

## RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

RAD Background Report/132  
(Poland)  
11 May 1981

### DEVELOPMENTS IN THE POLISH MEDIA SINCE AUGUST 1980

By Nika Krzeczunowicz

Summary: Since the word "strike," rather than the euphemism "work disturbance," was first used in Warsaw by a Politburo spokesman on August 12 at a press conference for foreign journalists, there has been a steady and constantly increasing stream of information and outright criticism expressed in the majority of Polish newspapers, on the radio, and, to a much lesser extent, on television. It would be an exaggeration to say that "nothing is sacred any more," but a previously dull and uniform press has become so lively that at times it is a desirable product for black market dealings.

+ + +

#### The Daily Press

Perhaps the most striking change has been wrought in the party daily, Trybuna Ludu - - not that it has become the most exciting publication in Poland, for others are much more so, but because it is the official party paper and what it says, goes. In recent months it has been publishing statements by Lech Walesa on page one, while its regular feature, "People Have Told Us," has been quoting remarks, usually critical, by workers identified as members of Solidarity. The two issues (March 30 and 31) immediately following the Ninth Plenum of the PUPP CC published page upon page of delegates' statements, highly critical of both the party leadership in the past and of the lack of positive developments at present. While still the poker-faced exponent of the party line with the obligatory photograph of busy workers in nearly every issue, Trybuna Ludu is not the "people's platform" as its name implies; but it has allowed at least some of the voices of the people to be expressed to give a glimpse of the widespread dissatisfaction at the party base.

Among the more popular dailies, Zycie Warszawy has become the most readable. It provides good insight into economic difficulties and is very critical of the official failure to cope with the situation, indeed, of the official inclination to make matters worse (the notorious problem of meat coupons, for example, where everyone had to register in a given shop and for a given day to pick up his meat rations, which caused even longer lines and burdened the staff with even more paperwork). It has provided fairly good news coverage of

various critical situations such as the strikes in Bydgoszcz and Radom. Above all, and this is not so much the merit of Zycie Warszawy as the result of the loosening grip of censorship (more about that later), the daily papers may now write about natural disasters and other accidents, something that was taboo until recently.

The daily paper, however, that is by far the most interesting with regard to controversial and critical articles, is now the Pax publication, Slowo Powszechne. Previously, it had been a fairly soporific mixture of party line and parochial Church information. It now provides some of the most open and aggressive reporting on current affairs. A recent issue (April 4-5) printed a photograph on page one of the peasant activist, Michal Bartoszcze (in striped pyjamas on his hospital bed), who had been beaten up by police in mufti in Bydgoszcz on March 19. The accompanying article was one long paean to the 68-year-old farmer, his patriotic past in the Home Army, his social involvement, agricultural know-how, and his successful sons -- all in keeping with the very strong line in support of the free farmers' movement, which Slowo Powszechne has been expounding for some time now. Similarly, Slowo Powszechne has been printing strongly worded editorial comments on events in Poland.

In the past, regional dailies have frequently been more frank in their reporting than the central press. This has remained so. A particularly telling example has been Dziennik Baltycki, which actually opened its pages to Solidarity from Gdansk for a biweekly column. This was temporarily dropped, primarily because Solidarity wanted more space. Another very interesting paper is Gazeta Krakowska. Actually, one cannot think offhand of a single daily in Poland that does not, at least from time to time if not on a steady basis, provide interesting and informative material.

The Polish army's daily, Zolnierz Wolnosci, is interesting for quite another reason. Surrounded by the rising waters of freedom of expression, it has remained a rock of Stalinist conservatism. Not only does it appeal for law and order and call for a return to hard work whenever there is labor trouble in Poland, but it regularly carries articles and comments which steadfastly deplore the spreading anarchy and hammer upon the connections between antisocialist forces in Solidarity and hostile imperialist circles and German revanchists abroad. "My party, right or wrong," would not be a strong enough slogan for the army paper. It is not only devoid of any criticism itself, it aggressively opposes all those who dare to criticize.

After speaking of the dailies, the case of PAP, the Polish Press Agency, has to be mentioned briefly. It has become notorious for offering half-truths or even bending the truth after the violent events in Bydgoszcz on March 19, following which two PAP correspondents there denied outright having provided the false information issued by the agency and resigned. The chief of the agency, Janusz Roszkowski, in an interview with Zycie Warszawy (April 10), was openly asked whether he was aware of the failures of his agency; and while finding various excuses, he did admit that it was not keeping up with demands and expectations. Incidentally, in many interviews the pointed questions are more telling than the verbose and evasive answers given by the officials.



The Periodicals

The more sophisticated weekly publications such as Polityka and Kultura have always managed to print reports and discussions which, however mangled by censorship, still provided information and food for thought. For this reason, the change in their format is perhaps not as startling as that of some of the daily press. Notable for its openness recently has been the weekly supplement to Zycie Warszawy, Zycie i Nowoczesnosc, the development of which has been following along the lines of its parent daily. The provincial weeklies have also become highly interesting, especially in on-the-spot reporting either on local scandals or on local heroes. A particularly fascinating weekly is Czas, which appears in Gdansk.

The Catholic Tygodnik Powszechny has always been exceptional among the weeklies in that it has, in a manner of speaking, been publishing nothing but the truth. Not the whole truth by any means -- the censor saw to that -- but never outright distortions. Now, perhaps, it has been allowed to come closer to the whole truth.

Among the many subjects that are raised, criticized, and indeed belabored are above all the economic ills of the country, with increased demands that those who are responsible for them should not only be dismissed from the party (as many already have been, including former Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz) but brought to justice. In the weekly Zycie i Nowoczesnosc (1) Zbigniew Loreth, a retired engineer formerly in charge of foundry planning offices, condemned with truly unprecedented virulence the construction of Katowice Foundry which, he said, was located at the wrong place for the wrong reasons (mainly the self-aggrandizement of local officials) and at enormous cost in money and labor far beyond the possible benefits for now or later. Other subjects include farming, particularly discrimination against individual farmers; education, with an emphasis on the distortion of the humanities; health services, especially the almost literal collapse of hospitals and the already notorious shortage of drugs; and alcoholism, including the mention that the state takes in enormous revenue from tax on alcohol. There are tales of corruption and profiteering among high party officials, particularly with regard to their luxurious housing in both principal and vacation homes. There have even been notes, albeit short, on former militiamen found guilty of beating up people; and there is growing concern among legal experts about the administration of justice and conditions in prisons. One can, in fact, hardly think of a subject, other than the alliance with the Soviet Union and the principles of communism, that has not already been considered and found wanting.

Radio and Television

The improvement in the overall programming of the Polish radio has been notable, ever since Radio Gdansk began broadcasting live the debates between Solidarity and the government commission in the shipyards there. The same cannot be said of television, a medium apparently still suffering from the aftereffects of the shallow propaganda of success and the catering to the lowest common denominator in entertainment, imposed by the notorious former TV chief, Maciej Szczepanski, now in jail for profiteering from public funds. The evening news on TV has become the object of a hate cult, expressed

(1) 16 April 1981.

through the press. Double-speak, mystification, distortion, and outright misinformation have caused, according to all critics, skepticism that was blamed, rightly or wrongly, for the credibility gap between the party leaders and the population. According to Bernard Guetta in Le Monde, (2) however, Polish TV news has pulled up its socks and is becoming as interesting as the rest of the media. TV has apparently gained much prestige through its live broadcasts of Sejm debates, with their clashes and outspoken viewpoints.

An undeniable factor in the emergence of the new Polish media had been the stormy congress of the Polish Journalists' Union which took place last fall and elected as its chairman the dynamic and courageous Stefan Bratkowski.

### Censorship

Obviously the scope of material published by the Polish media depends on the generosity of the censors. There are three levels of censorship: first comes self-censoring, where the author considers how much can be said and in what way; then the editor of the publication has a look, after which the material goes to the censors' offices, whence it allegedly frequently returns in shreds. The author then either tries to put it together again or gives up in despair.

When one of the Polish censors escaped to the West in 1977 with sheaves of instructions that were later published in a KSS "KOR" white paper, it became obvious to what extent censorship interfered in the day-to-day publication process. One of the demands of Solidarity in August 1980 was a new censorship law. Two versions of it have now been submitted to the Sejm. The one version, worked out by Solidarity, excludes from censorship internal Solidarity publications, a dubious point since they rarely remain internal for long. On the other hand, the government version gives the censor jurisdiction over matters "of importance to the national interests," a phrase that even non-Solidarity observers deem indefinitely extensible. There are also differences of opinion about who should supervise the decisions of the censor (the Sejm, the Council of Ministers, or the Council of State); what should be the means of appeal against censorship decisions; and whether cuts in the text could be marked as such. All these matters, incidentally, have been openly discussed in the press. It has been a long time since the very word "censor" was not used. Nowadays, while it is still not possible to say that an article had been rejected or mutilated beyond acceptability by the censor, papers do state that such and such an article "failed to appear for reasons beyond our control," or "the author has decided not to publish," which is clear enough.

The rules under which the censors operate are not quite clear at present. It is quite obvious that sometimes certain controversial matters

get through and also that some areas and some publications have better luck in putting through whatever they want, Stanislaw Baranczak, for example, said in an interview in Kultura (3) that one of his poems had been rejected for publication in Student but that it might appear in Odra.

While mentioning Baranczak, it should be noted that a number of former nonpersons, such as himself, and nonsubjects, such as Dip reports (at least the more recent ones), to mention just a few, have reappeared in official publications.

Another welcome reappearance has been genuine letters to the editor. Previously, this form was all too often exploited to present the regime's desired views of a "concerned citizen," or "worried mother," supporting some official decision or attacking some real or imaginary enemy of socialism. This is still the case in Zolnierz Wolnosci where some outraged retired sergeants still take pen in hand to defend the interests of beloved motherland. People misquoted or mentioned in some dispute, however, have been granted the right to reply, a recent example having been several Home Army officers (including a former nonperson, the historian Wlodzimierz Bartoszewski) who denied in Zycie Warszawy that they had been consulted about the controversial TV dramatization of the life and death of General Grot-Rowecki, a Home Army commander killed by the Germans in 1944.

### Distribution

Now that the press has become so much more interesting it has also become scarce. Two official decisions, plus a shortage of newsprint, have made access to papers more difficult for the public. The first was the decision in September 1980 to abandon the so-called system of "folders," whereby sales personnel in newsstands put aside certain selected publications for steady customers for a small consideration. Obviously, irregular customers or those who were not on good business terms with the newsstand managers objected, this time successfully. A second, more painful blow was dealt on 1 January 1981, when the post office announced from one day to the next that it would no longer deliver newspapers to subscribers at home together with the rest of the mail. Subscribers would have to pick up their dailies at newsstands and their periodicals at the post offices. This was particularly hard on readers in the countryside, where it is often several miles to the nearest kiosk or post office. These decisions have resulted in a loud outcry, long lines at newsstands early in the morning when papers are delivered, and a black market. Certain issues of certain publications apparently fetch as much as 300 zloty (more than 5% of the average monthly industrial wage) on the black market. While the post office claims that the weight of the papers was too much for the mail carriers, many of whom are women, it could be construed that this was one way of making sure that regional papers do not reach readers in other

(3) 22 March 1981.



parts of Poland. Incidentally, when cutting off newspaper deliveries, the post office promised that special news carriers would distribute papers to subscribers by April 1. To date no such service has been established.

### Conclusion

The situation in the media might be described by a quote from an interview given by the Chairman of the Department of Press, Radio, and Television at the CC PUWP, Jozef Klasa, in Gazeta Krakowska (4):

I see the most progress in commentaries, but a lot remains to be done in straight information, which is still bad. When the public fails to get honest information, it begins to suspect manipulation even where none exists; and the authorities must not show impatience with public mistrust, because they have too many sins on their conscience.

The question remains: who, among the said "authorities," is to draw conclusions and who must decide where lie the limits of freedom of the press. Until this is made clear, one way or another, it can only be hoped that engaged journalists will continue to venture further and delve deeper into the complex and fascinating situation in Poland.

- end -

---

(4) Quoted by Radio Warsaw I, 28 April 1981.