Polish Social and Independence Uprisings in “Tygodnik Solidarność” and “Tygodnik Powszechny” in 1981

Summary

The article presents a compilation and analysis of the content of press materials (historical articles, reports and reviews) concerning the Polish independence and social uprisings, which were published in the pages of “Tygodnik Solidarność” and “Tygodnik Powszechny” in 1981. The aim of the article is to show how the memory of the events of 1956 and 1970 was included in building the historical foundation of the “Solidarity” movement and union. The analysis concerned the content presented in the 1981 yearbook, i.e. after the formation of the movement and before the introduction of martial law. The juxtaposition of the two most important periodicals made it possible to show the common elements of the ideas and the differences in their presentation.

Keywords

Two national magazines, closely linked to Solidarity and published in the crucial year of 1981, provide a picture of the issues and events that were lived by more than just Poland’s largest social movement. “Tygodnik Powszechny”, which had existed since 1945 and “Tygodnik Solidarność” published since the spring of 1981, provided both news on current affairs, presented analyses on the relations between the authorities and society, but also presented historical materials that were part of the ideological foundation of the movement.

“Solidarity” was the most complex of the opposition movements that grew out of opposition to living and working conditions in post-war Poland. Such a powerful, multi-layered social phenomenon, far beyond the confines of a trade union alone, had to be given an ideological binder with a broad base. An important element of Solidarity’s ideological foundation was the interpretation of Poland’s recent history. Given the movement’s nature and size, it became extremely important to emphasize past events that represented distinctive moments of collective resistance in defense of freedom and human dignity.

The two magazines co-existed in their first circulation for only a short period, from the spring of 1981 until the imposition of martial law in December of that year. Therefore, comparing the content of both periodicals within the same year seems reasonable. In making such a comparison, it is necessary to remember the significance of the tenth anniversary of the December tragedy of 1970, which occurred before the founding of “Tygodnik Solidarność”, as well as the fact that “Tygodnik Powszechny” remained in the publishing field throughout the entire period of the People’s Republic of Poland (except for the years 1953–1956), while “Tygodnik Solidarność” was established as a consequence of the formation of a movement, and later a trade union, and the signing of the August Agreements with the government of 1980 (Gąsowski, 2022, p. 15). These factors influenced the distinct character of the periodicals, as well as the way they functioned. An analysis of the historical content of all editions of the incomplete 1981 edition of “Tygodnik Solidarność” was carried out and published in a volume dedicated to the journal two years ago (Nowakowski, 2022, pp. 111–143). Hence, in the present publication, these contents are merely referred to, outlined in order to make a comparison with the
way they are presented in “Tygodnik Powszechny”\(^1\). The reader interested in an in-depth analysis of the historical content in “Tygodnik Solidarność” is referred to that publication.

Among the important uprisings, national and social manifestations, which found their place in the memory of the editors of both periodicals, we can distinguish the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and the events of 1956, 1968, 1970 and 1976. Of these, three in particular (1944, 1956, 1970) deserve a closer look because they were part of the process of creating a historical identity for the Solidarity movement. They largely constituted the foundation for thinking about one’s own past and the continuity of aspirations of post-war Polish society.

**Warsaw Uprising**

The Warsaw Uprising was part of the historical consciousness of the Solidarity generation. In the case of this uprising, we can see its borderline character. Firstly, the participants of the movement sometimes referred to it as the foundation of freedom – the “zero point” on the axis of the most recent history of the Polish nation. The Uprising was accessible to living memory – by its participants, who were still alive and often contributed support for Solidarity, partly intellectual, partly moral. It was that case where an important historical event could be “touched” either through contact with a direct participant or through living memory in homes and families.

The phenomenon of great uprisings naturally receding into the past is evident with the January Uprising. Its living memory was clear during the wartime period and continued in the post-war period up to its 100\(^{th}\) anniversary in 1963. Of course, the change of regime in post-war Poland had a colossal impact on the forms of commemoration. After the Second World War, the January Uprising was not officially presented as the foundation of the rebirth of Polish statehood, as in the so called Piłsudczyce circle and later Sanation narrative. Rather, it was a collective social memory, independent of official propaganda.

\(^1\) Many thanks to Ms Helena Wąsik for her support in the factual search for historical material from the Tygodnik Powszechny.
In 1981, both major opposition periodicals feature a mention of the Warsaw Uprising, albeit in different forms. In the case of “Tygodnik Powszechny”, for example, it appears interestingly in the text about the Visitation Sisters. The author writes only that after the Warsaw Uprising the Warsaw Visitation Sisters found shelter with the Krakow Ursuline Sisters in Starowiślna Street, while some of the nuns went to live with the Bernardine Sisters. This brief mention is surprising in view of the title of the article, “From the relief of Vienna to the Warsaw Uprising”, which suggests historical content with important caesuras. Thus, the strongly emphasized uprising remains in the title, making an important point in the content, but lacking wider development (Wolny, 1981, p. 3).

In the 1981 issues of “Tygodnik Solidarność”, the Warsaw Uprising is prominently featured as a significant part of post-war Polish history. This point of view shines through most strongly in Helena Zakrzewska’s text “Independence will be your reward, betrayal will be punished by death”. Placing the Warsaw Uprising in the sequence of dramatic community decisions ultimately leading to the creation of ‘Solidarity’ is clearly the perspective adopted by the author who fought in the ranks of the Home Army. From her point of view, the ideological foundations in both cases were consistent:

Now after so many years, after all that came afterwards, after I sat for six years in Mokotow, where on 1 August I didn’t take their grub because I was celebrating the Uprising, I think that our Uprising there was necessary. And that the Uprising was absolutely victorious, even though we had to surrender; because it is an unquantifiable thing. The Uprising maintained the greatest trait of the Polish people: the love of freedom. For what is most dear in life? Not love, not happiness, not even health. The dearest thing is freedom! (Zakrzewska, 1981, p. 21).

This foundation of an author aware of social change links clearly to the new movement through ideological, intergenerational coherence.

Someone who came from Gdansk after the strike said he smelled the mood of the Warsaw Uprising. But Solidarity is not the Home Army. It is a movement of a society that is clarifying itself, and this is what we
have been waiting for day and night for thirty-six years! (Zakrzewska, 1981, p. 11)

Krzysztof Kłopotowski analysed the social change mentioned by Zakrzewska in his text. Pointing to the novelty in the bold portrayal of the conflict between power and society that the viewer encountered in the film “Man of Iron”, directed by Andrzej Wajda, he addressed the director directly:

Mr Andrzej, the noble Poland of individualists suffering defeats ended with the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 [...] the communist power, despite Stalin’s crimes and [...] has the great merit of having created a working class together with the technical intelligentsia. And this is a completely different mental type, reluctant to romantic impulses, thanks to hard work counting their strength against their intentions, trained to co-operate by industrial co-operation. This nation has never been so sober and so well organised as it is now (Kłopotowski, 1981, p. 14).

What emerges from Kłopotowski’s text, then, is a picture of a movement with a clear sublimation of the historical moment. After all, it remains to test both the romanticism in attitudes towards martial law and the historical memory of Solidarity, as well as to verify this capacity for cooperation during the post-Solidarity governments after 1989. What is important, however, is the mirror in which Kłopotowski observes the awakened movement. He sees in it a picture of a society being reshaped. The brutal caesura is the Warsaw Uprising – partly probably symbolically and partly literally – a period of extermination of the Polish elite by two destructive totalitarianisms. It is impossible to know more – a censor’s scalpel affected the passage, as we learn because of the law in force, which allows us to indicate where the censor has interfered.

The Warsaw Uprising is and at the same time is not inscribed in the identity of the Solidarity movement. It serves as a caesura for a new society that grows on the ruins of Warsaw, but also of the whole of pre-war Poland. In the new reality, it builds itself in a unique form, linking ideologically, but not constituting a simple historical continuity with the uprising. The announcement of the publication...
of Krystyna Kersten’s book “Historia polityczna Polski 1944–1956”, which appeared in issue 37 of the magazine on 11 December 1981, is highly symbolic at this point. Regarding press materials devoted to the uprising in the Tygodnik, Leszek Gęsiak pointed out that with the help of articles published at the end of July, readers were being prepared to commemorate the anniversary (Gęsiak, 2022, p. 35).

June 1956

The situation is different with the events of 1956 – June and October. These are already the events that Solidarity explicitly recognised as the foundations of its own identity. In both writings, they are therefore present explicitly and in occasional references. “Tygodnik Powszechny” is distinguished by its precise reference to the June events on the one hand and its focus on reporting on the successful efforts to have a monument to the victims of June in Poznań.

Jan Staszel, writing about the Poznan June 1956, places it firmly within the Solidarity identity. He paints a panorama of workers’ events beyond the protest at the Cegielski plant, calling a series of reactions in the city’s factories “Solidarity strikes”. Apart from a short calendar of events from twenty-five years ago, he also tries to outline their nature. He sees in them a dignity, social and religious aspect (Staszel, 1981, p. 1).

The text recalls the course of the June events, but is also a contemporary commentary. The author points, for example, to Edward Gierek (at the time of the text’s publication, already removed from his position as First Secretary of the ruling Polish United Workers’ Party), who, after the events of 1956, headed the party-government commission conducting “research into the background and causes of the Poznan events”. With irony, he points out the commission’s “vigorous activities”, which from the perspective of 1981 are not yet visible.

However, the initiative to commemorate the Poznań tragedy on its anniversary by erecting a monument to the victims of June 56 receives the most attention in connection with the Solidarity background. The description of the activities of the Social Committee for
the Construction of the Poznań June Monument chaired by Roman Brandstaetter, the design of two crosses and the depiction of two symbols of identity – a cross and an eagle – are inscribed in the current model of the movement (Staszel, 1981, p. 4).

Information about the activities of the Social Committee for the Construction of the Monument also finds a separate place in the pages of the weekly (in the correspondence section), together with a call to support the construction with a donation, but also a request to provide historical sources (documents, descriptions, memorabilia and recollections) for a study on June 1956 (SKBPPC, 1981, p. 2). The historical elaboration of the events supported their recognition as the foundation of the social movement, of which Solidarity was the new iteration. Hence Tadeusz Szyma, in a review article with the strong title “Truth about Poznań 1956”, approached the then-prepared publication by Jarosław Maciejewski and Zofia Trojanowiczowa in this way. He heralded it as a “publishing revelation”, prepared at great speed and destined for publication in a state-run publishing house. This review bears the hallmarks of the time and atmosphere in which it was written. On the one hand, the author tries to show how the legend of events and their significance make it difficult to reach the factual layer of a not so distant time (such as establishing the exact circumstances of the death of a teenage boy – Roman Strzałkowski) (Szyma, 1981b, p. 3). He has doubts about the possibility of investigating the public mood regarding some specific issues, such as the acceptance of the communist regime. On the other hand, he allows himself to be somewhat carried away by the atmosphere of hope by stating: “So is the truth – always a widow after time? No, not always. Mainly when the exercise of power consists in permanent deception” (Szyma, 1981b, p. 5).

Fr Stanisław Musiał SJ dealt with the monument differently, focusing on its biblical significance. With palpable exaltation, he compared the cross to “a biblical cloud leading the Israelites [...] through a desert full of dangers. For 40 years...” (Musial, 1981, p. 2). This image, in addition to the natural theological slant presented by the well-known Catholic priest, is also a confirmation on the identity perception of 1956. Musiał describes the crosses in the context of 1956, 1968, 1970 and 1976, leading them in one line to
the present day, when he briefly mentions the speeches of Lech Wałęsa and Stanisław Matyja (a participant in the events of 1956) during the unveiling of the monument. The biblical image inspires the reader hoping to reach the end of the journey through the wilderness of communism, and to show the perspective of the past quarter of a century in juxtaposition with the forty years of the trek from Egypt to the Promised Land. “Tygodnik Powszechny” also brings information about the commemoration of June 1956 in the cultural sphere by the performance “Oskarżony: June – 56”, directed by Izabella Cywińska and Janusz Michałowski (script by Izabella Cywińska and Włodzimierz Braniecki). Premiered at the New Theatre in Poznań in June of that year, the play was also staged as a guest at the Musical Theatre in Gdynia in early October 1981, accompanying the Solidarity Convention. Writing about this event, Benon Gazinski focused on the linguistic layer of the play. He argued that, with June 1956, language, instead of serving as a tool of communication, served to sustain fiction. In this vein, he emphasised the importance of the words uttered in the Olivia Hall (where the Union’s congress was held) and stated that the struggle for transformation in Poland was a struggle for “the dignity of the word, its credibility and respect for man” (Gaziński, 1981, p. 6).

“Tygodnik Solidarność” brings quite a lot of material on Poznań June 1956, and a greater historical focus is evident in this magazine. It goes back to the history of the organisation of workers’ self-government, capturing Poznań attitudes in the key of International Labour Organisation conventions (Jakubowicz, 1981, pp. 7–8; Chrzanowski, 1981, p. 10; Moliński, 1981, p. 10; Styczyński, 1981, p. 10). The historical reflection goes even deeper, towards the nineteenth century, inscribing it in the history of the domestic labour movement even from before independence (Kurczewski, 1981, p. 10). Such a broad historical outline does not affect the perception of June 1956 and the subsequent October as the foundations of the post-war formation of the movement moving towards Solidarity. There are quite a few of these approaches, especially in issues 12–14, which were published in June 1981. The juxtaposition of events and analyses of how the Poznań events of the summer of 1956 influenced the limited political transformation of the People’s Republic of Poland in the autumn
of that year appeared from time to time in issues published in the second half of the year (issues 30 and 31).

There was, of course, no shortage of anniversary shots either, linking the past to the present. The most striking expression of this was the citation of the anniversary speech by Stanislaw Matyja, the workers’ leader from Poznan 1956 (BSSERT, 2000, pp. 226–227). The legendary leader of the Poznań strike was also given the floor among the testimonies of the events titled “They were there” (Matyja, 1981, pp. 8–9).

Juxtaposing how the two periodicals present the events of June, we note some important differences. “Tygodnik Solidarność” presents more strictly historical texts, studies by professional historians, and evoked or documented sources. The magazine uses the pens of Jarosław Maciejewski and Zofia Trojanowicz in the collation of events, while “Tygodnik Powszechny” concentrates on reviewing their publications. The reflections of a more general nature dominate the Krakow weekly, with an emphasis on the cultural dimension, or – understandably given the nature of the magazine and author – with biblical references, a symbolic interpretation of those events. The journal’s journalistic trait manifests itself in sometimes short, one-sentence commentaries or references to contemporary situations. The different perspectives do not deprive the two editors of a common view of June 1956 as an element of Solidarity’s historical identity and its foundation.

**December 1970**

Among the speeches that became the basis for building the identity of the Solidarity movement was the December 1970 tragedy. In “Tygodnik Powszechny”, a series of materials fell on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the events on the Coast. The issue of 14 December 1980 opens with an article on the commemoration of December 1970. In it, Jacek Susuł adopts a very topical perspective, describing the work on erecting a monument to the victims, which allows him to cover the members of the social committee for the construction of the Monument to Fallen Shipyard Workers and build a journalistic bridge between the monument and the people, the year 1970 and 1980.
(Susuł, 1980, pp. 1,8). There is little about the tragedy itself in this text, the author relies on the reader’s knowledge, and the detailed description of the preparations for the unveiling (which took place on 16 December 1980) replaces here both an account of the celebrations and a detailed description of the events, which are present rather symbolically. The size of the text, which, besides the first page, also takes up almost the entire eighth page, also serves as a memento. Susuł moves between the recalled tragedy and the realities of 1980, including the August strikes, showing them as a link through the prism of the ten-year effort for the memorial. There is space here to explain the symbolism – in addition to the cross present – of the anchors and their source going back centuries. This is an article at a basic level dedicated to the monument, but at a deeper level dedicated to the people and the ideas, especially their continuity.

Subsequent materials naturally bring reflections on the anniversary celebrations. Among these, Father Stanislaw Musial SJ’s “Gdynia December 1980” stands out in particular. In his characteristic manner, the Jesuit shifts from an account to reflection, not omitting information about the course of the gathering, but directing the reader towards various interpretations. Musiał picks up on literary motifs (a reading of Czesław Miłosz’s “You Who Wronged a Simple Man”), reads religious symbolism in an unabashedly exalted manner and carries out an artistic and ideological analysis of the monument, and finally makes historical remarks. Among them, two stand out – the first, about the fact that a great gathering of people appeared on that day to “exhume History”, and the evocation of the statement by the coordinator of the Social Committee for the Construction of a Monument to the Victims of December, that defending the values of December under the banner of solidarity made it possible to achieve in August the demands expressed ten years earlier on the Coast (Musiał, 1981a, p. 6). This is a clear link of ideas, rooting the identity of the Solidarity movement and union in the tragedy of the Gdynia workers of 1970.

“Tygodnik Powszechny” devoted more attention to the December anniversary celebrations. Other texts resonate with and are complementary to articles by Jacek Susuł and Stanisław Musiał. The identity dimension of December ‘70 and the places associated with it also
shines through in Tadeusz Szyma’s article “In Szczecin after 10 years” (Szyma, 1981a, p. 6) and Susuł’s reportage of the celebrations (Susuł, 1981, p. 6). In the latter, the author points out that only a few months earlier, at the Gdansk Shipyard, there had been a lack of “a broad context of historical truth” and of its evaluation. Only the commemoration of the anniversary of the December tragedy, and in fact the unveiling of the Monument (word capitalized), allowed for a special historical catharsis. These two authors address the anniversary precisely in a spirit of continuity. In another text, “History regained”, Tadeusz Szyma presents his impressions of the photographic exhibition “Events of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976”, opened on 18 February 1981 in the Krakow salon on St Anne’s Street. The very mention of the exhibition’s title and layout is a telling statement, and the sarcasm rings out particularly strongly from the words: “what a bore, the same thing over and over again since 56...” (Szyma, 1981b, p. 6).

A series of texts by Andrzej Micewski concerning the attitude of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in the face of particular events accompanies articles about the Polish months. The author analyses the cardinal’s actions and behaviour in 1968 (Micewski, 1981a, p. 3), and in two texts he analyses the situation of 1970 (Micewski, 1981b, p. 3) and the evolution of state-church relations in the 1970s (Micewski, 1981c, p. 1). To a greater extent than in the historical dimension, Micewski shows the social aspects, Wyszyński’s reference to the historical bond between nation and Church and the supremacy of the nation over the state when it comes to historical permanence.

Looking at the media portrayal of 1970 from the perspective of “Tygodnik Solidarność”, one must remember its first issue fell in April 1981, i.e. a quarter after the anniversary celebrations, whose echoes were still strong in the first weeks of that year. Moreover, current issues – the Bydgoszcz crisis and the beating of Jan Rulewski, as well as the Warsaw Pact’s spring ‘Soyuz-81’ manoeuvres – resonated strongly. All this meant that, of the Polish dates, the anniversary of June 1956 resonated most strongly, and December 1970 was most often included in the set of dates that were analysed together. One can see such an arrangement in Krystyna Kersten’s article “1956. 1970. 1980. Historian’s reflections” (Kersten 1981, p. 4), but also Ernest Skalski’s “Control – not power!” (Skalski, 1981, pp. 3 and 5), or finally
Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s mention in the first issue of the magazine (Mazowiecki, 1981, p. 1), “Tygodnik Solidarność” refers to the canon of Polish months, which include the events of June and October 1956, March 1968, December 1970 and June 1976. As these are symbols that are clear to Poles, it is most often limited to mentioning the years themselves. It is not the rule to always mention all the dates, but 1970 appears every time (Nowakowski, 2021, p. 112).

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The juxtaposition of references to Polish workers’ protests in both periodicals shows the interesting position of these periodicals in the strictly limited media market of the People’s Republic of Poland. “Tygodnik Powszechny” is a periodical of the Kraków Catholic milieu, which can be seen in the treatment of anniversary texts or in the perspective of presenting the tragic events of workers’ recent history. They are mentioned either in a biblical and cultural context, as in the texts of the Jesuit priest Stanisław Musiał, or in a historically limited form, but with short, strong summaries that could be saved from being truncated by censorship. The only exceptions are actually texts devoted to the presentation of Cardinal Wyszyński’s activities in the key moments of the last decades.

“Tygodnik Solidarność” is clearly more strongly oriented towards history in its classical sense. Descriptions of events, quotations of sources and statements by witnesses to history, as well as texts by professional historians, are an important characteristic of the paper. It must be remembered that other areas of the magazine’s coverage – law (including labour law), economics and current affairs – also had an equally powerful impact.

These two different magazines had a partially common audience. Representing the public voices of the opposition milieu, they manifested certain similarities despite important differences. In the case of the references to the events of 1956 and 1970, these can be seen most clearly. It is a common idea, although presented from different perspectives, but not without coherence. Also, these differences in perspective further emphasised this coherence and made it more credible. This effect is gained by showing the sources of the Solidarity
identity, rooted especially in the workers’ speeches of 1956 and 1970. In both cases, they are not treated as isolated events, but presented as elements of a sequence of formation of a new society, caring for and able to demand respect for the dignity of the working man (Ruszar, 2022, pp. 67–74, writes about the idea itself in this dimension). “Solidarity” – both as a movement and as a trade union – is in this view the result of a historical process marked by the tragic events of those years. In this respect, both writings present exactly the same programme.

Bibliography

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