoWiD w Lublinie,’ 7 June 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 210, p. 26.
127 Ibid., p. 3.
128 Ibid., p. 2.
129 ‘Zadania ZBoWiD na obecnym etapie wygłoszone na Plenum ZG ZBoWiD’, 1 September 1951, ibid., p. 23.
known that many soldiers of the Home Army joined its ranks purely for the purpose of fighting the occupant, and they were unaware of the vile dealings of its leaders.\footnote{\textit{Protokół z rozszerzonego Plenum Zarządu Głównego ZBoWiD}, 1 September 1951, ibid., p. 6.}

However in June 1952, an ‘intensification of the fight against destructive elements’ and ‘constant purification of hostile and demoralized elements [and] economic and political wreckers’ were once again ordered during a session of the Main Directorate.\footnote{\textit{Referat gen. “Witolda”. IV rozszerzone Plenum ZG ZBoWiD}, 20 June 1952, AZGZRPiBWP 3, 31, p. 57.} Franciszek Jóźwiak explained, speaking metaphorically: ‘when an abscess has grown, you mustn’t pierce it, but pick up a good scalpel, do proper surgery, and then the wound will heal and the person will be healthy.’\footnote{\textit{Protokół z posiedzenia Plenum ZG ZBoWiD}, 20 June 1952, ibid., p. 72.} Information concerning the latter stages of verification is lacking. However, it can be assumed that they were overshadowed by a different phenomenon – the intentional liquidation of the regional structures of ZBoWiD.

\textbf{‘We have been unable to plough this fallow field’}

In June 1952, Franciszek Jóźwiak expressed himself using another metaphor: ‘In this area, we have not yet been able to plough this fallow field. We have been unable to till the soil exactly and properly and spread the right fertilizer, in other words to instate an ideology in order for noble and beautiful ideas of building socialism in our country to grow.’\footnote{\textit{Sprawozdanie za styczeń 1950 z działalności referatu organizacyjno-propagandowego Zarządu Okręgu w Lublinie}, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 210, p. 62.} Behind this image was concealed the idea that the lower echelons of the organization were not carrying out the instructions of the Main Directorate. The order to reach out and gain control over local-level activity – presented as a priority – was met with difficulties characteristic of the times, significantly including a shortage of devoted and suitably trained personnel. Inadequacies in staffing were reported by all organizations, including the communist party, youth association and the armed forces.\footnote{Marek Wierzbicki, \textit{Związek Młodzieży Polskiej i jego członkowie}, Warszawa 2006, pp. 315f.} Moreover, the lower the profile of an organization (at this time ZBoWiD was among the lesser bodies in Poland), the more difficult it was for them to keep its workers and most faithful activists.

Regional secretaries initially employed on a permanent basis were discovered to be ‘not up to ideological standards.’\footnote{\textit{Sprawozdanie za styczeń 1950 z działalności referatu organizacyjno-propagandowego Zarządu Okręgu w Lublinie}, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 210, p. 62.} According to a report of the Main
Directorate, a senior inspector in Lublin voivodeship was ‘expelled from the [party] apparatus for frequent drunkenness. Currently he is not drinking – he is fit to be a regional inspector [for ZBoWiD].’\textsuperscript{136} The secretary of ZBoWiD’s Main Directorate, Józef Passini, proposed a junior secretary of his local party cell for the vacant position of personnel inspector at ZBoWiD, arguing that ‘the accusation of semi-literacy laid by deputy chairman Kiryluk is not a barrier to carrying out the responsibilities in that area.’\textsuperscript{137} Arrests were another factor that complicated the task of the regional chapters. According to one set of minutes, the revision commission of the regional directorate in Warsaw in 1950 ‘carried out only two inspections, because some members of the directorate had left and others were in prison.’\textsuperscript{138}

Another reason for the high turnover of permanent employees was low pay. Officials at various levels drew attention to this problem: for example, the Warsaw directorate explained in 1949 that ‘the district directorate will be unable fully to comply with the wide array of tasks set by the Main Directorate, due to scarce personnel and salaries that are, for Warsaw, too low.’\textsuperscript{139} Three years later, Wilhelm Garncarczyk stated whilst explaining the ‘elastification of the payment net’ (i.e. the lowering of subscription fees) to a government inspection, that he was having difficulties with ‘keeping employees in work at this organization.’\textsuperscript{140}

The Main Directorate attempted to shift some of the propaganda work to activists. However, it could not find enough volunteers. It tried to mobilize people whom it thought it could rely on – employees of the power structures and party activists.\textsuperscript{141} They were, however, overburdened with duties at other mass organizations. Bernard Fuksiewicz explained this as follows: ‘people who are settled in their positions at the Union cannot work productively in several social functions at the same time, just as people cannot work effectively if they have arrived at the Union’s leadership with no knowledge of its work.’\textsuperscript{142} In Lublin, the chief of the regional directorate drew attention to the fact that many directorate

\textsuperscript{136} ‘Sprawozdanie z przeprowadzonej kontroli w ZO Lublin’, 11–12 November 1952, AZGZKRPIBWP 3, 76, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{137} ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD’, 28 February 1951, AZGZKRPIBWP 3, 70, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{138} ‘Protokół z zebrania ZO ZBoWiD’, 11 November 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 4, p. 321.
\textsuperscript{139} ‘Protokół z posiedzenia ZO ZBoWiD w Warszawie’, 23 November 1949, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 380, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{140} ‘Sprawozdanie z inspekcji przeprowadzonej w ZBoWiD przez Starszego Inspektora Prezydium Rady Ministrów 23 maja – 8 czerwca 1952’, AZGZKRPIBWP 8, 5, n.pag.
\textsuperscript{141} ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Plenum ZG ZBoWiD’, 18 March 1950, AZGZKRPIBWP 3, 28, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 10.
members were also members of the party, ‘which is a mistake because these people have been and are seriously involved in social work in other areas.’  

To reach its intended audience on a day-to-day basis, mass propaganda requires effective means of locomotion. The Main Directorate of ZBoWiD had at its disposal in 1952 six automobiles, of which four worked, but the employees of regional directorates had to use public transport. According to one report, at the regional level, cars were only lent out for use by patriot-priests. Employees of the Main Directorate who worked in the field were told by the Union’s authorities that they should use ‘urban transport channels’ and ‘the railway network’, which was not a very realistic solution considering the high levels of damage to infrastructure that had resulted from the war. The use of taxis was allowed by the Main Directorate only for special ceremonies in which representatives of party and state and foreign guests took part, for example the ‘Auschwitz event’, which made it necessary to use fast modes of transport. The ceremony at Auschwitz in 1951 was mentioned frequently in administrative reports – clearly, it gave the organization’s accountants many sleepless nights, as activists had claimed significant expenses not foreseen in the budget. Representatives of the regional directorate in Lublin were among those who complained of difficulties in ‘reaching the field’. They drew attention to the fact that ‘buses are overcrowded, and hire cars are expensive.’ They floated the idea of buying bicycles for county secretaries and complained that they could not get out to local districts because ‘they are reachable only by car or by bicycle, which the local chapters do not possess.’ The winter conditions and frosts in certain areas made propaganda work completely impossible.

143 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia ZO ZBoWiD w Lublinie’, 3 March 1951, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 210, p. 140.
144 ‘Wyjaśnienie ZG ZBoWiD dla Urzędu Rady Ministrów, Biura Planowania i Finansów’, 12 March 1953, AZGZKRPiBWP 8, 5, n.pag.
145 Ibid.
146 ‘Sprawozdanie z inspekcji przeprowadzonej w ZBoWiD przez Starszego Inspektora Prezydium Rady Ministrów 23 maja – 8 czerwca 1952’, AZGZKRPiBWP 8, 5, n.pag.
147 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZO ZBoWiD w Lublinie’, 6 March 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 210.
148 ‘Protokół z walnego zjazdu powiatowego członków ZBoWiD we Włodawie’, 2 April 1950, ibid., p. 49.
149 ‘Protokół z posiedzeniu Prezydium ZO ZBoWiD w Lublinie’, 9 March 1950, ibid., p. 33.
150 ‘Sprawozdanie za styczeń 1950 z działalności referatu organizacyjno-propagandowego Zarządu Okręgu w Lublinie’, ibid., p. 65.
The withdrawal of patronage and awards

“We entered a phase of so-called reorganization of ZBoWiD’s work which was understood by all members as a rapidly progressing liquidation of our organization”, stated Wilhelm Garncarczyk in 1957, in an overview of the organization’s activity in the years 1949–56.151 It transpires from sources left by some of the Union’s administrative cells and minutes of sessions of the Main Directorate that employee positions and regional structures were gradually phased out. As a result, ZBoWiD became little more than a dummy used for propaganda purposes.

At a meeting in January 1951, the Secretariat of the Political Bureau of the PZPR Central Committee re-analysed the guidelines then in place for the economic plan for the coming year, and before approving the instructions for the acquisition of grain, it:

[d]rew attention to the fact that ZBoWiD had played a large role in the popularization of the slogans of the fight for peace, but at the current stage, after the establishment of the [Polish] Committee for the Defence of Peace, the responsibilities of the organization had become significantly reduced. The Secretariat recommended to com[rade] Ochab that he reach an agreement with the Main Directorate of ZBoWiD regarding forms of communication and cooperation with the committees of defenders of peace. The secretariat recognized as a target the liquidation of permanent employee positions at ZBoWiD at county level.152

A few days later, the presidium of the Main Directorate ordered the ‘removal of all of the Union’s paid permanent staff at the county level, effective as of 28 February’, as well as ‘support to all branches of the Union’s work at the level of divisions, and interest groups of directorate members and activists carrying out social and voluntary activity.”153 The dismissal of permanent staff was labelled as a means of avoiding ‘administrative growth’.154 In this way, the Main Directorate was left with nineteen members of staff (including the caretaker). Further reductions were made in February 1954 at the provincial level.155 The available administrative

151 ‘Wyjaśnienie do protokołu Głównej Komisji Rewizyjnej ZBoWiD z 20 marca 1957 złożone 1 lipca 1957 przez głównego księgowego Piotra Zabłockiego i Członka Rady Naczelnej Wilhelma Garncarczyka’, AZGZRPiBWP 8, 1, n.pag.
154 ‘Ramowy plan pracy ZBoWiD na rok 1951’, ibid., p. 65.
155 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD’, 17 February 1954, AZGZRPiBWP 3, 80, p. 21.
data do not tell us how many members of staff were employed by ZBoWiD across the whole country, but even if one assumes that the figure was somewhat larger than the nineteen workers of the Main Directorate, it was still very small. For comparison, in 1954 the Union of Polish Youth (which was also reducing its number of staff) employed over 6,000 people. At the start of 1951 the Main Directorate formally decided to transfer ‘without damages’ all of the Union’s group and county-level premises to other organizations. ZBoWiD only reserved the right to continue to use these offices free of charge. This decision undoubtedly had an atomizing effect (although it is difficult to judge whether this effect was intended): veterans no longer had places to meet. The decision also contradicted complaints made by representatives of the Union’s leadership to the effect that propaganda was unable to reach ‘concrete individuals’; that ‘the masses, on whom we rely, are dead’; the ‘field [was] inactive’; or that ‘in many counties, offices [were found to be] closed.’ It showed that these accusations had a ritual quality, that they merely provided cover for the liquidation of the organization.

From 1951, the central offices received increasing numbers of reports from the provinces that described the departure of disillusioned ZBoWiD activists. For instance, a report from Lublin voivodeship stated that ‘members are not attending sessions, although they have been notified several times’; and that ‘the regional directorate sent a letter to the branch in Puławy, but the letter was returned with a scribble on the back of the envelope that “the Veterans’ Union does not exist in Puławy.”’ An inspection in Tomaszów Lubelski showed a ‘lack of outreach to members, which has caused a certain degree of forgetting about membership of the Union.’ In Łuków, it was reported that ‘nobody has conducted Union work for a year ... not even the presidium pays its dues.’ In Tomaszów Lubelski, ‘the current members of the directorate ... have no wish to hear about working for

156 Wierzbicki, p. 315.
158 ‘Protokół z zebrania Zarządu Okręgu ZBoWiD w Lublinie’, 11 November 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 4, p. 315.
159 ‘Protokół z rozszerzonego Plenum Zarządu Głównego’, 24 February 1951, AZGZRKPiBWP 3, 29, p. 56.
160 ‘Protokół z rozszerzonego Plenum Zarządu Głównego ZBoWiD’, 1 September 1951, AZGZRKPiBWP 3, 30, p. 7.
161 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Zarządu Oddziału ZBoWiD w Tomaszowie Lubelskim’, 10 August 1951, ibid., p. 41.
162 ‘Sprawozdanie z pobytu w terenie 31 lipca – 4 sierpnia 1953 w Powiecie Tomaszów’, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 223, p. 62.
163 ‘Sprawozdanie z delegacji’ 16–18 December 1952, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 223, p. 36.
the Union.’ Seven people were expected to attend a meeting called for eighty. In smaller towns of the area, eleven besieged individuals who at some point had been members of the Union ‘refused their membership, on the grounds of being overburdened with social work or on account of old age.’ The iconic symbols of the organization were not functioning – fees were not being collected and membership cards were not being distributed.

In 1957, Wilhelm Garnarczyk, in a report already referred to here, wrote:

I can state with a full responsibility that from 1951, and particularly from 1953, the provincial cells of PZPR were almost totally uninterested in the activity of ZBoWiD and provided no support for its work ... There was never any time for talking about ZBoWiD. This attitude of the Party to ZBoWiD finished off our organization.

Garncarczyk’s indictments are well confirmed by decisions of the Political Bureau. In August 1951, representatives of the party, who were moved to rectify the neglect of education among conscripts and military families, issued a document that ordered ‘enlightenment work among the popular masses.’ The aim of this initiative was to present the armed forces as a body ‘of workers and peasants, which had developed in the best traditions of fighting for the freedom of the Polish people, as the guardian of our independence and of the achievements of building socialism.’ They sought to involve, in addition to party cells: the Union of Polish Youth, trade unions, the League of Friends of Soldiers, the Air Force League, The Navy League, the Women’s League, the press, radio, cinematographers, and centres of culture and enlightenment. The veterans’ association receive no mention whatsoever in this long list of organizations that would carry out work related to military themes. The cult of the Polish army, which was developed on the pages of ZBoWiD’s journal and through various commemoration ceremonies, did not therefore mean that the Union had actual close ties with the armed forces. Thus, the regional activity of ZBoWiD began to wane in 1952. Several patriot-

164 ‘Sprawozdanie z delegacji’ 16–23 December 1952, ibid., p. 38.
165 ‘Sprawozdanie z pobytu w kołach Żulkiewice Wysokie [Żółkiewka, Wysokie],’ Turobin, 1 April 1953, ibid., p. 25.
166 ‘Sprawozdanie z działalności ZO ZBoWiD w Lublinie od 1 stycznia do 1 września 1951’, ibid., p. 123.
167 ‘Wyjaśnienie do protokołu Głównej Komisji Rewizyjnej ZBoWiD z 20 marca 1957 złożone 1 lipca 1957 przez głównego księgowego Piotra Zablockiego i Członka Rady Naczelnej Wilhelma Garnarczyka’, AZGZKRPiBWP 8, 1, n.pag.
priests also played a role in the liquidation of ZBoWiD, by trying to leave the organization in 1953 and 1954.169

Between 1945 and 1948, providing welfare assistance had been a priority for organizations of veterans and former political prisoners. In the early 1950s, alongside the liquidation of its branches, ZBoWiD embarked on a policy of withdrawing this patronage. In March 1950, Waclaw Rózga criticized the activity of former associations, underlining that ‘frequently it was limited to economic or sponsoring activity that remained confined to “one’s own backyard”, which led to demobilization rather than ideological and political fortification.’170 At the same time, the accountants of ZBoWiD reported decreased revenues, caused by a ban on conducting economic activity. They reported that they had faced difficulties in funding scholarships and children’s holidays, and also that plans were in place for the liquidation of both long- and short-term benefit payments.171 Subsequently, ZBoWiD almost entirely withdrew its social support programme. In 1950 and 1951, following government guidelines, the Main Directorate transferred several sanatoria, preventoria, orphanages and care homes to various ministries. In January 1951, it liquidated its welfare department.172

From 1951, subsidies from the government comprised the organization’s main source of funding (Table 3.1). These subsidies were low and did not cover administrative costs, let alone patronage activity. Limited funds were generated by leasing the Union’s real estate holdings, and also from the sale of movable assets (particularly in 1954) – if anything an indicator of the ongoing liquidation of the organization. The proportion of propaganda and administrative expenses (i.e. wages, costs for the upkeep of offices, travel, etc.) increased, whilst that of social welfare expenses steadily decreased (Table 3.2). In 1955 and 1956, after the reduction of staff numbers, the share of propaganda-related (so-called ‘socio-political’) expenses in the annual budget was as much as 70 percent and 63.5 percent respectively. Meanwhile, social welfare costs from 1951 oscillated between 2 and 5 percent of the budget. These figures demonstrate unambiguously that propaganda was the only function the organization retained.

171 Ibid.
Table 3.1 ZBoWiD’s income between 1950 and 1956 (thousands of zloty)

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<td></td>
<td>Amount</td>
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<td>Amount</td>
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<tr>
<td>Membership fees</td>
<td>747.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>204.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>188.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>174.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifts and bequests</td>
<td>236.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales of printed matter and medals</td>
<td>297.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>268.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income from fundraising events</td>
<td>375.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>128.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subsidies from office of council of ministers</td>
<td>2964.0</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>1009.0</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>2531.5</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>1940.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other subsidies</td>
<td>950.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>363.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income from leasing property</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>656.2</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>431.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>190.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sale of real estate</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Za Wolność i Lud*</td>
<td>140.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>900.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>191.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1677.4</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>254.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11899.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2867.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4872.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2598.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: AZGZKRPiBWP 8, 1, n.pag.

* From 1951, Za Wolność i Lud was published by the ‘Czytelnik’ publishing house.
Table 3.2 ZBoWiD’s expenses between 1950 and 1956 (thousands of złoty)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Expense</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1953</th>
<th>1954</th>
<th>1955</th>
<th>1956</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Amount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>6969.5</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>3281.7</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>2295.3</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>2110.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare</td>
<td>2304.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>205.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>102.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-political</td>
<td>1339.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>532.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>1318.4</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>566.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquidation of unions by ZBoWiD</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>291.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>153.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>219.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>188.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>196.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14373.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>4359.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>4047</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>3019</strong></td>
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Source: AZGZKRPiBWP 8, 1, n.pag.

The discourse surrounding welfare became both politicized and subordinated to the rhetoric of work. The Main Directorate placed a special emphasis on the ‘productivization’ of those under its patronage. It recommended the organization of ‘training workshops for the disabled’; the ‘rehabilitation in sanatoria of members of the Union, so that they can work’; ‘taking all those who are eligible under our care, including widows and the disabled, into [a programme of] productivization’; and ‘above all, helping widows and orphans by placing children in orphanages. Widows can be provided with employment.’

ZBoWiD offered direct, full-time support only to the victims of medical experiments at Ravensbrück. In October 1949, the Main Directorate registered its readiness to offer ‘help for the treatment of “guinea pigs.”’

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however, that this did not extend to proposing any sort of group autonomy within the organization to these women: an order that ‘a separate section of “Ravensbrück Women” should not be created, even if they want it’ was recorded five months later.\textsuperscript{176} Support for other people took the form of pressuring state institutions for official recognition that help was required. For example, the presidium of the Main Directorate decided to petition Józef Cyrankiewicz on behalf of former concentration camp inmates who had lost one or more limbs, for the right to be covered by disability legislation and have the costs of prosthesis covered by the state.\textsuperscript{177} The Union did have some limited funds for providing emergency or temporary benefits, but these monies were mostly spent on propaganda activity (as were the permanent funds for victims of Ravensbrück). According to a financial report, over nine months in 1952, the Main Directorate ‘provided benefits amounting to a total of 23,466 złoty. The majority of these funds were paid to members of the resistance movement from capitalist countries, where former resistance fighters are currently persecuted.’\textsuperscript{178} Local-level records show that increasing numbers of requests for medicine, prosthetic limbs, footwear and clothes were refused.

The situation improved somewhat for a portion of veterans in June 1954, when a universal pension scheme was launched, and in August 1954, when a decree was passed that provided for people who were disabled as a result of service in the military.\textsuperscript{179} These regulations did not, however, cover everyone – only people who had been employed for five years, not including prison terms and time spent in the underground movement, and professional military personnel were eligible – and the payments were low. According to data from the Central Statistical Office (\textit{Główny Urzęd Statystyczny}, GUS), the average disability allowance payment in 1955 was 79 złoty per month. For this amount, it was possible to buy a kilogram of ordinary sausage (26zł), half a litre of vodka (34zł), a kilogram of herring (18zł) and a third of a kilogram of bread (1zł). The price of a male overcoat (658zł) was more than eight times the monthly allowance. At the same time, the average pension allowance paid according to the universal pension scheme was 335 złoty per month.

\textsuperscript{176} ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD’, 21 February 1950, AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 69, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{177} ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD’, 10 October 1951, AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 72, p. 19
\textsuperscript{178} ‘Wyjaśnienie ZG ZBoWiD dla Urzędu Rady Ministrów, Biura Planowania i Finansów’, 12 March 1953, AZGZKRPiBWP 8, 5, n.pag.
The Union’s withdrawal of patronage initiatives harmed the essential basis of the organization’s legitimacy. After the Unification Congress at a rally in Krasnystaw, a certain Antoni Szuba from Łopiennik ‘opined that there are many combatants, but they have no social support and the powers-that-be don’t remember them.’\footnote{Protokoły z zebrań wyborczych w powiatach w woj. lubelskim [1949], AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 2, p. 355.} According to the minutes of the presidium of the Main Directorate, d[eputy] chairman Szewczyk took the following position on the issue of the revision of benefit payments – ‘it is difficult to carry out political work when widows are being deprived of their allowances.’\footnote{Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD’, 17 July 1950, AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 67, p. 38.} In Tomaszów Lubelski, ‘lack of consideration on the matter of allowances for those widowed and orphaned by the war’ was given as one of the reasons behind a dwindling interest in ZBoWiD.\footnote{Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu Oddziału ZBoWiD w Tomaszowie Lubelskim’, 1 September 1951 – 1 August 1952, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 223, p. 58.} Local directorates also justified their rejection of new membership applications by pointing to the absence of benefits. A party activist in Lublin voivodeship explained on behalf of veterans: ‘the Union provides no assistance, but they have too many dues to pay, as it often happens that one person belongs to six organizations.’\footnote{Sprawozdanie z pobytu w kołach Żułkiewka Wysokie’, Turobin, 1 April 1953, ibid., p. 25.}

‘Do decorated military personnel continue to deserve honours?’ – a representative of the regional directorate of ZBoWiD in Lublin suggested raising such a question with the party Provincial Committee in the spring of 1950.\footnote{Protokół z posiedzenia Plenum ZO ZBoWID w Lublinie’, 28 March 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD ZG, 1, 210, p. 47.} This was a topical issue, as awards for service during the Second World War were reluctantly handed out at this time. ZBoWiD documents from the second half of 1950 suggest a conflict with the office of President Bolesław Bierut over rejected applications for decoration. The matter was referred by Gen. Franciszek Księżarczyk, who did not agree with the decision: ‘the Honours Commission considers the materials it submits v[ery] carefully. In the documents sent to the party, the majority of candidates proposed for honours were people with no grounds for objection, including some candidates for posthumous decoration.’\footnote{Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD’, 31 August 1950, AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 67, p. 28.} Stanisław Kiryłuk, who took up the cause, stated that Bolesław Bierut had informed him in private conversation that ‘the giving of honours for the occupation period should be considered completed; now, applications should be sent for former combatants who distinguished themselves in the rebuilding and building of People’s
Poland. According to the presidium of the Main Directorate of ZBoWiD: ‘the non-consideration of the applications sent to the Main Honours Commission ... was the result of the presentation of individuals who are currently in prison or are not deserving of military honours for political reasons.’ The fact that awards for service during the war were curtailed, when juxtaposed with the disbandment of the local structures of the Union and the cuts in social welfare, was a sure sign of the liquidation of ZBoWiD as a veterans’ association.

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The logic of the myth of victory, which sought to mobilize the masses into participating in rituals and constructing a narrative of military glory that would serve the current politics, had profound effects on the practical running of ZBoWiD. Showing that the threat from fascism was still present, and that the ranks of veterans should unite for a future (and this time, final) victory, laid the foundations for the withdrawal of the Union’s traditional functions as a patronage organization. Veterans and victims of war were deprived of military decorations and social welfare, and local premises where they could meet and remember the war were taken away. Therefore, the myth of victory over fascism simultaneously entailed the depreciation of wartime experience, and also excluded individuals and groups by labelling as traitors those who were (considered to be) opponents of the new regime. By declaring ‘unity’, it atomized veterans’ groups.

The question arises whether ZBoWiD was a ‘transmission belt’ of power to society, as mass organizations in the Soviet bloc were then construed. It appears that the only transmission was of intensive propaganda and the rituals of mass ceremony. However, the Union spurned other vehicles for ‘reaching the masses’, as a result of which a fundamental contradiction arose between its declared aims and actual practice. The organization’s leadership sent out opposite signals: on the one hand, it declared full mobilization, and on the other, it was withdrawing social support, emptying organizational premises, and dismissing the staff who could carry out the aims of mobilization. In practical terms, therefore, ZBoWiD was not a transmission belt, but a propagandistic illusion.

The next chapters will show that the process of de-Stalinization brought changes not only in ideological formulae, but also in relations with the social sphere, which had been ignored in the Stalinist era. The new legitimacy formula that emerged after 1956, the myth of the unity of the resistance movement, rang in harmony with organizations of a clientelistic type which carried out patronage

186 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium ZG ZBoWiD’, 3 September 1950, AZGZKRPiBWP 3, 66, p. 4.
187 Ibid.
functions. Parts of the myth of victory over fascism did not, however, disappear entirely, and still played a significant role in the middle of the 1960s during the twentieth anniversary commemorations of the end of the Second World War and the one-thousand year anniversary of the Polish state. Former fighters of the international brigades in the Spanish Civil War, the Dąbrowski fighters, remained ‘living symbols’ who would lead the celebrations on anniversaries of the start of the Spanish war in 1956 and 1966, as did demobilized soldier-settlers from the formerly German territories (the former symbolized the beginning of the fight against fascism, the latter its victorious outcome).

The theme of the ‘fight for peace’ would also return in the first half of the 1960s, although in a less aggressive form than in the Stalinist era. Za Wolność i Lud took up themes related to liberation movements in French and British colonies, nuclear disarmament and banning the production of weapons of mass destruction (the declaration of the Rapacki plan provided a reason to discuss halting nuclear arms production throughout Europe at the ZBoWiD forum). Interpretive clichés from the Korean War returned during the Vietnam offensive and the 1967 war in the Middle East.

The German question retained a dominant place in the ideological activity of the Union – ZBoWiD organized many events and demonstrations that condemned the Federal Republic of Germany and emphasized the ‘bond of friendship’ with the GDR. FIR remained a strategic partner of ZBoWiD and had an especially important role in ideological issues concerning international politics. Representatives of the Union continued to participate in the work of FIR and travelled to conferences and seminars organized by the latter. The fourth congress of FIR took place in Warsaw in 1962 and approved an appeal to global public opinion in which the need was declared for the unity of all people of good will in supporting universal nuclear disarmament and peaceful co-existence. The International Auschwitz Committee was another institution that remained an important partner for ZBoWiD. Jointly with the IAC, ZBoWiD played an active part in the Auschwitz trials held in Frankfurt and was deeply involved in seeking evidence against the perpetrators. Nonetheless, despite the continued relevance of such themes, it was two derivative myths – the unity of the resistance and the innocence of the victims – that played the most significant role after 1956.

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188 A project for gradual disarmament and the creation of a nuclear-free zone, proposed at the UN in 1957 by Adam Rapacki, the foreign minister of Poland.