

ARTICLES

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ŁUKASZ JASIŃSKI

(Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin)

DECEMBER OF 1970 IN THE WEST GERMAN PRESS:
ACCOUNTS AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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December '70, the workers' protests on the Baltic Coast and their brutal suppression by the authorities have permanently entered the catalogue of 'months' celebrated in Poland. These events have for many years been the subject of interest for both researchers and popularisers of history. Most of the texts dedicated to December '70 focus on reconstructing the course of events as accurately as possible. The existing publications are also attempting at the reconstruction of the chain of events that led to the use of arms against the inhabitants of the Polish Baltic Coast, as well as the inquiry into the attitudes of the leadership of the Central Committee (Polish: Komitet Centralny – KC) of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polish: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – PZPR). In the context of the current state of research, one should also mention the memoirs and commemorating literature, which touches upon the widely understood memory of December '70, as well as source editions¹.

¹ It is impossible to list all the scholarly publications related to December '70. From among a great many publications the following ones deserve to be mentioned: Jerzy EISLER, *Grudzień 1970. Geneza – przebieg – konsekwencje*, Warszawa 2012; idem, *Grudzień 1970 w dokumentach MSW*, Warszawa 2000; Barbara DANOWSKA, *Grudzień 1970 na Wybrzeżu Gdańskim. Przyczyny – przebieg – reperkusje*, Pelplin 2000; Jerzy EISLER, Izabella GREZANIK-FILIPP, Wiesława KWIATKOWSKA, Janusz MARSZALEC, *To nie na darmo... Grudzień '70 w Gdańsku i Gdyni*, Pelplin 2006; Jerzy EISLER, Stanisław TREPCZYŃSKI, *Grudzień '70 wewnątrz „Białego Domu”*, Warszawa 1991; *Grudzień przed Sierpniem. W XXV rocznicę wydarzeń grudniowych*, ed. Lech MAŻEWSKI, Wojciech TUREK, Gdańsk 1996; Sławomir CENCKIEWICZ, *Gdański Grudzień '70. Rekonstrukcja – dokumentacja – walka z pamięcią*, Gdańsk–Warszawa 2009; Barbara SEIDLER, *Kto kazał strzelać? Grudzień '70*, Gdańsk 2010; Piotr BRZEZIŃSKI, Robert CHRZANOWSKI, Anna NADARZYŃSKA-PISZCZEWIAT, *Zbrodnia bez kary. Grudzień 1970 w Gdyni. Przebieg wydarzeń, represje, walka o prawdę*, Gdynia 2010; Henryk M. KULA, *Dwa oblicza Grudnia. Oficjalne i rzeczywiste*, Gdańsk 2000; Michał PAZIEWSKI, *Grudzień 1970 w Szczecinie*, Szczecin 2013; Wiesława

Despite the noticeable abundance of publications, the current state of research on this event still leaves room for further work. So far, there has been little research on the international reactions to the suppression of protests on the Polish Baltic Coast. The Polish literature on the subject features only short references to this issue, which are part of broader research on other topics². The situation is similar when we look at foreign literature on the history of Poland and Polish-German relations. In these publications, the descriptions of the ‘December tragedy’ are mostly concise and contain only a factual outline, without indicating the international ramifications or the analysis of the aftermath of these events³.

The aim of the presented article is to investigate reactions of the press in the Federal Republic of Germany (German: Bundesrepublik Deutschland – BRD) to the events of December ’70. The subject of the reflection is to show the factual picture of events in Poland through the prism of West German newspapers and weeklies, as well as the interpretations and evaluations of the political, social and economic situation in the Polish state contained therein. Given the temporal proximity of the workers’ revolt on the Baltic Coast and the signing of the agreement that regulated the relations between Warsaw and Bonn

KWIATKOWSKA, *Grudzień ’70 w Elblągu*, Elbląg 1988; eadem, *Grudniowa apokalipsa*, Gdynia 1993; *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego. Grudzień 1970*, ed. Paweł DOMAŃSKI, Londyn 1991; *Elbląg w Grudniu 1970*, ed. Janusz HOCHLEITNER, Elbląg 2006; Stanisław ŁACH, *Grudzień 1970 roku w Słupsku*, Słupsk 2003; *Historia, miasto, pamięć. Grudzień ’70 – Styczeń 1971 (perspektywa szczecińska)*, ed. Maciej KOWALSKI, Eryk KRASUCKI, Paweł MIEDZIŃSKI, Szczecin 2011; Małgorzata MACHALEK, Paweł MIEDZIŃSKI, *Zbuntowane miasto. Grudzień 1970 – Styczeń 1971*, Szczecin 2007. For the most complete list of publications devoted to December of 1970 see Krzysztof CHALIMONIUK, *Bibliografia Grudnia ’70*, *Rocznik Gdyński*, 2010, no. 22, pp. 85–115.

² See Jacek TEBINKA, *Nadzieje i rozczarowania. Polityka Wielkiej Brytanii wobec Polski 1956–1970*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 385–389; Mieczysław NUREK, *Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec Grudnia 1970. Pierwsze reakcje i oceny*, [in:] *Polska w podzielonym świecie po II wojnie światowej do 1989 r.*, ed. Mieczysław WOJCIECHOWSKI, Toruń 2002, pp. 279–297; Adam CIOŁKOSZ, *Polska wciąż na wulkanie*, London 1971; Małgorzata ALBIERSKA, *Ośrodki emigracji politycznej wobec kryzysów w kraju (1956–1981)*, Wrocław 2000; Małgorzata PTASIŃSKA-WÓJCIK, *Reakcja paryskiej „Kultury” na polski Grudzień ’70*, [in:] *„Intelektualiści polscy milczą zupełnie”. Grudzień 1970 – styczeń 1971 w Szczecinie*, ed. Sebastian LIGARSKI, Szczecin 2010, pp. 67–85. For some references to December ’70 seen from the perspective of the Soviet Union, see Piotr KOSTIKOW, Bohdan ROLIŃSKI, *Widziane z Kremla. Moskwa–Warszawa. Gra o Polskę*, Warszawa 1992, p. 128 et seq.

³ Cf. Dieter BINGEN, *Polityka Republiki Bońskiej wobec Polski. Od Adenauera do Kohla 1949–1991*, trans. and ed. Janusz J. WĘC, Kraków 1997; Włodzimierz BORODZIEJ, *Geschichte Polens im 20. Jahrhundert*, München 2010; Peter RAINA, *Gomulka. Politische Biographie*, Köln 1970; idem, *Political Opposition in Poland 1954–1977*, London 1978, p. 197 et seq. The most detailed description of December ’70, although also devoid of references to international reactions, was included in the work of Katarzyna Stokłosa. See Katarzyna STOKŁOSA, *Polen und die deutsche Ostpolitik 1945–1990*, Göttingen 2011, pp. 167–176.

of 7 December 1970, it is crucial to find an answer to the question of how journalists and commentators of political life in this country treated the protests in Poland and whether they somehow linked them to the changing international situation. It is also interesting how the West German press described and evaluated the social unrest in Poland and the resulting change of power in Warsaw, in the context of the initiated process of warming the relations between Bonn and Warsaw.

The chronological framework of the text closes in December 1970, starting from the first information in the West German press about the social unrest on the Polish Baltic Coast to the change in the position of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR. The source base is the West German press from that period, the largest and the most opinion-forming newspapers and weeklies that are still considered as such. The following titles should be mentioned here: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Der Spiegel*, *Stern*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Die Welt*, *Welt am Sonntag* and *Die Zeit*. It is worth noting that these titles present a full spectrum of views – from conservative, through centre-liberal to left-wing⁴. The press query was supplemented by the documents of the Counterintelligence of the Polish People's Republic (Polish: Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa – PRL) from the resources of the Institute of National Remembrance concerning the surveillance of Western journalists working in Poland.

A reservation should be made at this point as to the nature of the press as a source. In contrast to radio and television, it is a medium that provides information with a certain delay. The press reports on events and also contains comments until the closure of a newspaper issue. A delay of this kind, which necessarily makes it impossible to report a given event 'live', should also be taken into account when quoting journalistic accounts of December '70. It is also important that daily newspapers appear at different times, e.g. as morning newspapers or afternoon newspapers. Weeklies also have their own specificity, as they necessarily focus on descriptions of events from a longer perspective of the past week⁵.

Taking into account the nature of the articles on December '70 in the press, the text has been structured around three main themes: journalistic accounts of the situation on the Polish Baltic Coast, analyses of the causes of social protests, especially the economic situation of the Polish People's Republic, and investigations into Poland's domestic and international policy in the last phase of Władysław Gomułka's office.

⁴ For short profiles of German newspapers see <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/knowledge/national-newspapers> [accessed 28 February 2018].

⁵ For information on press as a historical source see Ireneusz IHNATOWICZ, *Nauki pomocnicze historii XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 130–147.

The first information about the unrest and strikes in Poland was published in West German press on Thursday, on 17 December. It was then that the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Der Tagesspiegel* and *Die Welt* published articles about social protests in several cities in Poland. They informed in general terms about strikes and demonstrations that took place on Tuesday and Wednesday, 15 and 16 December, in the Tri-City (formed by the cities of Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia). It was emphasized that the reason for the protest was the price increases announced by the authorities, as well as the general difficult economic situation of Poland⁶.

Press coverage of the first days of the December revolt cited official communiqués of the authorities, distributed by the Polish Press Agency (Polish: Polska Agencja Prasowa – PAP), and those published in both central and local press. Let us bear in mind that the official media reports contained claims that it was the ‘hooligans’ that took advantage of the shipyard workers’ discontent and led to street brawls, vandalism in shops and acts of arson. The quoted official announcements and comments also indicated that six people lost their lives as a result of the riots, while several hundred were wounded⁷. It is worth noting that the West German newspapers also reprinted photographs of the Central Photographic Agency (Polish: Centralna Agencja Fotograficzna – CAF) that depicted looting of shops. As it turned out years later, they were manipulated. Originally, they depicted shipyard workers trying to protect shops from looting. After the helmets were retouched, the captions said that they depicted the participants of the looting⁸. These photographs were used as illustrations in the quoted articles of the West German press of 17 December, published in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Die Welt* and *Der Spiegel* weekly⁹. Of course, the editors of the West German press could not have known about this manipulation at the time, but as a result, the readers of some newspapers and weeklies were shown a picture of shipyard workers presented as hooligans who were devastating shops.

⁶ Wolff-Dieter Gross, *Sechs Tote bei den Zwischenfällen in Polen. Schwerste Unruhen seit 1956. Ursache sind Preiserhöhungen*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 17 XII 1970, p. 1.

⁷ *Schwere Unruhen in Danzig und Gdingen*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17 XII 1970, p. 1. For the announcements of the authorities on the events in the Tri-City see e.g. *Do klasy robotniczej i ludzi pracy w Gdańsku*, *Dziennik Bałtycki*, 16 XII 1970, p. 1; *Rachunek strat*, *ibid.*; *Przemówienie Stanisława Kociołka do mieszkańców Gdańska*, *ibid.*; *Niepokój i potrzeba rozważli*, *Głos Wybrzeża*, 15 XII 1970, p. 1; *Tragiczne skutki wandalizmu*, *Głos Wybrzeża*, 16 XII 1970, p. 4. The latter of the mentioned articles contained the above-mentioned retouched pictures of shipyard workers.

⁸ J. EISLER, *Grudzień 1970. Genez – przebieg – konsekwencje*, pp. 152–153.

⁹ Cf. *Blutige Unruhen in Ostseestädten*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 XII 1970, p. 1; *Schwere Unruhen in Danzig und Gdingen*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17 XII 1970, p. 1; *Schwere Unruhen in Danzig. Sechs Todesopfer*, *Die Welt*, 17 XII 1970, p. 1; *Protest. Neue Etappe*, *Der Spiegel*, 21 XII 1970, p. 70.

However, journalists of West Germany tried to use other, unofficial sources of information to establish as much detail as possible about the situation on the Polish Baltic Coast, which is natural in this profession. It was difficult to establish the course, scale and full nature of the events until the arrival of wire copies from other countries, that is until Wednesday afternoon on 16 December¹⁰. At the same time, the correspondents stressed that despite the difficulties in exchanging information between the Tri-City and Warsaw, the Polish capital was “buzzing with rumours” about the protests on the Baltic Coast as early as on Tuesday. There were also rumours of strikes in certain, unspecified companies in Warsaw and Cracow¹¹. It is worth noting that, according to the findings of Tomasz Balbus and Łukasz Kamiński, as early as on 13 and 14 December, there were rumours of strikes in large companies in many cities in Poland¹².

It is also worth mentioning the representatives of Western editors and press agencies that were present in Poland at the time and their efforts to establish the actual course of events on the Polish Baltic Coast. Since 16 December they have been trying to gather as much information as possible on the situation in the Tri-City. Two people in particular played a special role here: Ludwig Zimmerer, representing ARD television and NDR radio, and Renate Marsch, a long-time correspondent of the German Press Agency (German: Deutsche Presse-Agentur – DPA) in Poland. The aforementioned official announcement of the PAP that blamed the ‘hooligans’ for the events on the Baltic Coast triggered a big argument between them, and Ronald Farquhar from Reuters and Nicholas Lillitos from the Associated Press. The correspondents did not believe the content of the announcement. According to the surviving reports of the Second Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Polish: Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych – MSW) from the surveillance of Western diplomats and journalists, the correspondents, who were probably trying to recognize the moods prevailing in Warsaw, travelled around the streets of the capital, observing larger workplaces with particular attention. However, they did not observe any signs of protests.

After this ‘reconnaissance’ they came to some conclusions about the current situation in Poland in the evening talks. The starting point for their deliberations was the agreement of 7 December, which they evaluated not only as a personal success of W. Gomułka and his co-workers, but also as a great success of Poland on the international arena. Hence, their surprise was all the greater both in the choice of the date of implementation and, above all, in the scale of the price increases. Interestingly, these journalists did not perceive the

¹⁰ *Schwere Unruhen in Danzig. Sechs Todesopfer*, pp. 1–2.

¹¹ W.-D. GROSS, *op.cit.*, pp. 1–2.

¹² Tomasz BALBUS, Łukasz KAMIŃSKI, *Wydarzenia grudniowe 1970 poza Wybrzeżem, Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 2002, no. 1, p. 147.

First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR as a person directly and exclusively responsible for the price increases. According to their first interpretations: “The First Secretary could not decide about it by himself. It must have been ‘some intellectual idiot’ who advised him such a step right after Brandt’s departure, and even more so, before holidays with such a rich tradition in Poland”¹³. There was also a suspicion that this ‘advisor’ intended to harm both Gomulka and Willy Brandt this way, “by giving arguments to his opposition in the BRD that he had made a deal with the government that workers were fighting against”¹⁴.

An interesting event took place during a car journey that several journalists made to Gdańsk. It was related to the attempt to break the information blockade and obtain information about the protests in the Tri-City itself. According to press reports, those unnamed representatives of Western press were turned back by the militia blockade 110 km before their destination¹⁵. According to the findings of Jerzy Eisler, the TV journalist Manfred Pessel, who was detained on the afternoon of 15 December in Ostróda and forced to return to Warsaw together with the Polish TV journalist Roman Nurowski, could have been involved¹⁶. According to one of the reports of the Second Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the participants of the unsuccessful expedition were, apart from M. Pessel and R. Nurowski, also N. Lillitos from the Associated Press agency and the *New York Times* correspondent, James Feron¹⁷.

On 16 December, a *Süddeutsche Zeitung* journalist Manfred Schröder, who was staying in Opole by the consent of the authorities, made an attempt to travel to Gdańsk¹⁸. It is unclear, however, whether it was successful. The author’s article about December ’70 was based on conversations with the inhabitants of Warsaw and was dated 21 December¹⁹. It can be assumed then, that this journalist also failed to break through the blockade.

Rumours about common strikes that had been circulating for several days occupied a prominent place in foreign journalists’ reports. The cacophony of

¹³ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance] (hereinafter cit. AIPN), Biuro Udostępniania (hereinafter cit. BU), ref. no. 01062/35, vol. 22, Informacja dotycząca komentarzy zachodnich dyplomatów i korespondentów na temat aktualnej sytuacji w kraju, Warszawa, 17 XII 1970, p. 3.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4. It is difficult to say whether the journalists who used these rather harsh words were thinking of Bolesław Jaszczuk, who was responsible for the economy, or whether they were just guessing.

¹⁵ *Blutige Unruhen in Ostsee*, p. 1.

¹⁶ J. EISLER, *Grudzień 1970. Geneza – przebieg – konsekwencje*, p. 211.

¹⁷ AIPN, BU, ref. no. 01062/35, vol. 22, Informacja dotycząca komentarzy na temat aktualnej sytuacji w kraju, Warszawa, 17 XII 1970, p. 10.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁹ See note no. 68.

unverified information generated because of the blockade of the Polish Baltic Coast was reinforced by a wire copy from the American agency United Press International informing about the alleged strikes of miners in Silesia²⁰. Reuters, in turn, reported on strikes and arrests in Poznań and at the Automobile Factory (Polish: Fabryka Samochodów Osobowych – FSO) in Żerań, Warsaw²¹. However, it should be remembered that the later findings of the researchers partly confirmed the rumours related to the protests in several places other than the Polish Baltic Coast. The events in Cracow are a good example of this, where street protests started on 16 December and lasted for several days until they were put down by the Citizens' Militia (Polish: Milicja Obywatelska – MO) and the Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia (Polish: Zmotyoryzowane Odwoły Milicji Obywatelskiej – ZOMO). These were the largest December protests that took place outside the Baltic Coast²².

In addition to unproven rumours, attempts were made to rely on more reliable sources of information. The Swedish diplomatic service should be mentioned here first. The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a communiqué on 16 December based on the information from the embassy in Warsaw, informing about the protests that took place in Gdańsk at the beginning of the week. According to this communiqué, the beginning of the protest was marked by a march of a group of about 600 students and workers from the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk through the city. There were also reports on the clashes of demonstrators with the militia and the proclaimed strike of shipyard workers²³.

Yet another element of the information 'jigsaw puzzle' with regard to the beginning of the protests was the broadcast in the Polish Radio Free Europe, which informed about the street fights in the centre of Gdańsk and the setting fire to the building of the Voivodeship Committee (Polish: Komitet Wojewódzki – KW) of the PZPR. It was the first broadcast that included information about the crowd not allowing fire brigade units to extinguish the KW building²⁴.

As we can see, from the very first days, the editors had been trying to find out about the events in Poland in various ways. Interestingly, none of the articles discussed in this text referred to information obtained from West German

²⁰ *Schwere Unruhen in Danzig und Gdingen*, p. 1.

²¹ *Blutige Unruhen in Ostsee*, p. 2. Perhaps the information about the strikes in Poznań and Żerań was in a way a reference to the protests of 1956, when the beginning of June '56 in Poznań was marked by a strike in the Cegielski factory, and the FSO was the centre of the workers' ferment in Warsaw. For more information on the subject see Paweł MACHCEWICZ, *Polski rok 1956*, Warszawa 1993.

²² T. BALBUS, Ł. KAMIŃSKI, op.cit., pp. 150–151.

²³ W.-D. GROSS, op.cit., p. 1.

²⁴ *Schwere innenpolitische Krise in Polen*, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 17 XII 1970, p. 1.

diplomats. It seems that the German Trade Representative Office in Warsaw did not support the media from its country in their search for information. Perhaps the German branch itself was insufficiently informed about the course and scale of the protests. Yet another explanation may also be that diplomats focused on informing the headquarters in Bonn about the situation in Poland, which necessarily pushed media support into the background. Perhaps they did not want to make such moves that the Polish side might consider unfriendly? Certainly, issues related to the functioning and reactions of Western diplomatic missions to the events of December '70 are an extremely interesting, yet separate research postulate.

The first reports that informed about the protests in Poland paid quite a lot of attention to the issue of the fate of merchant ships owned by West German shipowners that were mooring in Polish ports at that time. The loss of communication with these vessels was reported with concern, and so was the lack of response from the Polish authorities to enquiries about the fate and location of the vessels formulated by trade associations: German Shipowners' Defence Association (German: *Schutzverein Deutscher Rheder*) and the Association of German Coastal Ships (German: *Verband der Deutschen Küstenschiffer*)²⁵. However, there was no total radio blockade of the West German ships. This was confirmed by information about the account given by an anonymous captain of one of the ships waiting in the port of Gdańsk. He provided the information about setting fire to the building of the Voivodeship Committee of the PZPR, as well as the building of the railway station "Gdańsk Central". He identified the reasons for the protests to be purely economic²⁶.

A similar picture of the situation in Poland was outlined by weeklies. *Der Spiegel*, in particular, provided its readers with additional information on the details of the protests. It stressed probably the most peaceful, and strongly egalitarian and socialist character of the postulates, noting that "The Internationale" was among the songs chanted during the protests. In addition to emphasizing the low standard of living of Polish workers, including shipyard workers, a somewhat paradoxical situation was also noted in this context that it was the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk and the Paris Commune Shipyard in Gdynia that were important ship manufacturers for the Soviet Union²⁷.

The daily newspapers, which came out on 18 December, i.e. the day after 'black Thursday' in Gdynia, barely mentioned the tragedy that occurred at the train stop of the Gdynia Shipyard, where the army opened fire on workers that were going to work. The initial absence of this event in the West German

²⁵ W.-D. GROSS, op.cit., p. 1.

²⁶ *Schwere Unruhen in Danzig und Gdingen*, p. 1.

²⁷ *Protest. Neue Etappe*, p. 70.

press indicates the high effectiveness of the information blockade on the Polish Baltic Coast. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which published a short account of the situation in the Tri-City on 18 December, was very sceptical towards the rumours and conjectures circulating around Warsaw that the 'blue berets' in Gdynia took the side of the demonstrators²⁸. As we can see, even such a prestigious and opinion-forming daily newspaper had to limit itself to quoting unverified and highly dubitable information in the face of the information blockade.

The term 'blue berets' was used for the 7th Air Assault Division. It is worth mentioning that its command had been in contact with the management of the Voivodeship Committee of the PZPR, the Voivodeship Committee of the Citizens' Militia in Gdańsk and the 12th Armoured Division in Szczecin from 14 December. The subunits of the 7th Division also took part in street fighting in Gdańsk²⁹. However, its role in Gdynia was restricted. Although the 'blue berets' took up positions in the city on 17 December, e.g. in Tadeusz Kościuszko Square, it was the soldiers of the 8th Armoured Division that opened fire on workers in the place of the greatest tragedy, not far from the "Gdynia Shipyard" train stop³⁰. Perhaps it was the presence of the 'blue berets' in such a prominent place of Gdynia, that gave rise to the rumour about some soldiers taking the side of the protesters.

On 18 December another piece of sensational information appeared about the alleged explosion that was to take place the day before in the embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in Warsaw³¹. However, this rumour was quickly disclaimed by a spokesman of the Soviet diplomatic post³². Undoubtedly, such information intensified the chaos related to the events, which was dominated by rumours and conjectures.

It was not until a few days later, on 19 and 20 December, that some more detailed descriptions of street clashes on the Polish Baltic Coast started appearing. The columns of West German newspapers were occupied by journalistic descriptions of street fights in Słupsk and Szczecin, and to a much lesser extent also in Gdynia. This was due to the fact that journalists from Scandinavia were actually staying in these very cities. Some moving descriptions of the protests and street fights in these cities were published by a Swedish radio reporter Andreas Tunberg and Danish journalist Jacob Andersen of *Ekstra Bladet*, which were later extensively quoted. They tried to reach the Tri-City

²⁸ *Die Unruhe an der polnischen Ostseeküste hält weiter an*, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 18 XII 1970, p. 2.

²⁹ Edward Jan NALEPA, *Wojsko Polskie w Grudniu 1970*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 34–43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–63.

³¹ *Warschau droht mit Schußwaffengebrauch*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 18 XII 1970, p. 2.

³² *Auch in Stettin gab es Tote und Verletzte*, Der Tagesspiegel, 19 XII 1970, p. 2.

independently of each other. These attempts, however, proved unsuccessful, but both journalists witnessed the events in Szczecin and Słupsk respectively. Andreas Tunberg described in detail both the beginning of the strike in the Szczecin Shipyard as well as the march through the city and the first clashes with the militia by the building of the Voivodeship Committee of the PZPR. The Swede left Szczecin on Thursday, 17 December at 7 p.m.³³ In an interview he gave to the *Frankfurter Rundschau* daily, he said that he had witnessed street fights between the army that brought tanks into the city streets and a crowd of demonstrators who were using bottles filled with gasoline. He described Szczecin as a ‘battlefield’³⁴. The chronology of this account and its content corresponds to the course of events in Szczecin on 17 December, when the street riots actually began³⁵.

The second of the journalists who were extensively quoted was a Dane, Jacob Andersen. It is a well-known fact that on 17 December, both he and photojournalist Ole Henning Hansen, as well as three Swedish journalists, who were not mentioned in the reports³⁶, were forced to stop in Słupsk on their way from Świnoujście to the Tri-City due to a blockade. There, Andersen and his companions became witnesses to street fighting between workers and school youth with the militia³⁷. In his account, which was later quoted in the press, Andersen gave a vivid description of the clashes with the use of tear gas and the brutality of the militia, which often affected random people, including women. His Danish colleague Hansen, the photojournalist, just barely avoided a similar fate when a militiaman was about to hit him with a truncheon, but he pulled out his journalist’s card and avoided being hit³⁸. The accounts of the Scandinavian journalists that focus on chaotic street fighting, violence and brutality of the militia and the army, were also cited in the following days. The scenes of street violence shocked Jacob Andersen, who stated that Słupsk in December ’70 was dominated by the “atmosphere of violence”

³³ *Stettin: Panzer rollen in die Menge. Stolp: ein Kessel von Haß und Terror*, Die Welt, 19–20 XII 1970, p. 2.

³⁴ Günter GARAFFENBERGER, *Zuerst war es nur ein friedlicher Protest*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 19 XII 1970, p. 3.

³⁵ Cf. M. PAZIEWSKI, *op.cit.*, p. 138 et seq.

³⁶ These journalists, who were not mentioned in the German press by name, were Jean Peter Kask, Rolf Uno, Lenard Anderson, journalists of the Swedish magazine *Arbeter*, and Karin Gunver Cangermark, a correspondent of the *Tidningarnas*, see <http://www.gp24.pl/historia/art/4791533,slupski-grudzien-1970-w-oczach-dunskich-dziennikarzy;id,t.html> [accessed on 10 March 2018].

³⁷ Zenon ROMANOW, *Przebieg kryzysu społeczno-politycznego w Słupsku w grudniu 1970 i styczniu 1971 r.*, *Scripta historica*, 2015, no. 21, p. 232.

³⁸ *Stettin: Panzer rollen in die Menge*, p. 2.

just like a war-torn country³⁹. In this rather coincidental way, connected with the presence of these foreign journalists in the affected cities, the reports from Szczecin and Słupsk made their way to the front pages of German newspapers, pushing reports from the Tri-City to the background. Both Scandinavian journalists were soon detained by the police and interrogated. According to their accounts, their notes and camera film were confiscated⁴⁰. This course of events is confirmed by the findings of Rafał Marciniak and Zbigniew Romanow. We know that after the afore-mentioned items were confiscated, the Scandinavian journalists were banned from leaving the hotel, and the following day they were sent to the Voivodeship Headquarters of the Citizens' Militia in Koszalin, where their visas were cancelled and they were expelled from Poland. However, Andersen managed to send the first report on the events of the previous day in Słupsk from the post office in Koszalin to his editorial office. This information was also used by the Polish Radio Free Europe⁴¹.

The quoted accounts were not the only ones that the West German journalists cited. It should be mentioned that the account of the Danish journalist Povel Utzon Buch, the special correspondent of a tabloid *B.T.*, contains a rather inaccurate description of the situation in Gdynia. Buch claimed that he arrived in Gdynia on Wednesday, 16 December, and on the same day witnessed street fights near the railway station, where he had to hide from the bullets. According to this description, the crowd, which shouted "Gestapo" and called the soldiers to join them, was dispersed with shots and the use of tanks and armoured military vehicles. On the same day in the evening, Buch allegedly reached Gdańsk, where he saw the burnt down building of the Voivodeship Committee of the PZPR and other evidence of recent street fighting⁴².

However, the account of the clashes in Gdynia raises certain doubts, starting with the chronology of the events. On 16 December in Gdynia the situation was relatively calm – there were surely no fights with the forces of law and order or the use of firearms. Besides, a rather succinct description in the

³⁹ *Volksaufstand. Feuer von Danzig bis Stettin. Augenzeugen berichten über die Rebellion in Polen*, Stern, 27 XII 1970, p. 117.

⁴⁰ *Skandinavische Zeugen Berichten aus Stolp. Leute die ohne Hoffnung sind*, Die Welt, 21 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁴¹ Z. ROMANOW, op.cit., p. 232; Rafał MARCINIAK, *Między Gdańskiem a Szczecinem. Grudzień '70 w województwie koszalińskim*, [in:] *Historia, miasto, pamięć. Grudzień '70 – Styczeń 1971 (perspektywa szczecińska)*, ed. Maciej KOWALSKI, Eryk KRASUCKI, Paweł MIEDZIŃSKI, Szczecin 2011, pp. 171–172.

⁴² *Aufruhr jetzt auch in Stettin und Stolp. Nordpolen ist von der Armee abgeriegelt*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 19–20 XII 1970, p. 1. For the same report see *Augenzeugenberichte skandinavischer Journalisten*, Der Tagesspiegel, 19 XII 1970, p. 5. Despite the author's efforts, no more detailed information on P. U. Buch's stay in Poland could be found in the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance.

Süddeutsche Zeitung makes it difficult to deduce which “square in front of the station” it might have been. On ‘black Thursday’, the 17 December, after the workers’ massacre in the morning, several marches went through the city of Gdynia, which in various places, also in the vicinity of the “Gdynia Central” station, tried to get through the railway tracks towards the city centre and the building of the Presidium of the Municipal National Council⁴³.

It is difficult to determine the sources of inaccuracies contained in the report. Perhaps they were the result of a mistake that Buch made in dating, or there was a misrepresentation during the translation of his article from the *B.T.* newspaper, which was written in Danish, into German. Another explanation is that P. U. Buch confabulated for the needs of his story, e.g. by compiling information and rumours about the course of protests in other cities, which he had heard earlier.

In the West German press, however, there was no information describing the procession with the body of ‘Janek Wiśniewski’ (Zbigniew Godlewski), carried on a door through the city streets. This can be explained by the aforementioned blockade of the Polish Baltic Coast, which caused that none of the correspondents mentioned in this article managed to reach the Tri-City. In this situation, the editorial offices in Germany were forced to rely on ‘second-hand’ accounts, usually from Scandinavian journalists. Therefore, the tragedy in Gdynia, which continues to be a symbol of the December events, appeared in the German press only on the basis of incoherent accounts, such as the one quoted above.

As it was pointed out in the introduction, the descriptions of the protests in Poland, more or less consistent with reality, were but one element of the press commentaries made on the events of December ’70, as much attention was devoted to analysing the causes of the outbreak of social discontent and, more broadly, the economic situation of the People’s Republic of Poland after more than 14 years of rule of Władysław Gomułka cabinet.

From the very beginning, the workers’ revolt on the Polish Baltic Coast (Gdańsk was mentioned the most often, Gdynia – less frequently⁴⁴) was treated mainly as a reaction to the price increase of food and other basic products, announced on 12 December, which hit the home budgets of those who

⁴³ Cf. J. EISLER, *Grudzień 1970. Geneza – przebieg – konsekwencje*, pp. 277–288; W. KWIATKOWSKA, *Grudniowa apokalipsa*, p. 56 et seq.

⁴⁴ Interestingly, some newspapers published maps showing both the location of the Tri-City and a short description of the history of Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia, recalling the diverse history and character of these cities. Starting from Gdańsk, a former Hanseatic town dominated by the Germans until 1945, through the spa character of Sopot to Gdynia, which in turn was treated as a strictly Polish city. See *Schwere Unruhen in Danzig. Sechs Todesopfer*, p. 1.

were worse-off⁴⁵. The protests were considered fully spontaneous, devoid of elements of provocation or top-down arrangement (e.g. by one of the factions in the Central Committee of the PZPR)⁴⁶. It was pointed out that suppressing all manifestations of dissatisfaction with the policy of the authorities by force was a feature of the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, quite like a constant tendency to spread propaganda by referring to the protesters as 'hooligans' or various kinds of 'instigators'.

Moreover, the nature of the forces of law and order in the countries of the Eastern Bloc was observed to be ill-suited to a bloodless dispersal of demonstrations. In this situation, according to the commentator of *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the threat of using firearms increased, which was confirmed by the massacre on the Polish Baltic Coast⁴⁷.

The reductions in the price of luxury goods introduced at the same time as the increase in food prices were in turn considered an 'accounting trick' which increased public discontent. The journalists from Germany noted that the government intended these increases to be a prelude to a deeper reform of the Polish economy, which was not efficient due to its structural errors and being centrally controlled. In 1971, the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland planned to introduce additional incentives for the working population in order to increase labour productivity⁴⁸. From this point of view, the increases, although very severe, were seen in a broader perspective as an attempt to move from an extensive to an intensive economy⁴⁹.

The attempt to introduce economic changes was seen as an attempt to increase the competitiveness of the Polish economy and make it more oriented towards exports to Western countries. However, the authorities in Warsaw did not foresee such a rapid increase in dissatisfaction and social protests. This was considered as a rather surprising nonchalance of W. Gomułka's cabinet, who seemed to forget that, as he had experienced during June '56 in Poznań, the price of meat and other food products had for many years been more of

⁴⁵ *Vor allem die Masse der Verbraucher betroffen*, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 17 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Volksaufstand. Feuer von Danzig bis Stettin*, p. 116.

⁴⁷ Karl-Hermann FLACH, *Schüsse an der Ostsee*, Frankfurter Rundschau, 18 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁴⁸ J. EISLER, S. TREPCZYŃSKI, op.cit., pp. 5–6.

⁴⁹ *Es war euer Eigentum, das verwüstet wurde. Augenzeugenberichte über die Unruhen in Polen*, Frankfurter Rundschau, 17 XII 1970, pp. 2–3. On the other hand, however, as Jerzy Eisler noted, the partial economic reforms promoted by the Secretary of the Central Committee, Bolesław Jaszczuk, could not change the faulty economic system. Despite the aforementioned stimulus package, the economy was still to be based on heavy industry, and was still to "promote economic autarky". See J. EISLER, S. TREPCZYŃSKI, op.cit., p. 6.

a political than a strictly economic issue in Poland⁵⁰. It was also pointed out that while in March 1968, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR dealt firmly with the protesters and maintained his position, the current social and political crisis was considered a more serious threat to the authorities in Warsaw⁵¹.

In the context of Poland's situation at the end of 1970, some publicists also referred to the agreement with West Germany concluded only a few days earlier. As Immanuel Birnbaum, the journalist of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, noted, its conclusion was certainly a success for the cabinet of W. Gomułka and Józef Cyrankiewicz, which gave them an additional impulse in external policy. However, after this diplomatic success, a certain capital of trust was squandered and pushed into the background due to supply problems and dissatisfaction with the low standard of living and price increases. What is more, the normalisation of relations with West Germany and the rapprochement with the West could not, even in the longer term, have a direct effect on improving the standard of living and supplies, as it involved an increased inflow of capital and advanced technologies from Germany, but not basic consumer products⁵².

December '70 was therefore treated as a direct result of the inefficiency of the centrally planned economy, combined with incompetent attempts at economic reform. From Germany's point of view, they were caused by the errors in the construction and assumptions of the economic system and had nothing to do with the widespread stereotype of the 'Polish economy' (*Polnische Wirtschaft*)⁵³. It was considered tragic that nearly 200 million people in Central and Eastern Europe had to operate in such a flawed system, which created barriers to development and wasted the country's economic potential⁵⁴. Despite the economic backwardness of Poland, high professionalism of Polish workers was pointed out. According to the weekly *Spiegel*, Polish engineers, shipbuilders and architects were among the world's finest⁵⁵. It seems,

⁵⁰ Gert BAUMGARTEN, *Lebensmittelpreisen wurden zum Politikum*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁵¹ Walter GÜNZEL, *Wetterleuchten über Polen*, *Die Welt*, 17 XII 1970, p. 4.

⁵² Immanuel BIRNBAUM, *Der Hintergrund der Unruhen in Polen*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 XII 1970, p. 4.

⁵³ The stereotype of 'Polish economy' has been present in the German language since the 18th century as a synonym for poverty, mismanagement and mess. See Tomasz SZAROTA, *Pole, Polen und Polnisch in den deutschen Mundartenlexika und Sprichwörterbüchern*, *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 50: 1984, pp. 101–109; idem, *Niemcy i Polacy. Wzajemne postrzeganie i stereotypy*, Warszawa 1996; Hubert ORŁOWSKI, *Polnische Wirtschaft. Nowoczesny niemiecki dyskurs o Polsce*, Olsztyn 1998.

⁵⁴ S. X., *Wirtschaft in Ost und West*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 20 XII 1970, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Das Böse*, *Der Spiegel*, 28 XII 1970, p. 64.

therefore, that most journalists assessed real socialism as a system which, despite the actual industrialisation of Poland, contributed to wasting the potential of our country.

Immanuel Birnbaum, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* journalist whom we have already quoted, brought a pessimistic forecast for the future in another article about Poland. He believed that Gomułka's cabinet, by abandoning attempts at economic reforms and decentralization of the system of power after 1956, led to stagnation and increased social discontent. At the same time, I. Birnbaum predicted that the situation in Poland would be unstable for a long time to come, also due to difficulties with balancing the economy⁵⁶. He explained that the reason why Gdańsk and Gdynia became the centre of the protests was that they were port cities, which meant that a large part of the inhabitants had contact with sailors from behind the 'Iron Curtain' and, consequently, greater awareness of the differences between the living standards in the Polish People's Republic and in the West than people in other parts of Poland⁵⁷.

Some authors, especially in texts published after 19 December, tried to present different aspects of everyday life under the rule of W. Gomułka. The attitude of the society before the outbreak of the protests was assessed as a conglomerate of rage and resignation caused by the hardships of everyday life. In the context of December '70 it was also pointed out that a rebellion of such a 'vigorous nation' as Poland was the natural consequence of this state of affairs⁵⁸. The latter statement can be treated as reminiscent of yet another stereotype originating from the 19th century, i.e. the image of a Pole as a revolutionary and a rebel⁵⁹.

A rather interesting description of everyday Poland in the era of 'little stabilization' was presented by Hans-Roderich Schneider in his analysis in *Welt am Sonntag*. He outlined the basic problems that Poles had to face every day to the readers in Germany, probably on the basis of his own experiences from travels to Poland, as well as conversations with the anonymous inhabitants of Silesia. Schneider noted that practically for over 30 years, starting from the Third Reich's attack on Poland, through the German occupation, to the time of the communists' rule, Poles had been struggling with a low standard of living, verging on the subsistence minimum. However, the journalist not only noticed

⁵⁶ Immanuel BIRNBAUM, *Unruhiges Polen*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 XII 1970, p. 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Hans-Herbert GÄBEL, „Wir arbeiten schwer, aber wir kommen zu nichts“. *Die Menschen in Polen leisten Konsumverzicht extremsten Ausmaßes*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 21 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Brigitta HELBIG-MISCHEWSKI, *Polacy i Niemcy. Stereotypy i uprzedzenia, czy różnice kulturowe?*, [in:] *Doświadczenie (po)granicza. Polsko-niemieckie Pomorze w historii, literaturze, kulturze*, ed. Paweł WOLSKI, Warszawa 2014, p. 19.

the clearly visible problems of inefficient economy, such as queues in front of shops, but also depicted other elements of everyday life, which are typical for the era of 'little stabilization'. He described the phenomenon of illegal currency trading, as well as ascetic housing construction in the form of small, almost 'Spartan' flats. However, the most moving description in the quoted article was that of the middle aged generation of Poles, people over 40 years of age, who survived the war and spent their entire adult life in communist Poland. The traumatic experiences and hardships of everyday life had left such a mark on them that the author described them as a generation of 'premature elders', quite unique in entire Europe⁶⁰.

Manfred Schröder, the journalist of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* mentioned in the context of an attempted trip from Opole to Gdańsk, also managed to depict the exhaustion with economic problems and general aversion to the authorities in his analysis. At the beginning, he recalled his conversation with a Warsaw taxi driver who, although he did not speak German, managed to convey his attitude towards the authorities by repeating over and over again one sentence containing the words: 'communism' and a 'streetlight', embellished with a gesture of putting a rope around his neck⁶¹. Many people, especially young people, considered the economic situation to be the most difficult in years, which resulted in a social revolt, sometimes referred to as a 'people's uprising', compared to the events in the German Democratic Republic (German: Deutsche Demokratische Republik – DDR) of 1953 and the year 1956 in Poznań and Hungary⁶².

The people's difficult situation was exacerbated by the tense relations between workers and managers and bureaucrats belonging to the communist party. The instruments for forcing shipyard workers and representatives of other industries to make more and more effort were no longer limited to "propaganda or forced enthusiasm", but they changed to various types of harassment and financial penalties, and even violence in extreme cases⁶³.

The events of December '70 were perceived in a similar vein, through the prism of economic stagnation, by an expert in German-Polish relations, the editor-in-chief of the weekly *Die Zeit* Marion Dönhoff. She pointed out that it was only two years before that W. Gomułka had to face another political crisis, when students and the intelligentsia had expressed their opposition to his

⁶⁰ Hans Roderich SCHNEIDER, *Polens Wirtschaft und die Reichen*, Welt am Sonntag, 20 XII 1970, p. 7.

⁶¹ Manfred SCHRÖDER, *Warschau. Erst Kritik, dann Besorgnis. Warmer Dezember-heißer Winter?*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁶² *Volksaufstand. Feuer von Danzig bis Stettin*, p. 116.

⁶³ „Die Ausbeutung ist klar“. *Eine Kritik an Polens Wirtschaftssystem*, *Der Spiegel*, 28 XII 1970, p. 63.

methods of governing. December '70 was therefore the culmination of a severe power crisis in Poland which had lasted for several years⁶⁴.

It was not until the weekend of 19 and 20 December that articles containing deeper political analyses, also outlining the international context of the Polish crisis, appeared in the West German press. The West German government's statement of 19 December concerning the situation in Poland was published. A short, several-sentence long statement by the government spokesman Conrad Ahlers contained a reservation that due to the tragic course of events the government in Bonn did not intend to comment exhaustively on the events in Poland. However, C. Ahlers' statement contained references to earlier social and political crises in the Eastern Bloc countries: the protests in the DDR in 1953, the 1956 uprising in Hungary and the suppression of the 'Prague Spring' in 1968. From this point of view, the German authorities saw the situation in Poland as yet another manifestation of a "deep and insurmountable" crisis in the Eastern Bloc, which led to outbreaks of social discontent every few years. The need for a political solution to the tense situation in Poland was stressed⁶⁵.

In the context of December '70 and the growing tension within the PZPR leadership, it was feared that some of them might try to undermine the arrangements of 7 December. By referring to 'well-informed sources' in Warsaw, *Die Welt* daily considered Mieczysław Moczar and his supporters to be the greatest enemies of the agreement with BRD. According to this information, Mieczysław Moczar was to be the greatest opponent of establishing diplomatic relations with BRD and opening Poland to the West. The former head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was supposed to be afraid of the ensuing liberalisation which, in his opinion, could lead to further political turmoil⁶⁶. Despite these fearful opinions, however, it should be remembered that during the signing of the agreement with Germany M. Moczar adopted a passive attitude, avoiding public criticism of the agreement⁶⁷.

In addition to the question of the future of relations between Warsaw and Bonn in the press analyses, the journalists also closely observed the attitude of the DDR authorities towards the crisis in Poland. Excerpts from the East German press, especially from the press organ of the Socialist Unity Party

⁶⁴ Marion DÖNHOF, *Der Umsturz in Polen. Das Debakel eines versteinerten Regimes*, Die Zeit, 25 XII 1970, p. 1.

⁶⁵ *Bonn. Wie in Ungarn und Prag*, Welt am Sonntag, 20 XII 1970, p. 1; *Lage in Polen hat sich offenbar beruhigt*, Frankfurter Rundschau, 21 XII 1970, p. 1.

⁶⁶ *Widerstand gegen Vertrag mit Bonn in polnischen Parteikreisen?*, Die Welt, 19–20 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Krzysztof LESIAKOWSKI, *Mieczysław Moczar „Mietek”*. Biografia polityczna, Warszawa 1998, pp. 370–371.

of Germany (German: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands – SED) – *Neues Deutschland*, were cited. It was stressed that the DDR authorities, after initially staying silent, launched a press campaign accusing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) of causing unrest in Poland. The West German press also noticed the campaign in East Germany accusing the authorities in Bonn, as well as the local press of running a ‘hate campaign’ aimed at further inflaming the situation in Poland⁶⁸. Typically, the theses of the East German propaganda that blamed the West for the turmoil in Poland were cited almost without any comments. It seems that both journalists and readers of the West German press were used to the propaganda of East Berlin.

International policy commentators also tried to predict how the turbulence in Poland would affect the balance of power in the Eastern Bloc. The most exhaustive analysis was published in *Die Welt* by Berndt Conrad. In his opinion, the DDR leader Walter Ulbricht and the entire SED were the biggest beneficiary of December ’70. Against the background of Poland’s economic and political troubles, the DDR authorities could show Moscow that due to the oppressive regime, discipline and demonstrative ‘ideological vigilance’, they have perfect control over the situation in their own country. At the same time, the author stressed that the leaders of other Eastern Bloc countries could look at the DDR with a kind of jealousy, taking into account both the higher level of economic development in the country and the lack (after 1953) of social unrest⁶⁹.

It was pointed out that, on the one hand, the DDR authorities increased the salaries of almost two million workers at the end of 1970 and, on the other hand, increased taxes of craftsmen and private entrepreneurs. Thanks to these ‘tactically clever’ economic moves, from Bonn’s point of view, the SED power was still based on a solid foundation and did not seem to be threatened⁷⁰.

A separate question was how Moscow reacted to the protests in Poland. As in the case of the description of the events on the Polish Baltic Coast, this issue was also largely based on conjectures and rumours that were not supported by reality. Scandinavia remained the main channel of information flow. On the weekend of 19–20 December, foreign passengers of the ‘Gryf’ ferry running between Świnoujście and Ystad brought information about the situation in Poland. The reports about the alleged presence of Soviet soldiers in Szczecin sounded sensational and at the same time not very credible.

⁶⁸ *Lage in Polen hat sich offenbar beruhigt*, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Berndt CONRAD, *Die Unruhen in Polen stärken Ulbrichts Position*, *Die Welt*, 19–20 XII 1970, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Willi KINNIGKEIT, *Die SED braucht kein Danzig zu befürchten*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23 XII 1970, p. 4.

It was the Red Army soldiers wearing Polish uniforms who were to shoot at the protesting crowd. In this context, other reports appeared of alleged movements of Red Army⁷¹ units that were to cross the Czechoslovak-Polish border and move northwards⁷². It should be assumed that this information was a reflection of social attitudes and rumours circulating on the Baltic Coast at that time about the hypothetical use of Soviet troops to suppress the workers' protests. According to the reports from *Welt am Sonntag*, as well as press agencies, the situation on the Polish Baltic Coast was closely observed by Americans – both the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of State. Journalists cited in their opinions unspecified informants from Washington, according to whom the authorities in Moscow would not hesitate to intervene in Poland if the authorities in Warsaw lost control over the situation in the country. Our country, due to its geopolitical location, was a link between the USSR and Soviet troops that stationed in DDR bases⁷³. However, the assessment of the probability of Soviet intervention in Poland was far from unambiguous. According to Swedish observers, whose opinion was reprinted by *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Moscow's intervention was rather unlikely, and the most realistic option was for the authorities in Warsaw to solve the crisis⁷⁴.

The workers' protests in December '70 triggered a chain of events that led to changes in the leadership of the communist party. On 20 December 1970, the 7th Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the PZPR convened in Warsaw. A decision was made to dismiss Władysław Gomułka from the function of the First Secretary (officially for health reasons) and to entrust this function to Edward Gierek, the former First Secretary in Katowice. Soon, other important positions underwent changes too: Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz was replaced by Piotr Jaroszewicz. The former replaced Marian Spychalski as Chairman of the Council of State⁷⁵.

These changes, which are to be treated as a result of the workers' revolt in December, also had a wide impact on West Germany. The press in this country reported about the personal reshuffle in the Central Committee on the front pages⁷⁶. Journalists did not just describe the mechanism of W. Gomułka's

⁷¹ In the above-mentioned accounts this colloquial term was used to describe the USSR troops. It should be remembered, however, that from 1946 the official name was the Soviet Army.

⁷² *Polen-Reisende berichten: Sowjet-Truppen greifen ein. Stettin noch abgeschnitten*, *Welt am Sonntag*, 20 XII 1970, p. 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Lage in Polen hat sich offenbar beruhigt*, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Andrzej FRISZKE, *Polska. Losy państwa i narodu 1939–1989*, Warszawa 2003, p. 307.

⁷⁶ *Nach Gomułkas Sturz weitere Veränderungen*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 22 XII 1970, p. 1; *Gierek verspricht Korrekturen. Polens Parteichef zeigt Verständnis für die Unmut der Bevölkerung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 22 XII 1970, pp. 1–2; *Nach den blutigen Unruhen in den Ostseestädten*.

removal and present the profiles of the new government representatives. They also tried to predict whether and how the new leadership would calm the situation in the country and whether there would be a significant change of the political course.

Gomułka's resignation was treated as his personal defeat, as well as the twilight of a certain formation of ideological communists, who started their public activity as early as in the Second Polish Republic and were active in the structures of the communist anti-Nazi resistance during the Second World War. It was also perceived that W. Gomułka's biography had made a circle, from the hero of the masses and the man who epitomized the transformation of October '56 to the bitter, tired and lost leader who did not comprehend the requirements of the present day and the growing social aspirations⁷⁷. The outgoing First Secretary lost power only two weeks after the great international success of the agreement of 7 December⁷⁸.

On 22 December, the front pages of the biggest newspapers were filled with articles that brought the figure of Edward Gierek closer to the public opinion in West Germany. These short biographies were maintained in a similar tone: they presented him as a highly respected Silesian, dynamic First Secretary of the Voivodeship Committee in Katowice. There were also opinions about him being a good manager and pragmatist. In some places, the entire life journey of E. Gierek was presented, which led to the heights of power through economic emigration and work in mines in Belgium and France. However, the assessments of the new First Secretary were slightly ambivalent. On the one hand, it was pointed out that he was in favour of modernising the country and opening it to the world. At the same time, it was noted that he never openly opposed W. Gomułka's decisions. As an example, the words of E. Gierek from March 1968 were cited, when at a rally in Katowice he said in a threatening tone that the "Silesian water", would "crumble the bones" of the opponents of the authorities⁷⁹. Despite these doubts, commentators appreciated the fact that Gierek's first TV speech was generally quite well received by the public and calmed down the social attitudes that had been tense after the massacre on the Polish Baltic Coast to some extent⁸⁰.

Führungswechsel in Polen, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 22 XII 1970, p. 1; *Parteichef Gomulka gestürzt. Gierek übernimmt die Nachfolge*, Die Welt, 21 XII 1970, p. 1.

⁷⁷ *Das Böse*, pp. 60–62; Gerhard VON GLINSKI, *Seine Isolierung begann schon vor Jahren*, Die Welt, 22 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Andreas KOHLSHÜTTER, *Am Bürgerkrieg vorbei, aber noch hat Gierek Polen nicht gewonnen*, Die Zeit, 20 XII 1970, p. 1.

⁷⁹ As cited in: Jerzy EISLER, *Siedmiu wspomniałych. Poczet pierwszych sekretarzy KC PZPR*, Warszawa 2014, p. 273.

⁸⁰ See Hansjakob STEHLE, *Ein Pragmatiker auf Gomulkas Stuhl*, Die Zeit, 25 XII 1970, p. 3; Harry SCHLEICHER, *Seine Karriere begann nach dem Polnische Oktober. Der neue Mann in War-*

The commentators also presented various predictions of further developments in Poland. Some of them noted that E. Gierek had been considered as a potential successor of W. Gomułka in the party apparatus for some time, calling him the 'heir to the throne' (*Kronprinz*). It was also noted that during his work in Katowice, the First Secretary chose to work with young activists who looked to be quickly promoted. This fact was interpreted as a signal of rejuvenating the Central Committee of the PZPR, and probably introducing certain economic and political reforms⁸¹. At the same time, it was emphasized that M. Moczar, who was in turn considered a nationalist and an anti-Semite, certainly did not give up on his political ambitions. The decisive struggle for power was therefore to take place between these two characters⁸².

Apart from the descriptions of the new First Secretary, many of the articles were devoted to the issue of the future of relations between Bonn and Warsaw, especially in the context of the ratification of the agreement of 7 December. Despite a critical opinion about Gomułka, especially at the end of his office, the change of power in Warsaw meant, however, entering an unknown territory. The words of E. Gierek from his first speech, in which he announced the continuation of his predecessor's foreign policy, were quoted with considerable relief. This message was interpreted as a signal to Moscow that Poland would remain a faithful member of the Eastern Bloc, as a satellite of the USSR. However, in the context of Polish-German relations this declaration was accepted with a clear relief, as it was interpreted as a sign of continued openness towards the West and the normalisation of relations with Germany⁸³.

However, moderately optimistic forecasts about the future of Warsaw-Bonn relations were not common. *Die Welt* predicted that the political

schau: Edward Gierek, Frankfurter Rundschau, 22 XII 1970, p. 3; *Neue Parteiführung unter Gierek sucht Ausweg aus der Wirtschaftsmisere*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 22 XII 1970, p. 1; *Die Umbesetzung der politischen Führung Polens*, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 22 XII 1970, pp. 1-2; *Gierek verspricht Korrekturen. Polens Parteichef zeigt Verständnis für die Unmut der Bevölkerung*, Frankfurter Rundschau, 21 XII 1970, pp. 1-2.

⁸¹ Wanda BRONSKA-PAMPUCH, *Mit der „schlesischer Methode“ an die Macht*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 21 XII 1970, p. 3.

⁸² Harry SCHLEICHER, *Palast-Revolution*, Frankfurter Rundschau, 22 XII 1970, p. 3; *Der Widerhall der Warschauer Ereignisse*, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 23 XII 1970, p. 5. These assumptions turned out to be right. The literature on the subject indicates that E. Gierek removed M. Moczar and his supporters from power as early as in mid-1971. On 22 June of that year, the former head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was appointed head of the Supreme Audit Office, which in practice meant that he was excluded from the decision-making process. There are also speculations about an alleged attempted coup, which M. Moczar would have tried to stage in May 1971, during E. Gierek's absence in Poland. See J. EISLER, *Grudzień 1970. Geneza – przebieg – konsekwencje*, pp. 471-473; K. LESIAKOWSKI, op.cit., p. 386 et seq.

⁸³ A. KOHLSHÜTTER, op.cit., p. 2.

'earthquake' in Poland at the end of December 1970 could seriously complicate the process of ratifying the agreement in the Bundestag, and even the very continuation of the *Ostpolitik*. Some of the commentators in Bonn saw Chancellor Brandt's policy as excessively risky, as it consisted in making foreign policy dependable on the arrangements with authoritarian leaders from behind the 'Iron Curtain'. The authorities in Bonn assumed that such figures as W. Gomułka would rule their countries for many years to come, and perhaps even for life. However, December '70 proved that social discontent and political mistakes could lead to the change of the ruling team even in undemocratic countries. Władysław Gomułka left in dramatic circumstances, which was associated with international turmoil and a sense of uncertainty, especially in West Germany⁸⁴.

However, in order to obtain the fullest possible picture of the media coverage of December '70, it is necessary to make at least a brief quantitative analysis of the German press on the subject. The total of 71 articles and notes of different volumes, concerning the protests in Poland were published in dailies and weeklies. In all analysed titles, the first texts on the crisis in Poland appeared in the 17 December issues. The systematic coverage of these events lasted until 23 December. Individual articles also appeared on 24 December in *Der Tagesspiegel* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and on 27 December in *Welt am Sonntag*. It can therefore be concluded that there was a high concentration of texts on Poland, most of which were published in just a week.

What is more, the articles that described the day after the events on the Polish Baltic Coast occupied columns on the front and following pages of the newspapers. They were often accompanied by an editorial or a column on the following pages. Therefore, in this context, Poland, according to a popular saying, did not really go off the front pages of the newspapers. The front pages were filled with dramatic accounts of witnesses of the workers' revolt, photographs, as well as articles describing the change of the Central Committee of the PZPR leadership with photographs of E. Gierek and his short biographies. In order to find less sensational materials, but those based on analyses of the situation and the projected directions of its development, the readers usually had to go to inside pages. Thus, it can be concluded that the information layer was linked to the search for sensationalism, which is typical of the media, with the use of screaming headlines and photographs on the front pages of newspapers, pushing analyses and columns into the background.

⁸⁴ Walter GÜNZEL, *Gomułka verspielte seinen Kredit. Der Irrtum Bonns*, Die Welt, 22 XII 1970, p. 6.

Despite the great interest in the events in Poland, however, no daily or weekly newspaper in West Germany decided to publish a special issue or any form of separate supplement with regard to the protests on the Polish Baltic Coast.

In quantitative terms, the largest number of articles related to December '70, as many as 17, of different form and volume were published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Although this was the most important newspaper published in Bavaria, it should be noted that other magazines were not far behind with the amount of space devoted to the events. It seems that all the most important titles devoted a similar number of pages to Polish problems. It should be remembered that some information, such as the accounts of Scandinavian journalists or the statement of a spokesperson for the West German government, appeared in many of the titles simultaneously.

The articles published about Poland in weekly magazines are a separate issue. *Die Zeit* devoted as many as three articles to the situation in Poland in its 25 December issue. They were a general analysis of both the protests and Poland's economic situation, as well as the expected developments following Gomulka's replacement by Gierek.

The Hamburg-based weekly addressed these issues in a much broader way than *Der Spiegel* and *Stern*. The former title referred to the events in Poland in a rather idiosyncratic way. The issue of 21 December contained only one two-page article on the inside pages in the international section, describing in general terms the protests on the Polish Baltic Coast⁸⁵. The situation changed significantly in the following issue of 28 December, after the 'December tragedy'. At that time Poland hit the front page of *Der Spiegel* and the authors of the international section prepared two articles describing the very state of the Polish economy and a cross-sectional text containing a factual description of the massacre of workers, as well as presenting the profiles of W. Gomulka and E. Gierek, and describing everyday life in the Polish People's Republic. The seven-page article is the most sizeable single text published in the West German press⁸⁶.

The *Stern* had by far the least coverage of the events in Poland. The newspaper restricted the account to one article on the distant pages of the 27 December issue. The text was written in a sensational tone, shocking readers with such terms as 'rebellion' and 'uprising'. It was a kind of recapitulation of some of the most drastic descriptions of the events on the Polish Baltic Coast. However, apart from the shocking scenes of violence, it did not contain a particularly developed analytical layer⁸⁷.

⁸⁵ *Protest. Neue Etappe*, pp. 70–71.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Das Böse*, pp. 61–67; „*Die Ausbeutung ist klar*“, p. 63.

⁸⁷ *Volksaufstand. Feuer von Danzig bis Stettin*, pp. 116–117.

The above analyses indicate a mosaic of press descriptions and analyses of events hidden under the name December '70 in the German press. Despite such drawbacks as the repetitiveness of some of the content and relying on 'second-hand' sources, which was difficult to avoid in a situation of an information blockade, the press editors managed to gather information about the course of events taking place in Poland and convey it to the public in Germany. The question about the public reception of media coverage and the diplomatic repercussions of December '70 in the context of West Germany and other Western countries remains open.

* * *

The tragedy of December '70 was present in the headlines of West German newspapers for over a week. However, a large number of press articles and analyses in respect of the protests in Poland, their causes and consequences cannot overshadow the fact that they emerged from informative cacophony. In-depth economic and political analyses were often put side by side with a large number of sensational rumours, such as the alleged rebellion mentioned above and the army taking the side of the demonstrators in Gdynia.

This indicates that the information blockade of the Polish Baltic Coast was highly effective, which forced journalists to use other sources of information, such as reports of Scandinavian journalists. Such a way of collecting information caused, of course, some issues to be highlighted to an excessive degree, such as street fights in Słupsk, while others, such as 'black Thursday' in Gdynia, were only mentioned. Nevertheless, it was possible to outline the scale of the workers' tragedy on the Polish Baltic Coast for the needs of the press readers in Germany.

There is also value in the economic analyses and observations concerning the everyday life of the People's Republic of Poland in the final days of W. Gomułka's office, published in December 1970. Importantly, these publications contain a great deal of genuine sympathy for ordinary Poles, are devoid of anti-Polish resentments, and go beyond the stereotype of the *Polnische Wirtschaft*. Despite the fact that the overview of the situation was not complete, the West German publicists also managed to accurately predict the course of events after W. Gomułka was removed from power. The election of E. Gierek was accepted without much surprise, and the declarations of the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR about the desire to continue the foreign policy of his predecessor quickly reassured the publicists about the future of relations between Warsaw and Bonn.

Thus, the readers of opinion-forming West German dailies and weeklies received a relatively balanced and reliable picture of the protests in Poland, their origins and consequences, despite the shortcomings and drawbacks mentioned above. It may be suspected that for those readers who were not

interested in international politics and our country, the quoted articles and analyses were an opportunity to obtain basic information about Poland.

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Dr Łukasz Jasiński

*Centre for Historical Research of the
Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin*

e-mail: lukasz.jasinski@cbh.pan.pl

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9641-2813

DECEMBER OF 1970 IN THE WEST GERMAN PRESS:
ACCOUNTS AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Abstract

Key words: Polish-German relations, social protests, strikes, manifestations, Władysław Gomułka, Edward Gierek, public opinion, the Baltic coast

The purpose of the presented article is to indicate to what an extent and how the most opinion-forming dailies and weeklies in Germany reported events taking place on the Polish coast in December 1970. The workers' revolt, which ended with a bloody suppression by the army and militia, took place only a week after the agreement between the People's Republic of Poland and West Germany had been concluded.

Analyzing this issue, research questions can be asked, both about the number and size of articles as well as their nature. Were they predominantly accounts of the course of events or were commentaries also popular? Was, and if so, to what an extent social unrest in the People's Republic of Poland and the removal of Władysław Gomułka from power perceived as a threat to the just initiated process of rapprochement on the Warsaw-Bonn line? To what an extent did the publications in dailies and weeklies differ from each other? Finally, the question is whether the press appearing in the Federal Republic of Germany published information on reactions of the public of this country, acts of solidarity, or voices of condemnation addressed to the authorities in Warsaw?

The study undertook a critical analysis of texts describing the events of December 1970, establishing the chronology of these events. This analysis was also comparative in nature, as the content of the articles was compared with the former researchers' findings on the course of individual days of the December tragedy.

No less important for this text was the linguistic analysis, aimed at indicating to what an extent reports and columns regarding the situation in Poland were emotionally loaded, and to what an extent they constituted substantive, emotionless political analyses.

The next research method used in the presented research was the quantitative method. Its application made it possible to determine the number of articles referring to events in Poland and to indicate specific days when they had appeared in individual dailies and weeklies.

The results of the query and analysis of press articles indicate that, despite the information blockade, journalists managed to map, with a high degree of vagueness, the real course of workers' protests, especially their causes and the actions of the authorities leading to the brutal suppression.

From the point of view of the West German editors, reports obtained from journalists from Scandinavia who had managed to get to Szczecin and Słupsk played a significant role here. In this way, the descriptions of events from both cities quickly obscured the dramatic situation in Gdańsk and Gdynia, including the symbol of December 1970 – an episode related to the death of Zbyszek Godlewski (“Janek Wiśniewski”), which hardly appeared in the media in Germany.

A separate research problem to which special attention should be paid are the numerous social and economic analyzes of the situation in Poland published in West German press in December 1970. They pointed to the economic premises as the main reasons for the outbreak of protests, while criticizing the policy of Gomułka, which had led Poland to the economic stagnation. A similar position was taken by the government of Chancellor Willy Brandt, who at first took an expectant attitude, and then, through the words of the government's spokesman Conrad Ahlers, drew attention to the chronic economic problems of the so-called Eastern Bloc.

Despite some anxiety, journalists calmly accepted events in Poland, especially the removal of Gomułka from power and him being replaced by Edward Gierek. It was anticipated that the new Polish leader would continue the policy of rapprochement with Germany, and more broadly with the West.

DEZEMBER 1970 IN DER PRESSE DER BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND.
POLITISCHE ANALYSEN UND BERICHTE

Abstract

Schlüsselwörter: deutsch-polnische Beziehungen, soziale Proteste, Streiks, Demonstrationen, Władysław Gomułka, Edward Gierek, öffentliche Meinung, Ostseeküste

Der vorliegende Beitrag soll schildern, wie und inwieweit die wichtigsten in der BRD erscheinenden meinungsbildenden Tages- und Wochenzeitungen von den Ereignissen an der polnischen Ostseeküste im Dezember 1970 berichtet haben. Zum Arbeiteraufstand, der von der Armee und Miliz blutig niedergeschlagen wurde, kam es nur eine Woche nach dem Abschluss des Vertrags zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Volksrepublik Polen.

Bei der Analyse dieses Themas können Forschungsfragen nach der Anzahl und Größe der Artikel, aber auch nach ihrer Art gestellt werden. Überwogen nur Berich-

te über den Verlauf der Ereignisse oder kamen oft auch Kommentare vor? Wurden die sozialen Unruhen in der Volksrepublik Polen und die Absetzung Władysław Gomułkas als Bedrohung für den gerade eingeleiteten Annäherungsprozess auf der Linie Warschau-Bonn angesehen? Und wenn ja – inwiefern? In welchem Maße unterschieden sich die Publikationen in den Tages- und Wochenzeitungen voneinander? Und schließlich die Frage, ob in der in der BRD erscheinenden Presse Informationen über die Reaktionen der öffentlichen Meinung in diesem Land, über Solidaritätsbekundungen oder auch über verurteilende Stimmen in Richtung der Warschauer Behörden veröffentlicht wurden.

Im Rahmen der Forschungen wurden die Texte, welche die Ereignisse im Dezember 1970 beschreiben, einer kritischen Analyse unterzogen und es wurde ein Versuch unternommen, die Chronologie dieser Ereignisse zu ermitteln. Diese Analyse hatte auch einen vergleichenden Charakter, weil der Inhalt der Beiträge mit den seit Jahren bekannten Forschungserkenntnissen über den Verlauf der einzelnen Tage der Dezembertragödie verglichen wurde.

Nicht weniger wichtig war für den vorliegenden Text die sprachliche Analyse, die zeigen sollte, inwieweit die Berichte und die Feuilletons zur Situation in Polen emotional geladen waren und inwieweit sie inhaltliche politische Analysen ohne unnötige Emotionen umfassten.

Die nächste Forschungsmethode, die bei den präsentierten Forschungen angewandt wurde, war die quantitative Methode. Dank ihrer Anwendung konnten die Anzahl der Artikel zu den Ereignissen in Polen und konkrete Tage festgelegt werden, an denen sie in den einzelnen Tages- und Wochenzeitungen erschienen.

Die Ergebnisse der durchgeführten Recherche und Analyse von Presseartikeln zeigen, dass es – wenn auch nur sehr vage – den Journalisten und Publizisten trotz der Informationsblockade der polnischen Ostseeküste gelungen ist, den tatsächlichen Verlauf der Arbeiterproteste, insbesondere ihre Ursachen und die Versuche der Behörden, sie brutal niederzuschlagen, wiederzugeben.

Eine große Rolle spielten hier aus der Perspektive westdeutscher Redaktionen Berichte quasi „aus zweiter Hand“ von Journalisten aus Skandinavien, die es geschafft hatten, nach Stettin und Slupsk zu gelangen. Auf diese Weise stellten die Beschreibungen der Ereignisse aus diesen beiden Städten die dramatische Situation in Danzig und Gdynia schnell in den Schatten, darunter selbst die Episode, die bis heute eines der Symbole für den Dezember 1970 darstellt, nämlich den Tod von Zbyszek Godlewski („Janek Wiśniewski“), und die in den deutschen Medien fast keine Erwähnung fand.

Ein gesondertes Forschungsproblem, dem besondere Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt werden soll, sind die zahlreichen sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Analysen der Lage im Dezember 1970 in Polen, die in der westdeutschen Presse veröffentlicht wurden. Sie nannten die wirtschaftlichen Prämissen als die Hauptursache der Proteste und kritisierten gleichzeitig die Politik von W. Gomułka, die zur wirtschaftlichen Stagnation in Polen führte. Eine ähnliche Position bezog die Regierung von Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt, die zuerst eine abwartende Haltung einnahm und dann mithilfe der Aussage des Regierungssprechers Conrad Ahlers auf die chronischen wirtschaftlichen Probleme der Ostblockländer hinwies.

Trotz einer gewissen Beunruhigung nahmen die Journalisten und Publizisten die Ereignisse in Polen, insbesondere die Absetzung Władysław Gomułkas und seine Ersetzung durch Edward Gierek, relativ gelassen zur Kenntnis. Es wurde nämlich erwartet, dass der neue polnische Staatschef die Annäherungspolitik mit der BRD und im weiteren Sinne mit dem Westen fortsetzen würde.

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