

## Excerpts from Stefan's dossier with the State Police in Poland

Vladimir Drobot

This article contains excerpts from Stefan's personnel file maintained at the place he worked in Poland (Wroclaw Polytechnic). Pretty much everyone who was employed anywhere had such a dossier. Right after the war ended and the Communists came to power, such files contained information about person's political views, attitudes, reliability, social origin (very important), religious affiliations, etc. Presumably, it often contained incriminating material, if available, for possible future blackmail. These dossiers were maintained by the Polish Communist Party (PZPR – United Polish Worker's Party) in cooperation with the security apparatus. Without a favorable, or at least neutral, dossier any advancement was out of question. A negative content could have devastating results, including a prison term, and in extreme circumstances a firing squad. I am not exaggerating, it is estimated that several thousand of Poles were executed in the years 1946 – 1953, essentially for their political activities. Closer to home, Nata's brother Vladimir was sent to prison for five years for telling a joke about Stalin. This was in the Soviet Union not in Poland, true, but the Soviets were in complete control of Poland after the war and for many years dictated their wishes. The goal was to make Poland in the image of Soviet Union. The entries to the dossier were mainly made by party members who were co-workers with the individual in question. The basic setup lasted essentially until the collapse of Communism in 1990. After Stalin died in 1953, the situation became a lot less draconian, executions stopped, and a nasty dossier meant a loss of a good job, at the worst. Gradually the entries in these dossiers begin to deal with the normal things: work performance, accomplishments, etc., no different from an average personnel file in the United States. But early on, it was a very serious matter.

Portions of Stefan's dossier came into my possession in a peculiar way. After Stefan died in 1998, I wrote to some people in the Wroclaw mathematical community informing them of what happened. They remembered Stefan very fondly and a decision was made to publish his obituary. Two of his former students, Waclaw Kasprzak and Roscislaw Rabczuk, were charged with the job of writing it up. They contacted me regarding some information about Stefan, mainly about his activities in the United States, his publications, etc. There was a fair amount of correspondence between us, the article was finished in the spring of 1999, and eventually published in *Wiadomości Matematyczne*, the house organ of the Polish mathematical community. See the [copy](#) of the translation. It so happened that in the summer of 1999 I went to Poland to attend a wedding, and while there I phoned Kasprzak and thanked him for his efforts. He invited me to his office, I went there, and we had a pleasant chat reminiscing about Stefan. When I was leaving, he handed me a large envelope, saying it contained interesting stuff, and told me to open it later. When I got back to the house of the high school friend I was staying with, I did open it, and discovered that it contained copies of material from Stefan's dossier. My friend who, like my father, also worked at the Wroclaw Polytechnic, told me that Kasprzak used to be a big cheese in the Communist party, and that the party still

maintained these dossiers and very much controlled the access to them. This was in 1999, nine years after the collapse of the system. In fact, my friend said that he never saw a copy of a single item from his dossier or, in fact, from anyone else's. He had no idea what kind of stuff was kept in these things. He was like a kid who discovered a wonderful toy. The material created a considerable stir; people came to visit just to take a look.

In any case, I reproduce here the copies of all that I got. I have no idea if this represents the complete content, most likely it does not, but I am sure it is genuine. After such a dramatic introduction, you will find some of the stuff pretty mundane, in fact boring. Perhaps more juicy stuff was left out, but I doubt it. The bureaucracy, by its very nature, produces boring results. With millions of people to keep track of, all the dossiers will pretty much look alike, just like letters of recommendation one writes on behalf of student applying for a job: You have 3 or 4 standard templates; then you essentially fill in the name, and send it off. But, there are a couple of spicier items too.

The material contains several reports, most signed by the individual who wrote it, but there are some anonymous ones too. I reproduce a photo copy of each such report, and then provide a translation and a commentary.

Some general comments which apply to all the items.

1. Social background or origin. (Pochodzenie społeczne) As Frank remarked, it is a bit like the caste system in India. Every person was pigeonholed in some category, depending on the social status or the origin of the parents. So, in theory, there was no way one could change one's "Pochodzenie społeczne." I believe an official list of available categories existed, but I could not find a reference. In any case, the most desirable one was a "Worker" (Robotnik). Next was "Peasant" (Chłop). If your father was a peasant, and your mother worked in a factory, you became a mayor of a city, and that's no joke. At the bottom was "Bourgeoisie" (Burżuazja), whatever that meant, "Nobility" (Szlachcic), and maybe "Fabrykant" (Factory owner). I am not all that well versed in this, but roughly it is correct. Somewhere in the middle was "Pracująca inteligencja" which translates to "Working Intellectual." This encompassed teachers, doctors, office workers, university professors, and other motley crew. No distinction was made between a physician and a secretary, they were both Pracująca inteligencja. This is where Stefan fit in.
2. I write out in full and translate all the abbreviations, in so far as I can figure them out. For example, TPPR stands for Society to Promote Polish-Soviet Friendship (Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko Radzieckiej). Not doing it would obscure a lot essence of the document.

Now, the copies, the translations, and the comments of the actual items:

The first two items are a good example of bureaucracy in action. The items, marked 1 and 1a, are dated differently, one on March 12, 1954 and the other May 10, 1954. The content of both is identical; the second letter was verbatim copied from the first. The second item also has an extra signature, by the first secretary of the party organization in the Wrocław Polytechnic, H. Wieszaczewski. At that time, he was probably the most powerful person in the Polytechnic.

### Item 1

Politechnika Wrocławska  
ODDZIAŁ KADR  
we Wrocławiu  
ul. Wybrzeże Wyspiańskiego 27  
Nr OK. 83/042/54

Wrocław, dnia 12 marca 1954 r.

CHARAKTERYSTYKA

Ob.prof.dr.Stefan Drobot, ur. 7.VIII.1913 r. Pochodzenie społeczne -  
int.prac.Naukowo specjalizuje się w dziedzinie matematyki, mającej  
związek z techniką. W tych dziedzinach jest wybitnym, utalentowanym  
specjalistą, zna się na problematyce nauk technicznych. Bardzo dobry  
organizator pracy naukowej. Kieruje grupą zastosowań technicznych  
Instytutu Matematycznego P.A.N z dobrymi rezultatami. Kształci mło-  
dych przodowników nauki. Bardzo dobry i lubiany wykładowca i popula-  
ryzator matematyki, traktuje jednak pracę dydaktyczną nieco na margi-  
nesie. W stosunku do młodzieży raczej nieco chłodny, ale rzeczowy  
i sprawiedliwy. Bardzo ceni swoją niezależność osobistą i sceptycznie  
zapatruje się na potrzebę działalności politycznej i społecznej.  
Ateista - nie cuje się związany z żadnym kierunkiem światopoglądowym

Kierownik Oddziału Kadr  
*[Signature]*  
Teodor Czernik

## Item 1a

Wrocław, dnia 10.V.1954 r.

### C H A R A K T E R I S T Y K A

Ob.prof.Dr.Drobot Stefan ur.7.VIII.1913 r. w Krakowie.  
Pochodzenie społeczne - intel.prac. Naukowo specjalizuje się  
w dziedzinach matematyki, mającym związek z techniką i w tych  
dziedzinach jest wybitnie utalentowanym specjalistą. Zna się  
też na problematyce nauk technicznych. Bardzo dobry organizator  
pracy naukowej, kieruje grupą zastosowań technicznych instytutu  
matematycznego PAN. Z dobrymi rezultatami kształci młodych  
pracowników nauki. Bardzo siłą dobry i lubiany wykładowca  
i popularyzator matematyki, traktuje jednak pracę dydaktyczną  
nieco na marginesie. W stosunku do młodzieży raczej nie<sup>co</sup>chłodny  
ale rzeczowy i sprawiedliwy. Politycznie przychylny, aczkolwiek  
bardzo cení swoją niezależność osobistą i sceptycznie zapatruje  
się na potrzeby działalności politycznej i społecznej. Ateista.  
Nie czuje się jednak związany z żadnym kierunkiem światopoglądowym.-

Kierownik Oddziału Kadr

*Czernik*  
/Teodozja Czernik/

I Sekretarz P.O.P. PEPK.-  
przy Politechnice Wrocławskiej

*M. Hieszczyński*  
/M. Hieszczyński/

## Translation of Items 1 and 1a:

### PERSONAL CHARACTERISTIC

Citizen Professor Dr. Stefan Drobot, born on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1913. Social background: Working intellectual. In his research he specializes in the branch of mathematics that has connection with technology. In this area he is an outstanding, talented specialist, and is well acquainted with the problems involved the technical sciences. He is a very good coordinator of scientific research. He is the director of a group in the Mathematics Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences which deals with applications to technology. His leadership produced good results. He is active in promoting young leaders of science. He is an excellent and popular lecturer as well as an expositor of mathematics. He does, however, treat his pedagogical duties in a marginal way. In his dealing with young people he is somewhat aloof, but he acts very much in a matter-of-fact and just manner. He very much values his personal independence, and is skeptical as to the need of political and social activism. He is an atheist and is not connected with any organized world viewpoint or philosophy.

Director of personal matters  
Teodosia Czernik

Item 1 has a stamp stamp in the upper left corner:

Wroclaw Polytechnic,  
Personnel Department,  
Wroclaw, 27 Wybrzerze Wyspianskiego Street  
Document number: 83/07N/54  
It is dated Wroclaw, 12 day of March, 1954

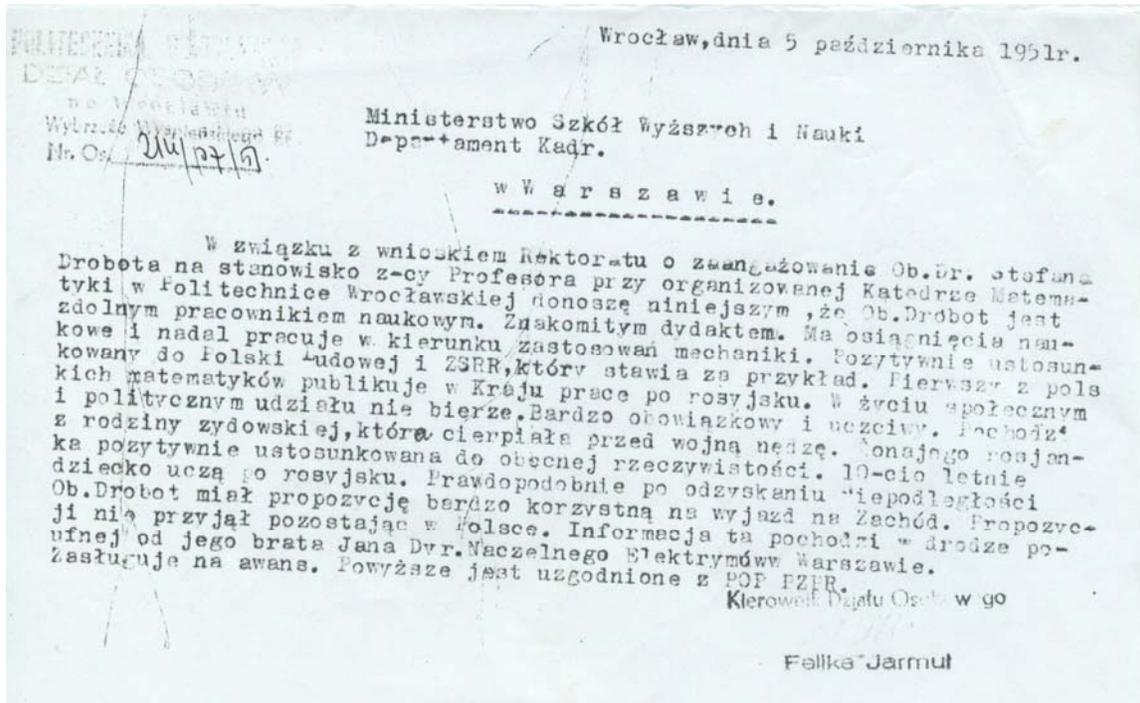
Item 1a has an additional signature:

First Secretary of the Local Party Cell of the Polish Communist Party  
At the Wroclaw Polytechnic  
H. Wieszaczewski  
It is dated May 10, 1954

**Comments:** Pretty much straight forward assessment of Stefan. The last bit about “world viewpoint” is just a euphemism saying that he is apolitical in his views.

Next item is a bit spicier.

## Item 2



### Translation of Item 2:

Ministry of Higher Education and Science  
Personnel Department  
In Warsaw

In connection with an application of the president's office to employ Citizen Dr. Stefan Drobot as an Auxiliary Professor at the currently forming Department of Mathematics at the Wrocław Polytechnic, this letter is to certify that Citizen Drobot is a talented scientist. He is an excellent lecturer. He has several scientific accomplishments and continues to work in the field of applied mechanics. He has a positive attitude toward Polish Peoples Republic and the USSR, which he holds up as an example worthy of following. He is the first among the Polish mathematicians to publish his papers in this country in the Russian language. Very conscientious and honest. He comes from a Jewish family which suffered poverty before the war. His wife, a Russian native, has a positive attitude toward the present political reality. His 10 year old child is learning Russian. It is probable that after independence he had an attractive offer to go to the West. He did not take up this offer and remained in Poland. This information was obtained in a confidential manner from his brother Jan, who is the chief executive of Elektrymów in Warsaw. He deserves the promotion. The above was cleared with the local Basic Party Organization of the Polish Communist Party.

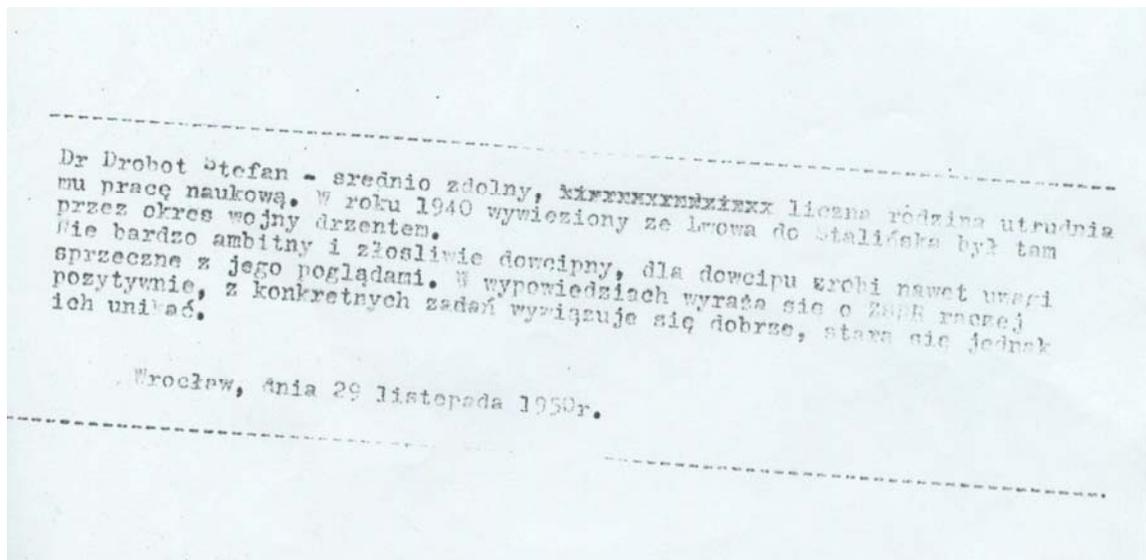
Dated Wrocław, October 5, 1951,

Signed by Falka Jarmut, Director of the Personnel Department

**Comments.** This one is a bit juicier, especially the Janek angle, as well as the issue of Stefan not emigrating to the West. The information that Stefan had an opportunity to do so and chose not to, for whatever reasons, apparently came from Janek. The “10 year old child” is, of course, yours truly. I was 10 in 1951. I didn’t take any special Russian lessons, aside those provided in school. It is not completely clear from the text, but I believe this was a copy of a letter sent to the Ministry of Higher Education in Warsaw, in support of Stefan getting a position at the Wroclaw Polytechnic. All such appointments had to come from the Ministry in Warsaw, and this was basically a letter of recommendation. Elektrymov is the name of the organization Janek worked for; he was actually the chief honcho in that outfit. “After independence” means after the war, when Poland regained the independence. Well, it was, from practical point of view a Soviet colony, but at least there was a country on the map of Europe labeled Poland.

The next piece, labeled Item3 is also interesting. It also seems to be anonymous.

**Item3:**



**Translation of Item 3.**

Dr Drobot Stefan – average talent. A large family makes it difficult for him to do research. In 1940 deported from Lwów to Stalinsk, where, during the war, held a position of a docent. Not very ambitious and has a caustic sense of humor. For the sake of a joke, he will say things which are contrary to his views. In his comments, he speaks about the USSR in a rather positive way. Carries out concrete assignments very well, however he tries to avoid them.

Wroclaw, November 29, 1950

No signature.

**Comments:** Well that was a good one. The comments about his jokes and the sense of humor were, at the time this blurb was written, more than of passing interest. Stalin was still alive, the regime was strict, and a few years back, Nata's brother Vladimir, was sent to prison for 5 years for telling a joke about Stalin. But Stefan got away this time with his anecdotes. The observation that he had a sharp sense of humor is certainly correct. The position of "docent" is not what "docent" means in English, at least in American English. There is a plethora of titles in Russian and Polish academia, and it is some times difficult to make an exact analogy with the American system, so let's just leave "docent" as it is. It is somewhere in the middle of the ladder.

Next is **Item 4:**

#### Item 4

Instytut POP PZPR  
Techniki Wrocławskiej

Wrocław, dnia 3 września 1952 r.

Ob. Prof. Dr Stefan DEBROT  
urodzony 7.VIII.1915 r. w Krakowie

CHARAKTERYSTYKA

Pochodzenie społeczne inteligencja pracująca /ojciec urzędnik prywatny/. Na stanowisko profesora awansowany w Politechnice Wrocławskiej w 1951 roku. Zdolny. Specjalista oddziału matematyki w zakresie zastosowanie techniczne. Oryginalny umysł. Świetny wykładowca. Czerpie wspaniałe z pracy dydaktycznej profesorów radzieckich. Przekazuje i tłumaczy literaturę radziecką, oraz korzysta z materiałów do wykładów z podręczników radzieckich. S-pomaga profesorom Politechniki wyróżnia się szczerą i bardzo wydatną pracą nad szkoleniem studentów odwiedzając ich nawet w domach akademickich. Wyraźnie troszczy się o to aby ucząca się w Politechnice młodzież mogła jak najszybszym czasie i z jak najlepszymi warunkami ukończyć studia i iść do pracy zawodowej zdając sobie z tego sprawą, że praca ta będzie pracą dla Polski ludowej. Bez namysłu przyjął zaproszenie mu stanowisko Przewodniczącego Miejscowego Zarządu Kół T.P.D.R. i na stanowisku tym pracuje szczerze i pozytywnie. Całkowicie jego działalność, pracy i zachowania się na uczelni wyraźnie wskazuje, że jest on usterunkowany do Władzy Ludowej i do budownictwa specjalistycznego w Polsce pozytywnie, i że chce się do tego budownictwa przyczynić osobiście. Atleta. Bardzo dobry organizator. Ogólnie bardzo ceniony profesor.

/Eugeniusz Olko/

**Translation of Item 4:**

Heading: Committee of the Party Cell of PZPR (Communist Party of Poland)

Place and Date: Wrocław, September 3, 1952

Citizen Prof. Dr. Stefan DROBOT

Born August 7, 1913 in Cracow

CHARACTERIZATION OF PERSONALITY

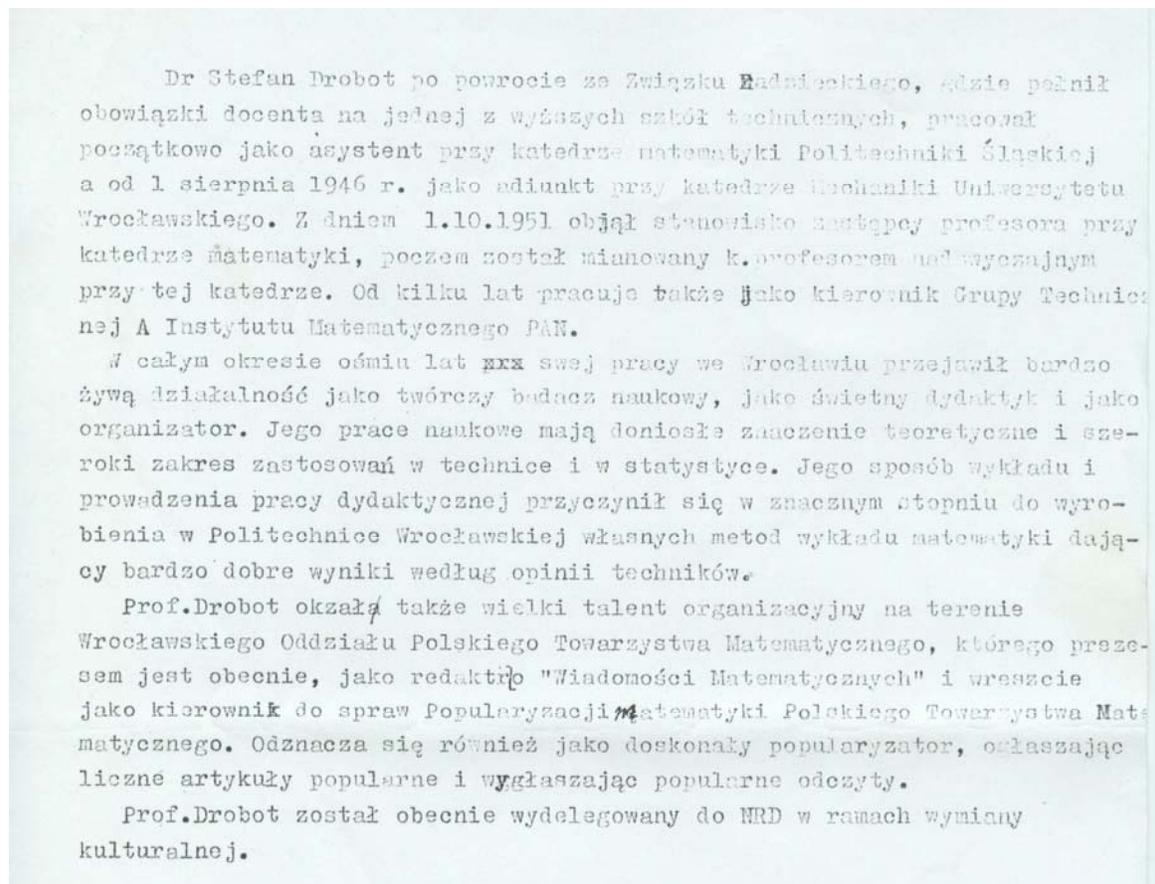
Social origin: Working Intellectual (Father was an office worker). Promoted to the position of a Professor at the Wrocław Polytechnic in 1951. Talented. Specializes in the branch of mathematics that has applications in technology. Original mind. Excellent lecturer. In his work uses examples and models from the works of Soviet professors. Propagates and translates Soviet scientific literature, and uses Soviet works as textbooks. Among the professors of Polytechnic, excels in sincere and effective work in educating the students, even to the point of visiting them in dormitories. He is very much concerned that the youth studying at the Polytechnic complete their studies in the shortest possible time, with the best possible results, and then continue on to work in their learned profession. He realizes that their work will benefit the Polish Peoples Republic. He was offered a position of a Chair of the local club of the TPPR – Society to Promote Polish-Soviet Friendship (Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko-Radzieckiej) and he accepted the offer without hesitation. In this capacity he makes sincere efforts and produces good results. The totality of his activities, work, and behavior at the school indicates that he has a positive attitude toward People's Government and toward construction of socialism in Poland, and that he personally wants to contribute to this endeavor. An atheist. Very good organizer. Generally, a very valued professor.

Signed: Eugeniusz Olko

**Comments:** First of all, there is a glaring spelling error in the original: 6<sup>th</sup> line from the bottom: “szczeże” should be “szczyrze” (in English: sincerely). OK, what's the big deal, we all make spelling mistakes and in these days there were no speller checkers. It is true, but somehow in the Polish culture a mistake such as this would be an indication that the person who wrote it was not too well educated. It's sort of like Dan Quayle spelling “potatoe”, except a lot worse. It might have been a secretary, of course, who took a dictation, but the error is glaring. Had the letter been known to the “Intellectual Crowd”, so to say, lots of head shaking would take place, with a mutter “What do you expect from the peasants?” Anyway, as far as the content of the note, his knowledge of the Russian language, acquired in Siberia, clearly came in handy. A word about TPPR – the Society to Promote Polish-Soviet Friendship. There was no Polish-Soviet friendship in the population, by en large there was hate. Poles hated Russians for centuries (and conversely), and the situation intensified tenfold after the Soviets took over. There were good reasons for it, of course. The organization was set up by the authorities to spread the Russian and Soviet culture, teach people the Russian language etc. It was thoroughly hated and despised. Many people belonged however, since it tended to produce a positive comment in their personnel file and was not as odious as belonging to the Communist

Party. It was notoriously difficult for the authorities to find anyone who would actually organize some activities at the local level. Now, Stefan spent 6 years in the Russian hinterland and knew that there are lots of good things about Russia, Russian culture, and Russian people, so he took the job when offered. I don't think he did it solely to please the authorities, he sincerely believed that it would be good if the people of two countries to get to know each other a bit better. I sort of remember that he once arranged for a lecture by some world class Russian scientist, and had a hard time rounding up the audience. So this activity looked good to the authorities. "Peoples Government" phrase (Władza Ludowa") is the euphemism for the Communist dictatorship, of course.

Next, an anonymous Item 5.



### Item 5

## Translation of Item 5.

Dr Stefan Drobot. After returning from the Soviet Union, where he worked as a docent at one of the higher schools of technology, he initially worked as an assistant at the Silesian Polytechnic, and from August 1 1946 as an adjunct at the Department of Mechanics at the Wroclaw Polytechnic Institute. On January 10, 1951 he assumed a position of an Adjunct Professor at the Department of Mathematics, and then was promoted to the rank of Extraordinary Professor at the same Department. In the past few years he was the director of Technology Group A of the Mathematical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

During the eight years he worked in Wroclaw, he was very active as a researcher, as an excellent lecturer, and as an administrator. His scientific papers are of significant theoretical importance, and have a wide range of applications in technology and statistics. His lecture style contributed to the development of new methods of instruction of Mathematics at the Wroclaw Polytechnic. According to the opinions of engineers, these methods produce very good results.

Prof. Drobot has also shown considerable administrative talents. He is currently the president of the Wroclaw Section of the Polish Mathematical Society, an editor of the "Mathematical News" ("Wiadomości Matematyczne"), and finally the person in charge of popularizing mathematics through the auspices of the Polish Mathematical Society. He also distinguishes himself as an excellent expositor, having published several expository articles, and giving many expository talks.

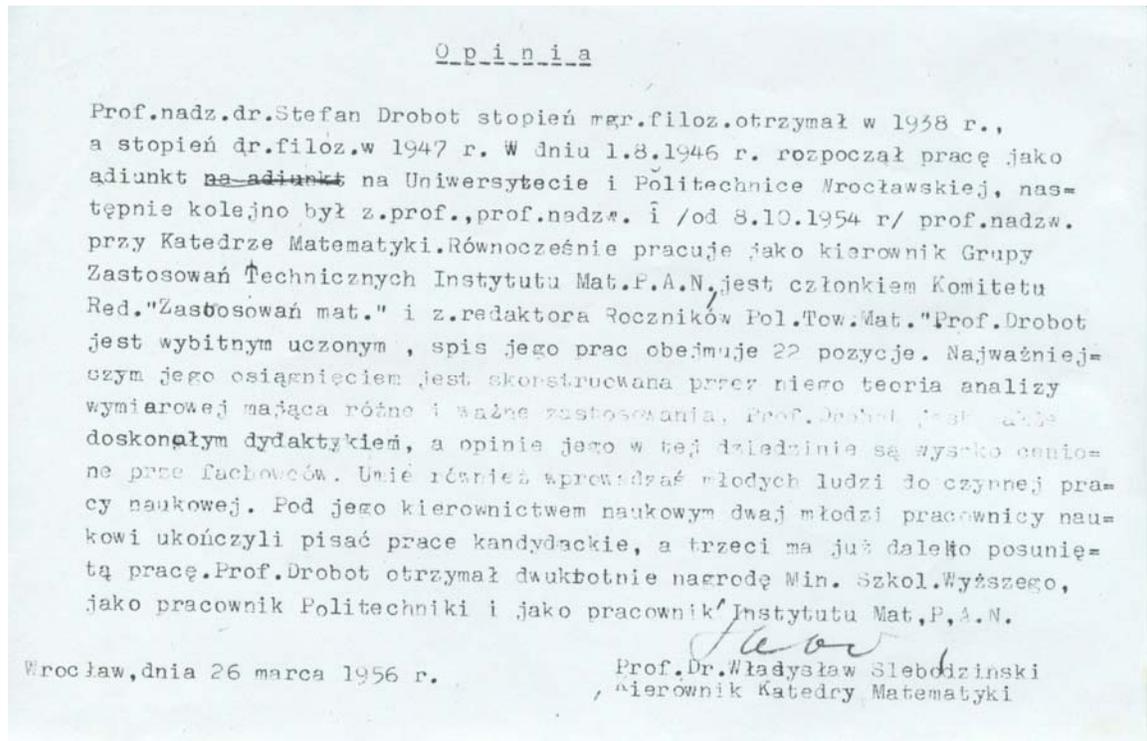
Currently he is visiting DDR (East Germany) as a part of cultural exchange.

**Comments.** This one is unsigned and undated. The date can be surmised, the year is roughly 1954. (8 years of employment, beginning with 1946). Also, I remember his trip to East Germany, I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the last grade of the elementary school. He brought back a ball pen for me – it was an object of envy to all my class mates. Going abroad was a big deal in these days. I lived in Poland from 1946 until 1959 and was abroad only once, to Czechoslovakia. I think Stefan made three visits: Czechoslovakia – a different occasion from mine, East Germany, and West Germany. On his trip to Czechoslovakia he bought a baby stroller for the twins, these were completely unavailable in Poland at all. I pushed this stroller around a lot, with Frank and Kathy inside. In fact, I used to race it with other such stroller-pushers, and on a sharp curve Frank or Kathy would occasionally fall out of to the ground.

As far as the piece itself, it is a very matter-of-fact, no mention of his religion, or a lack thereof, his sense of humor, social origin, etc. It reads like a normal, professional evaluation of a member of a department, something that can be found at any American university. The year was 1954, and the thaw was in progress.

I did not translate and/or fully explain various academic titles; the system in Poland is different from that in the United States, so just accept that he was climbing up the ladder. He never actually made to the top rung: Ordinary Professor (Full Professor here). He was slightly miffed over this.

Finally, the last **Item 6**.



**Translation of Item 6.**

Letter of Evaluation

Prof. Dr. Stefan Drobot received his M.S. degree in 1938 and his PhD in 1947. On July 1 1946 he began his employment at the Wroclaw University and Polytechnic. He successively held positions of Adjunct, Adjunct Professor, External Professor, and Extraordinary Professor. Beginning with October 10 1954 he is an Extraordinary Professor at the Department of Mathematics. At the same time he is the director of the Group of Applications to Technology of the Mathematical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He is also a member of the editorial boards of the journals "Applications of Mathematics" and "Annals of the Polish Mathematical Society." Prof. Drobot is an outstanding scientist; the list of his publications contains 22 items. His most important achievement is the establishment of rigorous foundations of dimensional analysis, which has a variety of important applications. Prof. Drobot is also an excellent teacher, and his views on the subject of pedagogy are highly valued by the specialists. He also knows how to involve young people in active research. Under his supervision, two young students completed their dissertation, and the third is well advanced in the process. Prof. Drobot was twice awarded a prize by the Ministry of Higher Education, as a member of the Faculty at the Polytechnic, and as a researcher of the Mathematical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Dated: March 26, 1956

Signed: Władysław Ślebodziński, Chairman of the Department of Mathematics

**Comments.** Well, this is again a matter-of-fact evaluation of a faculty member by his immediate supervisor. The year is 1956, when the political thaw is in the full bloom. The items in a person's dossier are written by his supervisors, and deal with research, teaching, and administration, and not by some political hack with comments about his religious preferences, social status of his parents, and political views of his wife. There the usual overabundance of academic titles, I just translated these verbatim. The full explanation of the intricacies of the academic ladder in Polish academia is beyond the scope of this note. One comment only: "Extraordinary Professor" is **not** the top step, it is below "Ordinary Professor." One comment about Stefan having two positions: one at the Polytechnic and one at the Mathematical Institute. The Polish Government was trying hard to encourage scientific development in the country and to attract people to scientific careers. The true and tried capitalistic method was to pay the scientists more. However, they just could not set the scientists' salaries high, that would create all sort of problems with equality doctrine and so on. ("To each according to his need and from each according to his abilities," in the words of Lenin, I think.) In the political correctness of the day, you could **not** pay a professor more than you could pay a coal miner. Hence a scientific research institute was established, and most of the mathematicians had a second job being employed there. It did not entail any more work that is usually expected by a faculty member, but they got two salaries. So Stefan was, relatively speaking, well off in Poland. Ślebodziński was a good friend of Stefan. When we spend a summer in Rabka once, he was vacationing close by, and came to visit us a couple times. I remember going on a couple of day-long hikes with him and Stefan.