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The Victims of *Sonderaktion Krakau*

Author: **ANNA CZOCHER** 12.06.2020

Aktion gegen Universitäts-Professoren, commonly known as *Sonderaktion Krakau*, has left its mark on the history of Cracow and modern history in general, as an unprecedented attack on Polish academic circles.

The representative of the German occupation authorities, SS-Sturmbannführer Bruno Müller, commanded Jagiellonian University Rector, Professor Tadeusz Lehr-Spławiński to convene a meeting of all the university's lecturers at the administrative center building in the Collegium Novum.

The meeting of 6 November 1939 turned out to be a trap – after a few-minute speech by Müller, in which he stated that the university had always been the “source of anti-German attitudes”, the professors were arrested. In total, 183 people were detained – mainly scholars associated with the Jagiellonian University, the

University of Mining and the Cracow Academy of Commerce, as well as several other people who were then in the building or its surroundings at the time. The arrested were transported to the police prison on Montelupich Street, and then to the barracks on Mazowiecka Street. Several days later, 172 of them (a few people had been released in the meantime) were taken to Wrocław, from where they were transferred to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp located on the outskirts of Oranienburg.



**Collegium Novum of the
Jagiellonian University, 1927.
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The eradication of the Polish intellectual elite

The police action of imprisoning the Cracow professors was part of a broader plan to eradicate Polish elites. The Intelligenzaktion operation, which lasted from the moment the Germans entered Poland in the autumn of

1939, was carried out mainly in the territories incorporated into the Reich. However, actions aimed against the Polish intellectual elites also took place in the General Government, where from the spring of 1940, they were continued under the so-called operation AB.

The events of 6 November were unprecedented. It was no coincidence that they occurred in line with the preparations for the inauguration of the academic year at the Jagiellonian University. Not only the University's academic staff, but also retired professors came to the appointed meeting, guided by their concern for the fate of the Academy. The imprisonment at the camp was particularly ruinous for the latter. Although the "Cracow group" was not forced to work, as the Stehkommando, they were not allowed to sit down during the working day. Roll calls were especially devastating to the inmates' health. An extremely cold winter, light camp clothing, hunger and lack of medical treatment also contributed to their poor physical condition.



Ceremony of awarding the honorary doctorate of the University of Poznan to professor Ignacy Chrzanowski (third from the left). 1938. From the collections of the National Digital Archives



Professor Michał Siedlecki gives a speech during the celebrations of the Sea Day in Krakow. 1937. From the collections of the National Digital Archives



Jubilee of the 40th anniversary of the scientific work of Kazimierz Kostanecki - anatomist, professor of the Jagiellonian University. Group photography with students and co-employees. Krakow, 1934. From the collections of the National Digital Archives

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Those who did not survive the camp

In February 1940, as a result of international efforts, the German authorities released 101 prisoners over the age of 40. By this time, 12 eminent professors had died of exhaustion. They were: Antoni Meyer – lawyer and mining engineer, Stanisław Estreicher – lawyer, former Rector of the Jagiellonian University, Stefan Bednarski – Russian teacher, Jerzy Smoleński – geographer, Tadeusz Garbowski – zoologist and philosopher, Michał Siedlecki and Feliks Rogoziński – zoologists, Kazimierz Kostanecki – anatomist, Ignacy Chrzanowski – literary historian, Adam Różański and Władysław Takliński – engineers, Antoni Hoborski – mathematician.



Adam Różański - professor of the Jagiellonian University, dean of the agricultural faculty. Portrait photography in a ceremonial, academic suit. From the collections of the National Digital Archives



Opening of a Swedish language course at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Group photography of participants of the ceremony. Present, among others (first row from the left): prof. Michał Siedlecki, prof. Leon Sternbach, prof. Antoni Kostanecki. 1932. From the collections of the National Digital Archives



PHD promotion of the marriage of Maria Irena and Wiktor Ormiccy at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Promoters are in the middle: professor Ludomir Sawicki (third from the left) and professor Jerzy Smoleński (second from the left). From the collections of the National Digital Archives

The next five died shortly after returning to Cracow: Antoni Wilk – astronomer, Jan Nowak – geologist, Stefan Kołaczkowski – literary historian, Jan Włodek – agronomist, Franciszek Bossowski – lawyer.

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The elderly Professor Leon Sternbach, classical philologist and Byzantinist, who was not released because of his Jewish descent, died in February 1940. A further two Jewish scholars, Wiktor Ormicki – geographer and Joachim Metallmann – philosopher, were separated from the group of academics and murdered in KL Mauthausen-Gusen and KL Buchenwald. The others, who were mostly transferred to KL Dachau, were gradually released. The last victim of Sonderaktion Krakau left the German concentration camp in October 1941.

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