

# THE BEGINNING OF REVOLUTION OF THE "SOLIDARITY" IN POLAND AS SEEN BY THE SWEDISH MEDIA (AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1980)

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## **Abstract:**

*This article is a case study on the role of media during the Cold War era. The aim is to present the effects of the ventures of Swedish journalists in Poland during the strike of summer 1980 and in its aftermath when the Polish authorities decided to accept the creation of a new trade union independent from the communist regime. How these events were interpreted and what kind of the future was predicted? The article will demonstrate that the creation and development of "Solidarity" Trade Union was received with a great interest in Sweden as well as in other western countries. Besides, it proves that this interest was a result of the course and the meaning of internal changes in Poland. Their scale and the non-violent means by which they were reached surprised and impressed numerous foreign observers.*

## **Rezumat:**

*Acest articol reprezintă un studiu de caz cu privire la rolul mass-media în timpul Războiului Rece. Scopul său este de a prezenta efectele activității jurnaliștilor suedezi în Polonia din perioada grevei din vara anului 1980 și după ce autoritățile poloneze au decis să accepte crearea unui nou sindicat independent de regimul comunist. Cum au fost interpretate aceste evenimente și ce fel de viitor a fost prezis Poloniei de către aceștia? Articolul va demonstra că formarea și dezvoltarea Sindicatului "Solidaritatea" a fost primită cu un interes deosebit atât în Suedia, cât și în alte țări occidentale. În plus, el dovedește că acest interes a fost rezultatul cursului și al*

*înțelesului schimbărilor interne din Polonia. Scara lor și mijloacele non-violente prin care au fost atinse au surprins și impresionat numeroși observatori străini.*

**Keywords:** Poland, Cold War, Solidarity (Solidarność), Swedish press, perceptions

The condition of foreign journalists' functioning in the Polish People's Republic was peculiar. They were kept under surveillance, some of them were spotted to be recruited into the Polish intelligence. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs tried to obstruct their work by issuing single-entry visas instead of multiple-entry visas. Extension of their stay was often dependent on the significance of the reports published in the press. When the Polish authorities were not satisfied with the tone of the articles, they tried to exercise a pressure on the author in order to make them change their reporting of events. It was not easy to be granted a status of a permanent correspondent. The authorities were most willing to accept persons who either couldn't speak Polish or had no idea whatsoever about the reality of life in Polish People's Republic. Leftist views of the candidates were very much welcomed. In addition, the Polish Agency Interpress, which provided assistance to international journalists, equipped them with earlier prepared materials on various subjects where all the problems were presented in a very positive light for the authorities of the Polish People's Republic<sup>1</sup>.

The August events and the establishment of „Solidarity” Trade Union changed a whole heap in the area of sharing news from Poland to foreign countries. According to the Polish Foreign Office documents while in 1978 a total of 72 journalists were accredited in the Polish People's Republic, in the autumn of 1980 no less than 65 journalists were representing the Swedish media.<sup>2</sup>

It needs to be mentioned that the Swedes enjoyed visa-free travels and thereby they operated according to exceptional rules in comparison to other international correspondents due to ease of access and relatively small

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<sup>1</sup> P. Długolecki, 'Korespondent i figurant', *Polityka*, nr 26/2014, s. 70–71.

<sup>2</sup> MSZ archives (Warsaw), Dep. IV, 43/84 w. 9, Report by 2nd secretary of Embassy of Poland in Stockholm J. Kawa: Swedish media on social and political events in Poland (July-August 1980) for MSZ (Polish Foreign Office), Stockholm, 9.10.1980.

distance separating the two countries.<sup>3</sup> The importance of visa-free travel agreement of 1974 in this context was fully realised by the Swedish Foreign Office. The Swedish diplomats underlined in their reports that the lack of visa obligation helped the Swedish journalists immediately make their way to Poland, whereas others had to wait for the green light. Thanks to a relatively numerous group of their own journalists the Swedish public regularly received exhaustive and up-to-date coverage of developments in Poland. The July and August strikes of 1980 and their consequences became the leading subject of the Swedish media reports. The Polish subject hardly came off the front pages of newspapers and it also dominated the television and radio news broadcasts.<sup>4</sup> Information was announced, interviews and commentaries were published.

Until now researchers concentrated rather on Polish-Swedish diplomatic relations during that time and the contacts between „Solidarity” and Swedish Confederation of the Trade Unions – LO<sup>5</sup>. The idea of this article is to analyse the role of media during the Cold War era as a case study based on the reporting on the establishment of Solidarność. The aim is to present the effects of the activity of the Swedish journalists in Poland at the time of the strike of summer 1980 and in its aftermath when the Polish authorities decided to accept the creation of a new trade union independent from the communist regime. How these events were interpreted and what kind of the future was predicted?

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<sup>3</sup> UD archives (Stockholm), HP1Ep vol. 137, Tom Engdahl (UD – Utrikesdepartementet – Swedish Foreign Office) to Lars Björkbom (Swedish Embassy in Warsaw), 24.10.1980.

<sup>4</sup> Lars-Ola Borglid, in a relatively short time made a documentary film about the strike in the shipyard entitled *Dagar i Gdansk (Days in Gdańsk)*, whose television première took place on 14 October 1981. The film was based on the materials that were secretly brought from Poland.

<sup>5</sup> K. Misgeld, K. Molin & P. Jaworski, *Solidaritet & diplomati. Svensk fackligt och diplomatiskt stöd till Polens demokratisering under 1980-talet*, Stockholm 2015; K. Misgeld, *A complicated Solidarity. The Swedish Labour Movement and Solidarność*, IISH Research Paper, Amsterdam 2010; K. Misgeld, 'Olof Palme, CIA och Polen. Källkritiska funderingar kring en osannolik historia', *Arbetshistoria*, nr 1-2, 2009; K. Misgeld, 'Samarbete och missförstånd. Anteckningar kring ett samtal mellan Landsorganisationen i Sverige och polska Solidaritet 1981', [in:] *I politikens irrganger*, LO Media, Oslo, 2009; K. Misgeld, 'Sweden: Focus on Fundamental Trade Union Rights', [in:] *Solidarity with Solidarity. Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982*, ed. Idesbald Goddeeris, Harvard Cold War Studies Book series, Lexington Books, 2010, s. 19–50; K. Misgeld, 'Svensk facklig press möter det 'katolska' i Solidaritet', *Signum: Katolsk orientering om kyrkan, kultur & samhälle* (Uppsala), vol. 34, nr 8, 2008; K. Misgeld, K. Molin, 'Solidarity despite reservations', *Baltic Worlds*, 2010, Vol. 3, no. 3.

The interest of Swedish media in Polish issues was visible much earlier than the summer of 1980. A development of mutual relations in 1970s brought an increasing number of press testimonies from Poland in the Swedish press. After 1976 more and more critical reports gradually appeared in the Swedish press. An important impulse was the emergence of an open opposition in Poland. Soon after the workers' protests in Radom and Ursus in June 1976, The Committee for Workers' Defence – Komitet Obrony Robotników (later to be re-baptized into the Committee for Social Self-Defence KOR – Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej KOR) was created. It was not the only representation of the opposition in Poland, but probably the most notorious abroad.

In 1980 it was generally known that Poland had been traversing a deep economic crisis for some time. This was evidenced, among others, by the report of the Polish discussion group close to Polish communist party (Polish United Workers' Party – *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*) named "Experience and Future".<sup>6</sup> However, it seems that no one expected such an escalation of the conflict. Strikes in Poland were noticed already in July but the real interest aroused when they spread all over the country and especially when the strikes broke out in Gdańsk acknowledged as a symbol of workers' protests in December 1970. Gradually the attention of media concentrated exclusively on the events unfolding in Gdańsk.

On 15 August, thanks to the news reported by the members of the KSS 'KOR', the liberal daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* published thorough news about the strike in the Lenin shipyard of Gdańsk in defence of Anna Walentynowicz, who was laid off.<sup>7</sup> The correspondent of the *Svenska Dagbladet* conservative daily, Mika Larsson, noted that the official Polish media responded to strikes differently than routinely as it was decided that the workers had a right to conduct such protests.<sup>8</sup> At the same time the authorities took pains to convince the international journalists that the nature of the strikes was exclusively economic, although a completely different picture of the situation was gradually emerging. Larsson, in his report published on 16 August, highlighted that the strike in the Gdańsk

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<sup>6</sup> M. Larsson, 'Polska kritiker kräver reformer. Dags riva ned kulisserna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2.08.1980.

<sup>7</sup> [Anonymous], 'Avskedad arbetare utlöste varvsstrejk', *Dagens Nyheter*, 15.08.1980.

<sup>8</sup> M. Larsson, 'Kursen ändras i Polen. Arbetarkrav godkänns', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 16.08.1980.

shipyard was political, which was indicated by the list of workers' demands. The KOR informed at the time about the fact that the wave of strikes was spreading around the entire neighbourhood of Gdańsk and the demands of the striking workers gradually extended. From that very same source came the interpretation of the causes of the conflict, which were rooted in the general inefficiency of the economic system. What was pointed out among others was the ineffectiveness of mechanized agriculture, the result of which was the deficit in supply.<sup>9</sup> With time the information transmitted by one of the KOR activists Jacek Kuroń was being compared with that announced by the government news agency Interpress. The latter reported on the return of the workers to work in a reassuring tone. Kuroń vowed that the strike was still spreading 'and the aim was a democratic Poland'.<sup>10</sup> On the next day it was confirmed that a strike committee, which became the head of all other plants, was indeed established in the shipyard. It was already known that 'it seemed that the political conflict would be considerable', as 'an extensive list of demands which openly challenge the Polish political system' was formulated.<sup>11</sup> From 19 August onwards entire columns of the Swedish dailies were filled with reports from Poland. Special correspondents made their way to Gdańsk. The journalists in general described the bad economic situation in the entire Eastern Europe and wondered what would be the reaction of the authorities of the Polish People's Republic. Hitherto they had been promising higher earnings and reforms.<sup>12</sup> But the strikes were already sweeping the entire country.<sup>13</sup> The Swedish commentators were already convinced that the purpose was 'a large revolt' and that the presented demands were 'nothing but a revolution for the communist society'.<sup>14</sup> Already from the outset they noted 'the risk that [the Polish workers] are aiming too high, as they are challenging the Soviet interests, and Moscow is perhaps not as busy in Afghanistan as many of the rebellious Poles thought'.<sup>15</sup> Already at that stage the comparison with the Prague Spring of

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<sup>9</sup> [Anonymous], 'Strejkvågen i Polen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 16.08.1980.

<sup>10</sup> [Anonymous], 'Varvarbetarna avbryter strejken', *Dagens Nyheter*, 17.08.1980; [Anonymous], 'Målet ett demokratiskt Polen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 17.08.1980.

<sup>11</sup> [Anonymous], 'Storkonflikten i Polen. Strejkerna samordnas', *Dagens Nyheter*, 18.08.1980.

<sup>12</sup> [Anonymous], 'Polens ledare vädjade i TV. Lovar reformer och höjda loner', *Dagens Nyheter*, 19.08.1980; [Anonymous], 'Löften och hot från Gierek', *Dagens Nyheter*, 19.08.1980; [Anonymous], 'Sämre tider i Östeuropa', *Dagens Nyheter*, 19.08.1980;

<sup>13</sup> [Anonymous], 'Frist till imorgon – men oron ökar', *Dagens Nyheter*, 20.08.1980.

<sup>14</sup> [Anonymous], 'Bred revolt', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 19.08.1980.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

1968 was rejected, for, as claimed an eminent representative of the Czechoslovakian communist party in the time of reform Zdeněk Mlynář, in Czechoslovakia the reforms were initiated by the party and in Poland by the mass strike movement.<sup>16</sup> It needs to be highlighted however that the fate of Czechoslovakia was a reference point virtually all the time, being an example of an armed response of the Soviet Union in an Eastern Bloc country, which made an attempt at introducing systemic reforms. First reports about the reactions of the authorities in Warsaw confirmed that the demand of establishing free trade unions was unacceptable<sup>17</sup> and the threat that the authorities would resolve the situation by force – considerable.<sup>18</sup>

The publicist of the *Svenska Dagbladet* Per Forslind completely rejected the demands of the Polish workers, as he considered them to be going too far – inasmuch as they were unacceptable both for the authorities of the Polish People's Republic and for Moscow.<sup>19</sup> He referred to the statement of the editor of a weekly magazine of the communist party *Polityka* Mieczysław Rakowski, who declared his readiness for discussion, but excluded derogations from the basic principles of the system. Bobo Scheutz confirmed this conviction in his report from Warsaw, writing that ‘nobody, except maybe a small group on the fringe of opposition, imagines that Poland would become anything else than a party-controlled republic under the auspices of the Soviets’.<sup>20</sup> But he expected that in the party the floor would be taken by the supporters of the reforms, as meeting financial demands of the striking workers was not the route out of the crisis. Olof Santesson in his commentary in the *Dagens Nyheter* wrote about ‘the battle of nerves in Poland’. He also drew attention to the words of Lord Carrington, who was at the time paying his official visit to Stockholm. At a press conference the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain Lord Carrington stated that nobody should interfere with the internal affairs of Poland. Santesson's summary was very clear: ‘Perhaps he was intending to give a warning to the Soviets. But sometimes the politics have also a strong moral dimension. The countries need to have the right to take a stand towards the

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<sup>16</sup> [Anonymous], ‘Dubcek-medarbetrade: Viktiga skillnader Polen-Prag 1968’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 21.08.1980.

<sup>17</sup> [Anonymous], ‘Någon ny fackförening kan aldrig tolereras’, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 20.08.1980.

<sup>18</sup> J. Mosander, ‘Militär och polis på väg till Gdansk’, *Aftonbladet*, 19.08.1980; J. Mosander, ‘Allt kan sluta i blodbad igen’, *Aftonbladet*, 19.08.1980.

<sup>19</sup> P. Forslind, ‘Ovisst om Polen’, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 22.08.1980.

<sup>20</sup> B. Scheutz, ‘Bara mumlet når ut’, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23.08.1980.

things that are taking place in their neighbourhood. Speaking of *not interfering* may in the worst case mean that the western world washes its hands off the Polish affairs. None of us should do it'.<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime the analyses of experts in Eastern Europe were published. One of them, known in Sweden for making the Polish issues popular among social democratic circles, Maria Borowska, when asked for a commentary, explained that the purpose of the KOR was 'democratic socialism'.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Lech Wałęsa, who became the leader of the striking workers, highlighted that it was about the 'trade union conflict, not political conflict'. An anonymous commentator showed understanding towards this reserve, but he explained that: 'they all know that the free trade unions are inconceivable in the current political system of Poland. And the trade union issue, not only in Poland, is a political issue'.<sup>23</sup> As a matter of fact, some journalists were inquisitive enough to gain access to information about opposition groups other than generally known KOR. In the *Svenska Dagbladet*, Agneta Ullenius analysed the programme of the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN) whose self-proclaimed representative in the territory Sweden became the runaway censor Tomasz Strzyżewski. He emphasised the negation of socialism and the maximalist demand of regaining independence.<sup>24</sup> In spite of this other organisations were also named: The Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO), the Student Committee of Solidarity (SKS), Polish Independence Agreement (PPN), The Young Poland Movement (RMP), Society for Educational Courses (TKN), the Experience and Future debating club (Doświadczenie i Przyszłość), Committees for the Self-Defense of Peasants, Free Trade Unions (WZZ), Independent Publishing House NOWA.<sup>25</sup>

The press of different political profiles showed its sympathy for the striking people. The editors of the *Svenska Dagbladet* had no doubts that the strike in the Gdańsk shipyard had already undermined the socialist system. Even the communist *Ny Dag* (the organ of the VPK, Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna - party sustaining the idea of eurocommunism) supported the demand for the right to organize strikes and to establish independent

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<sup>21</sup> O. S[antesson], 'Polen: I väntan', *Dagens Nyheter*, 23.08.1980.

<sup>22</sup> J. Kronholm, 'Oppositionens mål. Självstyrande organisationer', *Dagens Nyheter*, 23.08.1980.

<sup>23</sup> [Anonymous], 'Varvsarbetare i Gdansk till DN: Vi strejkar för sanningen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 24.08.1980.

<sup>24</sup> Agneta Ullenius, 'Parti för ett fritt Polen', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 29.08.1980.

<sup>25</sup> [Anonymous], 'Flera grupper i opposition', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 29.08.1980.

trade unions. The only thing that was feared was whether these demands were feasible and whether the Polish government would agree to such a radical rebuilding of the political system. The several days long deadlock in the negotiations was described as follows: 'The striking workers claim that the postulate of free trade unions does not affect the system. The government claims that it does. All depends on how we understand the free trade unions and the system'.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, information was regularly provided about the progress in the negotiations in Gdańsk. Eventually Santesson published an article under a telling headline: 'A New Deal in Poland'. He highlighted that 'thanks to their obstinacy and perseverance Polish workers have led to staff changes at key posts in the regime'. Gierek was still holding on, but, as Santesson added, it was he who was responsible for the entire policy that was conducted. Gierek's promise of 'new unionist, democratic and secret elections with unlimited number of candidates' Santesson judged being 'a dream, when one knows what habits are in the unionist apparatus in the east'.<sup>27</sup> He made the Swedish readers aware of what was the stake of the game at that point: 'The workers are demanding the abolition of the communist order as they know it. Whereas, it is increasingly visible through the prism of staff changes that Gierek is trying to save as much as it is possible of the old order. One thing is certain - theories and practice of the founding fathers will not provide any solutions'. The comment in the *Svenska Dagbladet* was more cautious. According to this newspaper the demands of the striking workers got dangerously close to the point that was intransgressible for the government.<sup>28</sup> In the coming days voices in the press were heard claiming that the authorities were nevertheless giving up and promising more and more.<sup>29</sup> Already on 26 August the news broke out that 'according to the unconfirmed information, the government is ready to accept the demand of the striking workers regarding the free trade unions. If it is true, this would be a sensational retreat'.<sup>30</sup> Already before the signing

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<sup>26</sup> MSZ archives, Dep. IV, 43/84 w. 9, Report by 2nd secretary of Embassy of Poland in Stockholm J. Kawa: Swedish media on social and political events in Poland (July-August 1980), Stockholm, 9.10.1980.

<sup>27</sup> O. S[antesson], 'Ny giv i Polen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 26.08.1980.

<sup>28</sup> [Anonymous], 'Halv Polsk reträtt', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 26.08.1980.

<sup>29</sup> [Anonymous], 'Nya eftergifter. Lagligt strejka löfte i Polen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 27.08.1980; [Anonymous], 'Polska regimen ger efter. Lag fast strejkrätt utlovas', *Dagens Nyheter*, 27.08.1980; [Anonymous], 'Strejkledare: Partiet lovar fria fack', *Dagens Nyheter*, 28.08.1980.

<sup>30</sup> [Anonymous], 'Polen vid vägskalet', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 28.08.1980.

of the agreement between the workers and the government an article by Jacek Kuroń was published, where he presented the programme of the grass-roots, deep and democratic social and economic reforms, aiming at preventing the upcoming catastrophe.<sup>31</sup> Everyone was naturally posing questions about the international dimension of the events in Poland. The self-restraint of the western countries was interpreted as a signal for Moscow that the same attitude was expected from the USSR. Santesson added that he had no idea about the possible impact of the crisis in Poland on the relations between the political-military blocks and that it was certain that the negotiations should not be abandoned.<sup>32</sup>

Suddenly, on 29 August news came in that the talks in Gdańsk had reached an impasse as the government was not willing to accept the demand of allowing the creation of free trade unions.<sup>33</sup> A complete list of 21 postulates was published for the first time.<sup>34</sup> The result of the negotiations was still uncertain, but Santesson had already stated: 'The regime's concessions went beyond Gierek's worst nightmares'. In his opinion, the ideology of Marxism-Leninism eventually went bankrupt. The question was, how were the talks between the authorities and the workers going to end? 'With a new fraud, just like it happened before, to make the workers return to work. Or with a step into an unknown ground, which Moscow had not yet allowed to be taken by any communist leader. In some way many were trying to find a solution, which at the same time would and would not change Poland. Does such *well-tailored* solution exist?'<sup>35</sup>

The ultimate consent, on 31 August, on the establishment of new unions that were to be independent from the state authorities were received with surprise and instantly interpreted as a governmental defeat. Both the television and the press announced far reaching consequences for the entire Eastern Bloc.<sup>36</sup> Another KOR activist Adam Michnik, in an interview for the

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<sup>31</sup> [Anonymous], 'Jacek Kuron, ordförande i KOR: 'Polen star inför en dramatisk vändpunkt'', *Dagens Nyheter*, 28.08.1980.

<sup>32</sup> O[lof] S[antesson], 'Öst, vast och krisen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 28.08.1980.

<sup>33</sup> [Anonymous], 'Förhandlingarna bröts. Låst läge on fria fack', *Dagens Nyheter*, 29.08.1980; P. Sjögren, 'Strejkleddare redo begränsa strejkerna? Dödläge för fackföreningar', *Dagens Nyheter*, 29.08.1980.

<sup>34</sup> [Anonymous], 'Strejkkommitténs 21 krav', *Dagens Nyheter*, 29.08.1980.

<sup>35</sup> O. S[antesson], 'Polska perspektiv', *Dagens Nyheter*, 29.08.1980.

<sup>36</sup> MSZ archives, Dep. IV, 43/84 w. 9, Report by 2nd secretary of Embassy of Poland in Stockholm J. Kawa: Swedish media on social and political events in Poland (July-August 1980), Stockholm, 9.10.1980.

Swedish television on 2 September, highlighted that agreement was a compromise, which would be beneficial for both sides – the workers and the government. Meanwhile, the *Svenska Dagbladet* published a reflection that the road from agreement to its implementation might be difficult. It was maintained that this was definitely a step towards democratization, but a forced one. The only thing that was certain hitherto was that ‘new forces were released and the communist party shall have to consider the will of the nation if it wants to control the situation’. Mika Larsson predicted that ‘the party-independent trade unions could transform into political centres, which would be difficult to control’.

Relatively early there appeared commentaries demanding that the new trade unions in Poland be granted international help. In this context the social democratic *Aftonbladet* published more requests for deliberation than enthusiastic statements: ‘This help needs to be planned carefully, considering the goals for trade unions, as well as political possibilities for cooperation. In the conceptual sense we may speak of an obligation of providing assistance to the strike committee. At the same time we may not turn a blind eye to the political constraints, which are present in the relations between the unions in Sweden and in Poland. That is why the suggestions regarding the Swedish assistance should be considered from a positive perspective but bearing realities in mind’.<sup>37</sup>

Already after signing the agreement on 31 August that confirmed the creation of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union (soon the name was completed with the word „Solidarity”), Santesson pointed out that the social moods were much more radical than the purposes of the strike committee. After all, as the Swedish commentator noticed, there appeared no aspirations for undermining either the one-party state or the presence of Poland in the Soviet security system. Nevertheless, the government agreed to establish government-independent trade unions. It was hard to judge what would happen next. Santesson was only convinced that ‘something new has germinated’ in Poland.<sup>38</sup> The period of 16 days which shook the ‘Soviet world’ was over.<sup>39</sup> Apart from the communist state apparatus and the Catholic Church there emerged ‘the third political force’.<sup>40</sup> The commentator

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> O. S[antesson], ‘Något har hänt i Polen’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 31.08.1980.

<sup>39</sup> O. S[antesson], ‘Polen som modell’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 2.09.1980.

<sup>40</sup> P. Sjögren, ‘Oron för framtiden kvar’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1.09.1980.

of the *Svenska Dagbladet* announced a great victory of the workers, although he carefully added that due to the lack of details on the agreement it was prudent to chill out. He claimed that most probably the deep-seated distrust of the workers towards the authorities would not disappear, and 'the conversion of the Polish regime under the gallows' was not thoroughgoing. In his opinion the concessions were nevertheless so far-reaching that the return to the state of affairs preceding the agreement was impossible. That is why it was possible to say that: 'A new chapter in the history of Poland has begun'. But, as he soon added: 'new chapter with an unknown content'. After all, much was expressed by the symbols used by the striking workers – Polish national flags and portraits of the pope John Paul II.<sup>41</sup>

The next press reports presented a picture of dynamic actions in the transitional period, whereas it was pointed out that nothing had been yet legally validated. The structures of the new unions were in the process of formation, and 'the only condition was to follow the constitution and recognise the leading role of the party'.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Santesson noted the attempts at diminishing the importance of the Gdańsk agreement by the authorities, connected with the propagandist attacks against the excessive engagement in politics of KOR activists headed by Jacek Kuroń.<sup>43</sup> At the outset of October he was already writing about the internal crisis resulting from the inability to reconcile various contradictions. In his opinion the picture of constant squabbles of the union with the authorities and the necessity to force the fulfilment of the earlier commitments was becoming clearer. Santesson predicted that if the government would become engaged in a duel with the trade unionists, there would be no winner, and 'the Polish nation would become a loser'.<sup>44</sup> What even today attracts special attention in the mass of various studies focused on the developments in Poland is the unconventional cycle of laconic reports from Poland by Staffan Skott, whose texts, full of suggestive commentaries, captured the essence of everyday life in the Polish People's Republic. The author was present in Gdańsk during the strike, and afterwards moved to Warsaw. There he drew attention to the specific location of Poland between East and West, by photographing on the one hand an automatic street soda vending machine produced in the USSR

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<sup>41</sup> [Anonymous], 'Nytt kapitel i Polen', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 31.08.1980.

<sup>42</sup> P. Sjögren, 'Runt om i Polen byggs fria fackföreningar upp', *Dagens Nyheter*, 18.09.1980.

<sup>43</sup> O. S[antesson], 'Polska kampen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 28.09.1980.

<sup>44</sup> O. S[antesson], 'Polsk manifestation', *Dagens Nyheter*, 4.10.1980.

and on the other a gastronomic outlet offering hamburgers. His commentary was distinctive: 'One needs to keep hoping that Poland would keep up this balance'.<sup>45</sup> Skott's sketches somehow remained at a margin of the mainstream reports by the Swedish correspondents in Poland. They mostly informed about the formal actions of the new trade unions which were at the time being formed.

The more time was passing from the strike and the conclusion of the agreement the more pompous sounded some of the commentaries of the Swedish journalists. At the outset of September Santesson claimed, this time more boldly, that 'we were the witnesses of a revolution', while predicting that similar events might take place in other countries of Eastern Europe: 'It is possible that in Poland, to a larger extent than in any other Eastern European country there are grounds for really taking the risk of reaching a political compromise, especially if the regime would improve the conditions and dare to embrace some fragments of the strong sense of national involvement that characterized the fight of the workers. Other countries of the Eastern Block are in a different situation, but as a matter of fact their problems are similar. And not a single person can deny that the Polish workers (...) constitute an inspiring example'.<sup>46</sup>

Klas Bergman pointed out that following 31 August Poland would perhaps become a country with a greater margin of civil liberties, but it also might become 'even poorer', if the government would meet its commitments such as higher wages, the right of the workers to strike, Saturdays free of work and other social conveniences.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Per Sjögren asked directly the question: are the authorities intending to meet their commitments or was their only purpose to buy time? He wondered whether the new trade unions would not simply become absorbed into the existing structures or whether the government would not withdraw from its promises in small steps.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, on 6 September 1980 Edward Gierek was deprived of the position of the head of the communist party. In addition to remarking that the person chosen as his successor was the completely unknown Stanisław Kania, Santesson also pointed out that once again in the history of the Polish

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<sup>45</sup> [S.] Skott, 'Polska bilder (4): Den polska jämvikten i näringsintaget', *Dagens Nyheter*, 17.09.1980.

<sup>46</sup> O. S[antesson], 'Polen som modell', *Dagens Nyheter*, 2.09.1980.

<sup>47</sup> K. Bergman, 'Ett fattigare Polen om reformer uppfylls', *Dagens Nyheter*, 2.09.1980.

<sup>48</sup> P. Sjögren, 'Polackerna vann slaget men kan förlora freden. En utmaning mot Lenin', *Dagens Nyheter*, 4.09.1980.

People's Republic social protests caused the removal of the government: 'Polish workers were not fighting for the right to choose the leader of their own country. In such a case the new head of the party would certainly not be Stanisław Kania. But while demanding better and more decent life, they removed the ruling politicians from power. The above situation cannot be disregarded by any Polish leader any longer'.<sup>49</sup> But Kania took over the power 'in a country which was economically bankrupt and whose government promised an increase in wages and reductions in working time'.<sup>50</sup> After all, the greatest problem was that the workers were demanding significant changes in the communist system and 'neither Kania nor any other Polish leader could introduce any fundamental changes in a system that has prevailed in Poland for the last 35 years'. Each such change 'could dangerously weaken the Soviet dominion over Eastern Europe'. According to the publicist of the *Svenska Dagbladet* the leaders of the communist states would probably employ a strategy of isolation not only from Poland but also from the West out of fear of weakening their position towards their own citizens. And this – he stated pessimistically – meant the end of relaxation on the international arena.<sup>51</sup> It was considered, not without reason, that the leaders of other communist countries – Polish neighbours Erich Honecker in German Democratic Republic and Gustav Husák in Czechoslovakia felt most 'fatally threatened' due to 'the Polish plague'.<sup>52</sup>

It is a matter of fact that the issue of the Soviet intervention was present in the analyses of the developments in Poland virtually from the beginning of the crisis. What was being highlighted in connection with this was the international context of the events in Poland. Fears were voiced that the East-West relations might collapse in the context of a possible Soviet attempt to isolate the Polish 'epidemic', which could lead Moscow to isolate the Eastern Bloc from the rest of the world. In any case, soon the news started pouring in to Stockholm about protests in Estonia, which were, among others, associated with the situation in Poland.<sup>53</sup> Nils-Erik Ekstrand, based on the talks with the analysts of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, came to the conclusion that the invasion did not take place in August 1980 most probably for two reasons: firstly, the Soviet

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<sup>49</sup> O. S[antesson], 'Skiftet i Polen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 7.09.1980.

<sup>50</sup> [Anonymous], 'Ny man i Polen', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 7.09.1980.

<sup>51</sup> [Anonymous], 'Polens dilemma', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 8.09.1980.

<sup>52</sup> [Anonymous], 'Den polska maran', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 16.10.1980.

<sup>53</sup> O[lof] S[antesson], 'Skuggor över Europa', *Dagens Nyheter*, 25.10.1980.

leaders were unwilling to break off their relations with the West, and secondly, they were not certain of the loyalty of the Polish army. At the same time he warned that in spite of the fact that during the great wave of the strikes the Soviet troops had not entered Poland that was still being probable.<sup>54</sup> The often quoted Santesson compared the existing articles which were being published in the Moscow newspaper *Pravda* with a dog which barks to show its presence to a passer-by. He was convinced that if the leaders of the USSR considered an intervention to be an effective measure to bring order in Poland, they would certainly make it happen. Right at that time they had to resort to other measures: 'If the leaders in Moscow really want to save the communist system in Eastern Europe, they must mobilize the capacity of self-control and thinking in new ways'.<sup>55</sup> For the time being, however, what was constantly pouring in were reports about the Warsaw Pact military exercises, which were interpreted as 'means of applying pressure in order to achieve political purposes, or as a shield for the preparations for the invasion'.<sup>56</sup> A characteristic was that in the following months the activists of Solidarity with Wałęsa as their head constantly repeated: 'I am not worried about their possible entry and I won't be afraid when they would enter'.<sup>57</sup> Kuroń stated unwaveringly that these were only threats.<sup>58</sup> And it was acknowledged that in case of an intervention the West would not take any actions. Such declaration was made in November 1980 by Secretary General of NATO Joseph Luns, who stated that 'the task of NATO is not to defend Poland against its friends'. He added that the Poles should thank the Afghans for the fact that the Soviet troops were at the time not yet in Warsaw.<sup>59</sup> The Soviet involvement in Afghanistan from December 1979 was obviously something that limited possible moves of the USSR authorities in Poland. In the same time the threat of Soviet intervention was present unremittingly, even after 13 December 1981 when gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski took the whole power in Poland and crushed the „Solidarity” movement without the Soviet military help.

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<sup>54</sup> N-E. Ekstrand, 'Invasionshotet är inte över', *Dagens Nyheter*, 4.09.1980.

<sup>55</sup> O. S[antesson], 'Sovjet ser på Polen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 5.09.1980.

<sup>56</sup> C. Björemann, 'NATO-Warszawapakten. Vapenskramlet är bara militär rutin', *Dagens Nyheter*, 6.09.1980.

<sup>57</sup> K. Bergman, 'Jag är inte rädd för ryssen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 7.11.1980.

<sup>58</sup> M. Lundegård, 'Oppositionsman tror på polsk balansakt. 'Sovjetisk invasion bara skrämskott'', *Dagens Nyheter*, 12.12.1980.

<sup>59</sup> [Anonymous], 'Polen. Varning från Walesa: Inga vilda strejker', *Dagens Nyheter*, 17.11.1980.

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The analysis of the Swedish press leaves no doubt that the creation and development of „Solidarity” Trade Union was regarded with great interest in Sweden as well as in other western countries<sup>60</sup>. And there is no doubt that the interest was a result of the course and the meaning of internal changes in Poland. Their scale and the non-violence developments were surprising and impressed many foreign observers. Information was delivered quickly and commented according to the public mood of the moment. The Swedish journalists presented various circumstances, also international perspectives, connected to the Polish events. According to them summer of 1980 was a turning point not only in the history of Poland, but of whole East Central Europe. In the same time they were aware that the changes signalled the beginning of an unstable situation and permanent crisis and the future was unpredictable, because the situation was so unusual. What was repeated in the following months was a speculation about the possibility of a Soviet intervention similar to what followed the abortive attempts to reform the communist system in Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968.

The comments of Swedish reporters were followed with attention by the Polish authorities. Habitually, they were regarded with discontent. Therefore sometimes they tried to make the work of Swedish journalists difficult. On 20 October, a correspondent of the *Dagens Nyheter* daily, Klas Bergman, was not allowed into the territory of Poland at the Okęcie airport due to his 'speculative' reports. After five hours of waiting he was forced to embark on a flight to Zurich. After less than two weeks he was allowed to re-enter Poland.<sup>61</sup> The Swedish ambassador to Warsaw Knut Thyberg informed *Utrikesdepartementet* (Swedish Foreign Ministry) that the Polish state was virtually in a state of disintegration and nobody knew why decisions such as this were being taken.<sup>62</sup> Another journalist who was treated this way was Lasse Persson from 'Expressen' daily. In November 1980 the

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<sup>60</sup> A survey of the reactions of the world to 'Solidarity' movement see: *Świat wobec Solidarności 1980-1989*, red. P. Jaworski, Ł. Kamiński, Warszawa 2013; P. Pleskot, *Kłopotliwa panna „S”*. *Postawy polityczne Zachodu wobec „Solidarności” na tle stosunków z PRL (1980-1989)*, Warszawa 2013.

<sup>61</sup> 'Polens kris fördjupas. Hotet om generalstrejk kravstår', *Dagens Nyheter*, 2.11.1980.

<sup>62</sup> UD arkiv, HP1Ep vol. 137, Ambassador to Warsaw Knut Thyberg to UD, 7.11.1980.

authorities decided to take a unique step by denying three journalists from the Swedish television access to Poland right before the „Solidarity” Trade Union was legalized. Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ola Ullsten intervened in this case with Polish Ambassador to Stockholm Paweł Cieślak, accusing the authorities of the Polish People's Republic of violating the visa waiver agreement and the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act. The Polish side tried to appease the situation. Cieślak explained that the prohibition concerned the foreign journalists in general.<sup>63</sup> He highlighted ‘the temporary character of the restrictions, which considered all the countries, and our readiness to examine individual applications’.<sup>64</sup>

At any rate, such administrative measures did not stop reporting about Polish issues abroad. The access to information was relatively wide and lasted until the martial law was introduced in Poland in December 1981.

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<sup>63</sup> UD arkiv, HP1Ep vol. 138, Press release from UD, 10.11.1980.

<sup>64</sup> AMSZ, Dep. IV, 43/84 w. 9, Ambassador to Stockholm Paweł Cieślak to MSZ, Stockholm, 11.11.1980.

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