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## POLISH RADIO ON THE EVENTS OF 1956 IN POLAND

The year 1956 is one of the crucial years in the history of Poland following World War II. It was marked by important events such as : the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its historical aftermath : a joint statement of the leadership of the CPSU, Italian Communist Party, Bulgarian Communist Party, Finnish Communist Party and the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) stating that the 1938 decision of the Executive Committee of the Communist International on the disbanding of the KPP (Polish Communist Party) had been totally groundless, as well as, the famous "secret speech" of the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU—Nikita Khrushchev "The Cult of Personality and Its Consequences," delivered on 25 February 1956 during a closed session of the Congress. In June Poland was electrified by the dramatic information that came from Poznań. Later, there was the October breakthrough and echoes of the bloodshed of the Hungarian Uprising. The year 1956 was, so far, the only single year when there were three successive 1st secretaries of the PZPR : Bolesław Bierut, Edward Ochab and Władysław Gomułka.

At the beginning of 1956, there were over 3 million registered radio sets in Poland, which means that there were about 10 people to 1 radio. However, due to wide-spread (since World War II) use of the radio voice boxes (*radiowęzeł*), radio was the main source of information for millions of Poles. Thus, several questions may be raised : what role did radio play in those dramatic events of 1956 and how were they presented on the air ? Since the ruling political

élite was divided—whose interests were represented by the Polish Radio? Were there any changes in the programme of the radio and, if so, to what degree? In what direction did the language of political information and commentary evolve?

Finally, and that is the most difficult question to answer (if at all): how did the Polish Radio influence public opinion and how successful was it in shaping social attitudes which were most desired by the authorities?

One has to stress at this point, that the present article does not pretend to give full answers to all the above questions. It is based on selected source materials. It deals with just one fragment of socio-political life, although it was then the most important one—namely, mass media. One should also remember that it is impossible to discuss the role of the Polish Radio without looking at the entire picture of the events that were taking place in Poland at that time.

1955 was the final year of the Six-Year Plan which had been intended to transform Poland into a strong industrial and agricultural country. The plan was not realized in many points, which was due to external reasons (i.e. cold war and concomitantly increased arms production) as well as internal ones (i.e. various pressures in the process of collectivization of agriculture). In spite of the announcements voiced in the early 1950s, the standard of living for many Poles not only did not increase but was considerably lower. Yet, this did not seem to be the worst thing. What many Poles considered to be a much more painful matter was the question of social justice and the rule of law. People were pained by the contempt shown for the achievements of AK (Armia Krajowa—Home Army) and the soldiers of the Polish Army in the West, thousands of political prisoners who were not even mentioned in public, persecution of people with “incorrect social background” (thousands of young people were not admitted to universities, or—at best—were forced to enter the least attractive departments). Intellectuals with an independent cast of mind were suffocating within the stifling formulas of social realism in culture, science, arts. For the Catholics the most painful was the open warfare against religion and the Church, which—for many—

was symbolized by the imprisonment of Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate.

After the death of Joseph Stalin, the process of the so called "thaw" began in the Soviet Union and later, also, in Poland. Slowly but gradually the erosion of the existing system was taking place. In Poland, important things started to happen. In January 1955, a note prepared for the use of Organization Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR concerning reports from regional—voivodship party committees informed that in the region of Kielce "people are interpreting the Christmas carols being broadcast on the radio as a prelude to some changes." In fact, in December 1954 Christmas carols were played on the radio, and that, indeed, was a sign of approaching change.<sup>1</sup>

Until then the Polish Radio programme had actually one aim—the glorification of work. It was dominated by mass songs (even festivals of mass songs were held), cheerful waltzes and folk music—preferably by the "Mazowsze" ensemble. In January 1955 a new radio show *Zgaduj Zgadula* [*Guess What?*] was launched and with its new style of entertainment, it heralded further changes. More and more openly, jazz was played on the radio. A real "revolution" of the radio programme was slowly approaching. For instance, until the mid-1955 presentations of foreign countries were limited to fellow socialist countries. When the first broadcasts on Western countries were prepared, their authors were facing many problems: lack of specialists who could take part in the programme, lack of up-to-date statistics, etc.<sup>2</sup>

All these changes were strictly watched by Party authorities who were very suspicious and more and more critical toward the activities of the Polish Radio. Its management was accused of broadcasting unnecessary music programmes "of cosmopolitan character." In the project of a resolution of the Political Bureau on the Polish Radio prepared by the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the PZPR, certain new "naturalistic

<sup>1</sup> Z. Rykowski, W. Władyka, "Polska próba. Październik 56" [*The Polish Attempt. October 56*], p. 136. This is a typescript of so far unpublished book. I take this opportunity to thank both authors for making the use of the typescript possible.

<sup>2</sup> H. Myślicka's report of 21 April, 1986.

tendencies” appearing in the radio programme were criticized. Radio journalists “began to visit and listen to talks in police stations, night clubs and coffee houses, they have started to make live reports on events showing anomalies and errors in our social life, which are, in fact, merely marginal and peripheral. [...] At the same time one notices a gradual departure from the problems of production, from the scenes and people of great sites of the building of socialism.”<sup>3</sup>

Taking all this into consideration, the Party authorities decided to influence the programme policy of the Polish Radio more efficiently, and especially in the field of agit-prop. It is to this effect that at a meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PZPR held in November 1955, the Department of Press, Radio and Publishing was formed. It was headed by the hitherto president of the Committee of Radio Affairs—Tadeusz Galiński. The Department of Press, Radio and Publishing was created by merging the sector of press and publishing of the Department of Propaganda and the sector of radio of the Department of Culture and Science.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it was decided that the information services of the Polish Radio should be enlarged. For this purpose, in January 1956, a new radio series: *Z kraju i ze świata* [*From Home and Abroad*] was launched. However, at the onset of the new—1956—year, the radio programme was still dominated by “the old.”

On 11 May, 1956, Janusz Matuszyński in his radio piece *Dyskutujemy o spółdzielczej demokracji* [*We Are Discussing the Co-Op Democracy*] was stressing the urgent need of taking up the subject of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and popularizing its achievements in agricultural co-operatives.<sup>5</sup> The demand was the more grounded, since Poland was the only country of “real socialism” in which Khrushchev’s “secret speech” was known to wider circles. As early as 21 March, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PZPR came to a decision to send out—to strictly appointed addressees—the Polish text of the “secret speech.” The text was

<sup>3</sup> Z. Rykowski, W. Władyka, *op. cit.*, pp. 145–146.

<sup>4</sup> B. Fijałkowska, *Polityka i twórcy (1948–1959)* [*Politics and Creative Artists 1948–1959*], Warszawa 1985, p. 317.

<sup>5</sup> Archiwum Dokumentacji Aktowej Komitetu do Spraw Radia i Tele-

read at Party meetings and it invariably made a great impression on the audience. During the reading at a meeting of the Polish Radio staff 4 persons are said to have fainted and the rest listened flabbergasted.<sup>6</sup> Party authorities criticized this meeting. Taking into consideration the whole atmosphere created around this matter, on 10 April the Secretariat of the Central Committee decided to delimit further readings of the "secret speech." It was decided that the full text would be accessible only to the members of higher Party bodies and secretaries of POP (Basic Party Organizations) whose job it was to present the main theses of the speech to the rank and file members.

In the meantime, events in Poland were gaining momentum. On 12 March, 1956, Bolesław Bierut—the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR, the head of the Polish delegation to the 20th Congress of the CPSU, died in Moscow. Obituaries appeared in newspapers, also on the radio. Naturally, the radio programme was changed: mainly classical music was played. On 14 March, 1956 Helena Jaworska—president of the Main Council of ZMP (Union of Polish Youth), also wife of the vice-president of the *Radiokomitet* (Radio-Committee)—Henryk Werner, delivered a farewell speech to Bierut on behalf of the Polish youth. Reminiscing about the war and post-war activities of "Towarzysz Tomasz" (Comrade Thomas), Jaworska said: "the beloved friend of youth passed away." She ended her speech with a peculiar oath: "We shall always remember the great son of the Polish nation, the soldier of the Party, the friend of youth. The beautiful, beloved man."<sup>7</sup>

The next day, Wanda Odolska was heard on the radio. Odolska was the radio announcer who, together with Stefan Martyka—the murdered reader of *Fala 49* [*Wave 49*—became a symbol of the radio journalism of the late 1940s and early 1950s. She made herself infamous particularly with her zealous reports from

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wizji [Archives of the Documentation of the Committee for the Affairs of Radio and Television]—abbreviation used below: ADA, Polish Radio programme of 11 May, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> F. Fejtő, *A History of the People's Democracies. Eastern Europe since Stalin*, London 1974, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> ADA, Polish Radio programme of 14 March, 1956.

political trials, which were full of invectives against the defendants. Following the death of "the man with an ardent heart," she said that "he was not above the nation, but in all its troubles, longings and joys. This is an extremely beautiful greatness, which is measured not with obedience toward an authority, but with an honest respect, tender love and unlimited trust." In the words of Odolska, Bierut appeared to be "courageous and self-sacrificing and an unrelenting soldier of socialism." "Let the tears flow freely down the cheeks—she continued—the death of Bolesław Bierut is a great loss to the nation, a blow to Polish hearts. [...] When one looks, through the tears, at a beloved face, emaciated by sickness, the memory cherishes a vivid picture of a warm smile and echo of quiet words, explanatory, fatherly. [...] The tears that are flowing are hot. Comrade Tomasz, we are going to continue on the road taken by the best people in the world—into bright future. There are many of us."<sup>8</sup>

The funeral ceremony on 16 March was transmitted live for many hours. Work on that day was suspended, so that the inhabitants of Warsaw could participate in the funeral *en masse*. At 10 a.m. the funeral procession started from the Central Committee headquarters. It proceeded to Stalin Square in front of the Palace of Culture where at 11 a.m. sharp the "funeral assembly" began. At that moment all traffic in Warsaw stopped for 3 minutes: pedestrians remained stationary to pay a silent tribute to the diseased leader of the Party. Crowds of inhabitants of Warsaw accompanied Bierut in his last voyage. For organizational reasons, only representatives of state and party authorities, foreign delegations, representatives of allied parties as well as delegations of workers from the entire country were admitted to the Military Cemetery where, in Aleja Zasłużonych (Heroes' Walk), Bierut's body was buried. For those who were unable to hear the live transmission of the funeral, Zbigniew Lutogniewski—a well-known radio-announcer, read an extended report of the funeral ceremony on the afternoon programme.

Approximately at the same time, at the 19th Session of Arts and Culture Council, Jerzy Andrzejewski, Kazimierz Brandys,

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<sup>8</sup> ADA, Polish Radio programme of 15 March, 1956.

Jan Kott, Antoni Słonimski and Adam Ważyk openly attacked its president—Włodzimierz Sokorski. They accused him of all sins he had and had not committed, and especially of having forced social realism on the Polish people. Sokorski, who a few days earlier had submitted his resignation from the post of Minister of Culture and the Arts, considering it inappropriate for the “supervisor” of social realism to “oversee” the art of the period of the “thaw,” was not in the least surprised when he was removed from his post. The decision on this matter was made on 12 April, 1956, at a meeting of the Political Bureau. At the same time he was appointed to the post (which had been vacant for a few months) of the president of the Radio-Committee, which he officially took over on 15 April.

In his memoirs, Sokorski writes that he found out immediately that his nomination was received without enthusiasm by the employees of the Radio-Committee. “People feared ‘Stalinist methods’ and social realism.” The first meeting with the programme section was unpleasant. “Although an attempt to disrupt the meeting by an external group demanding the dismissal from the radio of a ‘Stalinist’ was thwarted —Sokorski reminisces— nevertheless, an extreme opposition was clearly visible [...] and it was only with a great difficulty that I was able to master the situation. Although none of the proposed declarations was finally accepted, an unpleasant aftertaste and unsatisfied ambitions were still there. A storm was hanging in the air, and one had to expect a renewed action from the opposition at any propitious moment for them.”<sup>9</sup>

In the spring of 1956 Sokorski, together with his deputy—Henryk Werner and the head of the section of the programme for abroad—Edward Uzdański, personally controlled and “kept a finger on the pulse” of the majority of programmes. This was not an easy job, since most of the employees in the programme section favoured radical changes and wanted to present subjects that were then most alive in Poland. Many years later, Irena Wedzińska referred to that situation: “‘Po prostu’ [Simply] and

<sup>9</sup> W. Sokorski, *Żywe kręgle* [Live Skittles], “Miesięcznik Literacki,” 1985, No. 9, p. 103.

other magazines were fighting, while Sokorski and Werner were trying to keep the radio on a low key. They tried to play both sides of the road—on the one hand, babbling about democracy, yet on the other—not allowing any critical materials. This meant that materials were rejected ostensibly for technical reasons, but in real fact, because of their political content. Also the style of management was changed in the radio. In this respect, the affair of Filip Istner and Artur Fiszer was very symptomatic. Istner's main thesis was : socialism is all right, only Sokorski and Werner are . . . , etc. Fiszer, on the other hand, claimed that Sokorski and Werner are all right, only socialism is not for the people. Both were kicked out some time later. Now, the question : which one of them was taken back ? Naturally—Fiszer.”<sup>10</sup>

In mid-June the situation in the country seemed to be fairly stabilized, as if frozen by the holiday season. However, on Thursday, 28 June, workers' protest in Poznań exploded. In the early hours of the morning, the greatest industrial plant in Poland—Joseph Stalin (former Cegielski) works went on strike. A crowd formed a procession and went along the streets toward Stalin Square outside *Zamek* (the Castle)—the then headquarters of town authorities. After 9 a.m. there were about 100,000 people gathered in the Square. They sang patriotic songs, raised anti-communist and anti-government slogans. With every minute, tension grew among the people who began to occupy public buildings : the Town Council, Police Headquarters, finally—the building of Voivodship Committee of the PZPR on which a notice “To rent” was posted. The atmosphere was becoming more and more tense. About 10 a.m. the rumour about the arrest of the leaders of the workers' delegation spread among the people.

This inspired a group of protesters to go to the prison in Młyńska Street in order to free the supposedly arrested representatives. Simultaneously, a smaller group went in the direction of the voivodship headquarters of the Security Office (UB) in Kochanowski Street where at around 10.40 a.m. a real tragedy began—from a second floor window, first shoots fired at the

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted after J. Śpiewak, *Radio Października '56* [Radio of October '56], “Antena,” 1981, No. 38, p. 6.



gathering. Shooting began in many parts of the town, since the protesters found arms in the prison storage in Młyńska Street and in Military Training Department at the Agricultural Academy and, finally, at smaller police stations. Street fights lasted for about 24 hours, with some breaks. Many protesters and soldiers who were brought to Poznań in the afternoon of 28 June, took part in these fights.<sup>11</sup>

The above dramatic and tragic developments were unknown outside Poznań, since the town was practically sealed off from the rest of the country. It was not even known that at the order of the leadership of the Party, premier Józef Cyrankiewicz, general Stanisław Popławski—vice-marshal, in charge of the military action, and a Central Committee secretary—Edward Gierek (who, at the order of the Politburo, was later to stand at the head of the commission for the investigation of the causes, development and character of the events) flew in to Poznań. It was not until 9.30 p.m. that the Polish Radio presented a communiqué of PAP (Polish Press Agency) about the events in Poznań and thus, informed the nation about the dramatic bloodshed. This happened already after Reuter had informed the whole world about the demonstrations and street strike in Poznań. For Radio Free Europe, Poznań “bloody hunger riots” gave an excellent opportunity for a particularly vehement attack on Polish authorities. The idiom of these comments is worth noting, i.e.: “the radio of foreign oppressors and the organ of the occupying power—‘Trybuna Ludu’ [Tribune of the People—daily].”<sup>12</sup>

PAP’s official statement which was approved by the Political Bureau, mentioned “serious perturbances in the streets of Poznań.” In the further part it was stated that “the agents of the

<sup>11</sup> On the tragic events in the streets of Poznań, see, first of all: *Poznański Czerwiec 1956* [The Poznań June 1956], ed. by J. Maciejewski and Z. Trojanowiczowa, Poznań 1981; cf. also *Wydarzenia czerwcowe w Poznaniu 1956* [June Events in Poznań 1956], Proceedings of a conference organized by Institute of History, Adam Mickiewicz University, on 4 May, 1981, Poznań 1981; A. Czubiński, *Poznań Czerwiec 1956 - 1981* [Poznań June 1956 - 1981], Poznań 1981 and *Czerwiec 1956 w Poznaniu* [June 1956 in Poznań], Poznań 1986; J. Ptański, *Wydarzenia poznańskie—czerwiec 1956* [Uprising of Poznań—June 1956], Warszawa, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> ADA, “Codzienny Biuletyn Działu Odbioru Audycji z Zagranicy” [Daily Bulletin of the Department of Programmes from Abroad], Radio “Free Europe,” 29 June, 1956.

enemy succeeded in provoking street riots. Some public buildings were occupied causing casualties. [...] The initiators of the riots which had the air of carefully planned, wide-spread provocation and sabotage, will be punished with the full austerity of the law." One also could find out from the communiqué, that the instigators of the riots were "imperialist agents and reactionary underground," as well as that the representatives of the government and the Central Committee of the PZPR headed by premier Cyrankiewicz went to Poznań.

The next day, the premier spoke on the Polish Radio. He said that "the blood shed in Poznań is a charge against the imperialist centres and reactionary underground who are hostile to Poland and are the direct initiators of the events." It is in this speech that the famous sentence, quoted many times, was uttered: "Let every provocateur or madman who will dare to raise his hand against the rule of the people know without a doubt that the rule of the people will chop off this hand of his, in the interest of the working class, in the interest of the struggle for the improvement of the standard of living, in the interest of further democratization of our lives, in the interest of our Fatherland." The speech was also televised by the very new medium of communication, and the few TV owners could see with their own eyes that when the premier was speaking about the "chopping off" of hands, his own hands were "visibly trembling on TV screen."<sup>13</sup> The text of the speech was published next day in national and regional papers.

Although on 29 June, shooting stopped in the streets of Poznań, the situation continued to be tense. These were difficult moments for the Poznań radio headed by Stanisław Kubiak. Following a debate with his deputy—Henryk Werner, Sokorski decided to fortify the Poznań group by bringing in Henryk Kolat. All texts relating to Poznań were meticulously censored before they were put on the air, also by the president himself who more than once "took off" particular programmes.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A speech "60 lat Polskiego Radia" [60 Years of the Polish Radio] by M. Kwiatkowski at a conference in the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) on 16 May, 1986. I take this opportunity to thank the Author for providing me with a typescript.

<sup>14</sup> W. Sokorski, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

On 30 June the Polish Radio presented Jerzy Janicki's correspondence from Poznań, in which he reported on the situation in the town. In contrast to Friday when in the morning in some parts of the town "groups of bandits were being liquidated," Saturday in Poznań was quiet. Mr. Janicki said that workers were phoning the radio station asking him to announce that they resumed work at their factories. The author of the commentary considered that to be an admirable sign of "the husbandry of the Poznań workers." Moreover, they were supposed to prove their responsibility for the matters of the town and its peace. Finally—according to the reporter—they expressed the attitude "to the events of Thursday, with which the Poznań working class has nothing to do, for they were the work of provocateurs, enemies of our own People's Motherland." The most important—to him—piece of information was that "life in Poznań is back to normal, it continues its daily routine."

From the description of Poznań "after the battle" Janicki proceeds to an attempt at an analysis and presentation of what happened on Thursday. "Today, no one doubts that the provocateurs were followed by notorious criminals, bandits and hooligans. It is due to this kind of bandits and scum that on Thursday the greatest tragedy took place. I mean, the place in which blood was shed. Today I have had an opportunity to see the building of the Committee for Security Affairs, which had been the object of fierce attacks on the part of the provocateurs. I have seen the room on the second floor, in which one of the most heroic defenders of the building—lieutenant Kazimierz Graja was killed. Below a big map of Poland, in the corner next to the shattered window on a cream wall, there is a blood stain. This is the place where a bandit's bullet hit Kazimierz Graja in the mouth. This is the place where a young, thirty years old man who had been defending public peace and order died from a bandit's bullet. [. . .] Bandits who have been shooting at the building from the roofs and the windows of the neighbouring houses—at some point opened fire from a different location. Lieutenant Graja was the one who wanted to inspect the new 'nest' of the enemy." The author of the commentary relates also the beginning of the drama: "The

employees of the Voivodship Security Office, for a long time, did not react to the provocation of the bandits who were throwing stones and Molotov cocktails in the direction of the windows. They had been brought there by a young man with a crewcut, most obviously an escaped prisoner. It was not until the first soldier fell in the street, that it became clear that the assailants encouraged by the silence were getting ready for murder, and it was then that the employees of the Security Office were forced to active defence. The rule of the people acted not against the defenceless, but against armed bandits."

Next, the reporter presented his impressions of flats of the employees of the Security Office, which were plundered by groups of demonstrators. One of the owners complained: "My flat had been plundered before in a similar manner—by the SS." For Janicki, also the "methods used by the provocateurs and bandits were not dissimilar. When there were wounded in the building, and the doctor was called, the bandits opened fire at the ambulance. [...] They also planned to siphon petrol in the neighbouring garages and set on fire the heroically defended building." In the final section of his correspondence, Janicki informed that he took part in the first interrogations of "the bandits who were caught by the authorities," one of whom had been convicted in 1950 for "membership in an underground organization and for armed assaults." Apart from that, Janicki was shown "objects from looted shops: vodka, cigarettes, a bicycle. Just regular loot of thieves."<sup>15</sup>

On the evening of 1 July the Polish Radio presented subsequent correspondence of Jerzy Janicki, in which the author stressed an improvement in the situation in Poznań. He also returned to the question of responsibility for the bloody drama. He blamed those who were spreading false information about the arrest of the workers' delegation. For the author of the correspondence "all rumours were weapon of the enemy who used it in this way in order to confuse the innocent citizens, to stir ferment among them."

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<sup>15</sup> Centralna Fonoteka Polskiego Radia [Main Record Library of the Polish Radio]—abbreviation used below: CFPR, tape 597/4.

Then the commentator said that "the provocation has been prepared for a long time; it was organized by and linked to someone who did not have to be personally present in Poznań that Thursday and voiced the first rumours not necessarily in the Polish language." Janicki referred also to his former correspondence in which he had mentioned, among others, Radio Free Europe leaflets that were found on the detained. He then stated that many "anti-state banners were written in a beautiful lettering: nice and even—impossible to have been done in haste and fervour of the early hours on Thursday. Very many from among the detained provocateurs, bandits and trouble-makers came from elsewhere, outside Poznań; they arrived here as if for an appointed call-up, as if to the capital of their hostile, anti-people aims. Moreover, what seems to be peculiar, is that the bandit squads were acting in an extremely well organized way; in the general confusion they were destroying certain targets, while at the same time, avoiding other specific points. Thus, for instance, the seats of: the court, prosecutor's office and security office were attacked and destroyed. On the other hand, neither telephone network nor our radio station were destroyed, since they thought both telephone system and radio might come in handy following the success of their counter-revolutionary anti-people riot. On Thursday and still on Friday armed gangs were raiding flats of some employees of the Security Office and Public Prosecutor Department, according to previously prepared lists of names. They were looking for these employees, terrorizing their families and, finally, destroying and looting their private property. The arms of the bandits, however, turned out to be too short, although they were trying to reach the throat of the People's rule. The plans of the bandits were too obvious for the nation not to notice their actual nature."<sup>16</sup>

An analysis of the language and style of both correspondences of Jerzy Janicki seems to be superfluous. The idiom was typical for most of the press commentaries of the period. Besides, journalists were merely repeating opinions and statements formulated by the leadership of the Party and the State. However, in this particular case, the tragic events were presented in a particularly

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<sup>16</sup> CFPR—597/5.

aggressive style. In describing the participants of the riots, not even once, did the author use a more neutral word like “protesters” or “participants of demonstrations.” It was always “bandits,” “hooligans,” or other similar invectives. It took time to verify the principles of this kind of usage. One should remember, however, that not all journalists used as crude a language.

A piece by Gustaw Kaden (pseudonym of Roman Kornecki from “*Życie Warszawy*”) entitled *Prześciancie klaskać panowie* [*Stop Clapping, Gentlemen*] read by a well-known radio announcer—Ksawery Jasiński on the evening of 3 July, may serve as a point of reference.

In the introductory section, the listeners were informed that the American Congress designated 25 million dollars to finance “riots similar to those in Poznań.” The author addressed “the joyful audience from the West” saying: “Stop clapping and leave your theatre boxes, gentlemen. The shows that you are expecting have been cancelled.” In the further part of his piece, however, Kaden presents an analysis of the Poznań riots, which is more balanced than that by Janicki. He distinguishes “two tendencies which, today, are visible to the naked eye. There was the workers’ dissatisfaction which found expression in the strike and demonstration. [. . .] Yet, there was also another tendency in Poznań, a much weaker one, yet, indeed, evil. When small groups of people split from the major demonstration organized by the workers and when these groups attacked the Party headquarters, town council and the prison, the office of the daily paper and the radio station and, finally, the building of the Security Office—then it was the action of those groups which had nothing to do either with the strike or the working class. When, during the attack on the Security Office, the armed groups placed the nests of machine guns according to the rules and principles of street fights, it was the action of trained groups working according to an obvious plan and on orders. It was here—in the attempt to set the Office on fire and to massacre the security employees—that the wolf-like eyes of the enemy glowed with an ominous light. He made it a point that the Polish blood should be shed in the streets of Poznań during the International Fair. It is he who hid—as if behind

a shield—behind the screen of workers' unrest, strike and demonstration—in order to set up a provocation. [...] For the enemy who—arms in hand—strikes against the rule of the people, there cannot be and there shall not be any mercy.”<sup>17</sup>

The text of this commentary has been preserved in the archives; it is possible to see and analyze corrections done in pencil, although, today, it is impossible to establish who made them: the author himself? a censor? a journalist on duty? deputy-president Werner? or Sokorski—the president himself? The corrections are the evidence of the concern for a careful choice of individual phrases. One can also notice a greater care about the precision of language. The original sentence in which the author enumerates the targets of protesters' attacks was as follows: “[...] finally, the security building, that means two major strategic points of the town were attacked—that was already the action of a separate organization which had nothing to do with the strike, or with the working class.” In this original version the sentence sounded ominously and unequivocally suggested a purposeful action of some mysterious “separate organization.” It implied a possibility of a coup. On the other hand, whoever introduced the corrections in order—most probably—to heighten the dramatics of “the eyes of the enemy” could not help adding “wolf-like” in pencil. One more thing is worth mentioning: Janicki claimed that the radio station was not attacked by the demonstrators, while Kaden mentions it among “the strategic points” attacked by the crowd. How was it, then, in real fact?

As has been mentioned above, at the end of June and in the beginning of July the Polish Radio was going through troubled times. The radio people were holding stormy discussions about the events in Poznań as well as about the way the tragedy was presented on the air. Sokorski was basically pleased with the performance of the radio and new TV. So was the Party leadership, since it expressed its thanks to the top authorities of the Radio for its attitude. This concordance of stands is not at all surprising if one keeps in mind Sokorski's principle that “the radio cannot, does not even have the right to represent any view-

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<sup>17</sup> ADA, Polish Radio programme of 3 July, 1956.

point which would be different from that of the government and party leadership.’<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the radio version of what happened in the streets of Poznań echoes the official line while evolving parallel to it : from “provocation and alien agency” through the concept of “two tendencies in the Poznań events” to “the legitimate protest of the working class.”

An attempt at a new look at the events of 28 - 29 June was discussed at the 7th Plenum of the Central Committee which gathered between 18 and 28 July, with a break for the celebration of 22 July. Yet it seems that the atmosphere of the Plenum was dominated by personal affairs. Although the discussions of the 7th Plenum have—so far—not been published, there is a popular conviction that differences among the leadership of the PZPR became stronger and more conspicuous. Nevertheless, the original assesment of the Poznań riots was re-examined and the concept of “the two tendencies” was adopted. The 7th Plenum of the PZPR has left nothing worth remembering in the history of the Polish Radio. At least, it looks so from the present perspective when analyzing the radio archives.

There exists, however, in the Main Record Library a tape recording of a 1-hour speech delivered by Edward Ochab on 1 August, 1956 in Włocławek. This speech may, to a certain extent, be treated as a form of propaganda of the achievements of the 7th Plenum. Ochab said that “the development of defence industry has consumed huge multi-million expenses” and that had a decisive influence on the failure of the Six-Year Plan. Moreover, he claimed that the fact that the nation was not informed about the actual corrections in the Plan caused by the need for the intensification of “defensive efforts” was a serious mistake. He admitted openly that instead of projects for the benefit of the entire nation, plants and works producing tanks, jet planes and radars were built. At the same time, he insisted, things can be and shall be better. According to Ochab, it was the duty of the Party to improve continuously the standard of living, even if it turned out to be a slow process. He announced that in the years

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<sup>18</sup> W. Sokorski, *op. cit.*, pp. 104 - 105.



1956 - 1960 the standard of living in Poland would increase by 30%.

Ochab devoted a greater part of his speech to "the tragic events in Poznań." Curiously enough, while using the well known phrases "demagogues, brawlers," "hostile elements," "counter-revolutionary elements," "provocateurs," he presented a new interpretation of the riots. "Had not there been serious errors and mistakes in our Party work, in our state and economic organization and management, had not there been an increasing dissatisfaction among so many workers in Poznań, the enemy would never have been able to create such a chaos and collect such a bloody toll." Later on, in his speech Ochab stated that "our connections with particular sections of the working class were not reinforced but, on the contrary, deteriorated. If such a phenomenon exists, then—naturally—the enemy will take an advantage of it."<sup>19</sup> Thus, these were not the activities of the enemies of People's Poland, agents of imperialism, etc., that led the workers of Poznań into the streets. A path was being gradually prepared for the interpretation voiced by Gomułka at the 8th Plenum in October 1956.

In September and October the attention of the radio audience was again drawn to reports from Poznań and trials of people who had been detained during the June riots. Yet soon, even this receded into the background in view of the new exceptional developments. On 15 October a meeting of the Political Bureau was held with Władysław Gomułka who at that time was not even a member of the Central Committee of the PZPR and who, only two months earlier, had been re-instated as a member of the Party. The Political Bureau decided that the 8th Plenum—so much awaited by everyone—would gather in Warsaw on 19 October. A totally new thing in Polish public life was that the nation was officially informed about this in a PAP communiqué.

The situation in the entire country was becoming increasingly tense. Rumour was rife. Even today historians are unable to establish what really happened and what was merely "the talk of the town;" what was the reality of the Polish October and what

<sup>19</sup> CFPR—1685.

merely constituted its legend? The question of the then divisions in the Party, which were hidden behind the enigmatic and rather meaningless labels of the “Puławianie” (Puławy group) and the “Natolińczycy” (Natolin group) has caused heated disputes among historians. One of them—Mieczysław Jaworski claims that on 20 March, 1956, during the 6th Plenum when, in the presence of Khrushchev who had come to Warsaw, Ochab was elected as the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR, the two contesting wings were formed; later they were called the “puławska” and the “natolińska” group, respectively. The name of the first one derives from the name of the street—Puławska—where a few of its members lived. The second group took its name from the palace in Natolin—a meeting place of many representatives of this orientation.<sup>20</sup>

Into the first group the following Party and state activists are included: Jerzy Albrecht, Antoni Alster, Celina Budzyńska, Tadeusz Daniszewski, Ostap Dłuski, Teodora Feder, Edward Gierrek, Romana Granas, Piotr Jaroszewicz, Helena Jaworska, Leon Kasman, Julian Kole, Wincenty Kraško, Stanisław Kuziński, Władysław Matwin, Jerzy Morawski, Marian Naszkowski, Roman Nowak, Mateusz Oks, Józef Olszewski, Mieczysław Popiel, Jerzy Putrament, Mieczysław Rakowski, Adam Schaff, Artur Starewicz, Stefan Staszewski, Jerzy Sztachelski, Michalina Tatarówna-Majkowska, Zygmunt Trowiński, Roman Werfel, Roman Zambrowski, Janusz Zarzycki and many others. Moreover, close to the “puławska” group one should place the following members of the former PPS (Polish Socialist Party): Józef Cyrankiewicz, Tadeusz Dietrich, Henryk Jabłoński, Oskar Lange, Lucjan Motyka, Adam Rapacki, Marian Rybicki and Andrzej Werblan. Some time later the group was also supported by the then 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR—Edward Ochab.

On the other hand, the most influential personalities of the “Natolin” group are said to be the following: Stanisław Brodziński, Hilary Chełchowski, Władysław Dworakowski, Franciszek

<sup>20</sup> M. Jaworski, *Kryzys społeczno-polityczny 1956 roku* [Socio-Political Crisis of 1956], in: *Przesilenia i zwroty w dziejach Polski Ludowej* [Breakthrough and Changes in the History of People's Poland], “Zeszyty Naukowe Wojskowej Akademii Politycznej,” No. 110, Warszawa 1982, p. 75.

Józwiak, Wiktor Kłosiewicz, Władysław Kruczek, Jarosław Ładosz, Stanisław Łapot, Stefan Matuszewski, Kazimierz Mijał, Zenon Nowak, Konstanty Rokossowski, Bolesław Rumiński, Feliks Stołński, Jan Trusz and Kazimierz Witaszewski.

On 18 October, 1956, a rumour circulated in Warsaw that the "Natolin group" prepared a list of the most active supporters of the process of democratization. Therefore, many people spent the night of 18/19 October outside their homes. Information about movements of Polish and Soviet (stationed in Poland) armies has been frequently mentioned. News was spread in Warsaw that arms would be distributed among workers in the Żerań works so that the working class of Warsaw would be able to defend the process of democratization and the people who identified with it.

In those days the main "information exchange" was situated in the headquarters of the Association of Polish Journalists in Foksal Street in Warsaw. Polish journalists and foreign correspondents went there. Information—not always true—from various sources was exchanged there. The excitement spread also within the radio journalist circles who, thanks to Western broadcasts, knew more and sooner than the others; it also reached the headquarters of the Polish Radio. I was told how Werner, seriously disturbed by the situation, asked Sokorski: "what's going to happen with us now?" The latter was supposed to have answered: "We have to watch which army will take over the Radio station. If it's the KBW (the security corps) then, it's all right!"

Soon it turned out that Sokorski was right. General Waclaw Komar who himself was recently released from prison and took command of the Internal Defence Army gave orders to the KBW (also under his command) to begin patrolling the streets of Warsaw, check road exits from the city as well as the key buildings, including the premises of the Polish Radio. In the basement of the radio station in Myśliwiecka street the soldiers from the KBW were stationed. There is a humorous although a real story in connection with the stay of the soldiers in the radio building. During one of many staff meetings held in the big studio

M-1 one of the technical assistants asked, very elated: "And whose army is there—downstairs, is it ours or not?" The affirmative answer was applauded by the gathering.<sup>21</sup>

On Friday, 19 October at 10.00 a.m. the 8th Plenum of the Central Committee of the PZPR started. It was held in the building of the Council of Ministers in Aleje Ujazdowskie. Even before the beginning of the session it was known that a special airplane was to come from Moscow bringing in a high rank Soviet delegation. Some members of the Central Committee were of the opinion that unless Gomułka, Zenon Kliszko, Ignacy Loga-Sowiński and Marian Spychalski were co-opted to the Central Committee, permission for the landing of the plane which has just asked for it should not be granted. Finally, following the co-opting of these four, Ochab suspended the session until 6 p.m. During the break a meeting of the Soviet delegation and the Political Bureau—all its members plus Władysław Gomułka—was to be held. The Central Committee accepted the adjournment until 6 p.m. and authorized the Political Bureau and Gomułka to conduct talks with the Presidium of the CPSU. The Polish Radio informed its listeners about these decisions at quarter past eleven.<sup>22</sup>

Following the announcement of the adjournment, Sokorski (who was also a deputy member of the Central Committee) returned to the radio station and ordered the monitoring of foreign stations for the Political Bureau. The news was really alarming. There was an evidence of the movements of the Soviet army in Poland and on the frontiers, cruiser "Żdanov" accompanied by three destroyers and a fleet of smaller units appeared at the entrance to the Gdańsk Bay, at Warsaw Technical University and in the Żerań works continuous manifestations were held in support of the process of democratization and individuals who symbolized it in the eyes of the public. The atmosphere in the Polish Radio was equally tense. When the Soviet plane circled above Warsaw, one of the announcers passed the information through the Polish Radio internal news system. He said also that Poland is an independent

<sup>21</sup> H. Miroszowa's report of 12 May, 1986.

<sup>22</sup> P. Raina, *Political Opposition in Poland 1954 - 1977*, London 1978, p. 52; cf. *VIIIth Plenum of the Central Committee of PZPR 19 - 21 October, 1956*, "Nowe Drogi," 1956, No. 10.

state and that the talks would be held on the basis of equal partnership. He further added that Gomułka expressed a preliminary acceptance of the post of the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee. Finally, he called all his colleagues to a meeting at 3 p.m. in the courtyard of the building in Noakowski street no. 18/20 organized in support of Gomułka. Many years later, I was told by Halina Myślicka that while listening to those words she had been thinking that no one had spoken in such a way since 1939. She was extremely moved and grateful for the words with which she fully identified.<sup>23</sup>

Talks with the Soviet delegation were held in the Belvedere. Besides Khrushchev there were other members of the Presidium of the CPSU: Viaceslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganowich, Anastas Mikoian as well as the Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact—Joined Armed Forces—Ivan Koniev accompanied by a group of high rank Soviet army officials. The talks in the Belvedere were difficult. They did not end as expected at 6 p.m. and were continued into the night. In this situation, the role of the radio was increasingly growing, since it was the fastest medium of public communication. Years later Włodzimierz Sokorski wrote about it: "We are trying to present our information quietly, truly, without concealment. In the evening news we inform about talks and public meetings. The atmosphere in the radio is serious, no panic. We have been working all night. I am trying to phone the Belvedere. Unsuccessfully. It was not until the morning that we were allowed to release the news about the departure of the Soviet delegation and the resumption of the meeting of the Plenum."<sup>24</sup>

The most important event of the next day (20 October) was the famous speech of Władysław Gomułka, which made a great impression on the members of the Central Committee, many of whom claimed that it was only Gomułka who was capable of such a profound analysis of the past, and, at the same time, of such daring plans for the future. This speech was very important and was re-played several times that day.

Public meeting and gatherings continued on 20 and 21 October in support of Gomułka and the process of change. In the Main

<sup>23</sup> H. Myślicka's report of 21 April, 1986.

<sup>24</sup> W. Sokorski, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

Record Library of the Polish Radio there is a collection of fragments of tape-recordings from meetings at the Warsaw Technical University and the Żerań works including the speech of the 1st Secretary of the Żerań Party Committee—Lechosław Goździk. The recording, unlike the press reports, renders the lofty, ceremonious atmosphere of these meetings. One can hear shouts, cheers and ovation. It is worth noting that the shouts were raised in support of the Party. And, thus, for instance, when Goździk was speaking at the Żerań works about the will to continue the self-rule movement, he was accompanied by cries: “Long live the Central Committee of the Party,” “Long live Władysław Gomułka” [long cheers], “Long live the Leninist Politburo!” At the closing of the meeting the workers sang *The International*. The Warsaw workers believed that they themselves are influencing important political events. This is why, speaking on their behalf, Goździk strongly protested against some Plenum speeches which were critical of the Warsaw Party organization and also rejected “groundless attacks on the Warsaw working class, the working class of the capital.”<sup>25</sup>

On 21 October, in a secret vote for the membership in the Political Bureau and in the Secretariat of the Central Committee, Gomułka won 74 votes in 75 total. Subsequently, by acclamation, he was entrusted the post of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR. At 10.27 p.m. the Polish Radio interrupted the sports news to announce the names of the new Party leadership and especially about Gomułka's nomination.<sup>26</sup> About one hour later the news was printed in a special issue of “*Życie Warszawy*” which was distributed all over the town by workers and students.

Next day, a meeting was held at the General Staff Academy in Rembertów. There is a recording of this meeting at the Main Record Library at the Polish Radio. It is hard to say whether and in what form it was ever presented on the air. Nevertheless, the recording is an important document of the period. The temperature of the discussion as well as the frankness of some

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<sup>25</sup> CFPR—604 1/3/4.

<sup>26</sup> Z. Rykowski, W. Władyka, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

speeches is surprising, even today! For from these statements it is clear that the officers were not at all informed about the situation in the country, while at the same time the whole Academy was "on alert." One of the first speakers began in an obviously agitated tone: "Comrades! All present here! one can say that as of yesterday the independence of our Fatherland has begun. Let us call things by their true names. Until now our independence was fictitious. Recent dramatic events have been a clear evidence that certain conservative forces—one may say—members of the Targowica—wanted to direct our national soldiers against their own fathers and brothers. This is a scandal and therefore, in such a dramatic situation, we cannot have any empty talk. This is it. Those conservative powers are still alive and in our Academy they are waiting for instructions from Witaszewski or others who were..." [cheers]. "They are more interested in their salaries, they care more for two or three thousand [zloties], for a nice position—than for their dignity and respect for the Fatherland" [cheers]. At the end of his speech this officer, unknown by name, said: "We are in favour of the building of socialism, but within the framework of sovereignty and independence of the nation. It is for these things that communists always died" [applause].

Next, a soldier took the floor and said that the unit in Rembertów counting several hundreds soldiers has been on alert. "Why? We are asking. Why your rifle magazines are loaded in the storehouses? Why?" [cheers, voices from the audience: "unload them!"].

Next speaker was a young technician. He asked how was it possible that in the Academy—the school for army commanders—the alert was ever introduced. He also asked why the workers were not given an unequivocal support from the very beginning. He spoke about the gap between the army and the rest of the people due to, among other things, network of special shops "behind yellow curtains." However, the most essential element of this speech seems to be the part referring to the Polish-Soviet relations. "This is how I see it, I'm speaking openly, regardless of the consequences. Why do we have these twenty foreign

divisions—as I have just heard in our country? [...] Why is it so that 12 years after the war, there are still in the Polish army officers, high in command, generals with whom one cannot talk in Polish?” [cheers].<sup>27</sup>

Doubtlessly, the most important meeting in those days was the one held on 24 October in the square in front of the Palace of Culture in Warsaw. Endless crowds poured in. Nobody knows the actual numbers: 100, 200, 400, 500 thousand people—or more? Head to head. “Entire Warsaw” came to meet the new leadership, and especially the new First Secretary. The Polish Radio and TV presented live reports from the meeting. When Stefan Staszewski—the 1st Secretary of the Warsaw Committee who opened the meeting said: “The People of Warsaw” he was instantly interrupted by incredible cheers from the crowd. The radio reporter—extremely moved—shouted into the microphone “The enthusiasm is reaching unheard of level! Caps and hats are being thrown into the air, everybody is cheering our leaders!” Staszewski trying to calm down the crowds: “Not so loud, comrades, not so loud!” People pay no attention and spontaneously begin to sing “*Sto lat*” (Hundred years), “*Niech żyje, żyje nam!*” (May he live). And again, loud applause. Finally Staszewski managed to mention Gomulka’s name, yet he was interrupted by the loud “*Niech żyje*” (Long live).

When Gomulka started his speech, everybody listened attentively and when he said that “those who have compromised themselves with lack of competence or serious errors cannot continue to held responsible posts” applause interrupted him. People cheered when he spoke about the independence of the state and of the nation. A special cheer was heard when he said: “It is up to us—only—to decide whether and for how long Soviet experts will be needed in our army.” At the same time—he continued—comrade Khrushchev assured us that the Soviet soldiers stationed here in Poland will return to their bases within two days.” The gathering fully applauded the statement that the nation “can absolutely trust its own army and its leaders.” On the other hand, the call “Enough of gatherings, public meetings, enough de-

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<sup>27</sup> CFPR—295.



monstrations. It's time for daily work " was received by the crowd less than enthusiastically.

After Gomułka the crowd called Marian Spychalski to deliver a speech. Again, " *Sto lat* " was sung, and again there were cheers. Yet, altogether, the 40 minute meeting did not satisfy many from among the gathered. People had come to see their leaders whom they considered to be their genuine leaders, they had come to be together, they arrived driven by the solemn atmosphere—they expected grand words such as " Poland, Freedom, Democracy, Socialism, Independence, Truth, Man, " etc. Instead, they were told to go back to work and to mind the " discipline, law and order. " When listening to these recordings, after such a long time, one is moved and feels " something " grasping one's throat from emotion and anger at the crowd's spontaneous launching into the National Anthem—gradually increasing in volume " . . . *pod twoim przewodem . . .* " (under your leadership) and finally into the song *Gdy naród to boju . . .* [*When the Nation into the Battle . . .*] amplified by many loud-speakers.<sup>28</sup>

Some people were obviously disappointed. They came to participate in something exceptional—in the History. Instead they took part in just another political meeting. Hot heads—in spite of Goździk's appeals for quiet and peaceful dispersion—formed a march which went in the direction of Nowy Świat street. Still on the same day the Polish Radio informed in a broadcast called *Pełnym głosem* [*In Full Voice*] that following the meeting several hundred people " shouted " at the steps in front of the Palace of Culture and " some drunks, hooligans and loud-mouths " formed a procession.<sup>29</sup>

For many Poles today, October 1956 is history and, as a matter of fact, unknown history. It is actually hard to imagine the feelings of millions of Poles in those days. A radio speech by the minister of Finance—Tadeusz Dietrich on 25 October in *Z kraju i ze świata* [*From Home and Abroad*] seems to be very telling in this respect. The minister said : " The enthusiasm of the people at the news of the appointment of new members of the Political Bureau of the

<sup>28</sup> CFPR—604/6.

<sup>29</sup> CFPR—7803.

PZPR and comrade 'Wiesław' as the First Secretary is manifested—among other things—in mass offer of gifts of the bonds of the National Loan for the Development of Polish Force, money and gold, in declarations of deductions from salaries and even calls for the floating of a new state loan. On behalf of the government, I wish to express great thanks for this noble action which is the evidence of the national support for the programme of the 8th Plenum and for the policy of the Party and of the government in the sphere of continuous raising of the standard of living of the working class. Implementation of this policy of the Party and the government requires the increase of the national income, which can be achieved only thanks to the increase in production within the centrally planned supply and the lowering of the costs of production and consumption. I am addressing—with the help of the radio—all initiators of this patriotic movement, that in their noble desire to support the policy of the Party and the government they direct the initiatives of workers in their workplaces and enterprises not to personal renunciation but toward the revision of plans for 1957 and saving of extra funds for the state. Comrades! Citizens! Do not seek renunciation! Do revise production plans and plans for the lowering of the costs in your workplaces. Offer pledges from your enterprises to the budget.”<sup>10</sup>

On 27 October the radio series *Odpowiedzi Fali 49* [*Answers of Wave 49*] were presented on the radio. Since 1949 this radio series (hence its name) constituted a specific model of a socio-political radio broadcasts and served the purposes of intervention. Answers to letters from individuals provided an opportunity for various discussions on general national topics and were aimed at a wider audience. Years later, Halina Miroszowa who was transferred to *Fala 49* [*Wave 49*] in 1955 pointed to another aspect of this phenomenon. “When answering letters from our listeners we were really trying to help these people, we were full of good will. It turned out later that—unwittingly—we were harming them, that these letters were also processed elsewhere . . .”<sup>11</sup>

The last programme of *Fala 49* was a self-critical account of

<sup>10</sup> CFPR—606.

<sup>11</sup> J. Śpiewak, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

the past. There was talk about “black records” and “white records.” On this occasion “the first unjust accounts of the Poznań events” were mentioned, also the too optimistic assessments of the realization of the Six-Year Plan. A letter from a listener was quoted in which he suggested that the name of the programme be changed to *Fala 56* [*Wave 56*], which, as a matter of fact, was to happen.<sup>32</sup>

It is hard to say what topics were most frequently dealt with by the Polish Radio in autumn 1956. The simplest answer would be—that all of them were. Yet, the way of presenting the vital problems of the country was constantly changing. One can say that until the 8th Plenum there was a preponderance of the style of postulates, later—the tone of the defence of the achievements of October.

From 15 to 18 November, in accordance with earlier announcements, Polish Party and government delegation visited Moscow with Władysław Gomułka, Aleksander Zawadzki and Józef Cyrankiewicz at the head. They came back on a train. During the entire voyage from Terespol to Warsaw they were met with a warm welcome. At every station where the train stopped Gomułka was practically forced to deliver a speech. On this triumphant journey from the border the delegation was accompanied by a crew of the Polish Radio reporters who were tape-recording the unique atmosphere. When the special train arrived in Terespol, a spontaneous “*Sto lat,*” cheers of welcome and support for Gomułka were heard on the station. Gomułka reminded the crowd that the train was going to stop only for three minutes. “We can tell you—he said—that we have fulfilled your wishes and our duty. During the negotiations and debates in Moscow, the results of which are known to you from today’s papers, we have successfully voiced our legitimate postulates. The Soviet Union represented by its present leadership of the Party and government has liquidated—according to our demands—all the injustice which took place during Stalin’s times. It has cancelled everything both in the sphere of politics as well as economy. In politics—in accordance with the decisions of the 8th Plenum of the Central Committee of

<sup>32</sup> CFPR—12.587.

our Party—Soviet comrades agreed that our stand is right, that Poland should be totally independent and that no one is allowed to interfere into its internal affairs and that they, too, shall not interfere into our inner affairs [cheers, shouts and “Bravo!”]. We also took care of economic matters, that is, of some informalities which occurred in our trade with the Soviet Union, and, especially as regards coal. Soviet comrades acknowledged our claims and we received back the sums of money in such a way that the Soviet Union resigned all its claims, that it has cancelled our debts which were very high, since they have reached over 2 billion rubles. It means that the Polish government, the Polish authorities, the Polish nation received—counting in dollars, since it is best understood by the people—over a half a billion dollars. These are economic results. Moreover, as you know, we have received a great help in the form of grain supply on an extended credit. In connection with this, Comrades and Citizens, I am appealing to you! Our grain supplies have, so far, been very poor indeed. If you want the rule of the people to perform adequately its duties toward the nation, taking this opportunity, I’m appealing to you: do help the rule of the people, do help the new government, the Party leadership, especially, by means of your generous, intense, productive work in industrial plants and institutions—so far as workers and employees are concerned, and, as regards peasants—first of all—fulfil your duties toward the state, first of all, in the form of obligatory supplies. At present we have enough grain, thanks to the amount we have just received—1,400,000 tons—on credit. [. . .] As from now on everything depends on us. Nobody is going to disturb us in the shaping of our lives according to the principles that we shall choose ourselves. And this is our greatest success, and this is, among other things, the result of the changes that have recently occurred in our country.” In the end Gomułka thanked the crowd for “this very warm and spontaneous welcome.” There was applause and someone from the crowd shouted: “We love you for your courage and because you are really good Poles!” Somewhat astonishingly, Gomułka inquired: “Have you come here out of you free will, or someone has organized you?” The crowd answered: “Out of our free will!”

The tape-recording, as it is preserved in the Polish Radio archives, was never presented in this form. It is a working copy, a rough draft. At some point a reporter, travelling on the train, asked Gomułka for a brief interview for the listeners of the Polish Radio. "Wiesław" excused himself claiming he was tired and suggested that perhaps premier Cyrankiewicz would do it instead. Cyrankiewicz, in turn, said he would do it later. When, finally, he agreed to give the interview, he was asked by the reporter: "Are we to expect your statement in the Diet?" to which he answered, carelessly: "Well, one can always expect things. But no, this is not to be recorded, this should be erased." After a moment he recited: "We shall decide about that today during the meeting of the Presidium of the Diet."<sup>33</sup> A historian must be surprised at this lack of respect for the radio reporter on the part of the chief of the State. Not everything may be attributed to exhaustion. Was it, then, an astonishing lack of understanding for the role of mass media?

Not everyone in Poland was convinced by Gomułka's assurance that the relations with the Soviet Union will be based on the principles of equal partnership. On 18 November during a street demonstration in Bydgoszcz, the crowd demolished the Voivodship Police Headquarters and the equipment used for jamming of Western broadcasts. Even more anti-Soviet were riots in Szczecin, where on 10 December protesters entered the building of the Soviet Consulate. "Brawls in Bydgoszcz and Szczecin" were referred to in the radio commentary entitled *Najpilniejsze zadanie* [*The Most Urgent Task*] by Marian Bielicki. Having paid the proper tribute to "the Polish October revolution" he said, among others things: "There is a battle going on in Poland, a battle between the powers which want to turn the course of events back to the Stalinist period of economic and psychological terror and the powers which desire to give a bright lustre and a full meaning to the idea of socialist democracy. [...] One must not forget that the struggle against the strengthening the fruits of October is supported by elements for whom any concept of socialism is alien and abhorring."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> CFPR—613.

<sup>34</sup> ADA, Polish Radio programme of 14 December, 1956.

The above fragment was undoubtedly aimed against the organizers of both demonstrations. However, the truth is that the Bydgoszcz riots have had a beneficial consequences for the Polish Radio : on 25 November—i.e. a week after the riots—it has been announced that on the strength of the decision of the government, jamming stations have been closed down throughout the entire country. Two months later the public opinion was informed that 52 jamming stations have been made available for the purposes of radio-communication, including 11 stations for the use of the radio stations. This made it possible to open a few regional radio stations : among others on 19 January 1957 in Kielce and two days later in Zielona Góra.<sup>15</sup>

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In our attempt to answer questions which were posed at the beginning, we should continuously bear in mind the fact that the present paper deals only with a fragment of a larger whole. In 1956 the processes of the decomposition of a system of rule were taking place in Poland. It is difficult to say with utmost certainty, but it is quite possible that the political breakthrough performed at the 8th Plenum saved Poland from tragic consequences very possibly similar to those that were experienced by Hungary. The leadership of the Polish Radio—in accordance with directives coming from “the top”—was trying to tone down the overall mood. On the other hand, a part (not so small, as a matter of fact) of the employees thought that they were to be of service to the nation. This group wanted, first of all, to inform the nation about everything that related to it—even if it was done in an indirect way. One of the evidences is the variety of problems discussed on the radio in those days. Only a few of them have been mentioned in the present paper. When there were many discussions in Poland about the rehabilitation of people unjustly sentenced in “the former period,” on 11 December the Polish Radio presented a 15-minute talk with Kazimierz Moczarski who had been imprisoned for almost 11 years. The talk dealt mainly with the rehabilitation

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<sup>15</sup> M. Tarniewski, *Porcja wolności (Październik 1956)* [*A Portion of Freedom (October 1956)*], Paris 1979, pp. 94 - 95.

trial which was to be held in the near future, yet Moczarski spoke also about his high-ranking persecutors such as: Roman Romkowski, Józef Światło, Anatol Fejgin and Józef Róžański.<sup>46</sup>

As has been mentioned, in the mid-1950s, radio was the ready and easily accessible source of information. However, in 1956 it began to play also a slightly different role. As of then, on the radio, one could hear people who in the “former period” were not admitted near the microphones. Yet, what seems to be the most important of all, is the evolution of the language used in the Polish Radio. I have tried to show how, parallel to the development of events in Poland, the language of radio comments was changing. It is enough to compare respective texts from June and October. Language grew less and less vehement and aggressive, and at the same time, it became more communicative. More and more people were talking to people with a human voice and language. These changes must have been immediately noticed by the audience. Jan Górski, an eminent historian said that when in November 1956 he was listening to Radio Moscow with a group of friends—its language sounded wrong to them. It differed so much from the language of the Polish Radio news. In 1956 the Polish Radio had to perform an important social role and it seems that it did it adequately. This is perhaps the reason why a large part of the society remembers the achievements of the Polish Radio in those days and this is why the radio archives are full of priceless materials for the study of both: the history of the Polish Radio and the history of the People’s Poland in general.

*(Translated by Marta Sienicka)*

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<sup>46</sup> CFPR—614.