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WHAT IS "TYGODNIK SOLIDARNOSC" LIKE?

By Nika Krzeczunowicz

Summary: In the two months since the appearance, on April 3, of the first, long-awaited issue of Tygodnik Solidarnosc /Solidarity Weekly/, (1) the publication has had time to settle down to its regular schedule and to assume the form that, until further notice, it will present to the public. This is a brief review of the first seven issues.

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The appearance of Tygodnik Solidarnosc, after lengthy delays, was welcomed with great enthusiasm, as expressed in one of the letters to the editor: (2)

. . . at last, I have it; I have got the first issue of Tygodnik Solidarnosc and although I have to commute for over an hour, I did not dare read it on the bus. I held it in my lap, I looked at the red masthead, and I was proud, moved, joyous. People on the bus looked at me with unconcealed envy, wanted to know where I had bought it, asked my permission to leaf through it. . . . This is an event of the first magnitude, like the registering of our union. We have our own paper in which we shall write and read about our own affairs.

Solidarity Affairs

The weekly attempts to keep its readers abreast of the latest happenings in Poland. Page two is wholly devoted to a day-by-day register of major events in the country, in which Solidarity is usually involved. The cycle of production is somewhat too long to allow for immediate coverage, however; for instance, when an agreement was signed between Solidarity leaders and the government on March 30, averting a general strike following the Bydgoszcz events, an interview with Walesa, a description of the negotiations, and the response from regional and plant Solidarity branches were only published in the issue of April 10. This may have been, however, because the April 3 issue was the inaugural one, which had been prepared in advance, contained special material, and had no room for controversy.

- (1) See Polish Situation Report, 7, Radio Free Europe Research, 24 April 1980, Item 2.
- (2) Tygodnik Solidarnosc No. 6, 8 May 1981.

Actually, the controversial aspects of the decision to call off the strike were not concealed: expressions of protest were published alongside statements of approval, and Wojciech Arkuszewski wrote a column tellingly entitled "Democracy, Compromise, and Conflicts" in which he emphasized that disagreements were inevitable. The same view was expressed by Maciej Krol during a discussion on "Solidarity and Democracy," organized in the offices of the weekly in March, namely, that disagreement was a normal state of human affairs, while "internal solidarity functions on the principle of a stronghold under siege." (3)

A survey of 270 respondents from 25 selected plants, organized by the Center for Social Studies (OBS) of the Mazowsze branch of Solidarity, showed that 91% agreed with the decision to call off the strike, although only a single respondent thought that all the demands had been satisfied during the negotiations. (4)

Special attention has been devoted in almost every issue to the forthcoming elections of Solidarity representatives. All the more distressing must have been a report, "A Sensational Subject," written by Malgorzata Niezabitowska (5) who visited a plant in Cracow and discovered from conversations with workers that, while they were firmly behind Solidarity and the men who had emerged as its representatives in the plant, they had no knowledge of the internal disputes that have been taking place, no idea about electing officers, and were perfectly prepared to let others do their thinking and decision-making for them. Nor did they seem to have been reading such Solidarity publications as were made available to them and, since matters had calmed down, no longer went to meetings. Their "labor union awareness" was, in fact, nil.

Economy

Almost every issue carries articles and interviews on the economy and the means for its improvement. In an interview, "When Will We Get out of the Electric Power Misery?" (6) Professor Kazimierz Kopecki suggested drastic cuts in various production branches in order to save electricity and supported the construction of nuclear plants, yet saw no hope of improvement in the current decade. And while there are articles on economic reform, no one has any clear-cut solutions to offer, hardly surprising in view of the magnitude of the problem.

Other articles have taken a closer look at working conditions and individual cases. In this, Tygodnik Solidarnosc is probably the most outspoken and closest to the bone of all publications in Poland today. A whole section of one issue (7) was devoted to poverty, with special attention being given to a region usually regarded as being particularly prosperous, namely, Silesia, with photographs to the point. It has been statistically proven that some 6,000,000

(3) Ibid., No. 7, 15 May 1981.

(4) Ibid., No. 3, 17 April 1981.

(5) Ibid., No. 6, 8 May 1981.

(6) Ibid., No. 4, 24 April 1981.

(7) Ibid.

people in Poland live below the so-called social minimum: chiefly families with many children and pensioners. Barbara Szczepula described in "Twenty-Four Hours in the Life of a Woman" (8) the living and working conditions of a mother of two who works in a textile mill in Lodz that brings to mind 19th century Manchester. In another issue Jakub Kobec wrote on "Black Saturdays" and work in the coal mines. (9)

A lighter touch was provided by the sociologist Izabela Wieckowska in "A Portrait of Poles in Crisis," in which she classified various social types according to their behavior in food lines: pragmatists, aggressors, neurotics, organizers, deserters, idealists, and "active solidary people." (10)

Culture and Education

At least one article in each issue concerns some aspect of culture: on April 10 it was a long interview with Andrzej Wajda about his films; on May 8, an interview with the writer who specialized in criminal elements and social outcasts, Marek Nowakowski. The issue of April 17 reprinted a chapter from the book, Polish Complex, by Tadeusz Konwicki, which to date has only appeared in samizdat form, having been refused by the censor.

While on the subject of censors, a major achievement (and one that caused a one-day delay in the publication of that issue, since the censor rejected the item and the printers refused to print the issue without it) was the interview with a former censor, under his code name K-62, on the working of censorship. (11)

The shortcomings of Polish education have long been deplored by the population, especially the teaching of distorted and incomplete Polish history. The main feature of the sixth issue of Tygodnik Solidarnosc (May 8) was the problems of education, including the movement of renewal in Polish scouting which had been turned into a communist youth organization and is now being slowly restored to its old patriotic traditions.

Among articles on more recent history there was an interview with a worker from Gdansk, Wladyslaw Grudzien, who had been wounded during the demonstrations there in December 1970 and who has written poems on the subject. (12) In the Easter issue there was an excerpt from the memoirs of Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto which took place at Easter in 1943, under the title "They Rose To Die." (13)

Continuing the tradition of civil education started in the samizdat fortnightly Robotnik, there are in each issue short articles explaining various points of the penal code and the rights of an accused or arrested person.

(8) Ibid.

(9) Ibid., No. 7, 15 May 1981.

(10) Ibid., No. 3, 17 April 1981.

(11) Ibid., No. 6, 8 May 1981.

(12) Ibid., No. 4, 24 April 1981.

(13) Ibid., No. 3, 17 April 1981.

A whole section was devoted to the Polish penal and judicial system, pointing out its enormous shortcomings and the means to improve it. (14)

Topical Events

Topical events such as the shooting of Pope John Paul II (May 22) or the registration of Rural Solidarity (April 24) are featured on the front page.

After the riot in Otwock, where a militia station was burned down after the disorderly drunks had been beaten up while under arrest, Tygodnik Solidarnosc (15) published a colorful report by its star reporter, Jan Walc, previously known only from samizdat publications and well-known for his aggressive style. Again, he did not mince words in his criticism of the authorities, although he condemned equally strongly the behavior of the mob.

There are also reviews of major (and controversial) television programs and current films.

Conclusion

It is not possible in a short report to list, let alone do justice to, the many aspects of Polish life that are covered in the Solidarity weekly. The publication, though printed on the usual, poor quality paper, is handsome to look at, with its scarlet masthead, attractive and sometimes witty layout, good photographs, and topical cartoons. It is, however, a publication clearly addressed not so much to the workers, i.e., not to the millions of rank-and-file members of Solidarity, as to the intelligentsia. This was pointed out in a letter to the editor from Krzysztof and Mirosław Michalowski of Warsaw, (16) though not workers either, to judge from the style:

Don't forget that you exist not because of your doubtless great minds, but because of the wrath of simple and honest people. Remember that you are serving us.

On the other hand, it is equally undeniable that the workers and peasants are capable of dealing with highly intellectual matters, as was shown repeatedly by "simple electrician" Lech Walesa and "honest farmer" Jan Kulaj negotiating successfully with the most devious and sophisticated authorities. Moreover, the letters to the editor, taking up at least one page in the weekly, which aims to provide a forum for its readers, show that the people are truly interested in the publications and that these letters are not only written by members of the intelligentsia, since some of them

(14) Ibid., No. 4, 24 April 1981.

(15) No. 7, 15 May 1981.

(16) Ibid.

are signed not only with names but also with occupations, such as miner or metal-worker. In fact, the letters provide fascinating reading, on the one hand, showing a great deal of civil involvement, while, on the other, people in despair seeking help because they do not know where else to turn.

Tygodnik Solidarnosc, like its parent organization, enjoys the full trust of its readers since they believe it tells the truth and nothing but the truth even if, because of the demands of censorship, not the whole truth. For this reason it is received with greater interest and greater personal engagement than any other publication in Poland today. Moreover, it sells on the black market at 10 times its official price. It is only to be hoped that circumstances will allow it to continue along the way it has chosen and to fulfill the trust so obviously placed in it.

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