ESCAPE FROM EXILE*

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the feeling of joy and security was soon to give

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

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

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

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

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

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* This was Dzerzhinsky.—*Ed.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What about horses?"

"They'll be here in a jiffy."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The murmuring of the taiga never ceased.

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

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

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

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

"Who are you?"

"Stop!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

That's better!

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

But now another unpleasantness awaited them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO RELATIVES

1902-26

To A. E. Bułhak

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

Dear Aldona and Gedymin,

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

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

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

Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

[Geneva]
October 6 (September 23), 1902

Dear Aldona,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours as ever, [*Felix*].

To A. E. Bulhak

[Zakopane]
December 27 (14), 1902

My dear Aldona,

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

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

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

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

I embrace all of you.

Yours.

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

To A. E. Bułhak

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

My dear Aldona,

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

To A. E. Bułhak

[Berlin]**
December 12 (November 29), 1903

My dear Aldona,

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

Yours,
Felix.

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* Tuberculosis.—*Ed.*

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

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

To A. E. Bułhak

[Cracow]
December 31 (18), 1903

My dear Aldona,

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

To A. E. Bułhak [Cracow]
March 12 (February 28), 1904

My dear Aldona,

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

Yours,
Josef.

To A. E. Bułhak [Berlin]
March 19 (6), 1904

Dear Aldona,

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

Your brother.

To A. E. Bułhak [Cracow]
June 16 (3), 1904

Dear Aldona,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,

Josef.

To A. E. Bułhak

[Cracow]
July 7 (June 24), 1904

Dear Aldona,

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

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

Yours ever.

To A. E. Bułhak [Cracow]
October 3 (September 20), 1904

My dear Aldona,

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak [Cracow]
December 18 (5), 1904

My dear,

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

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* His sister had written about the death of a child.—*Ed.*
** The tsarist autocracy.—*Ed.*

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

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

Yours,
Josef.

To A. E. Bułhak

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

My dear,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

To I. E. Dzerzhinsky* No. 10 Block [Warsaw Citadel]

September 25 (12), 1905

My dear,

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

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

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

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* His brother, Ignaty.—*Ed.*

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

*** The revolutionary outings.—*Ed.*

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix

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

My dear brother,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Good health to you, I embrace all of you.

Yours,
Felix.

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

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

My dear brother,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

Aldona dearest,

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

Warsaw*
February 9 (January 27), 1906

My dear Aldona,

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

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

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

I warmly kiss you and the children.

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bulhak

[Berlin]
May 10 (April 27), 1906

Dear Aldona,

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

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

To A. E. Bułhak

Vilno*
July 17 (4), 1906

My dear,

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

Radom*
July 31 (18), 1906

Dearest,

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

St. Petersburg
September 16 (3), 1906

My dear,

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

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

To S. E. Dzerzhinsky* [Warsaw]
June 12 (30), 1907

Dear Stan,

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak [Berlin]
March 14 (1), 1910

Dearest,

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

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* His brother.—*Ed.*

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

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

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

Your brother *Felix.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Cracow
April 13 (March 31), 1911*

My dearest Zosia,

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

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

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

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

*** In emigration.—*Ed.*

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

[Cracow]
November 28 (15), 1911

Aldona dearest,

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

Berlin
December 15 (2), 1911

Dearest,

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Cracow
August 14 (1), 1912

My dear Zosia,

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

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

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

Felix.

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

Dear Zosia,

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

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

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

"Zosia Wilecka, Cracow, Starzyca No. 3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

Zosia dearest,

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

[No 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
June 16 (3), 1913

My dear Aldona,

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

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

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

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

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

Your brother, *Felix.*

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

My dear Zosia,

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

My dearest Zosia,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bulhak

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

My dearest Aldona,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

Zosia dearest,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

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

Dear Zosia,

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately I cannot help him and cannot even contact him.

Yours,
Felix.

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

Dearest Zosia,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
February 16 (3), 1914

My dear Aldona,

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

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

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

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

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

I would like these words of mine to convey to you that which a person placed as I am can convey, words prompted by my personal longing, by my struggle against the evil of present-day life and by my sufferings, and by the evil which is present in me too. The absolutely good people do not exist, and I certainly do not belong to that category. I simply am conscious of my aspirations and dreams, the aspirations and dreams of a man who knows life, and for this reason pain for me is not only a torment, it is joy, tranquillity, love of life and belief in a better future for all mankind....

Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
March 9 (Feb. 24), 1914

My dearest Zosia,

Again it is bright and cheery in my cell and all because yesterday I received your letter of February 27 together with the "note" from the frolicsome Jasiek. I would like to write to you oftener to tell you about the things I preserve in my mind about you, about all that makes up my song and which I feel deep within me, namely that life is so desirable and so powerful. Alas, I lack the words, for this life, like these walls, has dried me up, the words no longer come.... That is why I write so rarely. The solitude and the dead-house atmosphere of cell life put the stamp of silence on the mind, its greyness tends to make the mind, too, grey

Orel Tsentral Prison where F. E. Dzerzhinsky served penal servitude. 1915-1916

Butyrki Prison. Here F. E. Dzerzhinsky served penal servitude in 1916-1917

F. E. Dzerzhinsky and his wife Z. Z. Dzerzhinska and son Jasiek in Lugano, Switzerland. October 1918

and superficial, the monotony is such that the mind becomes stagnant and immobile, reverting all the time to the same thoughts and feelings. When I sit at the table I always have the feeling that I am about to repeat the same things and almost the same words. This is because I am chained here, whereas I long for life, for action and for movement, so much so that I sometimes say to myself that now freedom has no attraction for me whatever, seeing that I cannot think about it without being conscious of the shackles. As to thinking about my life here, both in its details and as a whole, that I cannot do, just as the living person is incapable of grasping the meaning of death. It is precisely because man has such love for the world of reality that he creates a world of abstract generalizations which for him acquires a real form. To a degree this takes place also in the outside world where there is so much that is hellish. Love of live leads to its denial, to the creation of a world of fantasy. And this world of fantasy constantly fuses with the real things in life, those which I love most of all. All the time I gaze on the infinitely dear face of our little Jasiek. I never tire of doing so, and I smile at his photo, in the same way as he, perhaps, gazes at mine, and I keep repeating: Jasiek, darling! In the last photos which you sent me Jasiek seemed to me to be different, but with every minute I got to know him better and better. When I look at him my gloomy thoughts and the apathy disappear. He is a splendid little chap, a source of strength and confidence, renewing my faith in the battle for life. The abstract, general ideas acquire flesh and blood and link me still more closely with the common stream of life. Being immured here, so far away and forced to sit in solitary immobility, I can do nothing to help you in battling for his body and soul, for his life as man.

I must put up with this—nothing can be done about it. Fate has so ordained that I am not here fortuitously. But when the thought troubles me that the burden may be too much for you, I feel bad. You, however, must not worry about me. I know, darling, that I can always rely on you. Your greatest help is that you write to me and keep me in touch with all I hold dear. In the material sense I am well off. I get everything that is allowed by the regulations. Often when I think of those who lack even the prime necessities I feel ashamed and become angry with myself and those who remember my needs and forget about the needs of others. To sit and eat can be a pleasure, but what comfort or consolation can there be in feasting, eating separately from your brother, your neighbour, with whom you are not allowed to fraternize, although you know that he is next door and has hardly anything to eat.* It is exactly the same outside where there are no walls, yet these walls exist and divide, and everyone is conscious of this in one way or another. Not being a sectarian, I know that it would be impossible to live and work without building these dividing walls, but anyone taking our name** should, in order not to have any feeling of shame, try to make the walls as few as possible and not absolutely impenetrable. All too frequently the feeling of brotherhood is confined to exclusive circles; this is done by people who deceive themselves and who live in the past. This brings me back to the conditions of working-class life. Among the workers one is conscious at every step of the feeling of brotherhood (not the philanthropic Christian brotherhood which played its part in the Middle Ages but which is now disgusting and hypocritical), a living, creative brotherhood.

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* The prisoners in No. 10 Block, being completely isolated, could not help one another.—*Ed.*

** This refers to the name Social-Democrat.—*Ed.*

Physically I am in good condition, but spiritually I find it harder to smile although I have never lost faith in life.... It is livelier in the cell—my companion was presented with the charges against him the other day and his trial will take place in a month or two. So far I have not heard anything about the investigation in my case; I suppose I will have to wait another year for the trial.

Yours,
Felix.

To Jasiek Dzerzhinsky [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
March 9 (Feb. 24), 1914

My dear son,

Papa cannot come to his darling Jasiek to hug his beloved boy and tell him the stories that he likes to hear. So Papa is writing to Jasiek enclosing a picture* and kisses and thanks him for his notes. He wants Jasiek to be good, healthy and obedient and to kiss his dear mother for Felek and to hug her with all his might. Let Jasiek kiss little Janek, Marilka and Papa Janek,** say to them that Felek is healthy and that he *will* return.

Your Papa.

To A. E. Bułhak [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
March 16(3), 1914

Dearest Aldona,

After four years' separation we again saw each other. To me it seemed like a dream, a nightmarish dream.

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* The "picture" was a silhouette of Dzerzhinsky drawn by his comrade in the cell.—*Ed.*

** Janek—the son of Stefan Bratmann-Brodowski, a prominent leader of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, later a member of the C.P.S.U.(B.) and Soviet diplomat; Marilka—Maria Bratmann, Janek's mother.—*Ed.*

They refused to let us embrace. The double row of netted wire and behind it the cage with me in the role of wild beast! I was unable even to give any sign of the gladness which you brought to me. I was sleepy and indifferent, ghostlike. But only real sleep brings balm and gladness, whereas our real life is a nightmare. Then, a few days later, came the blessed dream which enabled me to see you and embrace you without the netted wire. All around us were flowers and meadows, the whispering of the oak-trees and the murmuring of the pine woods. We were, I think, in Dzierżynowo and Jasiek was with us. I lay on my back, looking at the sky through the gently waving pine branches, at the clouds racing far into the distance like crowds of people chasing after happiness, impelled by the eternal longing for a better life. The movement of the clouds, and the feeling that I had you and Jasiek at my side set me dreaming. The dream, imparting flesh and blood to my thoughts, gave me renewed strength so that upon awakening I felt able to withstand this atmosphere of wearisome boredom, the isolation and the horrible vegetative existence.

I am greatly worried about Wanda's* health. I have not received any news about her since your visit. It is terrible to know that she really is in danger. When I think about all the misfortunes that befall man, about the fact that man is so often deprived of the things to which he is most attached, my mind tells me again that one should love with all one's heart and soul that which is not transient and which cannot be taken away from man and thanks to which he can become attached both to individuals and to things. To a degree that is how it has been up to the present: people have sought consolation and refuge from misfortune in thinking

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* Dzerzhinsky's niece who died shortly afterwards.—*Ed.*

about a life in the hereafter, about justice beyond the grave. But for everyday purposes this is a sterile thought, because it cannot advance life and merely sanktifies and perpetuates the misfortunes, covering the earth in a mantle of mourning. This is the thought of the prisoner serving a life sentence and entombed in a foul dungeon until the end of his days. But there is another thought, a thought which arises not from any false denial of life here on earth, but from love and attachment to it, the thought of victory on earth and not of punishment for sins, of eternal torment beyond the grave. Love for the suffering and oppressed humanity and the longing in the breast of everyone for beauty, happiness, strength and harmony impel us to seek an outlet and salvation right here on earth and show us the way. Love opens the heart of man not only to his near ones, it opens his eyes and ears and gives him boundless strength and confidence in victory. In such circumstances misfortune becomes a source of happiness and strength because it brings with it clarity of thought and illuminates the life hitherto wrapped in gloom. Thereafter any subsequent misfortune no longer leads to abnegation, apathy and moral degradation, again and again it awakens man to life, to struggle and to love. So that when the time to die comes one departs in peace, knowing no despair or fear of death.

Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]

March 30 (17), 1914

My dear Zosia,

...For the past two weeks I have been alone. This is the result of my own efforts and at the moment I am perfectly satisfied with my solitude.... Now I am really

buried in the prison silence; my cell is away from a communicating corridor and I rarely hear footsteps or the banging of doors. My neighbours do not tap and the cell below is empty. Beyond the window, quite near and yet so far away, is the Vistula. From time to time I hear the whistle of locomotives and the sounds of the Wawerski suburban railway on the other side of the river. This is all so near that I can hear these echoes of life exactly as in a dream, through some kind of a dense and distant mist. On my table, covered with a large white towel instead of a tablecloth, stand the photographs of Jasiek in white frames; he smiles at me from all sides. On the walls, like dabs of colour, are the postcards with the views. In the intense, sepulchral stillness I feel as if I myself and all around have been suddenly rooted to the spot by some kind of diabolical witchcraft. And listening, I have the premonition that I am about to hear bad tidings, but the only sound is the gnawing of a beetle in one of the planks of my bed, a gnawing that never leaves off. When I weary of the silence I break it by walking up and down the stone floor. And my steps echo and re-echo in the large empty cell, filling it and, it seems to me, the entire block....

At last, when fatigue compels me to stop, I waken up, so to speak, and return to my world of solitude. Now that I am alone I am doing more study and, I think, getting better results, and the days pass quickly. I tend to sleep too much, sometimes 11 and 12 hours at a stretch. Every night I have dreams—dreams that are rarely pleasant and all too often unpleasant—usually of a fantastic nature and certainly not healthy.

Yours,

Felix.

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

Zosia dearest,

My thoughts continually take flight from here, from the cell.... I have the uncanny feeling that, with you there, in contrast to me here, something important is taking place. I am keyed up with the expectation of hearing some kind of news.

For the past twelve days I have had a companion. He is a young worker, a nice fellow and, as far as I can judge, quite friendly. We get on fine. It may be that, as so often happens here, this will last only until we get to know each other better. However, I think that we will get on. I am always at my best among children and workers, and only an extremely nervous state could make this company, in which I feel perfectly at ease, wearisome. There is more simplicity and sincerity, fewer conventions and the interests and cares of this circle are more in tune with my own. In such company my thoughts cease to be something in the nature of abstractions, they become flesh and blood and acquire strength. Often, especially when dwelling on my recent years—and how long these seem—when prevented from living the everyday life* of the workers, I realize how much health and strength I have lost in consequence. Naturally, I am not blaming myself nor anyone else—fate and necessity have ordained my way of life. Still, I dream and believe that the day will come when I will be able to realize my aspirations and again draw health and vigour from this source. I have no regrets for the years that are gone, nor do I worry about the years ahead.** That my youth and its vigour

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* The years spent in prison, exile and emigration when he was unable to live among the workers.—*Ed.*

** That is, about the years already spent in prison and the forthcoming term of penal servitude.—*Ed.*

will be restored, of this I am certain. Such is will, the will that impels life forward and imparts strength. Now that I am sharing a cell with a youth almost young enough to be my own son, I hate the feeling of growing old. In fact I have forgotten about having passed the stage of youth, about the difference in age and feel that I will step out together with the young people.

You will gather, then, that I am in fairly good trim. (Physically I am healthy.) Only in recent times have I been somewhat upset. The investigation involving charges under Article 102, so I have been informed, will be completed in about a month; then begins the second, much longer, period (about 6 months) of waiting for the indictment and trial before I finally get the sentence and begin to serve it. . . .

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
May 16-18 (3-5), 1914

Zosia dearest,

This has been a week of impressions. The day before yesterday I received your letters of April 22 and May 8, and today the two postcards, the collective one dated May 3 and yours of May 11. I am so grateful to you—for everything, and especially for the postcard written in the evening at Jasiek's bedside. At the moment I am convinced, perhaps more so than ever before, that I shall return to life. I feel the vibrancy of my cherished dreams and aspirations, as if I myself were living in and through those who are dear to me and who are always in my heart. Your letters and your words speak to me of these things and they hearten me so much that I can see years of creative work ahead.

On Tuesday, May 12 (New Style), I appeared in the district court to answer the charge concerning my escape.* I did not write last week because I wanted to tell you about the trial, although you will know all about it before this letter reaches you. The indictment was handed to me a week before I appeared in court. The trial itself lasted no more than 20 or 30 minutes, including the time taken by the judges and the reading of the sentence. They read one and a half pages of the indictment, asked if I pleaded guilty to "running away," to which I said "Yes." The Prosecutor then uttered the words: "Pleads guilty," my defence council spoke for a few minutes about my long imprisonment, and about the Manifesto of 1905. I declined the opportunity to have a last say, the judges returned and read the harsh sentence: "The prisoner who escaped from exile is sentenced to three years hard labour. . . ." The sentence will be read in its final form within two weeks and that will be the end. I was hustled out of the dock because they were in a hurry to try the next case—a case of robbery.

I glanced round the hall in the hope of seeing somebody I knew—the trial was held in public. But in vain. All were strangers. They had come not to see me but others. Their faces reflected merely the curiosity of idlers. The absence of a friendly face, naturally, was a disappointment, although I had been prepared for it. I knew that none of my relatives could have come at such short notice. For this reason the bitterness of the moment did not evoke unjust thoughts.

I listened calmly to the sentence. I had an inkling of what it would be, gave no thought to it, and I am ready

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* The reference is to Dzerzhinsky's escape from exile in Taseyevka (Siberia) whither he had been sent to exile for life.—*Ed.*

to bear it. My thoughts were elsewhere. Life seemed to me to be so attractive, I saw it with the mind's eye, felt its fulness and heard its eternal hymn. My lawyer smiled politely, looked at his watch and hastened into the court for another, more serious case. He assured me that I looked much better than I did in 1909 when he last defended me. And looking him in the eyes I, for the life of me, cannot say why, suddenly remembered that the dog-skin boots which I wore on my winter flight from Siberia were also nice and warm. I mentioned this and he laughed. He thought to himself: what a queer fellow, and I divined his smile, the smug smile of a man with a position in life, and I felt relaxed. After all, I did come back in a dog's skin!

The journey itself, or rather the two journeys—first to hear the indictment and then for the trial—after twenty months in prison, the act of being in motion although I was handcuffed; the street life seen through the grating of the prison cart, the shop windows (one a florist's with the signboard: "Bordighera"—not so long ago I had been in Bordighera during a moonlight walk along the Mediterranean coast shortly after my escape); the restaurants and cafés, the tramcars (how much money I spent on them covering my traces and how many times I travelled on them before this solemn journey), the faces of the children (Jasiek, darling, what are you doing at this moment, are you as big as these boys, do you have their smiling eyes and are you as playful as they are?)—all brought tears to my eyes and evoked memories. I felt like a child, as if I were in a dream. So many recollections, so many colours, sounds, light and movement—all somehow merged into recollections of music I had listened to in days long past. The experience brought back the joy of life.... Poetry penetrates the grim and at times ter-

rible life through one's thoughts. Gloom absorbs light in the same way as dry sand absorbs moisture, and the light, breaking through the dark and the cold, warms and illuminates. And at the very moment when the words of poetry reflect that which is now dead, which is false, there arises a new poetry, the poetry of action, the bounden duty of human souls denying all tragedy, hopeless situations and the blackness of despair. This new poetry takes away the tragedy even from death and unbearable suffering and surrounds life not with the aureole of torment, but of boundless happiness.

I am back in my cell once more and it will be a long, long time before I leave it again, for the investigation of the charge under Article 102 is being dragged out and I calculate on being here at least for another year before all the formalities will be completed. This time, however, if my lawyer is not mistaken, the waiting will not matter very much, because the serving of the sentence will date from May 12, that is the day it was pronounced. And I have become so attuned to the tranquillity here that I think, not without dread, about the Arsenal....*

In 1909 when I was first taken there I never closed my eyes for three nights and almost went out of my mind. Through the cell window came the nerve-racking noise of the streets, the rattle of carts and the endless clanging of the tramcars. Only later, when they transferred me to another part of the building, away from the street, was I able to sleep.

Zosia, you write so much to me about Jasiek, and I read and re-read your words, that I return to him, again and again, gaze on his photograph and close my eyes

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* The Arsenal was a transit prison in Warsaw for persons sentenced to hard labour and exile.—*Ed.*

in order to see him in my imagination. Now and then I catch something—a smile, a look, and see him as he is, but the image vanishes instantaneously and I find myself unable to imagine his voice, size, mental development or to see him as a whole. I know, of course, that this is labour in vain. But when I read your words, when I think about him, I have the impression that he is beside me and I live minutes of happiness; so I have nothing whatever to complain about and nothing pains me. I again long for your words about him, for more and more of them. But, whatever you do, don't take hours off your sleep writing long letters. A few words about him on postcards and about yourself will give me a lot, they will banish the anxiety and I will be happy, knowing that he is well and how things are generally. I would dearly like to see Jasiek, to feel him in my arms, in my eyes, lips and heart, to listen to his prattle and even to see his tears, his smiling eyes, his cheeks and lips. After receiving the sentence according to Article 102, or after getting the indictment, I will apply for permission to see him without the barrier of the netted wire. I know that in the Arsenal or in the Mokotow* it is easier to get permission. But I fear he would be upset by seeing me in convict clothes and fetters. The sight might fill him with a feeling of loathing that would remain with him for life, and, who knows, might turn him against me. A man in convict clothes is not easily discernible. Jasiek mine, be patient, the day will come when your Felek will embrace, caress and hug you. Papa will write to you whenever possible, when you grow up a little, when you are so big that you will no longer ask to be carried in arms, but be a boy with firm legs. Meanwhile I am writing to Mummy, and

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* A convict prison in Warsaw.—*Ed.*

you, our dear one, I think of you and love you. A big, big hug for you, my darling boy.

I was taken to another cell today (May 16). I miss the old one. Although it was fairly cold—it faced north—and only at twilight did the sun send us its farewell rays, nevertheless, in the evenings (an hour or an hour and a half before 8.30) when the window was opened to air the cell, I could see the Vistula and the sunset. My eyes gazed afar, they at least are free. I used to stand at the window, oblivious of the bars separating me from the world, gazing at the wide and free expanse of the sky and the Vistula, at the lightning flight of the swallows and the pigeons, travelling in thought from here, contemplating on life and reliving the years of my youth that have gone for ever. There, too, I could think about a comrade,* but now not even to you can I pour out my soul as I did in my letters of January 21 and April 21.** There silence reigned supreme, here there is much more movement. Here in front of my window is a row of chestnut-trees. I listen to their rustling and I have the sun from one o'clock in the afternoon until sunset, screened, it is true, by the leaves. The cell is both dry and warm, so I have had no difficulty in getting used to it. As a rule when I am transferred from cell to cell I always feel a kind of attachment to the old one. But the new "apartment" is my old residence of 1909 and it reminds me of many past experiences; you, too, are acquainted with it.*** Please convey warm greetings to all comrades, write a

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* That is, he could maintain contact to some degree with his comrade confined in the same corridor.—*Ed.*

** He could no longer transmit letters secretly, evading censorhip, as was the case with the letters of January 21 and April 21.—*Ed.*

*** Dzerzhinsky is referring to the experiences described in his prison diary.—*Ed.*

nice letter to Wesiołowski.* When shall we be able to embrace each other? I kiss you warmly.

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

[No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
June 2 (May 20), 1914

My dearest Aldona,

Thank you for the postcards (the last dated May 2) with the views of Vilno which remind me so much of my childhood and youth. Three weeks ago I was sentenced on the first charge—the flight from Siberia. As I anticipated, they have given me three years hard labour. Since I expected this, the sentence has not oppressed me very much, the more so because on the second charge the sentence will be more severe (about 5 years) and only the more severe sentence will be applied, not, however, from the day of my arrest, but from May 12, that is, the date of the first trial. This means that I am now serving my sentence. I am still confined in No. 10 Block and will remain here until the second trial, which means about another year. I shall then be transferred to another prison. But who in my position does not dream of something happening, of being released earlier. Incidentally I give very little thought to the immediate years, just as everyone knows that death is inevitable but never gives it a thought and lives as if he were immortal. Such is the law of life. In the meantime I have had a break. Peering through the grating of the prison cart I saw the movement on the

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* Bronislaw Wesiołowski—a member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania and later of the Russian Communist Party. He was then serving a hard labour sentence. In December 1918, when acting as head of the Soviet Red Cross mission to Poland, he was murdered by Polish reactionaries.—*Ed.*

streets, listened to the noise of city life, glanced at the shop windows, saw the undertaker's where they sold coffins and, next door, a florist's with flowers from the Riviera advertized as "Bordighera." I have been in Bordighera.... I walked in the moonlight from Bordighera along the Mediterranean coast road and crossed the Italo-French border into Monte Carlo. I can visualize this road, the sea, silvery in the moonlight, the mountains and the palms. I remember the air, fragrant with the aroma of flowers and mimosa.

Alas, this belongs to the past. Still, I experienced it, and it remains in my mind which is filled with the songs of our woods and meadows, with the mists, the morning dew, and our sands. It is filled, too, with love and faith (in a better future for man), with our sorrows and all the subsequent happenings. And the more terrible the hell of our present life, the clearer and louder I hear the eternal hymn of life, the hymn of truth, beauty and happiness, and I no longer know despair. Life can be joyful even when one is in chains. So no matter what happens, you must not be downhearted—such is life. I have forgotten to convey to you warm greetings from my cell-mate for the wishes which you sent to him when you came to see me.

My new companion, a young worker, has been with me since April 10 and we are getting on fine. This cell faces the west and although I can no longer see the Vistula, we get sunlight from 2 o'clock onward. I have recently had very good news about Jasiek. He is healthy and coming along nicely. He was so delighted with the spring that when his mother took him to the countryside he became intoxicated with impressions.

Yours,

Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska* [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
June 24 (11), 1914

My dearest Zosia,

I don't know whether you received my letters of May 22 and June 21 and whether I made myself sufficiently clear. If there is anything not clear I can repeat the points, but I must know whether the letters reached you.** Don't be angry with me, Zosia, for not having written for such a long time. My thoughts are constantly with you. The one thing which has sustained my moral strength is the thought of our common work. I want to be worthy of the ideas which we both share. Any manifestation of weakness on my part, any longing for the end and quiet, any saying that "I cannot endure this any longer" would be tantamount to treachery and abandonment of my feelings for you and for that hymn of life which I always hear. . . .

Whenever I think of our beloved Jasiek I am overcome with happiness. Yet I am demented by the thought that all the burden of his upbringing has been borne by you alone, that it takes up much if not all your time, while I am powerless to do anything. You, I am sure, will transmit these feelings and thoughts to him, he knows of me from you, and the world of our thoughts, yours and mine, are one and the same. The fact that at present I am confined here, where you were with him, and the purpose of this will not be lost on him. He now feels, and soon he will understand and imbibe our thoughts. And the memory of the place where he was born,*** and the understanding of the reasons for this will remain with him for ever, deepening the purpose

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* This letter was sent illegally.—*Ed.*

** The letters on Party questions, in double cipher, were written in invisible ink.—*Ed.*

*** Dzerzhinsky's son was born in prison.—*Ed.*

of his life. It may well be that this memory will be decisive for him and determine his path in life, provided his character is not spoiled and that he does not become one of our typical intellectuals for whom words and thoughts are for the most part merely the "poetry" of life, a decoration, having nothing whatever in common with his actions and with his real life.

In the modern intellectual we see two different worlds—the world of thought and the world of action, refined idealism and vulgar materialism. The modern intellectual completely fails to see both the reality of the life around him and his own life. This is because he has no desire to see it. He can shed tears when he sees something acted on the stage and yet be completely indifferent and, what is more, use the mailed fist in practice, in daily life. That is why it is so important to inculcate in Jasiek a loathing and disgust for the lies and the affection which are so widespread among children who take their examples from our society.... But the lies, the sources of which are the social conditions, cannot be eliminated, and Jasiek should not be cut off from these conditions. He should get to know them and become conscious of them in order to become imbued with the feeling of disgust for lies, or to understand the necessity for and the inevitability of lying when prompted by pure and social aspirations, when the lie is necessary in the struggle for a deeper and nobler life. Jasiek should not be a hothouse plant. He should possess all the dialectic of feeling so that in life he will be able to fight for truth and for our idea. He should cherish a broader and stronger feeling than the sacred feeling for his mother or for the loved ones near and dear to him. He should be able to cherish the idea, that which unites him with the masses, that which for him will be a torch throughout life. He should understand that with you and with all the people to whom

he is attached, whom he loves, there is something stronger than love of the child, love of him, that the source of this something is both he and the love and the attachment to him. This sacred feeling is stronger than all others, stronger by virtue of its moral commandment: "That is how you should live, that is what you should be." Consciousness of this duty cannot be inculcated by reason alone.... I remember an evening in our little cottage in the country when Mother was telling us stories in the lamp-light, with the murmuring of the woods coming to us through the windows. I remember her telling us about the persecution of the Uniates,* about how the people in the chapels were forced to pray in Russian. She told us about the indemnities imposed on the population, about the persecution to which they were subjected, how they were made to pay heavy taxes, etc. Her stories taught me to hate every act of injustice. Their influence was such that they helped to make me a revolutionary. Ever afterwards I regarded the acts of violence which came to my knowledge (for example, in Kroży,** the cases of people being forced to speak Russian, to go to church on holidays, the system of spying in the schools, etc.), as violence against me personally. The result was that I and a group of boys of my own age pledged (in 1894) to fight against evil until the last breath. I reacted at once to every injustice and every humiliation suffered by the people, and I developed a loathing for evil. But

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* The Uniates—Byelorussians and Ukrainians who advocated the union of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches under the Pope and who for this reason were persecuted by tsarism, which, by violence and shootings, sought to get them to submit to the Greek Orthodox Church.—*Ed.*

** Kroży, a village in Lithuania where in 1893 the tsarist police and Cossacks slaughtered people for refusing to recognize the Greek Orthodox Church.—*Ed.*

I had to grope my way blindly, without any guidance or instruction, and in doing so I wasted much time and energy. Jasiek, fortunately, has you and all of us, to guide him; instead of groping in the dark, he will inherit our cause. But the heart alone is not sufficient. Needed too are the social conditions which will make it possible for him to become conscious of this inheritance and to take it over. These conditions exert a stronger influence than the heart.... It is only among the oppressed that one finds no disharmony between the older and younger generations. It is only in this environment that our idea grows, gains strength, spreads and becomes an indomitable force, without hypocrisy and without any contradiction between words and deeds. Time and again I revert to the thought that when Jasiek grows up he will derive much from this environment. While it may be premature to speak about this just now, the idea, nevertheless, is always in my mind. I very much want him to be an intellectual, but without the bad features of the intelligentsia. Because, as things are, the environment of the intellectuals is fatal for the mind. This environment attracts people and, like vodka, intoxicates them with its outward glitter and poetical forms and words, with its individual feeling of being superior. Moreover, it makes people so attached to the outward manifestations of "culture," to a definite "cultural level" that the moment a conflict sets in between the level of material life and the level of spiritual life, the requirements of the former predominate, with the result that man becomes nihilistic, a cynic, drunkard or hypocrite. And this inner conflict is never resolved.

Some may say that all this is nothing but barbarism. It may be argued that relinquishing the good things of life in order to fight for them jointly with those who are denied them is something in the nature of asceticism.

Be that as it may, it is a thought that is always in my mind and I am sharing it with you. I, of course, am not an ascetic. This is simply the dialectic of feeling, the source of which is found in everyday life and, in my view, in the life of the proletariat. The point is that this dialectic should complete its cycle in order to arrive at the synthesis—the solution of the contradictions. And this synthesis, being proletarian, should simultaneously be "my" truth, the truth of "my" mind. It is necessary to have the conviction of the need to suffer death for the sake of life, to go to prison for the sake of freedom, and to have the strength to experience with open eyes all the horrors of life, feeling in one's mind the grand, ennobling hymn of beauty, truth and happiness taken from this life. When you tell me that Jasiek goes into raptures when he gazes on the green of the fields and the woods, when he hears the warbling of the birds, sees the flowers and all living things, I realize at once that he has in him that which will enable him to raise the future edifice of this grand hymn, provided the conditions of life impart this feeling for beauty, and the conviction that one must fight to make human life equally beautiful and splendid.... Speaking for myself I can hardly remember an occasion when the grandeur of nature (lying at the edge of the forest on a starry night in summer listening to the gentle whispering and gazing at the stars; lying in a pine woods on a summer's day peeping through the gently waving branches at the clouds chasing across the sky; being in a boat on a moonlight night, rowing out to the middle of the pond and taking in the solitude, undisturbed by the slightest rustle, and oh how many of these pictures), did not remind me of our idea.... One should never reject the grandeur and loveliness of nature. Nature is the temple of the wanderers who lack the cosy "little homesteads" which lull and soothe the more enthusiastic spirits. And

those who at the present time lose their own firesides will gain the whole world provided they step out along with the proletariat. And should Jasiek be able to forego the "homestead comforts"—the supreme idea of our inteiligentsia—and be able to preserve the feeling and understanding of beauty, then the "my" concept will coincide with the "dear" concept, provided, of course, that the beauty is not regarded in the purely commercial sense, but in the sense of taking in the whole of this wonderful world as his own. In this case he will be the happiest of mortals and, what is more, one of the most useful. My dream is that he should be able to see, hear and feel, so that later on, when he grows up, his environment will make eye and ear keener and broaden the feeling of love for people, enabling him to become one of the millions, to understand them, so that their hymn becomes his hymn, to penetrate into the music of this hymn and in this way grasp and become conscious of the genuine beauty and happiness of man. Should this be so, he will not be a poet living at the expense of poetry, but, living the life of the millions, will compose his own song. It is also my hope that he will become not a crippled intellectual but a real man. Dreams, you may say. But which is better: to be a crippled intellectual or a crippled worker.... True, the worker is indeed crippled, but with the passing of the years his crippled state diminishes, while that of the intellectual increases.... I am convinced that the hour of victory is drawing near. But even now in his crippled state, the worker is entirely different. Being crippled by the oppression and violence, he fights against it. As to the intellectual, he regards his crippled state as a sign of his superiority, with the result that it is incurable.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
June 29 (16), 1914

Zosia dearest,

I will be brief today—I am still without your new address and I fear that the letter may not reach you. Moreover, I am somewhat off balance again. After the long confinement the slightest upset knocks my knees from under me, leaving me distraught. At long last the investigation of the second charge—under Article 102—has been completed and the investigation materials read to us. The reading lasted from Friday until today, five hours daily during the past four days. That is why I am listless, to say nothing about other reasons connected with the investigation materials.*

Soon, however, I will be myself again. The trial will not take place before January. Generally speaking, I am in reasonably good trim. But the prolonged inactivity and the fact that I am prevented from doing anything useful get me down. Alas, nothing can be done about it, the very thought of it is unbearable. Iron necessity, with which it is impossible to become reconciled, is not a lump of wood. I am waiting to hear from you as to what you are doing for the summer and about your arrangements.

I am so glad that Jasiek is such a lover of nature, that he has a keen ear and that he is fascinated by the forests, flowers and all the bounty of nature. The person with an instinct for beauty can grasp and understand the essence of life. After all, Jasiek is barely three and already he is absorbing the rays which throughout his life will impart gladness and which he will pass on to others. I myself recall those moments of inexpressible joy when, as a child, resting my head on Aldona's

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* Here he implies that the reading of the investigation materials had confirmed his suspicions of a provocation.—*Ed.*

knees, I listened in the evenings to the murmuring of the woods, the croaking of the frogs, the corncrake calling to its mate and gazed long at the twinkling stars.... Recollection of my childhood brings back those moments of real happiness when nature so absorbed me that I hardly believed that I existed and imagined myself a particle of nature, organically linked with it, as if I were a cloud, a tree or a bird. Has Jasiek seen how the stars twinkle and sparkle?

He is still an infant and I suppose that by the time the stars come out he is already asleep, but each year the world will open before him more and more of its bounty.

Whenever I think about my years at school, which instead of enriching my mind impoverished it, I begin to hate this training and its aim of turning out a so-called intellectual. Actually my happiest recollections are of childhood and, skipping the school years, of more recent times when, although I encountered so much suffering, my mind became infinitely much richer....

It is now late. I am finishing—correspondence must be handed in tomorrow morning. If this letter is so chaotic it is because I am tired and cannot concentrate. But when writing my thoughts are with you and I forget the things which upset me during the reading of the investigation materials; I will give my mind a rest and strength will come with the relaxation.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [No. 10 Block, Warsaw Citadel]
July 20 (7), 1914

My dear Zosia,

I have nothing new to report. It is stuffy and hot in the cell and difficult not only to do anything but even to think about anything.

Last week my cell-mate was told that he would be released on 200 rubles' bail. Naturally he was delighted with the news, but he is still here. Every minute is an eternity for him and the whole day from morning till night is spent in the anticipation that at any moment they will come and say, "Pack your things." I try to calm him and ask jokingly whether it will really be better for him out there or whether he is not better off behind bars, whence freedom seems so exciting and attractive; that when he goes out he will again be enmeshed in the yoke which, closing the world to him, may make him long for the solitude and tranquillity of our stone cell. This, of course, is make-believe, because I myself am sensible of his anticipation, though it is painful to think how far removed is the hour of freedom for me. I think only about this, and I drive away the pictures I see in my imagination, because they bring on a terrible longing for freedom, and yet I am powerless to break my chains. But what will be when at long last this moment arrives? I think about it not without misgivings. Always when in prison I have the feeling that I simply cannot endure life any longer, cannot smile or do anything. The unbearable heat has upset me today. Actually prison bars do more than sap one's strength, they sharpen vision and feeling, and whenever I think about life outside my impression is of some kind of a madhouse, and yet it could be so beautiful, simple and easy. Alas, how naive is this "could be."

I am writing after a rest of half an hour. They have just come for my cell-mate and taken him away. His relatives were waiting for him at the gates. He is now among his own after nearly eighteen months in prison.

At the moment I am alone and will not bother, at least not for a while, to ask for another companion. But

I don't want to be solitary too long. When alone I think too much about myself, whereas my sole desire is to forget all about myself. Usually I am saved by thinking about our little Jasiek and about our work. Consequently, every word and every bit of news from you means everything. Because of repairs I have been taken to a cell on the lower floor and sometimes I can see children playing. Longing and anger overcome me at the sight, because I am unable to see and embrace Jasiek. I have asked for permission to take farewell of him before getting the final sentence. They have agreed, although it is still not certain whether I shall be able to see him without the barrier. I imagine the sentence will not be delivered before January. When Jasiek grows up he will remember this moment which for me will be the greatest happiness of all the years of my imprisonment. I will write to you in detail about this; meanwhile a hug for my beloved son.

How are the youngsters getting on with each other? Give Janka's* father a hearty embrace for me. What about Leo's** health?

I have heard that Julian has had scarlatina.*** Are there any complications?

Yours,
Felix.

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* Janka's father, Adolf Warski-Warszawski, was a prominent member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, and later of the Communist Party of Poland.—*Ed.*

** Leon Jogiches—one of the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania; he was murdered in 1919 by German reactionaries.—*Ed.*

*** The reference is to the arrest of Julian Marchlewski, one of the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania. He was arrested in Germany.—*Ed.*

To A. E. Bułhak [Mtsensk, Orel Gubernia]*
September 7 (August 25), 1914

My dear Aldona,

Forgive me for not writing to you for so long, but, as you see, I am now in the heart of Russia, having spent much time en route to the prison in this town of which I had heard only once or twice previously. But, let me tell you everything in chronological order. At the end of July, Old Style, when war was already in the air, we were told in No. 10 Block that we would be transferred to another prison, and that possibly we, the political prisoners, would be set free. All visits were stopped and no parcels were delivered. On July 26, the prisoners under investigation, myself included, were transferred to the Mokotow Prison with all our belongings; these, in view of our long confinement, were quite bulky. We were issued with prison clothes and on July 28 entrained for Orel. The journey, an exceedingly tiring one of which I will not write, took three days. In Orel all of us from No. 10 Block were put into a large common cell. We were told that we could wear our own clothes, but it turned out that all our things had got lost on the journey and so we found ourselves without our own linen, suits, pillows, blankets and books. We were told that we would not be very long in Orel. Actually after three weeks we were transferred to the Mtsensk Prison where, it seems, I shall remain until my fate is finally decided. It is difficult without books and without news

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* In connection with the outbreak of the imperialist war of 1914-18 the political prisoners in Warsaw and other Polish towns were transferred to Russia. Dzerzhinsky, who had been sentenced to three years hard labour was sent to the Orel Convict Prison. Previously he had spent some time in the Mtsensk Prison, not far from Orel and afterwards in the Orel Prison. Dzerzhinsky's letters from Russia were written in Russian with the exception of those smuggled out.—*Ed.*

of one's relatives; however, the desire to live, to bear everything and to see you and my little Jasiek, to be together in Dzierżynowo is so strong that I think I can cope with the difficulties and return once more to freedom. Now I have no doubt that soon, very soon, I shall be free.*

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

[Mtsensk, Orel Gubernia]
October 20 (7), 1914

Aldona dearest,

I received the counterfoil** with your letter three days ago and ten days ago the sum of 25 rubles.

I am most grateful to you. But why, dearest, have you not written anything about yourself and the children? I suppose that you are still as busy as ever and, possibly, have more worries and woes. Write lots about yourself the moment you get any time. How are you managing during this terrible war. Have many of our relatives and near ones been called to the army, how are things generally? It is dreadful to think what Poland must now face—suffering, sorrow and devastation. I shall try not to think about these things. True, man can get used to everything, loses the capacity to feel, see and hear and becomes accustomed to any madness and horror. Reality signifies experiencing every moment, each separately and each prepared by the preceding one; but, grasping all this at once and seeing it in its entirety, one is filled with horror and, in order to retain his sanity, ceases to think. The senselessness of my present life, the powerlessness of my thoughts and

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* Dzerzhinsky was convinced that the war would accelerate revolution and his liberation.—*Ed.*

** Money order.—*Ed.*

feelings and the fact that they are superfluous are having a bad effect on me. It is hard to get away from oneself. You stew in your own juice and feel that the eternal strain will make it impossible to think and work; one hates oneself and evil ferments in the mind. Forgive me, Aldona, for these sentiments but behind them are concealed both my hopes and my strength, the passionate desire to live, and I cannot become reconciled to an existence which not only enmeshes the body but which wants to destroy the mind as well. Despair, as you know, is utterly alien to me, and you, when thinking about me, should remember this. Man has so much vitality and life has imparted so much that is bright and joyful, so much that is rational, that he can endure anything, even the horrors of death. He can understand everything and always see the good and hate the evil, can understand both the suffering and the pain, his own and that of others and take everything in his stride. The greatest happiness is the feeling which you impart to people and which people impart to you—your relations and non-relations—people like yourself. My dearest, I am grateful to you for your warm words, always when I am weary they give me strength and the desire to bear everything and to hold out. I have no idea how long I shall be in this place, presumably until the end of the war, which, I think, cannot continue very long. . . .

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak [Gubernia Prison, Orel]
My dearest Aldona, October 29 (16), 1914

I presume that you received the telegram which I sent from Mtsensk. The sentence for my flight from Siberia has entered into force and it may be that I will be

sent to another prison. In any case I expect to be here for at least three weeks and I rather think that your letter will still find me here. I have also received a postcard from Warsaw, but have not heard anything about Jasiek and Zosia. Don't worry about me, dearest, I will endure this and return.

Yours,
Felix

To A. E. Bułhak [Gubernia Prison, Orel]
November 15 (2), 1914

Aldona, my dearest,

A week ago I received your registered letter with the photo of Jasiek and was very glad—a ray of light penetrated into my cell and smiles reappeared on my face. A letter came from Warsaw a couple of days ago. Zosia and Jasiek, now in Zakopane, are quite well. Zosia has not written because of the ban on letters from abroad. Please ask Stan to take out a subscription for me from November 1 (Russian style), for *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* (*Government Herald*). Now, in wartime, we are allowed to subscribe to this paper.... I have a hunch that I will not have to spend as long in jail as I thought. My health is good and it may be that I will soon return and be able to see you, without having to hide, and pay a brief visit to our beloved Dzierżynowo.... Write to me, dearest, about how the war has affected life in Vilno. We are hungering for news. Fortunately, there is a fairly good library here (no need to send books) and I recently read a very touching book about the Franco-Prussian war. Reading it my thoughts travelled to Poland and to that part of Lithuania now enveloped in the flames of war, where men are bleeding and women weeping. Out there nothing but the horror and the insanity which we here experience in thought, and at times the thought is even worse than

the reality. I expect to spend another month or six weeks in this place before being sent to the convict prison, although I am not sure whether they will do this in view of the fact that there has been no hearing of the second charge. I have written about this to the Inspector of Prisons but so far have not had any reply. Conditions here are worse and the regime more strict than in No. 10 Block. But one gets used to everything, and there are much worse things in the world just now than those which we are forced to endure here. This thought makes me ashamed for my weakness and lack of spirits and imparts the feeling that sometime, when I get out of this place, I will be able to do something useful.

Your brother *Felix*

To A. E. Bułhak

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]
November 30 (17), 1914

My dearest Aldona,

I wrote to you a fortnight ago but don't know whether or not you received my letter. I sent it without a stamp—it was impossible to get one. So I am writing again in case the previous letter didn't reach you and so that you should not be worried. I am as well as it is possible to be in such conditions. Zosia's father has written to me from Lublin saying that Zosia and Jasiek are now in Zakopane, that they are quite well and that she had sufficient money when she left. I had been very anxious about them. I imagined her in Warsaw and was upset at not hearing from her. Because of the war, letters from Zakopane do not reach us, which explains why I have had no word from Zosia. Now, however, I am getting letters from Warsaw. We are always on the wait for news about the war, anxious to know how soon this horror will end. My own inactivity makes me de-

pressed. My first sentence, as I had anticipated, will not become effective until the sentence is delivered on the second charge under Article 102. I shall just have to wait in patience until the end of the war. Sometimes I have the impression that I have been turned into patience itself, being utterly listless and envying those who suffer and have real feelings, even the most tormenting ones. I shall wait; it may be that these terrible times will bring consolation. In a year or two the tears will be forgotten and life will again flower in the places where blood is now flowing in streams. It is my firm belief that I will soon be free and will avail myself of Stan's help. Meanwhile, let him forgive me for the worry I am causing him and for the expenditure. I have had a letter from Stasia—I replied a couple of weeks ago, addressing it to Dzierżynowo; no doubt she will be bored there alone with the children during the winter. I have no recollection at all of Dzierżynowo in winter time; whenever I think about it my thoughts are always of summer. I wrote to you earlier, confirming receipt of your letter of October 16 and the photo of Jasiek. Many thanks.

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak* [Gubernia Prison, Orel]
December 31 (18), 1914

My dear Aldona,

Your welcome letter with the photographs of my little Jasiek arrived today. I am answering at once, taking advantage of the opportunity to send you this letter. This has been a sad Christmas for all of us. The only thing which gives us strength is the warm feeling

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* This letter was sent illegally.—*Ed.*

linking us with each other and with those with whom we were once together. When you feel a friendly hand, when you recall the joyful moments, when you are consoled with sympathetic words, the pain is taken out of the suffering and the longing for life and faith in oneself returns. The real festive spirit is a merging of human feelings. Today, with hatred all around, with so many people hurled against one another, it may be that in the heart of more than one person, turning in thought (during Christmas) to his dear ones, the longing for love and brotherhood will reawaken. To sit here now, useless and inactive, when outside things are so much worse, is doubly difficult, because it is my belief that soon evil will be vanquished and use found for my strength and thoughts. War will be declared on war, eliminating for ever the sources of hatred. Today my thoughts are with those whom I love, with those to whom I want to give happiness, and who have the conviction that love will triumph and be master of the earth. We are living in times when hatred, having been thoroughly discredited, will drown in its own blood. What can be more monstrous than this war? I think about it all the time, and I would like to send New Year wishes to the millions sent to the slaughter against their will. It would be hopeless to live either here in prison or at freedom without the conviction that the kingdom of truth, love and happiness will come. All my thoughts are with you today. I am writing to you lying on my bed, because I must get the letter off in the morning. Have no fears for me, Aldona dear, I am quite well and I hope to return healthy, with the strength to live as my conscience tells me. I cannot say how long I shall be here. The place is buzzing with rumours, but, apart from the desire for liberty, all of them lack foundation. I, too, entertain this desire, and live in the hope that

the year 1915 will see me at liberty. Meanwhile, time is on the wing. Five months have passed since I left Warsaw.

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak [Gubernia Prison, Orel]
January 17 (4), 1915

Aldona, my dearest,

Your letter with the photo of my little Jasiek, as always, made me happy. Once again I have tender recollections of the distant and so utterly different past. The present, if only for a time, yields somehow to the past. I was slightly ill for a few days. The fever, however, has passed and I have been discharged from the hospital. It is dreary here in the cell where there are so many of us, each with his own burden of sorrow. It is awful having to sit here without knowing how long one will have to wait. Yet it is in a place like this that one really appreciates the vast spiritual strength stored up in man. I am writing in this way because I know what is taking place in the outside world. I am getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* and I am approaching Stan with the request that he should renew the subscription for another two months—it is a link with the outside world. I have not had any letters from Warsaw for a long time.

I fear I have written a very sad letter and am worried lest you take it too much to heart. But then you know me, you know my love of life and how I look at it, that there is always in my heart so much love that I eternally hear the music of the fields and woods and of the blue sky, and that I am capable of forgetting about the burden which I am called upon to bear. Always

when I think of you, when writing to you, I feel uplifted, as if you were alongside me and that I was telling you about my experiences. So, darling, don't have any fears for me. I hug you tenderly, my dearest.

Your brother *Felix.*

To Z. G. Muszkat*

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]
January 29 (16), 1915

...I am greatly worried at not having news for such a long time about Zosia and Jasiek. With my transfer to Orel all contact was suddenly broken. Then, after a long interval, I got your letter and a little later a postcard. Please write to me, tell me all you know about Jasiek and Zosia. Things cannot be well with them, that I know, for who can be well nowadays when horror has become "daily bread."

Zosia, I know, is not afraid of trouble, she will courageously bear everything, nevertheless I am most anxious about our little Jasiek and I would like news of him every day. This, I know, is a dream. My sister Aldona sent me photos of him, so that I now have him with me in my cell. I am not sure whether you know that we lost our things on the way to Orel, including all the photos. I am relatively well off here, getting everything that one is allowed to have and so far my health has not let me down. The life, as you can imagine, is none too easy. At the moment I am in a large cell with 70 other prisoners—all from Warsaw. Nerves are on edge, the result of the senseless incarceration far from one's relatives, the constant anxiety about them and the daily expectancy of something important about to take place in our lives. The diet is inadequate and

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* Zygmunt Muszkat, Dzerzhinsky's father-in-law.—*Ed.*

there are all kinds of other privations. By reading and studying we try to give sense to our lives. We are allowed pencils and notebooks and many are learning to read and write and are mastering the rudiments of mathematics. Fortunately we have a reasonably good library. Time flies and I hope that soon the day will come when we can say good-bye to prison. Write to me, dear, about yourself and about life in Lublin, about how the war has affected you. I am getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik*—my brother having taken out a subscription for me. Thanks to this we are not completely cut off from the outside world.

To A. E. Bułhak

[Gubernia Prison], Orel
February 16 (3), 1915

My dearest Aldona,

I have received your warm letter of January 11. There is no need to be anxious about me. True, I had a slight bout of illness, but who is not ill these days! Zosia has written to me from Zurich with news of Jasiek. The letter took only 24 days, which is not so bad. Jasiek gained strength in Zakopane, she wrote, but the long journey to Vienna tired him and he caught cold. He has now recovered, and the place is ringing with his merry laughter. The news, naturally, has calmed me; they have their difficulties, but these are hard times for everybody, at least they have the happiness of being together. My things have been found, but what state they are in I do not know. I expect to get them in a week or two; their loss would have been a blow. Have no fears about me, dear. Send me postcards with views of Vilno—it doesn't matter about the captions—they can be in Chinese for all I care. I love Vilno, of which I have happy recol-

lections, and relive the time I spent there and dream of returning to it. I warmly embrace you and the children.

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak* [Gubernia Prison, Orel]
March 28(15), 1915

Aldona dearest,

I am hastening to write since there is the opportunity of getting a letter to you. I received your postcard dated February 19, with the view of the cathedral. Thanks very much for it. Please convey my gratitude to Stan for the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* which I will receive up to May. In all probability I shall be here for a long time, but just how long I cannot say.

My case is now with the Court of Justice and I rather think the trial will take place shortly. This means that I may be sent to Warsaw. The uncertainty is most annoying, but, having become used to these "comforts" I am now indifferent to them. It is so sunny and warm outside that I have no desire to think about anything. The sunlight is pouring into our cell, and through the window I can see the expanse of sky, the town and, in the distance, the snow-covered fields. Beneath the window I can hear the jangling of fetters as the convicts take their exercise. In a week's time it will be Easter, an Easter of universal suffering, onerous labour and want. The only bright things are our feelings, our dreams and the conviction that a better day will come. I send you my heartiest wishes and embrace you. Come what may, I am convinced that we shall meet in other conditions, when I shall no longer need to conceal

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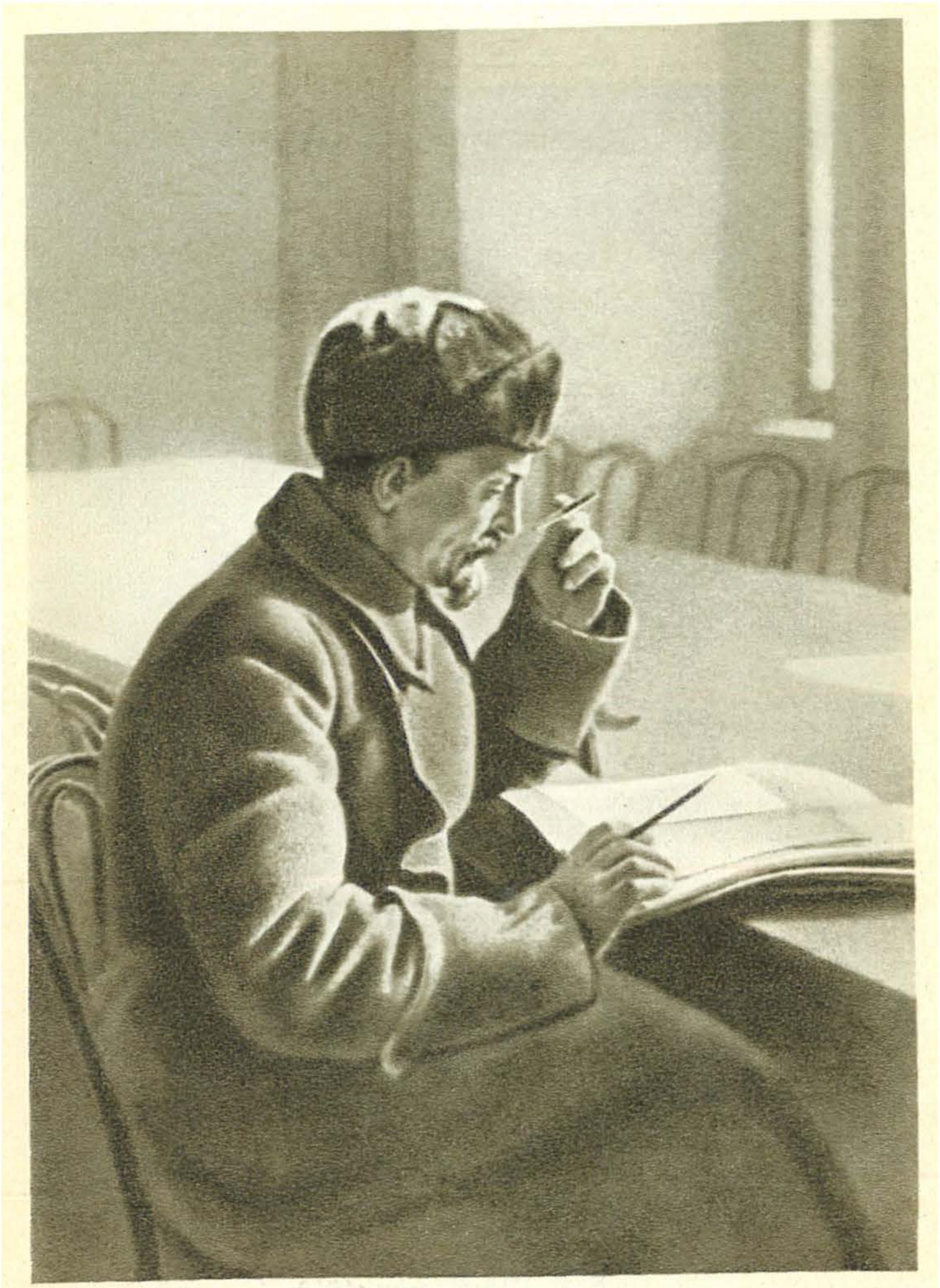
* This letter was sent illegally.—*Ed.*

F. E. Dzerzhinsky. 1919



F. E. Dzerzhinsky during a trip to Siberia. 1922

myself and when the work and the torment suffered by myself and millions of others will yield their fruit. . . .

I am fit and well despite the unbearable conditions. At the moment enteric fever is raging here and they say that many political prisoners have succumbed to it. We don't know exactly how many because the sick are taken from here to the former women's prison, which is near by. The conditions for treatment are indescribable. The doctor, Rychliński by name, is known among the prisoners as the executioner.... Apart from powders, there is no medicine of any kind for the sick. It is difficult even to see or to summon the male nurse. A man with a high temperature remains in his cell days on end without any medical help. It is not surprising that so many of our people are dying, especially those from Częstochowa, Lodz and Dąbrowa Basin, that is, those who cannot get any help from home. Already six of our comrades have died—five of them from consumption.... My cell gets a certain amount of sunshine and we have formed a group of comrades with whom I associate. I help the others with their studies and the time passes quickly. There is no need to worry about me. We can buy bacon, salt meat, a little cheese and pickled herring, so we have enough. After all a man doesn't need so very much. So no anxiety, please. I am now getting letters and news from Warsaw, from Zosia, too, and I have had two new photos of Jasiek. Jasiek is growing normally and he is a very gentle boy; this news has cheered me. We are still waiting for our things. The railway authorities, because of certain formalities, do not want to part with them, possibly they are insisting on payment from the prison administration for the eight months' storage. We shall lodge another complaint, meanwhile most of us are walking about without any soles to our shoes because there is no leather in the prison and we have been told that there is none outside either. Most of us are

coughing and only a few are able to go out for the daily exercise. Everyone looks green or yellow. No attention is paid to our complaints. An inspector who visited us said that the soldiers at the front had worse boots. Dearest, in the event of me being transferred to another prison I will try to send you my personal correspondence, I want you to keep it for me because in travelling from prison to prison things get lost and I am most anxious to preserve some of the letters.

P.S. Rumours are going the rounds here that cholera has broken out in Warsaw. Have you heard anything about this? Write to me without mentioning the illness, otherwise the letter may be confiscated. Many of the prisoners have their families there and they are greatly alarmed. Once again I hug you.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. G. Muszkat*

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]
March 1915

I have had two letters from Zosia, one dated January 15 and the other February 5, with two photos of Jasiek. I am delighted that I am at last getting letters again from my dear ones.

I write rarely now because the monotony lends too grey a tone to my mood. When I think about the hell in which all of you are living now my own hell seems to be such a petty affair that I don't want to write about it although it weighs heavily, very heavily at times.

That which you have learned of our conditions is perfectly true—they are simply unbearable. Men are carried to their graves nearly every day.... Of our

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* This letter was smuggled out of prison.—*Ed.*

category* five have died from consumption in the past six weeks. Three had long been waiting to go to their place of exile but had been detained because it took more than seven months to "clear" their documents. All had been transferred thither from Piotrków, which meant that they could not get any help from home since their families were on the other side of the border,** and the conditions here are too awful for words. Because of the abominable conditions, many prisoners have contracted enteric and spotted fever. It is said that there are two or three burials every day and that thirty died between February 5 (Old Style) and March 4. The fever patients are taken from our "sanctuary" to the former women's prison—now used as a so-called hospital for the typhus cases. They wait four or five days for someone to come and diagnose the illness and they lie with the other prisoners in an overcrowded cell, with high temperatures. It is difficult to summon even the male nurse, to say nothing about the doctor, who only comes to see the dying and even then only those dying from non-infectious illness. The doctor, Rychliński, a Pole, mimics the Polish speech of the Polish "pensioners" who cannot speak Russian and curses them in the vilest language. He is known as the executioner and his brutal treatment of the sick prisoners in the Orel Convict Prison is recounted. I have just learned about the death of one of the prisoners who took ill in our cell two weeks ago; after lying for four days with a high temperature, unable to move, he was taken to the "hospital." The doctor never bothers to look at the patients there, leaving them to the mercy of the male nurse who regards us as being worse than dogs. Nearly all the

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* That is, political prisoners and prisoners waiting to be sent to their place of exile.—*Ed.*

** Piotrków was then occupied by Austro-German troops.—*Ed.*

prisoners are ill. The food is disgusting, an eternal diet of tasteless cabbage soup five times a week and something which we call pea soup twice a week; we get from one to two spoonfuls of watery porridge every day. The only food available to those who do not get money from home is one and a half pounds of black bread (often containing sand) or one pound of white bread. Who can live on such a diet? All are pale, green or yellow and anaemic. Linen is changed once a fortnight, and verminous, soiled linen is given in return. The overcrowding makes it impossible to keep clear of vermin. For example, there are sixty prisoners in my cell (two weeks ago we were seventy-one) which can accommodate thirty-seven. We, the hard-labour prisoners, are in a somewhat privileged situation, because in cells of the same size there are up to 150 transit prisoners and men charged with evading military service. Hence the typhus and the large number of victims. My cell is dry, whereas most of the others are so damp that water drips from ceiling and walls.

I am living with a group in a kind of commune; we study together and I am helping some of the others so that time flies. It is difficult to believe that eight months have passed since they took us from Warsaw. I am still getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* and we know everything that it is possible to know from the brief press cables about the war. We live in our own intimate circle, because we have in the cell those who are utterly alien to us, even enemies—some of these, arrested for espionage and banditry, are a disgusting lot. But among the others there are different types. Nothing so brings out the real man as this common life. The experience of it, while it makes one long, long ardently, to change the way of life, has a healing effect, being an antidote to pessimism and disappointment. Were I in a position to write about the things in my

mind I would say nothing about the typhus, cabbage and lice; I would write about our dreams which, although today an abstract idea, are in reality our daily bread.... Pondering over what is now taking place in the world, over the alleged collapse of all hope, I have come to the firm conclusion that the more complete the collapse, the quicker and the more complete will be the triumph of life. For this reason I try not to think about the present war or its results, I look farther and I see that about which I cannot speak today....

My health is fair and I have no wants....

How long I shall remain here I cannot say. Two months ago a number of prisoners left here to stand trial in Warsaw. Soon, I hope, I shall receive the indictment—the documents have been in the Court of Justice for a month; it may be that I will be taken to Warsaw. For the time being, because of the typhus, prisoners are not taken from here.

I wrote to Zosia immediately after getting her first letter from Switzerland; whether or not she got it I still do not know. I am glad that she is in Zurich and that Jasiek is coming along finely.

Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska*

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]
May 3 (April 20), 1915

My dearest Zosia,

I have just been told that I shall be transferred today to the convict prison (also here in Orel). This is not as calamitous as it sounds.** Conditions there, at least so I am told, are not too bad. My only regret is that I will not be able to bid farewell to my comrades. Ever

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* This letter was smuggled out of prison.—*Ed.*

** The convict prison in Orel was notorious for brutal treatment.—*Ed.*

a wanderer, I have no fears of any kind. Incidentally they are taking me there solely because of a misunderstanding, and I think that in a couple of weeks I will be brought back because the prisoners charged with me received the indictment today and I expect to get it in a day or two. Perhaps they will soon take us to Warsaw. Physically and morally I feel good and the latest news, provided it is true, heralds freedom for me as well.

I have had two letters from you; I sent you one but apparently it did not reach you. Maybe you have heard about me from your father. I wrote him a pretty detailed letter. He told me that Jasiek had another attack of tonsillitis and the news caused me no little anxiety.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Convict Prison, Orel]
August 14 (1), 1915

My dearest Zosia,

I think I have received all your letters and the postcards—the last being a postcard dated July 25. Every letter from you is a big event in my life, since I get to know something about you and Jasiek. At times I long for him, but, let the heart be silent. The day will come, of this I am sure, when I shall be with you.... At the moment I am in a kind of torpor, a state of mental immobility as in a dream....

Don't be anxious about me, I am quite well, having plenty of strength and everything I need. My cell-mate is a good companion and time flies.

This is a better place than the Gubernia Prison. It is quiet, there is no dust, no vermin, we bathe every ten days, get clean linen and half an hour exercise every day. I do not know when the second case will be tried. I received the indictment two months ago; my current

three-year sentence should, according to my calculations, expire on February 29, 1916, Old Style; then, I imagine I shall be taken back to the Gubernia Prison.

I know about the war as much as one can learn from the press telegrams. Permission has been granted to subscribe to the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik*, which I shall get from today onward. While in the Gubernia Prison I wrote to your father about Julian* in the hope that he would inform his wife. Julian died, in January I think, from consumption. From the moment of his arrival in Orel he looked awful, although he never complained; he died in the hospital where he lay for several weeks among strangers; he passed away without even knowing that he was dying. The exact date I do not remember. His wife should write about this to the prison administration.

I have not heard from Aldona for a long time and am worried; I wrote to her a month ago in reply to her letter of June 10, but have not heard from her. I have sent all my photos of Jasiek to my brother for safekeeping—I am not allowed to have them here. But I remember them and often, lying on the bed with my eyes closed, I visualize the photos and suffer much pain when I fail to evoke the image of Jasiek himself. My dear little boy, my happiness, I kiss and embrace you; I will come to you, we will see each other, only be patient, the time will come. Keep well and be a good boy. Write to me, darling, whenever you get the opportunity.

Yours,
Felix.

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* Julian Kahn, a miner from the Dąbrowa Basin, member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania.—*Ed.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Central Convict Prison, Orel]
September 14 (1), 1915

Zosia, my dearest,

I am sending a postcard this time to make sure of it reaching you. Don't fret about me, I am quite well and lack nothing. True, the boredom is pretty awful, but that, after all, is my lot and will be until this thing is ended. I keep on waiting and the days run into weeks and the weeks into months. I have now been confined exactly three years. I am tranquil, not upset in any way, just as if I had shed my last strength and been left completely numb, as if my entire existence were one continual nightmare.

Awaiting the awakening, my mind is at ease, because I know that it is bound to come. And you, dearest, write to me, let me have all your news—the sad and the glad—your letters are practically my sole contact with the world.... How are you managing now that your lessons are finished, have you found other work?

How I long for Jasiek, to hear his voice, to see his little hands and to take him into my arms; at times the longing is so overwhelming that it is almost impossible to believe that things are as they are—you there, and me here. I embrace and hug him. When, at last, will the day come?

But we must not give way.... All that life sends to us we shall bear.... Write to me, Zosia, whenever you feel the desire to do so, whenever you get a minute to spare.

How are things with our family, will they be able to return to Warsaw?* What about your father? Please convey to him my warm greetings. I have had a post-

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* The "family" refers to the Polish Social-Democratic émigrés in Germany and Austria. Warsaw was occupied by the Germans at the time.—*Ed.*

card from Aldona saying that she has remained in Vilno. Alas, my letter did not reach her. I am now getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* again. I have money and books and the time passes quickly. When Rosa returns from her holiday* convey to her and to her family** my warmest greetings.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Central Convict Prison, Orel]
October 15 (2), 1915

Zosia dearest,

Don't have any fears for me—my health is reasonably good and the food is not too bad. According to my calculations, in four months' time (March 13, 1916) my sentence will expire*** and then, I daresay, I shall be transferred to the Gubernia Prison where I shall have to wait until the end of the war. It is hardly likely that the trial will take place earlier. Conditions here are better than in the Gubernia Prison, but it will be a welcome change because I find the monotony and the boredom exceedingly wearisome. I have not had any news from my brothers and sisters. Aldona is staying on in Vilno but the children have been sent away. Ignaty is in Warsaw. I know something about the progress of the war thanks to the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik*, but because of my nerves I just scan the pages. I kill the time by reading books. My nerves are shattered.

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* The reference is to Rosa Luxemburg who at this time was in prison in Germany.—*Ed.*

** Dzerzhinsky has in mind the leaders of Polish Social-Democracy.—*Ed.*

*** The sentence for the first charge—the flight from Siberian exile.—*Ed.*

What is more, I have aged and I fear that in another year I shall not have a single hair on my head. In the daytime I am in a state of apathy. The only thing that rouses me is your letters. I dream every night and the dreams are so expressive as to be almost real....

Jasiek, my darling boy. I gaze at you, at your photos and hug and kiss you. When we meet we will laugh and be glad, play and listen to Mamma when she sits at the piano. We shall walk hand in hand in the countryside and pick flowers and listen to the birds and to the rustle of the leaves. We shall chase one another and, embracing, will sit down and tell each other stories. This will be a great day for us. Meanwhile, forced to remain here in Orel and unable to be with you, I shall think of you and you will think of me, and I know that you will be glad when my words come to you, telling you how glad I was to get your letter and how precious your words are to me.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Central Convict Prison, Orel]
January 17 (4), 1916

Zosia, my dearest,

Two months ago, on November 15, I wrote a long letter to you and Jasiek and since then have received a postcard dated December 6 and a fine photo. This means that you did not get my letter, although I registered it; now I am rebuking myself for not sending you at least a postcard in December. You must forgive me for writing so rarely.... This is a lifeless existence and there is really nothing to write about.... I am now in my fourth year in prison, no good to anyone and powerless to do anything for anybody. Meanwhile,

thanks to your care, Jasiek has become a big boy. When, at long last, shall we meet, when shall I press him to my heart? I live with this thought and at the same time the reality of everyday life is so remote from this hope that it seems that this wonderful moment will never come....

I have little new to report. For the past two months I have been alone in the cell and am quite satisfied. The sentence for my flight from exile expires on February 29 (Old Style), that is, in two months, and I rather think I will then be taken back to the Gubernia Prison for the duration of the war. There is little chance of the trial taking place earlier. I shorten the time by reading. Warm greetings to your family and our acquaintances.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Central Convict Prison, Orel]
February 17 (4), 1916

My dear Zosia,

A month ago I sent you a very sad letter and just as I was handing it in I received simultaneously two letters from you and the note from Jasiek. It was too late to send another letter. Forgive me for this. Your subsequent silence, for which I was unable to find any explanation, so upset me that I imagined all kinds of horrors. But all's well that ends well. Your two postcards of the 4th and 7th of January have reassured me. You, dearest, should not fret when you think about me and when you read my letters. Whatever fate may have in store for me, no matter how low my spirits, you know that it would never enter my mind to make groundless complaints. Even when overcome with weariness, deep in my heart I am calm and preserve my

love of life and understanding of it, of you and of others. I love life exactly as it is, in its reality, in its eternal movement, in its harmony and in its terrible contradictions. My eyes still see, my ears still hear, my mind receives and my heart has not yet become hardened. The song of life lives in my heart.... And he who hears this song in his heart, never, no matter what torment he may be called upon to endure, never curses his lot and would never exchange it for the normal and peaceful existence. To me this song is everything, the only thing left, the song of love of life. Both in prison and in the outside world where there is now so much horror, it lives on, eternal as the stars; the stars and all the loveliness of nature give birth to it and it finds its way to the human heart; the heart sings, eternally seeking resurrection. In the daytime when the sky is cloudless, and at night when the stars peep at me through the bars as if whispering something, I, dreamy and oblivious, visualize the smile on Jasiek's lips, and his eyes filled only with love and truth, vividly recall the faces and the names of friends, of my loved ones. At such moments I experience a wonderful spiritual peace and contentment as if I myself were a child, pure and unsullied, so much so that I forget all about myself and my torments....

In a postscript to my last letter I suggested that if at all possible you should return home.* Should this cause difficulties with our correspondence or cause it to cease altogether,** don't worry. The main thing is that all should be well with you.

Have no fears for me. I am well, the cough no longer troubles me, it is warm in the cell (the winter has been

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* That is, to return to Warsaw from abroad.—*Ed.*

** In view of the German occupation it was impossible to send letters from Warsaw to Russia.—*Ed.*

an extremely mild one) and the food is reasonably good. In a little more than three weeks they will transfer me, as I told you, to the Gubernia Prison.

Before ending, a few words and all my heart and all my caresses to our little Jasiek, buy for him half a dozen buns—after all, I won't be seeing him for a while. My darling boy, my own Jasiek, warm kisses from your daddy. When they let me out I will come to you at once, the train will take me nearer and nearer to you and you and Mamma will be at the station to meet me. I will be seeing you for the first time. I will carry you on my shoulders and hug and kiss my own dear Jasiek. Keep well, be good and grow up. From your daddy Felek.

How is Aunt Levicka,* or have you parted with her again?

Your,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Gubernia Prison, Orel]
March 26 (13), 1916

Dearest Zosia,

I was taken to the Gubernia Prison a fortnight ago. According to a decision of the Senate, the charge against myself and the others has been handed over to the Moscow Court of Justice. This is because the trial is likely to take place before the end of the war. I impatiently await news from you and, not feeling like writing myself, I am sending a postcard. You know about my life here—there are twenty-eight of us in the cell.... We do

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* Code name for the Left Polish Socialist Party. During the 1914-18 war the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania and the Left Polish Socialist Party drew closer.—*Ed.*

a little studying and the time passes. My health is good. I kiss Jasiek and embrace you. Hearty greetings to our relatives and acquaintances.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison, Orel]
April 2 (March 20), 1916

. . .I feel at ease and I am quite well. The time passes quickly. I spend practically the whole day teaching comrades to read and write. We expect to be transferred to the Gubernia Prison in Moscow (not the Butyrki) sometime this week because the Moscow Court of Justice is now preparing to hear the charge against us. . . .*

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison, Moscow]
April 27 (14), 1916

Dear Zosia,

I have been at this address for the past three weeks and hope that one of these days I shall get news from you. My case will be reviewed in the very near future, but I have not yet been told of the date. You, I presume, will learn of the sentence from the newspapers; they say that the sentences for political charges are milder now, but I am not thinking very much about this and will not engage in any guesswork. Although I am sup-

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* Dzerzhinsky was tried on the second charge—that of revolutionary activity during 1910-12. In April 1916, he was transferred to Moscow where on May 17(4), 1916, the Moscow Court of Justice sentenced him to another six years of hard labour. He began to serve this sentence in the Moscow transit prison (Butyrki), whence he was released by the February Revolution of 1917. —*Ed.*

posed to be in solitary confinement there are two of us in the cell. Actually I would prefer being alone, the more so because my cell-mate is not to my liking.... I read all the time and the time passes and the end, at last, is approaching. Conditions here are bearable, I am not as isolated as in Orel. I have learned that my sister Jadwiga is living here; she left Vilno before the occupation but does not know that I am in Moscow. I have written to her and if she has not left the city, we will be able to meet.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]
May 14 (1), 1916

Zosia, my dearest,

Only yesterday evening did your letters of February 27 and March 15 with the flowers from Jasiek reach me. I am sending a postcard and after the trial will write to you at greater length. The silence worried me, but I knew that my letters were being held up because of the transfer to Moscow, so I waited patiently, and the patience brought its reward. There is much that is sad and sorrowful in your letters, relieved, it is true, by the gladness of Jasiek. How I envy you. With what joy I would bury myself deep in the countryside, alone with Jasiek and you—a complete world of our own—in the warm rays of the sun, the cool shade of the trees, the eternally flowing stream, the tender flowers, meadows and skies....

My trial begins in three days from now. I have briefed counsel. I had a postcard yesterday from a lawyer named Kozlovsky in Petrograd to the effect that you had approached him with a view to defending me. But I do not need him, and will inform him accordingly. Zosia,

have no fears for me, I give you my honest word that I have everything I need for the entire period of my imprisonment. . . .

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]
May 26 (13), 1916

Zosia dearest,

I imagine that you already know from the newspapers of the sentence: six years (hard labour), but three years have been taken into account, which means another three to go. The main thing is that I will not be in irons —the period of wearing fetters being part of the three years already served.* The sentence will enter into force in seventeen days and I will soon (possibly within a month) be transferred to the convict prison. I will make every effort to be allowed to serve the sentence in the Butyrki Prison in Moscow.

We are still two in the cell but during exercise ten of us walk together so that I am not quite so lonely. I shall be glad of the transfer—I have had my fill of solitary confinement. I am hoping that I will be allowed to work. If so, the time will pass more quickly and I will strengthen my muscles somewhat. It is astonishing how time flies. Jasiek is now quite a big boy, in a month he will be celebrating his fifth birthday. My own darling boy. When I think of the pain, sorrow and torment which his upbringing has cost you, I think also about the happiness which he gives and I envy you and am glad for your sake and long to see him. . . . One must have moments of happiness in order to live and to be a bright torch in life, to be the bearer of joy,

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* Nevertheless Dzerzhinsky was kept in irons for a long time after the trial.

to be able to suffer and to come through unscathed, be the trials what they may.... The memory of his mother's love will remain with him for life.... Jasiek dear, when will my eyes rest on you? When will you be at my side so that all my troubles and all my bitterness will fly away? When shall I, like you, be able to laugh and play? That day will come, it is coming and, perhaps, is not so very far away....

Yours,
Felix.

To Jasiek Dzerzhinsky [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]
June 6 (May 24), 1916

My darling Jasiek,

I received your words (of April 11) which you sent to me from Hubel, from the mountains. Like little birds, they flew to me and are now with me in the cell. I am so glad that my Jasiek remembers me and that he is in good health. Yes, my dear boy, when I return we will climb still higher mountains, climb to the clouds, to the snow-capped peaks where the eagle builds its nest. We will look down on the lakes and meadows, on the villages and towns, on the green woods and the rugged cliffs and the whole world will appear before our eyes. I will tell you stories about myself, of places visited and things seen, of my joys and sorrows and of how I love you, my son; we shall talk about you, about the things you love and the people you love, about what you will be and about the joy you will be for Mamma, for myself and for all people.

Your flowers are with me here, and when I look at them and at your photo I think about you. We shall roam among the wild flowers—white and red, yellow and blue and all the other colours, watch the bees settle on them and see how they gather the honey. We shall

listen to the sounds of the bees, flowers, trees and birds, to the ringing of the bells; at home, listening to Mamma playing the piano, we shall be quiet and silent so as not to interfere.

But now good-bye, my wonderful boy. A great big hug and embrace from your daddy.

Your *Papa Felek.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]
June 29 (16), 1916

Dearest Zosia,

I have just received your letter of June 5 and the photo of Jasiek. You are worrying needlessly about me. After all, the sentence could hardly have been milder. I, having expected a more severe one, am not the least bit upset. Another three years, this time, I think, in Moscow in the Butyrki Prison, whither I shall be transferred in the coming weeks. I cannot complain about my health. The food, considering the present hard times, is not bad, money I have, and there was no need whatever for you to send me any. I know only too well how things are with you, so please don't send any more money. My chief worry is that I am powerless to do anything to help you, and the thought of being a burden to you is too much.

So once again, dearest, have no fears for me, and if it would be better for you to go home,* by all means do so, after all, the war is bound to end some time. At any rate we shall be together in thought. So good-bye, and kisses to both of you.

Yours,
Felix.

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* That is, to Poland, which was then occupied by the Germans. The German authorities refused Z. Z. Dzerzhinska permission to travel to Poland.—*Ed.*

P.S. Jasiek is now in his sixth year. What a big boy we have!

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]
July 24 (11), 1916

Zosia dearest,

I have not written for a long time although I had intended writing a long letter. I have been waiting for the transfer to the Butyrki Prison. It now looks as if I will stay here for some time to learn the art of tailoring, that is to sew on a machine and, when proficient, go to the Butyrki for work. The prospect of serving the remainder of my sentence in Moscow gladdens me.... My cell-mate is a companionable fellow. That is all the news. I am not short of anything, I'm in good health, time is passing and the day of my return to freedom is drawing near.... On no account must you fret for me —there is nothing accidental in my being here. This is my fate. I feel fit and indeed my lot is better than that of many others. Now that I have the prospect of work time will fly even more quickly.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska [Gubernia Prison, Moscow]
August 2 (July 20), 1916

My dear Zosia,

I have not heard from you for a long time and in your last letter, dated June 14, you wrote about Jasiek being ill. Perhaps you addressed your letters to the Butyrki Prison. The likelihood is that I shall remain in the Gubernia Prison at least for some months until I learn to handle the machine. Write to me here, because even if I am transferred, the correspondence will

be sent on. Your silence worries me, and your letters bring so much gladness into my cell.

Any news of Julian?* Without his support it will be exceedingly difficult for you. What have you decided about returning to your father? Not long ago I saw Jasiek in a dream, just as if he were alongside me, and the longing gnaws at my heart. When, when shall we see each other and be together? Sometimes I think it would be better if I were to harden my heart, to become numb and insensible to all feeling. I want to live, but I must quench the longing and silence my heart.... I see nothing but these cold, grim walls.... But, when through the bars I catch a glimpse of the floating clouds, the swallows and the pigeons, and see the western sky ablaze with colour, tranquillity and hope return. Life is indeed grand and invincible.

Felix.

P.S. August 3. I am being transferred today to the Butyrki Prison. Write to me there.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Gubernia Prison Hospital, Moscow]
August 30 (17), 1916

Zosia dear, my beloved,

This finds me in the prison hospital suffering from a not very serious complaint. I have strained a tendon in the leg;** it will soon disappear and in a few days I will return to the Butyrki Prison. Write to me there. Honestly, there is no need whatever to worry about

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* Julian Marchlewski was confined in a concentration camp in Hafelburg, Germany.—*Ed.*

** In addition to the strained tendon Dzerzhinsky suffered from sores caused by the fetters and was in danger of blood poisoning. —*Ed.*

F. E. Dzerzhinsky in his office. 1921

F. E. Dzerzhinsky and Z. Z. Dzerzhinska at a summer resort near Moscow. 1923

F. E. Dzerzhinsky. 1926

me. Jadwiga, my sister, comes to see me. The other day I had a visit from Wladek's wife*.... I hug and embrace you and Jasiek.

Felix.

To W. E. Dzerzhinsky**

[Gubernia Prison Hospital, Moscow]
September 11 (August 29), 1916

...Always when I recall our years in Dzierżynowo I am overcome with emotion and relive the joys of our childhood.... The longing comes over me to revisit the woods and hear the murmuring of the trees, the croaking of the frogs and all the music of nature. It may well be that I derived my spirit from this music of the woods, the music of my childhood years which, unceasingly, plays in my heart the hymn of life. You ask, have I changed? I don't know. My youth has passed. Life has left me with many furrows and not only on my brow. Apart from the alien torment I have no regrets whatever; because of my desire for truth I have brought much pain upon my beloved ones. I have lived a rich and deep life, without any show of sentimentality, without despondency. And my public life? I have grown up not only with my thoughts, but also with the masses, and together with them I must experience the entire struggle, the torment and the hopes. I have never lived with closed eyes, engrossed solely in my thoughts. I have never been an idealist. I have learnt to know the human heart and it seems to me that I feel its every throb.... I have lived in order to fulfil my mission and to be myself. So now you know the conditions of my life: In a few days it will be four years since I have been forced to live without life. I think and I feel, it is

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* Zosia, the wife of his brother Wladyslaw.—*Ed.*

** This letter was smuggled out of prison.—*Ed.*

true, but these are the thoughts and the feelings of the dead, as if one were held fast in a swamp, as if dreaming without being asleep.... I am powerless and useless. But my brain counsels me not to give in. I must carry on to the very end. It cannot be otherwise. I have no qualms. And although I do not know what fate has in store for me, in my mind I am always tracing the contours of the future with which the struggle will be crowned. I am, as you see, an optimist.

More than anything I long for Jasiek. He was five last June. He has been ill a little—he has a weak throat. He is a fine boy, intelligent, but somewhat nervous. I have always loved children. In their company I feel myself a carefree child, I can be myself with them. Zosia tells me all about him and these letters take his place for me. After Jasiek, my greatest longing is to be with nature. These grey stones, these iron bars numb the spirit and make everything colourless. Zosia* has told you about visiting me in Moscow. Please convey hearty greetings to her and kiss little Zosia** for her uncle. I see her in my mind's eye just as she was in Wylęgi.*** I am taking advantage of the opportunity to send you this letter and for this reason I am writing in Polish. Tomorrow I shall be discharged from the hospital, so write to me at the transit prison.... Send a postcard confirming receipt of this letter.

Felix.

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* Zosia, Wladyslaw's wife.—*Ed.*

** Dzerzhinsky's niece.—*Ed.*

*** The farm near Lublin where Dzerzhinsky often hid from the police.—*Ed.*

To W. E. Dzerzhinsky [Central Transit Prison, Moscow]

September 15 (2), 1916

My dear brother,

I am now an "apprentice" in a workshop making military uniforms.* After four years, nearly all of them in solitary confinement, I have become tired of inactivity and time drags especially when I think of my isolation and uselessness. . . . In a way the work on the machine is healing me physically. Alone it would soon become tedious, but I am working with others and time flies. I can no longer think about the things which torment me. Life is monotonous and empty, but such is fate and I am not complaining. This is my lot. In my mind there is still the same song of life, the same music of grandeur and beauty and the same dreams of a better world. Yes, I have remained the same although my teeth are not as sound and as sharp as they were. After all, I am now nearing forty, my youth has gone irrevocably and with it the ability to be as receptive and responsive as was the case earlier. . . . When will we be able to have a heart to heart talk? During visits this is impossible. For me the visits are agony. Many people meet at the same time and, being forced to shout in order to hear one another, the result is that nothing at all can be heard because of the din. I would like to meet you in other circumstances, and I hope the time will come when it will be possible for us to meet in our village, to listen once again to the sounds of our woods and open up our hearts. For me Dzierżynowo is a kind of fairy-land. I always dream that if only I could go there I would regain my strength and my youth. I was last there in 1892, and in my dreams I often see the house, the pine-trees, the sand-hills and the ditches—everything down to the most minute detail.

Felix.

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* In Butyrki Prison.—*Ed.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]
September 16 (3), 1916

Zosia dearest,

I am now a workman. The day before yesterday I began to work. Already I feel better mentally and I am sure it will be better for my health. A commission has decreed me unfit for heavy manual labour and I am now an "apprentice" to a tailor. In a couple of months I shall begin to sew on the machine and should soon be able to earn enough to maintain myself and thus relieve my relatives of any expenditure. I am still in irons, but I am hoping that my two-year period in the chain-gang will be calculated as part of the three years already served. The chains in themselves are not the bugbear, the real trouble is the eternal clanging. But then one gets used to everything. I am writing to you candidly, and you, dearest, should not be worried. I really feel fine and I am telling you this without any shade of complaint or sorrow. I am confident that we shall meet again, that we shall both caress our little Jasiek and tell each other about all that has happened.

Today, after a long absence, the sun reappeared, peeped into our cell and warmed us with its tender rays. And my heart, lighter, feels as one does on a balmy day in autumn. How many years have gone by, how much suffering and torment, and yet the heart is able to forget it all and be blithe at the thought of a smile, the smile of a child, our little Jasiek, at the thought of his eyes, free from guile, clear and deep. I am relaxing at the moment, thinking about the day when I shall see him. This will be the day of days, a day such as we have never known before, and I am confident that it will restore to me my youth and springtime.

I am now in a common cell, which is all to the good. We all go out to work and the cell is quite an airy one.

I am sleeping better and my appetite has returned. I am sewing and my only regret is that, having mastered the art, I cannot make anything for Jasiek. Tell him that I am working, but that I cannot send him any of the things I make, since this is not permitted and because you are so far away from Moscow.

What have you decided about going home? I know what it means to be so far away from all that one holds dear, and I am gladdened by the thought that maybe you will succeed in returning to your friends and home.

In future I shall be able to write only once or at most twice a month, but don't let this alarm you.... I am reasonably fit—my illness was purely accidental, and I would hate to think that anxiety about me should be a source of worry to those whom I love. And Jasiek's love for you and me should be the kind that liberates rather than fetters, enriching the life of the loved one, enabling him to live with all the fulness of heart and soul.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]
October 29 (16), 1916

My dear Zosia,

Your postcard dated September 23 reached me only the other day. It is awful having to wait so long for letters. How are things with you? The parting from Jasiek must have been heartbreaking for you, and Jasiek, how is he? I impatiently await news from you. Nothing has changed with me. I wrote to you while in hospital and again when I was discharged. I have been working for the past six weeks and the days pass quickly. Each evening I say to myself: one day less, a day nearer to

freedom and our reunion. My health is good, I find the work beneficial and my apathy is on the wane. Generally speaking, the conditions here are bearable. Jadwiga visits me once a month. True, the life is pretty monotonous and boring as is always the case in prison. But what with working, sleeping and reading there is no time to be blue. My dreams are mostly of walking in freedom. When I retire I close my eyes and see clearly the faces of those dear to me and the Jasiek of my imagination; the faces are always in movement, changing as in a kaleidoscope, one succeeded by another.... I haven't written to Jasiek for a long time. But he is never out of my thoughts and I am happy about him. Give him a big hug for me. Return I will and great will be our gladness.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]
November 19 (6), 1916

Zosia dearest,

I am so glad that Jasiek is now with you, being together is much better. I can thoroughly understand the tears of joy shed by our little fellow. The news that he had remained behind and that you were travelling alone upset me every bit as much as if I had been with you and that we had been forced to part. I dream of that wonderful day when I, too, will return and embrace you both. That this day will come, I have no doubt, although I have become so used to this repulsive and nerve-racking atmosphere that at times I feel as if it had swallowed me for ever, as if our reunion were a joy never to be realized. But our dream will come true. Meanwhile you must live as deep and full a life as possible and

think of me as a close friend for whom the thought of you is his mainstay and joy. Jasiek dear, often during work and when on exercise I think of you and send you a glad smile. Have a good time and be good yourself. I want you to grow up healthy and strong and to be a good worker. I embrace and hug you.

Yours,

Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Moscow, Central Transit Prison]
December 3 (November 20), 1916

Dearest Zosia,

Your last letter dated October 15. reached me and, as usual, your words brought me joy and comfort. The hope of returning has never left me and I live with this conviction. Your words tell me about the things dearest to my heart and somehow I feel your nearness and our kinship. Reading them, the feeling of being alone disappears and with it the bitter thoughts of helpiessness and the isolation; I feel an infusion of new strength and awareness of the necessity not to be downhearted, to hold out until the end. How much of me remains I do not know, or whether when at last I leave this place I will be able to live a real life again. These bitter thoughts poison my mind. But I have a good antidote in Jasiek. Love tells me that he is my son, that my youth lives on in him, that I will see him, that if I have conserved my strength, he will awaken it and summon it to action. And I am comforted. What is to be will be. Even if my strength should not be the same, the world will not cease to be beautiful and the hymn of life, the hymn of love will never cease to swell out in my heart. Our suffering will be a mere detail, because our persecutors are powerless to turn us into people

with petty minds. Man's sole happiness is his ability to love and, thanks to this, to grasp the idea of life in its eternal motion. And I bless my fate and the fate of all those dear to me that it has given us this most precious of jewels.

I have become so used to prison life that I find it easier to experience it than to think about somebody else having to endure it. It is exactly the same when one thinks about war, about its insanity and horrors, to use the words of Andreyev. The mere thought of it is terrifying and one finds it hard to understand why it is permitted. In everyday life people, step by step, experience all the horrors, yet many preserve their minds and see, precisely because of the horrors, the immortal substance of life and its wonderful beauty. But our trials, bad as they are, are not so very terrible and one feels ashamed for thinking of them at this time of slaughter and devastation.

In a few days from now they will take off my fetters; incidentally, since recovering from my illness the irons have not troubled me greatly. Like everything else, one gets used to them. My work is not too tiring, the hours are few because the days are short and the workshop—the corridor—is badly lit. At the moment I am a helper to two comrades working on the machines. I do all the handwork. It is a friendly atmosphere and we enjoy each other's company. During October and November I earned a ration* worth nine rubles and some odd kopeks. Don't send me any money. I really don't need it and in any case prisoners allocated to work draw rations only to the amount of their earnings. Moreover I get a parcel once a month when my sister visits me, thus I have all the food I need. The work is also good for my nerves, so all in all I have nothing to com-

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* A ration of food products.—*Ed.*

plain about. I am glad that I now have more people in the cell. It is much worse when there are only two. I find it easier to be alone when there are more people, and it is easier to find sympathetic souls. Although Edward* is here I have not been able to meet him. Those who have seen him say that he looks well. What about his wife? Please convey greetings from me. Is she still in Paris? And what about our family?** Is it possible to maintain contact with them? Samuel*** promised to write via his sister but so far there has been no letter from him.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]
December 31 (18), 1916

My dearest Zosia,

This is the last day of 1916 and although there is still no sign of the war coming to an end, the day of our reunion, the day of our joy, is drawing nearer and nearer. Of this I am absolutely convinced.... What 1917 has in store for us we do not know, but we shall be stout of heart and that is the main thing. It depresses me having to go through this alone without Jasiek, without seeing how he is growing up and how his character is being moulded. I am with you in thought and so strong is the conviction that I shall return that the yearning no longer causes me any pain. Jasiek is grow-

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* Edward Próchniak.—*Ed.*

** Here Dzerzhinsky is referring to Party comrades in Poland. —*Ed.*

*** Samuel Lazowert, member of the Social-Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania and later of the C.P.S.U.(B.)—*Ed.*

ing and soon he will be going to school. All I want is that our darling boy should be healthy.

Things here are much the same. The irons have been taken off in order to make it more convenient to work. The work is not too heavy nor does it fatigue me, in fact, it has even strengthened both my muscles and my nerves. Jadwiga visits me once a month, which means that I am not completely cut off from my relatives, while the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* and the *Russky Invalid* keep me posted with the news. The food is adequate, so don't have any fears whatever about me. Apparently it is now possible to send and receive letters from home,* maybe you have had news about your relatives.** Is it true that they too are now in a bad plight?...

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]
January 14 (1), 1917

My dear Zosia,

I have before me your letter of November 24 and Jasiek's cuttings. When I look at them and think that they were in his hands, that he himself cut them out, playing and smiling and studying at the same time, a wave of love for him fills my heart and I speak to him in the tenderest words and wish him to grow up strong and good, to be a torch, able to love and to be loved. We must hold ourselves in patience for the great day of our reunion. The time will pass quickly and Jasiek will be quite a big boy, a real man. It may be that we

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* The reference here is to Warsaw which was then under German occupation.—*Ed.*

** Dzerzhinsky has in mind the life of the Social-Democratic organization in Poland.—*Ed.*

will never have to part again, that we will be able to lead a normal life. This, at any rate, is my dream, and it is for this I wait. I want to feel that I am still alive, that my strength has not departed. Eight months have already gone by since my last trial. You must not be anxious about me, I am no longer in irons, the food is bearable, the cell is heated and I am warmly clad. Remember that your joy, and Jasiek's, is my joy, that it gives me the strength and the will to wait until at long last our spring comes.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Central Transit Prison, Moscow]
March 4 (February 19), 1917

My dear Zosia,

Last time I sent you a registered letter dated January 14(1). Since then I have received a letter and postcard dated December 4 and 26 respectively, and a postcard from Jasiek sent on Christmas day. I have not yet got the photos of Jasiek, although I signed for a packet two weeks ago (I think this was the photos). I am so glad at the prospect of being able to see my little son again even on paper and for such a short time. One is not allowed to keep a photo in the cell, not even of one's son, but I am hoping that they will allow me to keep it at least for one day. On my table is the postcard from Jasiek coloured by him, his words to me, his thoughts, feelings and smiles. How I would love to be with you, my little boy, to blow bubbles so that they should swell and glide through the air, we would watch them and keep blowing to stop them from falling. I think that when you grow up, when you are big and strong, we will learn to pilot an airplane and fly like birds over

the hills and above the clouds, and look down on the villages and towns, the fields and forests, valleys and rivers, lakes and seas, taking in the whole world in all its beauty. The sun will be above us and we will fly on and on. Jasiek dearest, don't be upset that I am not able to be with you. It cannot be otherwise, I love you, my little one, you are my heart's delight, although I see you only in dreams and in thoughts. You are everything to me. Be good, happy and healthy so that Mamma and Papa and all people will be proud of you, so that when you grow up and begin to work you will derive pleasure from your work and give pleasure to others and be an example. I kiss you and give you a big hug, my little one.

I write so rarely now because my life here is unutterably grey and monotonous. I am immured here, but man, like everything living, is always in motion, something in him is always dying and always being born, every moment is a new life, the manifestation of latent energy and possibilities; life is in flux and this is the source of its beauty. Any desire or any attempt to halt it, to perpetuate the moment of happiness or misfortune signifies slavery and the end of life. Consequently I recoil from this prison life, which is nothing but a stagnant swamp and have no desire to write about it or to describe it. At the moment I am dozing, like a bear in his winter den, all that remains is the thought that spring will come and I will cease to suck my paw and all the strength that still remains in my mind and body will manifest itself. Live I will. I am still sharing the cell with a comrade and am quite satisfied. I work about five hours a day on the machine. I am doing more reading and I am getting the *Pravitelstvenny Vestnik* again. The diet is ample. In fact I do not eat all the bread. You dearest, should have no fears for me, and remember I am writing this not just to reassure you.

Such reassurance is not to my liking—it is insulting. If you, for instance, were to conceal any misfortune from me I would take it badly. We must live in truth and know everything. There is no need to send me anything and in any case it is almost impossible to do so. Only bacon, sugar and bread are allowed, and these we have. As for the chocolate, grapes and sweets which Jasiek wants to send me, I am most grateful, but we shall eat them together one day. We will arrange a feast, invite Janek and his friends and recall the past, but at the moment we can do this only in our imagination. Unfortunately I cannot write to Marylka, please convey hearty greetings from me, a kiss for Janek and Stefan. Greetings to our friends and relatives. Have you had any news of your father? How are things with him? Embrace him for me. Is it now possible to correspond freely with Warsaw? How are our relatives* there? All my thoughts are with them. I must end. I embrace and kiss you.

Yours,
Felix.

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To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Moscow
March 31(18), 1917

My dearest Zosia and Jasiek,

Did you get the telegram and postcard which I sent immediately after my release?

For the past few days I have been resting in the outskirts of the city, in Sokolniki, because the impressions and the bustle of the first days of freedom and of the Revolution were too much for me. My nerves, weakened by the long years of confinement, failed to stand up to the burden of work. I became slightly ill but now after

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* This refers to his Party comrades.—*Ed.*

a few days rest the fever has passed completely and I feel perfectly all right. The doctor did not find anything seriously wrong and in all probability I'll be back at work in a week's time.

At the moment I am using the time in order to fill the gap in my knowledge (about Party and political life) and to put my thoughts in order....

I am up to my ears in activity.*

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Moscow
May 27, 1918

Dearest,

I am in the very thick of the struggle, leading the life of a soldier for whom there is no rest because it is necessary to save our house. There is no time to think about one's relatives or oneself. The work and the struggle are hellish. But in this fight my heart remains just exactly as it was in the past. All my time is eaten up with work....

My purpose compels me to be merciless and I am firmly resolved to pursue it to the end....

The ring of enemies is steadily closing in on us, approaching nearer to the heart.... Each day compels us to resort to ever more resolute measures. At the moment we are confronted with a mortal enemy—famine. In order to get bread it is necessary to take the grain from those who have it and share it with those who have not. The Civil War is bound to develop on a vast scale. Having been appointed to a post in the front line, I am determined to fight and to look with open eyes at all

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* In the ranks of the Communist Party.—*Ed.*

the danger of the threatening situation, and I too must be merciless. . . .

Physically I am tired, but I am keeping a grip on my nerves and I have never been downhearted. I hardly ever leave my office. In the corner behind a screen is my bed. I have now been in Moscow for several months. My address is Bolshaya Lubyanka, 11.

If you can find the opportunity, write to me about yourself and Jasiek.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Moscow
August (approximately 22), 1918

My dearest,

Forgive me for not writing. I am with you in spirit but I just haven't got a moment to spare. Like a soldier, I am constantly in battle, and it may be that this will be the last one. I hug you.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Moscow
August 29, 1918

My dear Zosia and my precious Jasiek,

I am constantly on the go with the result that today I am simply unable to concentrate, analyze and write.

We are soldiers at our fighting posts, I live for that which confronts me because this demands the utmost attention and vigilance in order to ensure victory. My will is for victory and despite everything, despite the fact that a smile rarely breaks on my face, I am sure of the victory of the mission and the movement for which and in which I live and work. . . .

We are witnessing the dance of life or death, a moment of truly bloody struggle, of titanic effort....

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

[Berlin]*
October 28, 1918

Dearest,

Today at noon we shall continue our journey. Yesterday there was a number of meetings here at which Liebknecht spoke, and after the speeches a demonstration. The demonstrators were dispersed by the police who used their batons and some people were seriously injured. Groups of demonstrators broke through the police cordon to the Soviet Embassy where they shouted greetings, waved hats and cried, "*Hoch!*" The movement is only beginning. The masses await the revolution. What is needed is a group of pioneers with the necessary will-power and prestige.

Rosa** is still in prison and we do not know when she will be released. We think, however, that it will be very soon. Liebknecht is in complete solidarity with us. In the bigger sections of the Party there is still lack of faith in their own strength, and this is the source of the purely "defeatist" sentiments.

Over us (Russia), apparently, the clouds are gathering not only on the part of the Entente but also of Germany. It looks as if we shall be faced with an exceedingly grim struggle.

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* Dzerzhinsky broke his journey in Berlin on the way back from Switzerland whither he had gone for a few days to see his wife and son after being parted for eight years.—*Ed.*

** At this time Rosa Luxemburg was in prison in Germany. —*Ed.*

Karsky,* refused permission by the Austrians to enter the country, left for Moscow yesterday. He will now go to Warsaw to act as our Consul.

Greetings to Marylka, Stefan and Janek.

I embrace and hug you.

Yours,
Felix.

To A. E. Bułhak

Moscow
April 15, 1919

Dear Aldona,

After the long separation I don't know what to write about or how to begin....

If only we could meet you would realize that I have not changed a bit since the days when I was nearer to you not only by kinship. It is hard to write—especially in the lifeless words of a brief letter—about the things I would like to tell you. To explain everything in a letter is impossible—people see things in a different light and, what is more, not everyone has the gift of being able to turn over in his mind all that the soul has suffered in the long and excruciating years of wandering. But this I can say: I have remained true to myself, I have not changed, although I know that for many there is no name more terrifying than mine.

Today, as yesterday, love is everything for me, I hear and feel its song in my heart, the song that calls to struggle, for unbending will and tireless work. Now, as in the past, the sole determinant of my actions is my ideas, my striving for justice. I find it difficult to write.... I, the eternal wanderer, find myself in the

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* Karsky—Julian Marchlewski—was en route to Vienna as diplomatic representative of the R.S.F.S.R.—*Ed.*

thick of the movement, of the Revolution, helping to build a new life. I see the future and I want to be a party to its shaping, to be in the thick of things, like a stone discharged from a sling, until the end comes and I find eternal peace. Have you ever given a thought to what war really means? You have shut out from your mind the thought of human bodies torn to pieces by shells, the wounded on the battle-fields and the vultures plucking the eyes of the dying. You have turned away from the ghastly sights which confront us every day. How can you understand me, a soldier of the Revolution fighting to banish injustice from the world, so that this war should not hand over millions and millions of people to those drunk with victory—the rich. War is a fearful calamity. The world of the rich and wealthy is advancing against us. The most unfortunate and the most downtrodden people, the first to rise in defence of their rights, are hurling back the armies of the world. Would you have me remain aloof from this struggle? Aldona, dear, you do not understand me and that is why I find it hard to write to you. If you could see how I live, if you could look me in the eyes, you would realize, or to be more precise, you would feel that I have not changed one iota.

Alas, I never got to Vilno, I had intended going there for the sole purpose of seeing you. But I just couldn't find the time. I am sending you the things from Dzierżynowo. In accordance with our laws most of the family valuables have been confiscated.... I know that the news will pain you, but it had to be done. Such is our law in relation to gold. I enclose a list of the articles I am sending on to you. Zosia and Jasiek arrived in Moscow in February. I hug you.

Yours,

Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Kharkov*
Before June 13, 1920

My dear Zosia and Jasiek,

...Summer has come to Kharkov where everything is in blossom and where at the moment we are having a heatwave. Kharkov is a city of gardens.... The profiteering here is incredible. We shall have to work hard and long in order to really win the support of the country. As for me I am unable to act the role of onlooker. It would be worth my staying here for some time, but I don't know what the all-powerful Central Committee will say about this. In any case we'll be seeing each other so I finish without sentiments. All the best. I kiss you.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Kharkov
June 13, 1920

Zosia dearest,

...I am not satisfied with myself. I have the feeling that I could give more than I am actually giving. Could give.... But my nerves are in such a state that I cannot concentrate and take myself in hand in order to conserve my strength in a way that it would give better results with the least expenditure of effort. One should so work that every day the brain and the nerves get a rest. But, while I write about this and give much thought to it, for me it is simply wishful thinking. I am not made that way.

Generally speaking, my stay in the Ukraine has en-

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* At this time Dzerzhinsky was in Kharkov in charge of the rear lines of the South-Western Front.—*Ed.*

livened and broadened the work and is yielding results. I rather think I shall have to stay here for some considerable time, at least until the Central Committee recalls me to Moscow.... I like the work, and would have nothing against staying on. I have no desire to return to Moscow until we render the Makhno gangs harmless. It is not easy to cope with them because they have cavalry, and I haven't. However, should we succeed in smashing Makhno, I will return to Moscow for a few days for further instructions and settle matters on the spot. I kiss you both.

F. D.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Vilno
July 30, 1920

Dear Zosia,

In half an hour we shall be continuing our journey to Grodno and thence to Białystok.* Since there is no time for sentiment I will be brief. So far things are going well. Bring pressure to bear on Sever** to send people here. We and the army of the Polish Front need help because we ourselves cannot take over the entire line. Unschlicht is leaving for Minsk. He is anxious to work there but I have doubts whether he has the strength for this or whether the doctor will give him permission. I kiss you and Jasiek.

Yours,
Felix.

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* On July 30, 1920, a Provisional Revolutionary Committee for Poland was set up in Białystok and consisted of Julian Marchlewski (Chairman), Felix Dzerzhinsky, Felix Kohn, Edward Próchniak and Josef Unschlicht.—*Ed.*

** Sever—Edward Próchniak.—*Ed.*

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Białystok
August 17, 1920

Zosia dearest,

Yesterday we were at Wyszkow, some fifty odd kilometres from Warsaw, and returned to Białystok. We had anticipated being in Warsaw yesterday but now I think this will not be for some time.

Now that we are in the vicinity of the city I am uneasy, having the impression that it may not be the old Warsaw, that it may not greet us in the way we would like. The thing is that our Warsaw, terrorized and crushed, is silent. We do not hear its ringing voice. Evidently our Central Committee [Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party] has not succeeded in winning over the masses or in getting control of the political situation. There is a shortage of leaders, no Lenin, no Marxist politician. But of one thing I am certain: we are at the turning point; the struggle in Russia is developing into an international struggle that will decide the destiny of the world. . . .

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Minsk
August 25, 1920

My dear Zosia,

The fear that catastrophe would overtake us* had long been troubling me, but military matters were not my sphere and it was clear that the political situation necessitated taking risks. We did our bit and learned of the scale of the defeat only when the whiteguard forces were within thirty kilometres of us, not from the west

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* This refers to the unsuccessful offensive of the Soviet troops at Warsaw.—*Ed.*

but already from the south. Cool heads were needed in order to extricate some units without panic, while others prepared to repel the enemy and cover the retreat. As far as I know, we have not lost any of our Białystok workers.

We reached Minsk the day before yesterday. The military situation is still not clear, but what is obvious is the need for a tremendous effort in order to achieve a balance and then superiority....

It may be that I will be taking part in the work of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Front.

Things are in a bad way in Poland. The Party, apparently, has been smashed and has lost its bearings. The working class, paralyzed, submits passively to the repressions. We were welcomed everywhere by the people. Even the rank and file of the Polish Socialist Party aligned themselves with us, but, lacking faith in their strength, failed to conduct active revolutionary work and expected us to do the main job for them.

I should emphasize, however, that our Red Army (with very few exceptions) acted as a Red Army should and, thanks to its behaviour, could have been a revolutionary factor. Generally speaking, there was no looting, the soldiers knew that they were fighting only against the gentry, that they had come not to conquer Poland but to liberate it. I am convinced that the fruits of the work done by our army will soon be reaped.

Our defeat was the result not of an uprising of the Poles against an "invasion,"* it was caused by the ex-

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* When the Red Army, having thrown out the Polish white-guards from the Soviet Ukraine and Byelorussia and pursuing them, entered Poland, the Polish landlords and capitalists and also their stooges in the Right wing of the Polish Socialist Party, for the purpose of deceiving the masses and compelling them to defend the bourgeois-landlord rule in Poland, screamed about a Soviet "invasion" of Poland.—*Ed.*

treme exhaustion of our troops and by the frantic activity of the Polish whiteguards.

The Polish Socialist Party did not give any real support. It paralyzed the working class and stood idly by while the Communists were being smashed. It opposed any class struggle in Poland and, by so doing, enabled the whiteguards to rally and strike at the exhausted Red Army.

The most important task for you in Moscow at the moment is work among the prisoners of war. They should be won over, won to our principles, so that they return to Poland convinced Communists. They should be treated in a comradely way, drawn into work so that they feel the spirit of the new Russia, the pulse of its life and so that they should regard all the shortcomings as things that are being overcome and will be overcome. Let us have a detailed report about all the work, about the people, committees, programme, funds, etc.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Novonikolayevsk*
January 22, 1922**

Dear Zosia,

...There is plenty to be done here and it is being done with great difficulty. The work is not yielding the results that we anticipated and for which we are striv-

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* Novonikolayevsk—now Novosibirsk.—*Ed.*

** At the end of 1921 Dzerzhinsky was appointed a member of the commission set up by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party to supervise deliveries of food and seed grain from Siberia, the Ukraine and abroad. At the beginning of January 1922, he travelled to Siberia as the special representative of

ing. I have the feeling that Moscow is not satisfied with us. We found things in such a state that much time will be needed to get the work going, but the Republic cannot afford to wait. So we are working grimly, straining every nerve in order to hold out and to overcome the new difficulties which are continually arising. The fault, of course, lies with us—the People's Commissariat of Railways. We failed to foresee things, failed to devote attention to matters three or four months ago. True, Yemshanov* was on the spot, but he did absolutely nothing. I am exceedingly angry with him. I realize now that in order to be a Commissar of Railways good intentions alone are not enough. It is only now, in winter, that I clearly understand how essential it is to prepare for winter in summer. But in summer I was still a greenhorn and my assistants were unable to foresee things.

I am not, therefore, in the best of tempers, and this, I think, affects my work and makes it impossible for me to rest and recover from the fatigue. Compared with Moscow I have less work, yet I feel utterly exhausted. How long I shall remain here I can't say, perhaps until March. If summoned to Moscow or if I succeed in delivering the necessary quantity of food, my departure may be speeded up. However, my presence is needed here, and though the direct results are not evident, we are, nevertheless, doing an important job and, in time, it will yield fruit. The rot has been stopped, we are concentrating all efforts in a single direction, and I am certain that

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the All-Russian Executive Committee and the Council of Labour and Defence of the R.S.F.S.R. in order to take emergency measures for the delivery of food to Moscow, Petrograd and the famine-stricken regions of the Volga.—*Ed.*

* A. Yemshanov, special representative of the People's Commissariat of Railways.—*Ed.*

the difficulties will be overcome. This faith keeps me going, gives me the strength to carry on in spite of everything.... I embrace you.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Omsk,
February 7, 1922

Zosia dearest,

You are worried by the thought of my long stay here. It is quite on the cards that I may be able to leave at the beginning of March, but I am not sure. In any case I am working with redoubled energy to complete the job entrusted to me and for which I am responsible. A hellishly hard job, it calls for terrific will-power in order not to retreat, to hold out and not to let the Republic down. Siberian bread and seed for the spring sowing are our salvation and our bulwark in Genoa.*

I have been reduced to such a state that I can hardly sleep, and impotent anger wells up, driving me to think in terms of revenge against the loafers and fools sitting

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* The reference is to the Genoa Conference (World Economic Conference). It was held over April 10-May 19, 1922, in Genoa with representatives from Soviet Russia, Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Japan, Germany and other countries taking part. The United States was represented by an observer.

The imperialist powers represented at the conference tried to use the economic difficulties experienced by Soviet Russia to dictate an extortionate agreement. They insisted on payment of all the tsarist debts, including the prewar debt, compensation to foreigners for the nationalized enterprises, etc. The Soviet delegation, rejecting the claims of the imperialists, submitted proposals for universal disarmament and the annulment of all war debts. The talks in Genoa, which were resumed at the Haague in June and July 1922, did not yield any results.—*Ed.*

in their office chairs.* They completely deceived us, the place was in chaos when we arrived. Among the masses, and even among Party people, there was indifference and no appreciation of the dangerous times in which we are now living. We ourselves had to do everything to ensure normal functioning of the railroads, had to follow up every order to see that it did not remain on paper, and had to hustle everybody to get things done. As for me I had to restrain my anger in order not to ruin the organization completely.

Politically, too, things are not what they should be. Sabotage by the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Japanese agents makes itself felt. This, then, is the atmosphere in which I have to work. Fortunately I have with me some good assistants—Party comrades and specialists, and I hope that in the long run we shall complete the job. You will appreciate that I cannot leave until this is done, although personally I would like to return as quickly as possible.

If I were to leave now, I would never be able to look anybody in the eyes and for me this would be the worst thing that could happen; what is more, it would poison life for us. Today Gerson** in great secrecy from me, acting on instructions from Lenin, asked Belenky*** about the state of my health, as to whether I could remain in Siberia without further injury to it. True enough, the work here is not good for my health. In the mirror I see an angry, sullen, care-worn face with puffy eyes. But I doubt if my health would gain were I recalled before I am able to say that my mission has been carried out in the main. I should be recalled only in the

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* The local railway officials.—*Ed.*

** Dzerzhinsky's secretary in the Cheka and later in the O.G.P.U. —*Ed.*

*** State security worker who accompanied Dzerzhinsky on his journey to Siberia.—*Ed.*

event of my stay here being regarded as useless, as not having yielded the desired results, or if I as People's Commissar for Railways, am held responsible for the state of the railways of which I was wholly unaware until I came here. My month's work in Siberia has taught me more than all the previous years, and I have submitted a number of proposals to the Central Committee.

If as a result of the hellish work we succeed in doing the job, in delivering the necessary supplies of food, I will be glad, because both myself and the Republic will make use of the lesson; we will simplify our managerial system, abolish the centralization which is killing everything, get rid of the superfluous and indeed harmful apparatus of railway commissars and devote more attention to the localities, to better methods of work by switching personnel from their Moscow offices to practical work in the localities.... A kiss for you both.

Yours,
Felix.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Omsk-Novonikolayevsk
February 20, 1922

Zosia dearest,

The mail for the past two weeks has just been brought to me here in the train. Although it is now past midnight I have only finished reading the correspondence from Moscow. I am writing to you now because I won't have time in the morning. I shall spend one day in Novonikolayevsk, where we shall discuss matters with the Revolutionary Committee. The difficulties here are stupendous. Just as the work of the railways was getting into its stride blizzards and snowstorms disorganized everything. Soon we shall be confronted with a new threat—

the food supplies are considerably less than we believed them to be. I cannot cut myself into pieces and foresee everything, and energy alone is no substitute for knowledge and experience. I simply must learn. Nor is the correspondence from Moscow any too happy. Serebryakov,* it seems, is on his last legs.

He, too, is anxious that I should return as quickly as possible, but I cannot do so until we clear up the situation. Bread from Siberia means salvation for the Republic. Moreover, when I return I have no desire to get engrossed in the current work, to be a prisoner to it. The Siberian experience has enabled me to see the basic shortcomings in our system of management, has revealed the necessity of eliminating them. This, however, will be a long struggle. I fear, alas, that nobody will want to listen to me on the subject because in Moscow, too, there is plenty to be done, and, being beset with difficulties, the time, as is often the case, simply won't be found. I have come to the definite conclusion that the main work lies not in Moscow but in the localities, that two-thirds of the responsible comrades and specialists of all Party organizations (including the Central Committee), Soviets and trade-union bodies should be transferred from Moscow to the localities. There is no need to fear that the central establishments will go to pieces. All forces should be concentrated in the factories, in the mills and in the countryside in order really to raise labour productivity; these are not times for pen-pushing in offices. Unless this is done we will not pull through. Even the best plans and instructions from Moscow get stuck on the way and remain suspended in mid-air. It is only now that I have really delved deeply into life and I am determined to battle for it. The chances

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* L. Serebryakov—Deputy People's Commissar for Railways. He subsequently became a Trotskyite.—*Ed.*

are that I shall return to Moscow in the first half of March—about the fifteenth. My fellow workers are also anxious to return as quickly as possible. They are worn out by the endless toil and the isolation from their families. I was forced to remind them that Moscow expects not us, but bread from us. And I must say that they have responded magnificently, and are working selflessly. Even the "specialists" are working like Trojans. We are getting along fine—team spirit is wonderful.... The specialists have become different people altogether—even without any help from the commissars. The institute of commissars in the People's Commissariat for Railways has outlived itself, it should be abolished at once.

But enough.

You will gather that my life is an extremely busy one. I sleep badly, keep thinking all the time and seek an outlet in working to get the job done. Luckily, my health is all right....

Yours,
Felix.

To Jasiek Dzerzhinsky

Omsk-Novonikolayevsk
February 20, 1922

My dear Jasiek,

The train on which I am travelling from Omsk to Novonikolayevsk is a rather bumpy one with the result that my writing is like yours—lines all slanted. Still, I send you kisses and greetings. I am well and have lots to do. The railway car in which I live is quite warm, although outside there are forty degrees of frost. Belenky sends you greetings.... I still don't know when I shall return to Moscow, in any case not before I have completed the work entrusted to me. And you, what are you doing? Are you busy with lessons, and what about

play? Greetings to Chesek.* Kiss Mamma for me fourteen and a half times and keep well. I kiss you warmly. Good-bye.

Your *Papa.*

P. S. I am sending you a copy of the *Siberian Gudok.* On page 4 you will find a puzzle,** see if you can solve it. If you cannot do it yourself, ask Mamma, she will help you. Kisses.

Yours,
F. D.

To Z. Z. Dzerzhinska

Kharkov
May 20, 1926

My dearest,

I have been in Kharkov for two days now and feel fine, in fact better than when I was here before.***

In a week or so I shall leave for Yekaterinoslav and the Donets Coal Basin. New people have developed here, the problems are much more concrete. People listen willingly to what I have to say and respond accordingly.... I would gladly remain in the provinces for permanent work....

Yours,
Felix.

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* Chesek, Jasiek's school-mate.—*Ed.*

** The reference is to a satirical article ridiculing the shortcomings of the Soviet apparatus. The copy of the newspaper has not been preserved.—*Ed.*

*** Beginning of May 1926.—*Ed*

TO THE READER

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ПИСЬМА К РОДНЫМ