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Title: Media, Censorship and the Church in the People's Republic of Poland

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Issue: 7/2016

Citation style: Roman Jankowski. "Media, Censorship and the Church in the People's Republic of Poland".
History of Communism in Europe 7:63-80.

<https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=703911>

Media, Censorship and the Church in the People's Republic of Poland

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Abstract: During the Communist regime, after Poland was officially proclaimed the People's Republic of Poland, the aim of the Polish Communist government was to control all aspects of society. Communist ideals were enforced in books and other publications; censorship was introduced on all published materials. This paper aims to present the situation of (print) media in People's Poland, as well as to provide a background and description of Polish censorship. Additionally, this paper will exposit and examine the socio-political role of *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Universal Weekly) in Polish society. As *TP* is a Catholic weekly, an outline of the unique socio-political role of the Polish Roman Catholic Church in communist Poland will accompany the above analysis. This paper is based on the research conducted by the author in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree written and defended at the Central European University in Budapest in 2012.

Keywords: Media, Censorship, Poland, Communism, Church

Introduction

In the era of the People's Republic of Poland, the aim of the Polish Communist government was to control all aspects of society. In the postwar period, Communist ideals were enforced in books and other publications; censorship was introduced on all published materials as they might have otherwise contradicted or challenged the regime's political ideals and agendas. The institutional

¹ Budapest, Nádor u. 9, 1051 Hungary.

framework of control of all media was established. This included standardized although not uniform instructions regarding censorship of books, publications, theatre and arts, as well as radio and television broadcasts.

In Communist Poland, according to Tomasz Goban-Klas, “the media was instrumental both in building the system and in later destroying it [and the Polish press was] the most active and the most subversive of all Eastern European media.”² Mass media in postwar Poland, which was modeled after the Soviet system, should be interpreted within the framework of what Goban-Klas calls a closed society. In a closed society, the ruling elite is to have monopoly on information, which means controlling “all knowledge (collected in universities, archives, libraries etc.) and the institutions that retrieve and analyze information (research institutes), process it (bureaucratic apparatus), and distribute it (media).”³ In Poland, the Polish United Workers’ Party⁴ (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, hereafter PZPR) worked together with the censorship authorities in creating the most completely constructed reality. The exception was Catholic and Peasant Party⁵ press. The Communist leadership, in order not to allow the Church to get too powerful, did not grant it access to either radio or television, only printed materials were allowed to be published by the Church.⁶ Only after the agreement between Solidarity and government representatives was signed in August 1980, “the Roman Catholic mass and religious services (or programmes) of other churches were introduced into the radio schedule.”⁷ This was a unique period in the institutional infrastructure of Polish mass media, which gave the Polish Roman Catholic Church a unique socio-political role in the Polish society and allowed the hierarchy of the Polish Catholic Church to influence the events that eventually led to the transformation in 1989.

The aim of this paper is to describe the complex situation of (print) media in Communist Poland, which includes both official, as well as unofficial press, including Catholic and underground publications. Also, this paper outlines the structure and functioning of censorship in the People’s Republic of Poland, including the changes that followed after the August 1980 agreement between Solidarity and the Communist leadership, as well as their aftermath. In addition, this paper will explain the significant socio-political role of

² Goban-Klas 1994: 3-4.

³ *Ibidem*, 15.

⁴ The Communist Party of the People’s Republic of Poland (1948-1989), established at the Unification Congress of the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza - PPR) and Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna - PPS) held from 15 to 21 December 1948; ideologically based on the theories of Marxism-Leninism; see Davies 1981: 549.

⁵ Polish Peasants’ Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, abbreviated to PSL) is a centrist, agrarian and Christian democratic political party, which was formed after Poland regained its independence following World War I in 1918.

⁶ Curry: 1984: 32.

⁷ Jakubowicz 1990a: 344.

*Tygodnik Powszechny*⁸, hereafter *TP* (Universal Weekly) in Polish society and, therefore, the role of religion and the Polish Roman Catholic Church during the Polish Communist regime.

TP played an important role under Communism, as it was the only medium of the Catholic intelligentsia and a space where Polish intellectuals could exchange opinions. Among others, Karol Wojtyła (the later Pope John Paul II), as well as other poets and writers, such as Czesław Miłosz⁹, wrote for *TP*. It was considered the only magazine which, to some extent (determined by censorship), could contain views that were critical of the Communist authorities. The Communist government officially closed down *TP* between 1953 and 1956, and later for a few months after the Martial Law was declared in Poland, in 1981. Today *TP* is regarded as the voice of the modern, liberal wing of the Catholic Church in Poland.

This paper is entirely based and includes excerpts, as well as full chapters from the author's Master's Thesis, written and defended in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree at the Central European University in Budapest in 2012. The theoretical research conducted by the author has been complemented with interviews with old members of the editorial staff or certain authors who had articles published in *TP* during the Communist regime. Due to the limitation of space, as well as privacy laws, this paper consists of only the theoretical part of the Master's Thesis.

Media in the People's Republic of Poland

The media system in the People's Republic of Poland was the most diverse in the Soviet bloc. According to Antony Buzek, "the Polish press [...] stands out from that of other Soviet bloc countries."¹⁰ For a population of over 30 million people, there were 56 different dailies, 595 magazines, 4 radio stations and 2 television channels, as well as 220 different factory newsletters and a lively world of theatres and cabarets. During the post-Stalinist period, more and more Catholic periodicals were also available.¹¹

The Polish press was in a miserable situation at the end of World War II. More than 50% of printing devices were not suitable for use; 70% of the paper industry and 90% of the broadcasting industry was destroyed. More than 4000 skilled journalists were murdered or died between 1939 and 1944.

⁸ A Roman Catholic weekly magazine, which focuses on social and cultural issues; established by Cardinal Adam Sapieha: Archbishop of Krakow, in 1945.

⁹ A Polish poet, prose writer and translator, who served as a cultural attaché of the Communist People's Republic of Poland, was forbidden to be published in Polish media as he defected, obtaining political asylum in France in 1951.

¹⁰ Buzek 1964: 96.

¹¹ Curry 1984: 25-26.

During the war, the press had already come under Communist control.¹² The 1944 political manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation promised freedom of press, but already in 1944 “all printed works were subjected to military censorship and, after 1946, to state censorship.”¹³ Furthermore, “the postwar newspapers proudly called themselves ‘new press’ or a ‘press of a new type’ [as] they voluntarily endorsed a new style of journalism.”¹⁴ Following World War II, the press became completely dependent on the Party, and its political allies, as well as subject to State censorship.¹⁵

The first restrictions in publishing activity began in 1947 and were coordinated by the Ministry of Propaganda.¹⁶ A political officer nominated and accepted editors and managers of newspapers, radio and television. The Central and Regional Committees of the Polish United Workers’ Party were directly influencing the messages transmitted by the media. During periodic meetings and conferences journalists were informed about what and how they should write.¹⁷ In Poland, *Robotnicza Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza ‘Prasa-Książka-Ruch’*, hereafter *RSW* (Workers’ Publishing Cooperative ‘Press-Book-Movement’) provided the institutional framework for a full control of the press by the State. It was established as a cooperative in 1947, being also one of the main administrative units of the Office of Control of Press, Publications and Public Performances and “a formal owner of 22 publishing houses, 17 printing houses, 2 press photo agencies, some 34,496 newspaper selling kiosks and other small shops, numerous press clubs as well as the foreign trade agency *Ars Polona* and of two media research institutes.”¹⁸ Following the creation of the centralized publishing, *Trybuna Ludu*¹⁹ (People’s Tribune) became the main official media outlet of the Polish United Workers’ Party. It was one of the largest newspapers in Communist Poland.²⁰ It had been granted the role of presenting the position of the Party, publishing official materials and speeches, supporting its economic plans, starting campaigns against ‘enemies of the people’, informing about changes in the Party’s personnel, as well as commenting its politics. It was fully subordinated and completely uncritical of the Party, as well as one of its main propaganda outlets.²¹ In 1953, after Stalin’s

¹² Dziki 2000: 49.

¹³ Goban-Klas 1994: 54.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 57.

¹⁵ Mielczarek 1998: 14.

¹⁶ Dziki 2000: 51.

¹⁷ Mielczarek 1998: 15.

¹⁸ Giorgi 1995: 74.

¹⁹ A national daily published between 1948 and 1990 in Warsaw; see *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN* vol. 5 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1997), s.v. “Trybuna Ludu.”

²⁰ Around 1.5 million issues published in the mid-1970s; see *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, vol. 5. (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1997), s.v. “Trybuna Ludu.”

²¹ *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, vol. 5. (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1997), s.v. “Trybuna Ludu.”

death, a spontaneous movement of journalists and writers started the wave of liberalization of the press. A variety of new publications were available in the entire country. However, by 1957, the Party – dissatisfied with the situation – re-imposed its control by “systematically reducing the number of certain newspapers and periodicals, and limiting the circulation of others. [...] Party officials [claimed] that in a Socialist country there was no need for a wide range of publications, which only duplicated each other's work and contents since there were no opposing classes or ideologies.”²²

Karol Jakubowicz explains that, in addition to the official press network, Poland had had a second, alternative network, connected to the Roman Catholic Church since 1956 at the earliest. According to Tomasz Mielczarek, only the Catholic press could be considered partially independent.²³ Jakubowicz adds that “other churches and denominations also had their own periodicals, though nothing like the scale of the Catholic press.”²⁴ Madeleine Korbel Albright calls *Tygodnik Powszechny* “the flagship of an extensive Catholic press network, which had grown alongside the official press, [and which] included about 50 different publications with a circulation of about 500 thousand.”²⁵ However, most publications had a limited scope, being only regional or diocesan publications, as oppose to *TP*, which had a much broader scope, as it was a national publication. Nevertheless, Jakubowicz states that these publications have always been a major forum for voices outside of the regime.²⁶ Furthermore, the extensive Catholic press network that Albright mentions was not homogeneous; it could be divided into four distinct categories. The first group included publications put out by the Church Episcopate itself, for which priest-editors took responsibility, for example, weeklies or monthlies such as the *Tygodnik Katolicki* (Catholic Weekly) of Poznań, or the *Gość Niedzielny* (Sunday Visitor) of Silesia. The second group included publications such as *Tygodnik Powszechny* and the monthly *Znak*²⁷ (Sign), edited by lay Catholics, as well as a so-called ‘church assistant’ who acted as a personal link between the Church and the editorial board. The third group consisted of publications issued by Catholics affiliated to the pro-regime PAX²⁸ organization. These publications did not have the blessing of the Church authorities. The fourth group consisted of uncensored publications. These comprised the pre-Gdańsk period underground press that included papers put out by the young Catholics and which were not censored upon publication.²⁹ *TP* played

²² Buzek 1964: 93-95.

²³ Mielczarek 1998: 12.

²⁴ Jakubowicz 1990a: 198.

²⁵ Albright 1983: 86.

²⁶ Jakubowicz 1990a: 198.

²⁷ An intellectual magazine published in Kraków, focusing on social and cultural issues, associated with *Tygodnik Powszechny*.

²⁸ A pro-Communist secular Catholic organization created in 1947.

²⁹ Albright 1983: 86-87.

a crucial role in the pre-August 1980 period. "It had been a refuge to those whose views had diverged significantly from the party line. Often under the cover of pseudonyms, used as a result of writers being blacklisted, contributors presented outspoken criticisms of regime policies,"³⁰ for which it earned the respect of Western observers.

Madeleine Korbel Albright in her book about *The Role of the Press in Political Change in Poland*, written during the early days of Solidarity and Martial Law, states that by 1980, the Polish people were tired of being constantly told that their standard of living was improving, which was the main tactic of Gierek's³¹ propaganda of success when it comes to press policy.³² According to Albright, Gierek believed that media should serve as a handmaiden to the Party and journalists' role was to interpret the Party line according to strict instructions. In order to guarantee that media fulfills its proper role, "journalists [prior to 1980] were controlled indirectly by limiting their access to information and, directly, through a pervasive censorship system."³³ The Polish United Workers' Party took interest in all aspects of the media by appointing one member of Politburo as a Central Committee secretary for propaganda and ideology, as well as another as head of the Central Committee Press Department. The supervising occurred through speeches on media policy, attending meetings with the Journalists' Association or issuing special instructions to the editors in chief. Very often journalists were simply instructed to emulate *Trybuna Ludu*. The government's methods of indirect control over the media were fairly simple. Journalists were denied information on particular issues by not being allowed to interview knowledgeable individuals. Otherwise, government officials would call the editor or used the censor's office to prevent publication based on a formal ruling. Direct control over media was exercised by the Main Administration for Control of Press, Publications, and Public Performances, which will be discussed further in this chapter. Albright concludes that "Gierek's press policy contributed to his downfall."³⁴

Naturally enough, the official domestic media were not the only sources of information about Polish and foreign events for the Polish people. The existence of alternative sources of information, such as the well-functioning rumour network, well-received foreign broadcasts, and a growing underground press provided the population with materials that contradicted the official propaganda. Karol Jakubowicz mentions the underground press network, which consisted of periodicals and books that were published in Poland since

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 87.

³¹ Edward Gierek (1913-2001) - First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party from 1970 to 1980.

³² Albright 1983: 8.

³³ Albright 1983: 11.

³⁴ Albright 1983: 16.

1976.³⁵ This is when *Komited Obrony Robotników*, hereafter KOR³⁶ (The Committee for the Defense of Workers) “started sponsoring the publication of a range of periodicals, spreading ideas of dissent and reform.”³⁷ He further states that between the introduction of Martial Law in December of 1981 and early 1989, “a total of 2077 titles of underground periodicals of various description were published;” they ranged “from national and regional periodicals with a circulation of up to 50-80,000, to those serving particular regions and towns, socio-occupational groups, industries and factories, colleges and even a large number of secondary schools.”³⁸ Furthermore, Madeleine Albright states that “in 1977 Poles made almost 12.5 million journeys abroad and of this number more than half a million journeys were made to capitalist countries”, which allowed for a great deal of nonofficial information.³⁹ Also, “by 1979 the underground press could boast 38 bulletins and journals appearing outside state censorship with circulations ranging from a few hundred to several thousand copies.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, people learned about the matters left unsaid by the domestic media from foreign radio, mainly Radio Free Europe, BBC, and Voice of America or from the foreign press. Underground publications were smuggled into the West and then Radio Free Europe used the information they contained during its broadcasts at the same time confirming the existence of such material. Other broadcasts also supplied additional facts, further undermining the credibility of the regime.⁴¹

The underground press “came into the open during the Solidarity period in 1980-1, in the form of about 1000 Solidarity periodicals.”⁴² *TP* gave a great deal of publicity to Solidarity activities, through which it made itself “the primary intellectual forefather of the Solidarity press.”⁴³ However, after the founding of *Tygodnik Solidarność* (Solidarity Weekly) and as uncensored bulletins proliferated, *TP* lost its monopoly over opposition ideas, which allowed *TP* to look at other – social – issues. Nevertheless, this continued only until December 13, 1981, when General Wojciech Jaruzelski introduced Martial Law, having military taking over control of the country, imposing curfew hours, de-legalizing Solidarity and imprisoning its members. The Union's weekly was then suspended until the final years of Communism in Poland.

During Communism, official media in Poland mainly fulfilled the role of an organ of political and ideological propaganda. Only the Catholic press was

³⁵ Jakubowicz 1990a: 198.

³⁶ A Polish civil society group of intellectuals aiming to help persecuted workers and their families, which emerged after the 1976 protests.

³⁷ Jakubowicz 1990b: 338.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 338.

³⁹ Albright 1983: 17.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 17.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 16-19.

⁴² Jakubowicz 1990a: 198-99.

⁴³ Albright 1983: 88.

partially independent. In this context, *Tygodnik Powszechny* played an especially important role, as it provided the population with information contradicting the data found in the official press. Also, *TP* served as the basis for the Solidarity press. The implementation of the freedom of the press in a liberal sense was one of the main, basic ideas of the Solidarity movement, historically stemming from the constant struggle for freedom of expression.⁴⁴ Although in the 1980's more press freedom was achieved through the agreement between the opposition movement and the Communist government, the freedom of expression was not guaranteed as a citizen's right, but seen as a general gift from the Socialist state, and therefore limited according to authorities' discretion.⁴⁵ Censorship had been implemented in Poland since 1944, throughout the entire era of the People's Republic of Poland; it was abolished only one year after the democratic changes in Poland. The official press, dependent on the Party's concern, fully subordinated to the Party, and published during the Communist regime of the People's Republic of Poland, ceased to exist after 1990. It was replaced with independent press, which was an outcome of the Polish Round Table Agreement between the Communist government and the Solidarity movement in 1989.

Censorship in the Era of the People's Republic of Poland

In the People's Republic of Poland, censorship functioned primarily through the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Public Performances (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk – hereafter, GUKPPiW), established by decree on July 5, 1946. GUKPPiW was responsible for the detailed control and verification of all media nation-wide, including press, books, all theatre and arts, as well as Polish radio and television broadcasts.⁴⁶ GUKPPiW comprised of a central main office, in addition to a series of regional offices.⁴⁷ The decree establishing GUKPPiW did not really reflect the reality, as censorship had already functioned in Poland for nearly two years; since the Soviet Troops arrived, in 1944. The Polish Committee of National Liberation established a Department of Censorship that formally accepted a year later to supplement military censorship. In 1946 a law was passed establishing and regulating the Main Office of Control of the Press, Publications and Images.⁴⁸ It was established as part of the government structure and subordinated to the State Council until 1975 and thereafter directly to the Prime Minister's office. In reality it always answered to the Party through the Central Committee Press Department. Censorship with its irritating

⁴⁴ Mielczarek 1998: 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 17.

⁴⁶ Bates 2001: 1891-94.

⁴⁷ Giorgi 1995: 74.

⁴⁸ Pawlicki 2001: 30.

methods was used by PZPR “to suppress the politically inconvenient or otherwise unwanted newspapers and periodicals,” especially after the liberalization of the press in 1956-57.⁴⁹

An interview with one of the censors, conducted by Barbara Lopienska in November 1980 and printed in the 8 May 1981 issue of *Tygodnik Solidarność*, offers an invaluable insight into the work of a censor, as well as the functioning and practices of censorship as an institution. K-62 (the censor's code number) explains the principles on which the business worked. He states: “there [was] a chairman, two vice-chairmen and a couple of unit directors; press, books, performances, analysis, and training. There was a sundry printing unit too. In all the old voivodship capitals there [were] branches of the main office, with a similar structure. Work in branch offices [was] much easier [but] in Krakow work [was] complicated if not more so, because this is where *Tygodnik Powszechny* comes out.”⁵⁰ He further explains that “there [was] a specialized group in the press unit that read religious publications, and its actions [were] the outcome of relations between the Office for Religious Denominations and the Episcopate. [...] Another group would attend movie shows, theatres, and cabarets.”⁵¹ K-62 describes the job of poster censors as the easiest, the job of book censors as terribly dull and the press people as the most noteworthy group. He calls them the business foundation, the largest and the brightest unit, and the first line of fire. Furthermore, he provides a detailed explanation of the procedure of becoming a censor. “Anyone with a university degree and the desire to work in this business” could become a censor.⁵² “In the beginning one [went] through thorough training being given information about things that others must not be informed about, [including] the broadest interpretation of our recent history. The training [took] about two weeks and [was organized] according to needs”, and was based on practical exercises.⁵³ K-62 explains that censors worked “using a very thick instruction book and generally stated but not fully detailed principles of censorship. Each week [they would have] a conference for the press censors on censorship editing in the coming week.”⁵⁴ K-62 further explains that “the training and the analysis unit published an information bulletin on how a good censor should act in a given situation. Instructions, as well as examples, were given. [Furthermore], everything was numbered; you could not take anything outside of the office.”⁵⁵ Curry adds that these encrypted classified regulations specifying in great detail

⁴⁹ Buzek 1964: 95.

⁵⁰ Schöpflin 1982: 105.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² Schöpflin 1982: 102.

⁵³ Schöpflin 1982: 107.

⁵⁴ Schöpflin 1982: 110.

⁵⁵ Schöpflin 1982: 105-106.

what could not be published were “sent to various censorship offices to be used by censors but not referred to in any discussion with media personnel.”⁵⁶

Albright also explains the highly centralized censorship network significant to the Gierek period. It was “divided vertically into bureaus specializing in various types of media and public productions, such as newspapers, periodicals, television, radio, books, theatre, and films. Within these divisions, censors were responsible for specific subjects, such as religion, economics, and science”, and their responsibilities were rotated quite frequently in order to discourage prejudice and personal concern, which could as a result lead to less rigorous control.⁵⁷ The organizational structure of GUKPPiW and its work was never discussed publicly. Fifty percent of censors’ interventions were based on regulations; they operated within well-defined guidelines. Any criticism of the Soviet Union, Marxist-Leninist ideology, or party officials was censored. Also, general economic policy, social problems, or failures of the government’s delivery of social services could not be criticized. Very specific directives were at times issued to instruct censors how to deal with Poland’s foreign economic relations; problems of industry, agriculture, and public health; as well as emigration opportunities. Also, a list of authors and personalities of Polish origin who were forbidden to be mentioned was created, among which were Czesław Miłosz, Leszek Kołakowski⁵⁸, and Zbigniew Brzeziński⁵⁹.⁶⁰ The list of names to be removed or added was heavily influenced by social and political circumstances. Magda Stroińska confirms that “some people or historical facts ceased to exist because any mention of them was banned from public discourse.”⁶¹ She adds that “in Communist Poland, [the secret protocol of] the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement was as much of a secret in the 1960s or 1970s as it was in 1939. Deportations of Poles to Siberia or Kazakhstan never happened [...] And it was Nazi Germans who killed Polish officers and buried them in the mass graves in Katyń.”⁶² Historical names of people, cities, and countries not approved by the current ideology, could not be used in the official media of the People’s Republic of Poland; these names could only be seen in historical research.⁶³

Although censors followed precise regulations they were allowed a certain leeway in interpreting their instructions, which was to be based on past experiences and common sense. “A rule of thumb seems to be that the lower the

⁵⁶ Curry 2011: 151.

⁵⁷ Albright 1983: 12.

⁵⁸ A Polish philosopher and historian of ideas, best known for his critical analyses of Marxist thought.

⁵⁹ A Polish-American political scientist, geostrategist, and statesman, who served as National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter from 1977 to 1981.

⁶⁰ Albright 1983: 12-13.

⁶¹ Stroińska 2010: 88.

⁶² Stroińska 2010: 17.

⁶³ Sambor 1985: 373.

circulation of a publication the more information it was allowed to contain.”⁶⁴ This meant that high circulation socio-political weeklies were the most censored, one of them being *TP*. Over the years, published authors learned the art of self-censorship, knowing what not to write or presenting certain information in a nonthreatening manner. This was much easier for those who had once worked as censors. Under Gomułka, it was a common belief that the censorship profession is permanent; however, Gierek's intention was to have censors go into Party journalism or editorial work after working for more or less five years at GUKPPiW.⁶⁵ This was a perfect tactic, as a censor who becomes a journalist or an editor will know best what not to write or how to write about certain issues; therefore, at the same time such practice could save work for the GUKPPiW, as well as eliminate any room for inexperienced or disloyal censors to make mistakes.

In a book on *Censorship and Political Communication in Eastern Europe*, written in 1982, George Schöpflin states that the Polish censorship model is likely to be troublesome for the regime because it relies on having it policed by outsiders; therefore, the writers are set against the censors and this can result in constant arguments and attempts by writers to break down the censors by persuasion.⁶⁶

Jane Curry admits that although “individual censors had little contact with individual journalists, those that were assigned to specific journals, did work with the editors. Journalists and editors could [...] argue their cases. Censors often engaged with editors in finding ways around the censorship or in rephrasing words.”⁶⁷ However, according to K-62, a censor had no contact with the author of a text.⁶⁸ It is necessary to remember that Jane Curry refers to these censorship practices in the context of the whole institution, whereas K-62 describes these practices in his interview from the perspective of only one office where he worked.

An interesting aspect is the fact that a process in place for appealing censors' decisions did in fact exist; however, it involved going back to those who issued the regulations in the first place and no government official would actively get involved in an appeal of a case against a censor. It was not until the new law on censorship was issued in 1981 that Solidarity actually won its first appeal against the censors on November 2, 1981.⁶⁹

According to the *Black Book of Polish Censorship*, “the world of the Polish censors was not a simple one.”⁷⁰ Journalists and editors had developed what can be referred to as a sixth sense of what could be written, as well as “an arse-

⁶⁴ Albright 1983: 13.

⁶⁵ Albright 1983: 13-15.

⁶⁶ Schöpflin: 1982: 4.

⁶⁷ Curry 2011: 151.

⁶⁸ Schöpflin 1982: 109.

⁶⁹ Albright 1983: 124.

⁷⁰ Curry 1984: 25.

nal of maneuvers for getting their material published despite the censors.”⁷¹ The substantial Catholic media was “subject to special censorship regulations, and [...] specially trained censors scrutinized with great care everything that was to be published,”⁷² whereas, the Party media was accorded special treatment. “In fact, most of the journals and programs in Poland needed little outside censorship [as] their editors chose not to take risks and thus avoided anything they thought might be censored.”⁷³ Therefore, censorship in Poland was inconsistent, some things could be published in one journal and not another, for example, some specialized journals were able to publish more than others in their area of expertise. According to a *TP* editor, the weekly was the only censored independent paper in Poland. Other papers and editorial boards were ashamed when censors marked them. It was considered to be a sign that they were not working well or that the editorial board was not politically mature. *TP* boasted about being the paper that had the greatest number of censorship marks.⁷⁴

During the negotiations between Solidarity and the Communist government, it was agreed that a new censorship law would be passed within three months of the signing of the Gdansk Agreement.⁷⁵ On July 31, 1981 the Polish Parliament passed a legislation that invalidated the 1946 decree, yet it did not place a formal restriction on official interference. This meant that censorship was to be removed from government and Party control, with the Censor’s Office being the sole agency responsible for censorship.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the new law provided 22 categories of publications which were not subject to censorship, including internal union bulletins and religious materials. Any interference would need to be marked in the body of the censored text, indicating the section of the law that applied there. Also, other significant restrictions were introduced, such as the amount of time a censor could hold up an article and, more significantly, the introduction of the legal provision for a detailed appeals process. The law came into effect only on October 1, 1981 and although the passage of the new censorship law was considered a great success, it did not solve all the problems with the media, as both the authorities and the journalists struggled to understand its meaning and its extent. According to Albright, although this law affected the work of the institution responsible with censorship, many censors changed their behaviour mainly as a result of not knowing how to react to the new situation; therefore, they behaved simply as though official restriction had been relaxed.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Albright, 1983: 25.

⁷² Curry 1984: 31-32.

⁷³ Curry 1984: 33.

⁷⁴ Albright 1983: 87.

⁷⁵ Albright 1983: 51.

⁷⁶ Albright 1983: 123-124.

⁷⁷ Albright 1983: 47-49.

These alternations, however, were repealed following the introduction of Martial Law until the Round Table discussions. After December 1981, the government got complete control of the media and the Censor's Office, which marked the official end to the 16-month period of relaxation. Following the transition from Communism to democracy, nearly a decade later, in 1989, the new government passed a Law on the Liquidation of the RSW, which came into force on March 22, 1990, setting guidelines about privatization by liquidation, and on April 11, 1990 censorship was finally abolished, including the Main Office of Control, as well as its regional equivalents.⁷⁸

The Socio-Political Role of the Polish Roman Catholic Church

From 1945 until 1989, Poland was under the Soviet sphere of influence. A Soviet-backed provisional government, which operated in opposition to the London-based Polish government in exile, was formed after the 1944 political manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, hereafter PKWN). It exercised control over the Polish territory re-taken from Nazi Germany and was fully sponsored and controlled by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In 1948, the Communists consolidated their power by forming the Polish United Workers' Party, which would monopolize the political stage in Poland until 1989.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in various studies dedicated to the Communist history of Eastern and Central Europe, Poland could be singled out mainly because of the unique socio-political role of the Polish Roman Catholic Church. According to Robert Brier, "the role of the Roman Catholic Church in Polish society is often taken for granted."⁸⁰ As Brian Porter points out, "the linkage between Catholicism and Polish culture is more tenuous than is usually assumed."⁸¹ Robert Brier rightly notes that "the Catholic Church's strong position in both Communist and post-Communist Poland has to be considered a historical problem in need of explanation."⁸²

In the initial post-World War II years, the status of the Polish Roman Catholic Church was under threat. During Stalinism (1945-1956), it experienced strong persecution, including confiscation of properties, as well as internment and imprisonment of priests and bishops, including the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (imprisoned by the Communist regime from 1953 until 1956). The end of Stalinism marked a general softening of the State's religious policies, as well as relations between the State and the Church. In his article *Solidarity and 'The Rebirth of Civil Society' in Poland*,

⁷⁸ Giorgi 1995: 74-75.

⁷⁹ Davies 1981: 556-557.

⁸⁰ Brier 2009: 71.

⁸¹ Porter 2001: 289.

⁸² Brier 2009: 71.

1976-81, Zbigniew Pelczyński rightly points out that “the Roman Catholic Church fully recovered its internal autonomy after 1956 – it acted as an independent body in social, cultural and religious matters and, on select issues, even as a political opposition.”⁸³ During Communism, the Church had become the “leading force in patriotic attempts to shake off foreign domination.”⁸⁴

The Polish Roman Catholic Church, by strongly opposing Communism, developed a unique social position; “[it] reached a particularly prominent position in politics and culture.”⁸⁵ It acted as an anti-state force, opposing, among other things, official atheism, secularization of education, liberal divorce law and, especially, the legalization of abortion. The Catholic Church was the only national institution independent of the State.

The election of Karol Wojtyła to Papacy in October 1978 had a great significance for the role that the Polish Roman Catholic Church played vis-à-vis the Polish Communist regime in the last decade of Communist rule in Poland, as it certainly strengthened the status of the Church even further, and the Pope’s numerous visits to Poland turned into nation-wide demonstrations against the regime. Furthermore, from behind the Iron Curtain, through the institution of the Church, the Pope was able to internationalize the problems and the struggles of Polish society, which was a significant disadvantage for the Communist regime.

The Pope’s first visit to Poland in June 1979 was the most influential for later events. The most significant part of the visit was the homily at the Victory Square in Warsaw on June 2, 1979. The Pope spoke indirectly to the Communist government while at the same time proclaiming the undoubted connection between Polish history and religion, and particularly the Roman Catholic Church.

The Polish Pope’s visit to his homeland produced, as Gale Stokes summarizes, a ‘psychological earthquake’ that opened the door to transformation, paving the road for the Solidarity movement a year later:

John Paul II’s tremendous personal appeal, as well as the nationalist overtones of his visit [...] helped create the conditions in which Solidarity could emerge a year later. After a generation of debasement of public rhetoric, the airing of John Paul’s ethical, moral, and national appeals to literally millions of people in the face of official foot-dragging demonstrated to ordinary Poles that it was possible to discuss public affairs in a vocabulary that did not derive from the single-party state.⁸⁶

The Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity” was founded in Gdansk one year after the Pope’s visit to Poland. Solidarity was the first

⁸³ Pelczyński 1988: 36-37.

⁸⁴ Inglis, Mach and Mazanek 2000: 116.

⁸⁵ Inglis, Mach and Mazanek 2000: 113.

⁸⁶ Stokes 1996: 193.

non-Communist trade union in any Communist country. However, “although Solidarity was in name a trade union it was in fact, from the start, a political movement.”⁸⁷ Pelczyński accurately observes that “[...] few Solidarity leaders and advisers believed that the movement’s most important task was to entrench itself within the existing system and to enjoy the enormous gains of the August 1980 agreements. It was mainly the Church hierarchy, dominated by the personality of the aged and ailing Cardinal Wyszyński, that believed in consolidation.”⁸⁸ He wanted Solidarity “to pause and take stock of the situation, to streamline its organization, to train a large cadre of activists and officials, to focus its attention on various social and economic grievances of the population, and to help other social groups.”⁸⁹ Wyszyński wanted Solidarity first to master the difficult task of establishing itself as an independent trade-union movement and only then “extend its activities gradually to broader, more political issues.”⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the emergence of Solidarity in Poland in 1980 was a phenomenon of global importance. The movement’s growth and popularity weakened the position of the Communist party, which eventually led to the round-table talks in 1989, and the first semi-free elections, and the first democratic government in over 40 years. As a result, the People’s Republic of Poland became the Third Polish Republic. It was these events that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall and, eventually, to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which marked the end of the Cold War and Communism. The Polish Roman Catholic Church played an important role in this process.

The role of the Polish Roman Catholic Church during Communism cannot be associated strictly with religion. During the Communist regime, the Polish Church was the only institution independent of the State. Moreover, it was the center of debates and exchange of ideas for Polish intellectuals. This was possible because, by focusing on social and cultural issues, the Church allowed people of different religious attitudes to meet. The Church was able to fulfill this role also through media, specifically the Catholic press, by concentrating on social and cultural rather than strictly religious issues, which would increase its scope, as well as its influence in society. Furthermore, the Polish Roman Catholic Church, including Wyszyński as the head of the Polish Church and later, after his death, Wojtyła as Pope, were undoubtedly the most significant players in leading the Polish nation towards political transformation. Wyszyński was able to gain authority and society’s trust in the Church in their fight against a common enemy – the Communist regime; Wojtyła was able to make the society believe that, united, they can change reality, which had a strong influence on later events.

⁸⁷ Pelczyński 1988: 369.

⁸⁸ Pelczyński 1988: 373.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

Conclusion

Poland definitely stands out in academic studies of Communist Eastern and Central Europe regimes, mainly as a result of the socio-political role of the Polish Roman Catholic Church under Communism. The Church played a significant role in the fight for independence and national survival in the era of the People's Republic of Poland, between 1945(48) and 1989. Furthermore, during Communism, the Polish Church developed a unique social and political position and acted as a cultural center where all intellectuals could exchange opinions by focusing on social and cultural rather than strictly religious issues. The Polish Roman Catholic Church was the only institution that was fully independent of the State. However, the Catholic press was only partially independent from the regime. Regardless of its ideological autonomy, the Catholic press was still subjected to State censorship. *Tygodnik Powszechny*, the flagship of the Catholic press network, is considered to be the only legal opposition paper in Communist Poland. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the head of the Polish Roman Catholic Church, played an important role in the fight against the Communist regime; moreover, the election of a Polish Pope had a great significance and a great influence on later events that led to the democratic changes in 1989. Therefore, the socio-political role of the Polish Roman Catholic Church is an inseparable part of the history of the People's Republic of Poland.

The development of free mass media has been going on for no more than 20 years, as Poland was considered to be a free and democratic country only after the fall of Communism in 1989. The mass media in Communist Poland was the most diverse in the Soviet bloc. Although media in postwar Poland mainly fulfilled the role of an organ of political and ideological propaganda, Poland had an alternative press network, comprising Catholic press, as well as an underground press network. Both provided the population with information that contradicted State propaganda found in the official press and therefore influenced the public opinion in opposition to the regime. *TP*, a powerful publication as a result of association with the Roman Catholic Church and therefore the opposition, had a significant influence among the population during Communism.

In the People's Republic of Poland, censorship functioned primarily through the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk – GUKPPiW), created by decree on July 5, 1946. In addition to the main office located in Warsaw, a series of regional offices existed in each voivodship capital. GUKPPiW was responsible for controlling all media, including the press, books, theatre and arts, as well as radio and television broadcasts. High circulation socio-political weeklies – one of them being *TP* – were the most censored. Furthermore, the Catholic press was subject to more scrutinized censorship. Following the agreement

between Solidarity and the Communist leadership, the new censorship law allowed unofficial publications, independent of Party concern, to mark censorship interferences with three dots or dashes in square brackets: [...] or [---]. Also during this period, a formal appeals process to GUKPPiW, as well as a formal appeals process to the Administrative Court would be in place. However, although the legal framework existed in theory, in practice taking this path was not regarded favourably by the regime and sometimes could result in repercussions for the editorial office. Also, a list of authors who would be forbidden to publish or be published was created. This list was subsequently modified several times. The list of names to be removed or added was heavily influenced by social and political circumstances. Censorship was abolished on April 11, 1990, following the transition to democracy.

The research conducted by the author contributes to the strengthening, widening and deepening of the knowledge of media and censorship in Poland, with an emphasis on the socio-political role of *Tygodnik Powszechny* and the Polish Catholic church under Communism, and on the avenue to political transformation. It can contribute to the study of media and censorship in other Central European countries under the Soviet sphere of influence (GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary), as well as the Soviet Union itself. This research could also be used in comparative studies of censorship practices in other regions subjected to Communist ideology in Europe (Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania), and the world (China, North Korea, Cuba).

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