SOLIDARITY IN THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH, 1980-1981

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Solidarity was a social movement from which numerous trends merged. As a trade union, it was concerned with fighting for fair labor conditions. At the same time, it also served as a movement for the national and religious emancipation of Polish citizens, employing patriotic symbolism and relying on Polish historic traditions. Finally, Solidarity battled for values of a more universal character, such as democracy and human rights. Freedom of speech was one of the principles that played a central role in the understanding of the entire movement. The ability to promote one’s views freely – a value that is taken for granted in today’s democratic nation – was in conflict with the reality of a state ruled by Communists. Solidarity fought against the information monopoly of the Polish authorities. Illegally published books and papers constituted the primary weapons in this struggle.

The communist system was based, inter alia, on the authorities’ control over those areas of life that under democratic conditions that function freely and enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy from the state. The Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – PZPR) and its dependent organizations controlled radio, television, press and other publications. The role of the Main Office for Press, Publication and Performance Control (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy Publikacji i Widowisk) was what is commonly referred to as

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censorship, which had great significance as well. The office’s task was to make sure that content that was unwelcome by the authorities did not leak into the public domain. The authorities banned certain authors whose publications were perceived as potentially harmful to the policy of the ruling class. Similar bans were imposed on specific topics that could not be dealt with, or discussed, publically.\textsuperscript{2}

The emergence of a democratic opposition in the second half of the 1970s was of fundamental importance in the fight for freedom of speech, conducted by those who contested the system. Opposition organizations acting at that time were not only appealing to respect freedom of speech, but went a step further: their members faced PRL authorities with facts, as they illegally published papers and books to escape censorship. Polish underground traditions dating back to the Polish uprisings of the nineteenth century, the Polish World War II-era underground state, and the conspiratorial struggle for independence immediately following the war, was of crucial importance here. Polish opposition activists also based their actions on dissident movements in the USSR and Czechoslovakia, illegally distributing hand-copied texts, the so-called \textit{samizdat} (from the Russian expression “\textit{sam-seba-izdat}” – “to publish oneself”).\textsuperscript{3}

The first attempts to issue illegal publications in Poland were made prior to 1976, but were of a rather incidental nature. Illegal publications were printed by the hardline, underground Communist Party of Poland criticizing the Polish authorities, and by Jehovah’s Witnesses. No such actions were attempted on a frequent basis within democratic opposition circles. The underground, independence-oriented organization \textit{Ruch} was one of the few exceptions to this rule. The organization consisted of participants from the 1968 student protests and the so-called

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Tatra climbers (*taternicy*), who smuggled literature to Poland from Czechoslovakia, as well as representatives of the Wroclaw artist community.\(^4\)

The beginnings of the Polish “second circulation” date back to the appearance of publications issued by the Workers’ Defense Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników – KOR) with such titles as *Komunikat* and *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, a paper entitled *U Progu* issued by the activists of the aforementioned *Ruch* organization, as well as studies published by the underground Polish Independence Accord (*Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległościowe*). With time, other opposition organizations began to issue their own uncensored publications: the Movement in Defense of Human and Civic Rights (*Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela*) issued such publications as *Opinia*, *Droga*, *Gospodarz*, and *Ruch Związkowy*; the Young Poland Movement (*Ruch Młodej Polski*) issued *Bratniak*; Students’ Solidarity Committees (*Studenckie Komitety Solidarności*) – *Indeks*; the Confederation for an Independent Poland (Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej) – *Gazeta Polska*. The Workers’ Defense Committee published, among other, *Głos*, *Krytyka*, *Robotnik*, and *Placówka*. Such papers as *Spotkania* and *Res Publica*, which dealt with general political issues, along with *Zapis* and *Puls*, which had a more literary profile, were important as well.\(^5\) In total, nearly 100 periodic magazines (720 issues) of various types were published prior to August 1980.\(^6\)

The illegal press soon included book publishing houses that operated in a similar manner. The Independent Publishing House (*Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza* – NOWA) was the first such publishing house. It was originally established by a group of students (including Janusz


Krupski) from the Catholic University of Lublin (Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski) as the Uncensored Publishing House (Nieocenzurowana Oficyna Wydawnicza).\(^7\) Having issued its first publications, the organization moved to Warsaw, where its name changed and KOR activist Miroslaw Chojecki became its head. NOWA became the largest independent publisher in Poland, primarily for books and literary papers.\(^8\) NOWA had close ties with the Workers’ Defense Committee. Over the years, other publishing houses were created that were linked with other opposition circles (e.g. Wydawnictwo Polskie, Wydawnictwo im. Konstytucji 3 Maja, Wydawnictwo Głos, Oficyna Liberalów, Wydawnictwo Konfederacji Polski Niepodległej). By 1980, there were at least 35 independent publishing houses operating in Poland.\(^9\)

The existence of a publishing movement that served as an alternative to the official press and book market was of significant importance for promoting resistance against the system. Printing and circulating independent publications became one of the primary tasks of those involved in opposition activity.\(^10\) The important role of “alternative circulation” publications consisted, inter alia, of integrating opposition groups. At the early stage, when the papers were simply copied by hand, subsequent readers were given an opportunity to become involved in anti-system actions. In numerous instances, it was their first step on the path to becoming involved in other types of opposition activity. The first publications were created by the so-called Chinese copier method, employing the *samizdat* principle. Each person, having copied the text using carbon paper on a typewriter, handed it over to other readers. Apart from increasing the circulation of individual publications, this was also important from an organizational point of

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view: it quickly developed the network of opposition activists and allowed an ever-greater number of persons to feel involved. Jacek Kuroń, one of the main KOR activists, recalled:

One person was able to make 6 copies of the announcement. One of them was returned, and five [were] distributed among friends, who did the same thing. When walking next to my block of flats in the evening, I could hear all the typewriters at work. Later, when we started using copiers, I recalled that typewriter era with great sentiment. The people [then] were so eager to sacrifice their time, effort and apartments, were so spontaneous and were joining the typewriting network in such great numbers.\textsuperscript{11}

The copy machines that appeared a few months after underground publications began to appear were either imported by opposition activists from abroad or were built by them. They allowed the opposition to print a higher volume and faster. Their use was also associated with overcoming very real fears, as severe repressions were envisaged for copying publication materials without a license. Opposition organizations that acted openly tried to keep their printing machinery a closely guarded secret. The makeup of some editorial teams were communicated to the public, but the locations and the machinery on which the papers were printed remained unknown. One may wonder how successful those organizations were in keeping the information away from the Secret Police - arrests and confiscations were not uncommon, but a considerable portion of the opposition’s publication activity was never worked out by the secret police of the People’s Republic of Poland.

The illegal press contained detailed descriptions of the repression methods used against opposition activists, with the intent of offering them at least partial protection. Opposition publications helped the first anti-system organizations formulate their agendas, something that should not be underestimated. Books and political publications allowed readers to explore areas in various social sciences (economics, sociology, literature, law, political thought) that were not

available officially. The social reception of independent publications is an issue that is difficult to examine. The circulation of books and publications was not high. The majority of illegal press titles were issued in several hundred copies. The most popular publications enjoyed a circulation of several thousand. *Robotnik* (Worker) was an exception, as its authors managed to achieve a circulation of 20,000 copies. The underground publications were popular among various circles of readers: from the opposition activists themselves, who were trying to keep track of all the titles, to people who got their hands on such papers only accidentally. The reception of the content published therein, however, was much wider thanks to Radio Free Europe broadcasts, which quoted the opposition press sources on numerous occasions.

Independent publications played an important role during the protests in the summer of 1980, both during their first wave in July and during the August strikes, as they informed on an on-going basis current developments in the movement.\(^\text{12}\) Opposition publications were also used – just as they were used in the years directly preceding the outbreak of protests – to highlight the importance of strikes at individual plants and factories, without the need to organize marches in the streets of individual towns. By supporting the striking workforce, the opposition press also boosted their morale. Information about the protests sparked actions in other factories. For instance, *Biuletyn Dolnośląski*, headed by Kornel Morawiecki, published a special issue which ended up being one of the factors that encouraged the city of Wrocław and the entire Lower Silesia region to be the first to express their support for strikes in the north of the country.\(^\text{13}\)

Illegal publications that reached the striking workers drew their attention to the problem of the lack of free speech in Poland. This was proven by the fact that the issue was referred to in


the famous twenty-one demands that the workers published. They demanded that freedom of speech, print, and publication, as provided for in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Poland, be observed, that independent publishers be free from repression, that the mass media be made available for representatives of all religions, that information about the establishment of the Inter-company Strike Committee (Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy) be disseminated, that its demands be published, and that the social and economic situation be described in the media in a reliable manner.

The workers on strike expressed their negative attitude towards the official press, and considered the opposition publications a reliable source of information.\textsuperscript{15} Underground publications were also issued on the premises of the striking factories themselves. In the Gdańsk Shipyard, a group of opposition activists (Konrad Bieliński, Ewa Milewicz, Mariusz Wilk and Krzysztof Wyszkowski) issued the Solidarity Strike Information Bulletin (\textit{Strajkowy Biuletyn Informacyjny Solidarność}), whose circulation reached several hundred thousand copies.\textsuperscript{16} Its importance is best proven by the fact that very soon after, the word Solidarity which it had first used in its publication heading, became the name of a trade union and social movement with over 9 million members.

From the very beginning of its existence, Solidarity focused on breaking the information monopoly of the communist authorities of Poland. The completely new political situation that was created after the authorities consented to the establishment of independent trade unions was not easy comprehensible for a society that was used to functioning under totally different conditions. Independent publications that informed about current events, explained the rights that

\textsuperscript{15} P. Sowiński, \textit{Komunikaty z pola walki}, „Wolność i Solidarność. Studia z dziejów opozycji wobec komunizmu u dyktatury,” issue 1, 2010.

their readers enjoyed, and printed statutes of the first trade union organizations served as a road sign, informing the society as to how to behave under the new circumstances.

The independent publication market was booming in 1980 and 1981 on an unprecedented scale. Approximately 400 new, independent press titles appeared during the first few months of 1980. An even greater boom was observed the following year, when over 1,800 titles were offered. During the term in which Solidarity was functioning legally, a total of nearly 2,000 independent press titles were issued.\textsuperscript{17} The uncensored press – just like the entire independent publication movement – ceased to be an elite phenomenon in 1980-1981. Circulation soared. The largest titles were offered in tens of thousands of copies. They were relatively easily available, although Solidarity structures complained that the demand was much higher than the supply offered by the union. The craving for independent information grew in force as the conflict between Solidarity and the authorities developed. The independent press answered the attacks on the union which appeared on a continual basis in the official media. It was then that the real free press market was shaped. One could access it without much trouble and there was virtually no risk attached. Free access to information was one of the major elements of the breakthrough in society’s awareness - at least in the awareness of that portion of society that sympathized with the opposition.

The independent press, which formed its structures alongside the trade union movement, allowed for the dissemination of information on the ways in which society could organize. Especially in the early stages, the Solidarity press was dominated by information, statutes, and proposals. Political discussions devoted to the authorities’ actions, union agendas, or the economic situation were published as well. Historical topics were also present.

\textsuperscript{17} J. Błażejowska, „Chciałem mieć w rękę broń…,” p. 238; R. Wróblewski, \textit{Charakterystyka liczbowa prasy niezależnej z lat 1976-1990...}, p. 158.
As the press market grew, the volume and the frequency of publication of certain titles dwindled. Trade union publications functioned openly. Publications intended for use within the organization or within the trade union were guaranteed to Solidarity under clause 36 of its statute. The wording of this clause, however, was interpreted rather freely and the publications were simply distributed among all interested parties. The status of trade union publications was provided for in the Act on Publication and Performance Control dated 31 July 1981. Censorship was avoided via reference to internal trade union publication status. In line with the Act, “bulletins containing information and opinions concerning issues related to statutory activity, as well as forms and notifications issued by political organizations, trade unions and other social organizations, intended for internal distribution among the members of such organizations and labeled accordingly, are not subject to control.” In fact, such publications were distributed outside trade union structures as well.

When Solidarity became legal, the authorities tolerated the growth of the independent publishing market. Pressure exerted by the secret police was rare, but not unheard of. Searches or arrests, conducted at times in a brutal manner, occurred as well. The secret police campaigned to control publications, influence their content (eliminating anti-system and anti-Soviet content), and minimize their range. Attempts were made to infiltrate some titles editorial teams and install spies. Efforts undertaken by the secret police with regard to the trade union press were also aimed at minimizing the influence that trade union activists (especially those from KSS “KOR”) held over the editorial teams.

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The majority of independent titles were published by several trade union centers: Warsaw (273 publications), Krakow (153), Wrocław (143) and Gdańsk (136).\(^\text{20}\) These were primarily cities in which the union’s most important regions had their headquarters. The most prominent of those titles included: Wiadomości Dnia, Niezależność (Warsaw), Solidarność. Biuletyn Informacyjny, Informator, Biuletyn Informacyjny Hutników (Krakow), Solidarność Dolnośląska, Z dnia na dzień (Wrocław), Biuletyn Informacyjny Solidarność (Gdańsk). There were two important anti-official trade union information agency bulletins called AS (Warsaw) and BIPS (Gdańsk).

In the majority of the remaining trade union regions, a single paper was published that enjoyed a dominant position and was linked, in most cases, to the region’s structures. Internal factory publications played, as mentioned before, a considerable role as well. But the impact that certain titles had was not only limited to individual plants and factories. Wolny Związkowiec – a Solidarity publication issued in the Katowice Steelworks – serves as a good example here. Its circulation reached up to 40,000 copies.\(^\text{21}\) The Solidarity press constantly dealt with material problems, as well as obstacles created by the authorities. Resistance by pro-government trade unions, the administration, and party structures was a common phenomenon. Foreign assistance, inter alia by Western trade union organizations, which contributed copiers, for example, is also not to be underestimated.

The papers’ independence from the trade union was a serious problem that Solidarity media had to deal with. A question was often asked about the degree to which the trade union press should represent the union’s interest and advocate its views, and the degree to which it should remain fully independent. The problem was discussed during the conference of trade

\(^{20}\) J. Błażejowska, „Chciałem mieć w ręku broń…,” p. 238.
union press publishers, as referenced above, which was held in January 1981, and at a meeting of trade union press publishers in May 1981. It was then decided that the titles should remain independent and that their content could not be censored. It was also pointed out that a general meeting of delegates of an appropriate level was the only organ authorized to withdraw the trade union status of any paper. The papers were also to represent the views of the trade union even in a situation in which members of their editorial teams supported different ideas. The papers were obliged to remain fully available during the periods of strike readiness or during strikes as such. This issue was also subject of heated discussions within Solidarity.²²

The activists of the pre-August opposition played a central role in the establishment of the trade union press force. Interestingly, the four major opposition centers in which the independent press was blooming, i.e. Warsaw, Krakow, Wrocław and Gdańsk, also served as the major centers of democratic opposition in the years 1976-1980. Its activists were rich in experience from the second half of the 1970s and they shared their knowledge with those for whom Solidarity was the beginning of their struggle with the system. Such support was offered both in terms of editorial skills and printing techniques. Some of these techniques were created before 1980, others were modified, and new ones were invented as well. The spirit copiers, popular prior to the onset of Solidarity, were replaced by other methods: the so-called frames, as well as screen and offset printing, which were also in use after Martial Law had been imposed. The use of some of these techniques had an integration value as well, as they contributed to the formation of well-unified printing teams.²³

²² J. Błażejowska, „Chciałem mieć w ręku broń…,” p. 207.
During Solidarity’s period of legal operation, some opposition papers issued in the second half of the 1980s were still present on the market. Opposition publications, having no ties with trade unions, were published unofficially, without disclosing their printing methods or distribution networks. They did not enjoy the status of intra-trade union publications, but the authorities were very stringent in hampering their activity. Book publishing houses, such as NOWA, NOWA II, “Głos,” Oficyna Liberalów, and Wydawnictwo im. Konstytucji 3 Maja also continued to operate. Many new publishing houses were established as well, with Kraq and Unia Nowoczesnego Humanizmu amongst the most prominent. In total, over 160 publishing houses existed, which issued over one thousand book titles. The books were very popular and available in libraries operating within trade union structures.

Regardless of the pace of development and the significant degree of popularity that independent publications enjoyed in 1980-1981, their range was restricted compared to that of the official state-sponsored media. The dynamically growing trade union press was no match for radio and television propaganda. Aside from creating its own information system, Solidarity also aimed to obtain unrestricted access to information, as guaranteed in the August Accords. In practice, however, the problem became one of the major causes of conflict between the authorities and the social movement, which demanded its rights be observed. The situation of Solidarity being deprived of access to the mass media was best described by Zbigniew Bujak, the head of Solidarity’s Mazowsze region: “Lack of access to the mass media: radio, television and press, prevents us from reacting, publically, to disinformation and lies fed to the audience, and
does not allow us to keep the public informed about the aims and forms of Solidarity’s current activity.”

Trade union materials were presented on radio and television, but often in a manner that did not achieve the expectations of Solidarity’s management. The trade unions attempted to create electronic media that would serve as an alternative to official media, but such efforts failed to materialize sufficiently for their scale to be comparable with that of the independent press. What the trade union succeeded in achieving was the creation of its own officially published press titles. Such publications were censored, but nevertheless contributed to the fact that the number of trade union press recipients was growing. The nationwide Tygodnik Solidarność weekly, with Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Catholic activist in the editor’s chair, was the most important such title. Most of its authors had some ties with opposition circles. The editorial team was made up of both highly experienced journalists and young people at the very beginning of their career paths. Mazowiecki managed the paper in a rather conservative manner and made sure that it focused on representing center-oriented and moderate fractions within Solidarity. At times, the texts published in Tygodnik Solidarność tended to express the union’s expectations towards the authorities, rather than present an in-depth analysis of the situation. At the same time, however, issues were discussed that were not present in other official titles. These included, for instance, some aspects of Poland’s modern history. Several titles of regional range also belonged to the officially recognized publications.

Another of the objectives that Solidarity pursued on the publication market was to establish the rules for censorship activity. The Gdańsk Accords included a declaration, made by

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the authorities, on amending the Act on Publication and Performance Control. In accordance with the principle of self-limiting revolution, the trade union activists – aware of the real situation – did not attempt to immediately do away with the institution that was the most evident symbol of the lack of freedom of speech in the Peoples Republic of Poland.

Certain content was allowed into the public domain during the “Solidarity” times, which would have been absolutely unthinkable just a few years earlier. The censors’ relative liberalism was proven, before martial law, by their acceptance of certain movies or publications, even those that strayed quite far from the official ideology. Such an approach made it possible for a few outstanding works, such as “Człowiek z żelaza” (Man of Iron) by Andrzej Wajda, to be completed.

Solidarity fought for clear principles concerning censorship-imposed restrictions. Its efforts were rewarded by the Censorship Act, passed in July 1980. Pursuant to its provisions, the decisions of the Main Office for Publication and Performance Control were subject to appeal. Authors were also offered the opportunity to mark in their works those places in which materials deleted by censors were originally present. In practice, it was mainly Tygodnik Powszechny that took advantage of this mechanism.

The transformation of the social communication system was in-depth and affected not only opposition journalists, but also those writing for legal press titles. The divide between official and unofficial circulation was becoming ever more blurred. Attitudes of some journalist circles working for the official media were shifting as well, and certain press titles were changing too, as they began to assume a stance that was more favorable toward the Solidarity movement. Such titles included Gazeta Krakowska, Kultura, and Kurier Polski. Changes were also visible in such papers as Polityka and Literatura. The Association of Polish Journalists was affected by
change as well, as it joined, under the leadership of Stefan Bratkowski, the process of transformation occurring thanks to Solidarity. The establishment of the union was a real breakthrough for many journalists. The years 1980-1981 were a transition period, after which they joined the opposition following the onset of martial law.

The independent press of 1980 and 1981 played a key role in the history of Solidarity. Free access to information was one of the milestones that contributed to the breakthrough in the level of societal awareness for at least that part of the society that was sympathizing with the opposition. After martial law was introduced, underground publication activity became one of the main areas in which resistance to the authorities’ policy manifested itself. It was a dangerous undertaking, as distribution of information outside the official system was an offence that martial law regulations punished with up to 10 years of imprisonment. Nevertheless, several thousand books and publications were issued unofficially in Poland prior to 1989.

Thousands of people involved in the independent publication movement were willing to take that risk thanks to the transformation that occurred within Polish society after Solidarity was established. The experience of dealing with free speech in 1980 and 1981 made the return to a situation in which access to information was confined to Communist-created propaganda unthinkable. Repressions by the authorities and their aggressive anti-Solidarity propaganda, still present in the official media after December 13, 1981, resulted in a desire for independent information that caused political discussions, literature, culture, and art to quickly develop throughout the entire society. That is when skills learned between August 1980 and December 1981 were put to good use. The Solidarity carnival was a period that played a central role in the fight for freedom of speech, which ended successfully in 1989.