

## Article 29

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### Dr Krzysztof Komorowski, The Press in Occupied Poland

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After her defeat in September 1939, Poland was put under the occupations of her enemies. In territories directly incorporated into Third Reich the Goebbels press system was introduced, which meant the abolition of all Polish language newspapers and replacing them with German titles, such as the Kattowitzer Zeitung in Katowice or the Ostdeutsche Zeitung in Poznan. In the General Government (GG) genuine Polish newspapers were replaced by German newspapers in the Polish language. At first these newspapers provided information only, but very quickly they also started to be used as a means of influencing attitudes in Polish society, which led them to be popularly referred to as the 'reptile press'. They contained articles written to weaken the spirit of resistance, instilling and preserving the feeling of total defeat and the pointlessness of continuing the struggle. Eight dailies appeared in the General Government. The most important of these were: Nowy Kurier Warszawski (derisively called 'kurwar'), which first came out on 11th October 1939 with a circulation of 200,000, and Goniec Krakowski (derisively called 'podgoniec') with a circulation of 60,000 copies. In addition to dailies there were also numerous periodicals. Ilustrowany Kurier Polski (Illustrated Polish Courier) started being published in Krakow in 1940, whereas 7 Dni (7 Days), Fala (Wave) and Co miesiac powiesc (Every Month a Story) appeared in Warsaw. Moreover, there were also specialist magazines concerning, for instance, farming or horticulture. It is estimated that in the years 1939-1944 a total of 50 'reptile' press titles appeared in occupied Poland. In 1941 their total circulation was almost 700,000 copies, whereas in 1944 it reached over million.

Similarly, in Soviet occupied territories the pre-war Polish press was abolished and replaced with Soviet reptile papers. In Kiev the Polish propaganda daily Glos Radziecki (Soviet Voice) continued to be published, in Tarnopol Prawda Boszewicka (Bolshevik Truth) started to appear, whereas in Lwow the anti-Polish Czerwony Sztandar (Red Standard) was issued with a circulation 40,000 copies. Moreover, there were numerous local papers, such as Wolna Lomza (Free Lomza) or in Lapy Iskra. The situation was somewhat different in Lithuanian occupied territory, particularly in the Wilno region. Up until incorporation into the Soviet Union (in August 1940) several Polish newspapers continued to appear, the most important of which were Kurjer Wilenski (Wilno Courier) and Gazeta Codzienna (Daily Newspaper). After the Soviet takeover, these newspapers were closed and replaced with the Polish language communist papers Prawda Wilenska (Wilno Truth) and Prawda Komsomolska (Komsomol Truth).

In face of the occupying powers taking over all the legal Polish language press and turning it against the Polish nation, the emergence of underground publications became essential. They were virtually the only source of reasonably full and reliable information that simultaneously helped develop political thoughts and stances in the Polish community. Their primary tasks included: informing Polish society of how the war was progressing, of the international situation and of resolutions made by the underground authorities, but also to enhancing the sense of patriotism, raising or keeping up the spirit of resistance and also exposing the reptile press. Apart from press associated with the Polish government-in-exile (represented by direct successors of pre-war military and political organisations and therefore part of the pre-war Polish legal system), there was a press associated with opponents of the pre-war system, including for instance communists, leftwing socialists and radical people's movement activists.

The greatest in terms of the number of titles and also in terms of circulation was the underground press of the military organisation Service for Poland's Victory – later Union for Armed Struggle (ZWZ) and finally the Polish Home Army (AK). During the occupation it produced no less than 250 newspapers with a circulation

of over 200,000 copies. At first the central authority for the underground press was the Political and Propaganda Department, which in the spring of 1940 was transformed into the Bureau of Information and Propaganda (BIP), which was also known as Section VI of the ZWZ-AK Headquarters. Its chief newspaper was the *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (Information Bulletin), which for most of the occupation was a weekly, but during the Warsaw Uprising it became a daily with a circulation ranging from 25,000 to 50,000 copies. Its creator and long-time editor-in-chief was Aleksander Kamiński, the main commander of the *Wawer* Small Sabotage Organization and also the author of occupied Warsaw's most famous book, *Kamienie na szaniec* (Stones on the Rampart). *Biuletyn Informacyjny* was above all addressed to soldiers of the Polish underground, but on account of their propaganda and informative value its articles also appeared in the provincial underground press. An important role was also played by the underground newspapers *Wiadomości Polskie* (Polish News) and *Agencja Prasowa* (Press Agency), whose articles were reprinted by BIP throughout the country, for instance in the *Biuletyn Informacyjny Małopolski* (Little Poland Bulletin) in Kraków, the *Biuletyn Ziemi Czerwińskiej* (Czerwińska Land Bulletin) in Lwów or the *Świt Polski* (Polish Dawn) in the Nowogródek region. The BIP Editorial Section for the Professional Military Press published two army newspapers: *Insurekcja* (Insurrection) and *Żołnierz Polski* (Polish Soldier). Their primary purpose was to serve as educational material for junior officers of the Polish Home Army and they contained articles on military history as well as on the operational and tactical situation on the fronts.

Another important role of BIP was its publication of propaganda material targeting citizens of the Third Reich, the *Volksdeutschen* (German nationals) and functionaries of the occupant administration. The operation was codenamed Action 'N' and its objectives were to disorientate and undermine the morale of the Germans as well as to counter German propaganda. Among its most important papers were *Der Soldat* (The Soldier) and *Der Frontkämpfer* (The Frontline Fighter), which suggested the existence of a broad anti-Nazi movement within the German army, as well as *Kennst Du die Wahrheit?* (Do You Know the Truth?), which was addressed to Third Reich Germans and the *Volksdeutschen*.

Towards the end of 1943 BIP also started Action 'R' for the purpose of countering communist and soviet propaganda. Newspapers issued as part of this operation were *Głos Ludu* (People's Voice) directed at the rural population and *Wolność Robotnicza* (Worker Freedom) for urban populations. Apart from anti-communist material, these newspapers also included news of how fighting was progressing against the Germans and anti-German propaganda.

In the Polish Underground State there was also a significant group of newspapers associated with the Government Delegation for Poland. The publishing was supervised by the Department of Information, the civilian equivalent of BIP. Its main title was the fortnightly *Rzeczpospolita Polska* (Polish Republic), which appeared first in March 1941 and had a circulation of 15,000 copies. Other important titles were the weekly *Kraj. Agencja Informacyjna* (The Country. The Information Agency) and the monthly *Dokumenty Chwili* (Documents of the Moment).

A specific role was also played by the underground press addressed to scouts in the Grey Ranks. Of the 50 newspaper titles in this category the most important included *Źródło* (Source) and *Dzis i Jutro* (Today and Tomorrow), the latter being specifically addressed to girl guides.

Alongside press directly connected with the ZWZ-AK and Government Delegation for Poland there were also the newspapers of the many political parties which served as a platform to exchange ideas and formulate political programmes.

During the occupation the people's movement produced as many as 160 newspaper titles. The press of the centrist *Roch* People's Party reached a total circulation of 9,000 copies and included titles such as *Przegląd* (Review), *Ku Zwycięstwu* (Towards Victory) and *Agencja Informacyjna – Wies* (Information Agency – The Country). The Peasants' Battalions also had their own press. Their most important newspapers included *Żywią i Bronią* (They Feed and Defend), *Samoobrona Chłopska* (Peasant Self-Defence) and *Chłostra* (a Polish acronym for the words Peasant Guards). The socialist movement produced over 100 newspaper titles. Over half were associated with the Freedom, Equality, Independence – Polish Socialist Party (PPS-WRN), the most important of which included *Informator* (Information Guide) – which was first published in November 1939 and subsequently changed its name first to WRN and later *Robotnik* (Worker), *Gwardia Ludowa* (People's Guard) and *Plomienie* (Flames). In occupied Poland there also appeared approximately

120 underground newspaper titles associated with the national camp. The first important newspaper was Szaniec (Rampart), published jointly by the National Party and the ABC Radical National Camp as early as in 1939. The political programme it advocated included a determined battle against the left in all its forms. When this newspaper was taken over by the Radical National Camp in its entirety, the National Party started publishing a different newspaper called Walka (The Struggle), which mainly urged readers to adopt anti-communist and anti-soviet stances. That party's other major newspapers included Sprawy Narodu (National Matters), Szczerbiec (the notched sword of Polish kings) and Warszawski Dziennik (Warsaw Daily). The most important newspapers of the Confederation of the Nation (before the war called ONR-Falanga) included the fortnightly Nowa Polska. Organ Konfederacji Narodu (New Poland. Organ of the Confederation of the Nation) as well as Biuletyn Słowiański (Slavic Bulletin) and Blok Środkowo-Europejski. Agencja (Central European Bloc. Agency), which advocated among other things a federation of Slavic states (with the exception of the Soviet Union). The press of the fourth major group within the PKP, the Labour Party, was the least developed. Among the few newspapers associated with this political group one should distinguish Głos Warszawy (Warsaw Voice), Reforma (Reform) and Zryw (Rising), which propagated social resistance and solidarity in a future Poland.

The pro-Piłsudski camp also had its own press. The newspapers published by the Fighting Poland Camp included Słowo Polskie (Polish Word) and Państwo Polskie (Polish State), whereas the Independence Organisations' Convention published Myśl Państwowa. Agencja Polityczna (State Thought. Political Agency).

In the years 1939–1942 the activity of underground revolutionary leftist and communist groups was very limited on account of the lack of developed area structures. Despite this fact, in that time they managed to produce approximately 45 newspaper titles, including Wolność (Freedom), Chłop i Robotnik (The Peasant and Worker) and Młot i Sierp (The Hammer and Sickle). When in January 1942 the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) was formed, the situation changed. By 1944 this party together with affiliated organisations had produced a total of 200 secret newspaper titles, although their circulation was limited. The most important PPR newspapers included Trybuna Wolności (Freedom Tribune) and Trybuna Chłopska (Peasants' Tribune), and these were complemented by numerous underground newspapers published in local districts and neighbourhoods. Articles and slogans found therein called for the people to fight for a democratic Poland where land would be distributed among the peasants, but at the same time they argued for the cession of Poland's eastern borderlands and the necessity of an alliance with the Soviet Union.

The press of the Warsaw Uprising was a very particular phenomenon. Once it broke out, on 1st August 1944, the underground press could suddenly become open. It has been estimated that in the two months of fighting almost 200 newspaper titles were published. They mainly contained news of fighting in the capital and the world as well as the resolutions of the insurgent commanders.

The underground press relied on three basic sources: the radio, press communiqués (produced by secret agencies) and its own underground intelligence. Apart from information gathering, the actual printing posed considerable problems. Most of the printing houses had been confiscated in 1939 and there was a huge shortage of printing machines, paper and ink. It is therefore very admirable facts that during the occupation as many as 150 illegal printing houses were set up in Warsaw alone as many. Another immensely important aspect was the distribution, which was above all carried out by women. With great valour they not only reached secret locales in towns but also partisan outposts far from major settlements.

In the years 1939-1945 the underground press existed primarily in the major cities within in the General Government. However, there was also a developed underground press network that encompassed territories incorporated into the Third Reich as well as the eastern borderlands. The regular circulation of over 1,500 successive newspaper titles not only bore testimony to Polish society's undeniable will to resist and regain independence but it was also a unique phenomenon in the whole of occupied Europe.

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