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## Manipulation techniques aiming at discrediting the Church among soldiers of the Polish People's Army during John Paul's II second pilgrimage to Poland

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**Abstract:** *The aim of the following article is to present how the Armed Forces of the Polish People's Republic reacted to the second pilgrimage of John Paul II to Poland. It outlines multiple processes, mainly of social origin, which occurred during the preparations for the visit, its course and after its completion. Moreover, the author depicts political and cultural circumstances in which soldiers and conscripts had to serve. At the same time, numerous manipulation techniques that were used to discredit the Catholic Church have been included.*

**Key words:** History, John Paul II, Polish People's Republic, Polish People's Army, Catholic Church, pilgrimage, manipulation techniques

### Introduction

The Armed Forces of the Polish People's Republic (PRL)<sup>1</sup> were one of the most crucial image-building tools used by communist propaganda. Even though all aspects related to the Armed Forces of the Polish People's Republic are fairly interesting for historical and interdisciplinary research, they are not as popular as the structural and organisational analysis of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). Subscribing to Krzysztof Komorowski's thesis, we still lack perspective and distance, which is so essential for a historian, although along with the closure of the PRL chapter, its subchapter entitled the Polish People's Army was closed too. Komorowski touches upon a considerably important issue, namely researchers' (not just historians) diverse atti-

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<sup>1</sup> The Armed Forces of the Polish People's Republic was an official name that had been used since July 1952. Further on, another common term, which was to be associated with a new chapter, came into usage – the Reborn Polish Army or later the Polish People's Army. Communist propaganda wanted to make a distinction and emphasize that it was creating new armed forces, thus separating them from traditions of the Polish Army from the inter-war period and political elites of that time, which were blamed for the failure of the September Campaign of 1939.

tudes – from idealizing to extremely negating PRL’s Armed Forces.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, research on the history of the Polish People’s Army requires from its analysts due diligence and objectivity. It would be hard to adopt just one research method towards such a diverse organisation – it should not be even done this way. Taking a critical approach to resources seems to be the most classic, however it should be supported with their appropriate interpretation. In this matter, I share Jan Pomorski’s opinion, who rightly claims that:

“neither research practice nor scientific knowledge can be reduced to (in a methodologist’s terms: is not reducible) individual cognitive effort. It is for these reasons that we will speak and write from now on about social practice of historical research (historiography) and cognitive cultures/thinking styles/historiographic paradigms, which every historian (more or less consciously) belongs to”.<sup>3</sup>

The primary aim of the research is to characterize a variety of manipulation techniques that were employed on a massive scale by the Armed Forces of the Polish People’s Republic to interpret John Paul’s II words as well as the general meaning of his second visit to homeland. Records of the military provenance stored in the Central Military Archives became the core subject for analysis.

John Paul’s II pilgrimage to his homeland in 1983 has been recorded in contemporary historiography.<sup>4</sup> It is worth looking at the extent to which it could affect the functioning of the PRL Armed Forces. In this article, I would like to pick up an ideological thread, which was extremely important in the context of professional army that was being formed and soldiers pursuing compulsory military service. Over years, the Polish People’s Army developed a fairly efficient machine of political indoctrination. Intensity and directions of adopted measures depended on prevailing political trends and a specific, sometimes short-term, goal. At critical moments, the authorities had to resort to the most drastic solutions, namely the use of the army against citizens. These events were recorded as the darkest pages in the history of the Polish People’s Republic.

Originally, the Pope’s visit to the country was to take place in 1982, however the imposition of martial law caused some discrepancies between the Episcopate and communist authorities.<sup>5</sup> The most poignant reminder are the morning events of

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<sup>2</sup> Komorowski, 2014: 16.

<sup>3</sup> Pomorski, 2022: 25: “ani praktyka badawcza, ani wiedza naukowa nie dadzą się sprowadzić (metodologowie: nie są redukowalne) do indywidualnego wysiłku poznawczego. Z tych powodów właśnie będziemy mówić i pisać już od tej chwili o społecznej praktyce badań historycznych (historiografii) i o kulturach poznawczych/stylach myślenia/paradygmatach historiograficznych, do jakich każdy historyk (mniej lub bardziej świadomie) przynależy”.

<sup>4</sup> Łatka, 2013; 2014; Kozłowski, 2014; Polak, Kufeland & Ruchlewski, 2019; Felak, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Łatka, 2013b: 95.

December 13, 1981, when the chief communist leader – the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Poland General Wojciech Jaruzelski<sup>6</sup> mobilized the armed forces against citizens. These developments occurred prior to the second visit of John Paul II to his homeland and had an enormous impact on its course as the Pope's multiple addresses referred to the situation within the country. At this point, it is necessary to explain the rationale behind bringing the army into streets and outline the general social mood. The imposition of martial law in Poland caused a fully understandable trauma, reminiscent of World War II. In fact, not only ordinary citizens were concerned about unfolding events, but even the military had little understanding of the situation. In my humble opinion, rulers lacked such awareness either. Incessant disputes over whether Jaruzelski's decision protected the country from Soviet intervention, or whether it was his fully autonomous idea to solve the problem, have been ongoing until today.<sup>7</sup> An idea for introducing martial law had germinated much earlier, especially among military ranks. Ryszard Kukliński<sup>8</sup> recalled that intensive operational and planning work had started at least a year before. Moreover, the date of imposing martial law, on Saturday night into Sunday, was not accidental. Most factories were closed, so workers, staying at home, were unable to stage consolidated protests.<sup>9</sup>

### **Preparations for the Pope's second pilgrimage to his homeland**

In spring of 1983, distressed Polish society was longing for John Paul's II visit to his homeland. Having developed a programme (negotiations with the authorities), the visit was scheduled from June 16 to 23, 1983.<sup>10</sup> John Paul II was to visit Warsaw, Niepokalanów, Częstochowa, Poznań, Katowice, Wrocław, Góra Św. Anny and Cracow. Both for political reasons and fear of possible riots, the communist authorities refused the Pope's visit in Gdańsk – a cradle of 'Solidarity'. During his stay, the Pope met General Wojciech Jaruzelski twice and it transpired that the General was extremely tense, especially at their first encounter. At the end of his pilgrimage, John Paul II requested to meet Lech Wałęsa and his family. The papal visit was progressing peacefully, with crowds pouring out onto streets with posters and welcoming the head of the Catholic Church. Some banners were bearing political slogans, expressing the prevailing social mood.<sup>11</sup> At this point, it is apt to raise the question how the state leadership, especially command of the Polish People's Army, intended to protect

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<sup>6</sup> Wojciech Jaruzelski (1923-2014) – Polish communist, military general of the Polish People's Army. The first and last president of the Polish People's Republic, in 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Eisler, 2008: 207.

<sup>8</sup> Ryszard Kukliński (1930-2004) – colonel of the Polish People's Army, since 1970 an intelligence officer of the American Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>9</sup> Eisler, 2018: 390-1.

<sup>10</sup> See also Raina, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Eisler, 2018, 433.

the military personnel and soldiers from the Pope's forceful comments and gestures. Were the military just unwittingly waiting for the course of events or did they have an emergency plan that would be implemented in the event of a possible mutiny? Armed forces are an organization with its own strict and pre-defined pecking order that automatically initiates command mechanisms over particular groups. The Polish People's Republic authorities at the time were fully aware that having a disciplined army at their disposal was crucial. The pilgrimage created favourable conditions for inciting people and reinforcing anti-socialist attitudes among society. Obviously, the army was vulnerable to such phenomena too. The Main Political Board of the Polish Army (GZP WP)<sup>12</sup> was very carefully monitoring preparations for the Pope's visit and moods prevailing among servicemen. In spite of the fact that martial law was formally suspended, military discipline was subject to close surveillance, whereas political training was continually moderated. Military discipline combined with political indoctrination and specialist military training gave a real advantage, indispensable for holding power. In early spring of 1983, GZP WP launched necessary preparations for the pilgrimage. As characteristic of his narrative, the first secretary assured that the government extended its hand to reach a compromise but it was rejected by a portion of the clergy.

“Though with regret, it must be said that not everyone accepts the perspective of harmonious coexistence between believers and non-believers. There are reverberating inflammatory voices, straight from the darkest times of the Counter-Reformation. There are also unlawful actions. Advocates of politicizing the Church, tendencies written off by history, allude not to the conciliatory spirit of the Second Vatican Council but instead a poor tradition of political clericalism. Fanaticism has no future in Poland”.<sup>13</sup>

However, one should pay attention to the further part of the speech by the KC PZPR's first secretary, referring to the Primate of Poland, Archbishop Józef Glemp.<sup>14</sup> Jaruzelski claimed that the Primate's addresses coincided in many respects with the Polish national interest. There was nothing odd about it as following his charismatic predecessor, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński,<sup>15</sup> to whom communist activists were

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<sup>12</sup> Main Political Board of the Polish Army (GZP WP) – earlier in 1944-1950, it was called the Main Political and Educational Board of the Polish Army (GZPW WP) – it was a central MoD institution operating within the Polish People's Army until 1989 – a military counterpart of KC PZPR.

<sup>13</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 22: “Z ubolewaniem jednak trzeba stwierdzić, że nie wszystkim odpowiada perspektywa zgodnego współżycia wierzących i niewierzących. Rozlegają się głosy jątżzące, rodem z najciemniejszych kart kontreformacji. Zdarzają się i sprzeczne z prawem działania. Rzecznicy upolitycznienia Kościoła, opowiadając się po stronie tendencji przekreślonych przez historię, nawiązują nie do pojedynczego ducha II Soboru Watykańskiego, lecz do złych tradycji politycznego klerykalizmu. Fanatyzm nie ma w Polsce przyszłości”.

<sup>14</sup> Józef Glemp (1929-2013) – Polish Primate in 1981-2006, immediate successor of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Cardinal priest since 1983.

<sup>15</sup> Stefan Wyszyński (1901-1981) – Polish Primate in 1948-1981, Cardinal priest since 1953.

particularly hostile, the party leadership tried to improve relations with the new primate. In fact, Glemp was more open to compromise with the regime than was Wyszyński (or Wojtyła). The authorities of the Polish People's Republic antagonized neither church circles nor clergy (at least officially) – until martial law was in force.<sup>16</sup> The upcoming Pope's pilgrimage made them change the way Catholics were perceived since they accounted for an overwhelming majority of the Polish society, including soldiers. They were deeply concerned about a possible outbreak of riots and often voiced it in high dignitaries' speeches, calling for mutual respect. A document prepared by GZP WP states:

“Commitment of millions of Catholics and followers of other denominations to socialism is a fact. For this reason, Catholics – communism supporters, are closer to communists rather than atheists – communism opponents”.<sup>17</sup>

Such narrative was intended to abate social enthusiasm and show that the state and Church could coexist. Undoubtedly, it was an official statement included in propaganda speeches addressed to the general public.

On the eve of the visit, detailed instructions were issued on how, when, and where to watch broadcasts of papal ceremonies. As early as on June 6, 1983, GZP WP sent a telegram with detailed guidelines to its all subordinate institutions. Soldiers performing compulsory military service were advised to watch the main issue of 'Dziennik TV' in common rooms, in the presence of their commanders. Watching transmissions in large groups was available only on condition that it did not interfere with a training programme. Within the guidelines, “competent and well-prepared officers”<sup>18</sup> had to be present during television broadcasts of John Paul's II stay in order to answer all arising questions or interpret the Pope's words on an ongoing basis. The last order was *sine qua non* that “prior to the visit [...] all television sets in a unit should undergo a service and be completely restored”.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, GZP WP established the 'Propaganda and Information Team', which was working from 14 to 24 June 1983 (from 8 am to 10 pm). Its main task was to gather and send information (situational reports) regarding the pilgrimage up to the regimental level. In addition, the reports obligatorily included political notes along with the Pope's addresses and other related issues such as society's behaviour and priests' attitudes. Officers who belonged to the Team, resembled hotline employees who provided information

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<sup>16</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 23.

<sup>17</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 24: “Zaangażowanie milionów katolików i wyznawców innych wyznań po stronie socjalizmu jest faktem. Dlatego komunistom bliżsi są katolicy – zwolennicy komunizmu niż ateści – przeciwnicy komunizmu”

<sup>18</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 51: “kompetentni, dobrze przygotowani oficerowie”.

<sup>19</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 51: “przed wizytą [...] dokonać w jednostce przeglądu odbiorników TV i doprowadzić je do pełnej sprawności technicznej”.

systematically – gave advice on problems reported by Military Districts (OW), Military Branches (RSZ), Military Academies (AW), Tactical Units (ZT). Whenever it was necessary, a special ‘informative and explanatory’ meeting used to be held for soldiers. Questions and problems that bothered the military could only be reported to the Team through political executives of OW and RSZ.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, another example of preventative measure taken before the start of the visit was drawing up ‘answers to questions about state-Church relations’ by political officers. Namely, these were very comprehensive responses to the following three questions:

“Is it true that the Vatican provided Poland with financial support? Has an increase in religiousness been observed among Polish society and what are the reasons for this? What is characteristic of Primate Glemp’s realism?”<sup>21</sup>

All the provided answers are comprehensive and have all the hallmarks of communist propaganda. They are full of slanders, hypotheses and implicit statements. The most common expressions are: it is said, probably, etc.

Why did the words of Pope and hierarchs of the Polish Church require special translation? The answer is quite simple. As soon as Cardinal Wojtyła became the Pope of the Universal Church, a surge in religiousness could be observed as people started to frequently attend services and church ceremonies. The reaction to the first papal pilgrimage to his homeland in 1979 was very spontaneous. Neither authorities nor society knew what to expect of it. Of course, the attachment to religious practices at the time of the Polish People’s Republic was completely understandable, although the communists wanted to create a model of a secular state and citizen. Soldiers who pursued the compulsory military service, especially those coming from small towns or villages, displayed strong attachment to faith. The military command had to take steps to prevent ‘negative’ responses to John Paul’s II visit, hence the development of numerous propaganda materials that were used to educate soldiers on a daily basis.

### **Power of propaganda, or comments on the Pope’s pilgrimage speeches**

All speeches delivered by John Paul II during his stay in Poland were thoroughly analysed by designated officials or political officers. It was to ensure the right (concurrent with communist rhetoric) interpretation of the addresses and be used for training purposes at various military levels. Despite the fact that officially the visit of the Catholic Church’s head was a religious event, it had also the implied

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<sup>20</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 61.

<sup>21</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 62–5: “Czy prawdą jest, że Watykan udzielił pomocy finansowej Polsce? Czy można mówić o wzroście religijności w polskim społeczeństwie i jakie są tego przyczyny? Czym charakteryzuje się realizm prymasa Glempa?”

political meaning. Obviously, in his speeches the Pope appealed for respect for human rights, talked about persecution for political reasons, etc. Some of his comments were very direct statements, whereas the others subtle allusions. John Paul II did not miss the first opportunity to express his support for members of the illegal Solidarity movement.<sup>22</sup> In their commentary, the authors emphasize that the Pope did not think much about the background that had led to the formation of the organisation.

“The fragment quoted from the Pope’s sermon confirms that during the visit to Poland he is going to present himself as a redeemer of the whole society, as the one who stands at the cross on behalf of the nation”.<sup>23</sup>

Those who analysed the homily noticed that he used a lot of favourable words to refer to late Primate Stefan Wyszyński. Such comments were badly received by the communist authorities as they did not herald anything positive in relations between the state and Church. The analysis finishes with an explanation (allegedly in response to soldiers’ favours) about the meaning of the Year of Redemption in the Church. Officers of GZP WP Propaganda and Agitation Board<sup>24</sup> served as experts in this field.

Services of the Polish People’s Republic kept constant surveillance over the pilgrimage and all papal speeches in terms of, as it was claimed, manipulation techniques used to influence the worshippers. According to preliminary findings, John Paul’s II words were received emotionally rather than rationally. The authors of the aforementioned analyses claimed that people who gathered to attend ceremonies did not have a sufficient educational level and hence their emotions could be easily influenced. As far as the training of military personnel was concerned, they did not spot a long-term threat derived from the visit. It was reported that emotional addresses of the Pope should not cause any considerable changes among certain social circles. Whereas some negative, from the authorities’ perspective, elements could be effectively reversed through intensified ‘ideological and educational’ actions. It was pointed out that some of these changes had been observed in the military. According to the report, soldiers expressed a growing interest in the pilgrimage prior to it, and over time a downward trend settled. There allegedly appeared soldiers’ accounts that broadcasts were boring and therefore they stopped watching, for instance, ‘Dziennik TV’.<sup>25</sup> For obvious reasons, political officers did not notice the profound effect exerted on his compatriots by John Paul II. Religious celebrations were considered to have been socio-technical manipulations that the Church had been employing for thousand years.

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<sup>22</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 73.

<sup>23</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 74: “Cytowany fragment kazania papieża potwierdza także, że ma on zamiar w trakcie wizyty w Polsce przedstawić się jako odkupiciel całego społeczeństwa, jako ten, który staje pod krzyżem w imieniu narodu”.

<sup>24</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 75–6.

<sup>25</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 125.

Moreover, the analysts asserted that the Pope was capable of forging emotional bonds with various groups thanks to his personality. They also raised the issue of Karol Wojtyła's acting skills that he willingly presented during all meetings, as if they had completely forgotten about his theatrical performances in student years. Every effort was made to depreciate the Pope's authority, criticising, for example, splendour during masses or feudal gestures showed throughout his visit to homeland.<sup>26</sup> Having analysed GZP WP records, a question arises whether political officers intentionally disregarded the spiritual and historical meaning of the pilgrimage, or whether they simply did their assigned tasks. It caused utter surprise that the homilies were directed to particular social or professional groups. In Poznań, the Pope spoke to farmers of Great Poland, whereas in Katowice he addressed miners and steelworkers. Bystanders of those events highlight how the crowds reacted whenever John Paul II used the word 'solidarity' – sometimes as a synonym, but always with due emphasis – the gathered people repeatedly responded with euphoria and storms of applause. Communist officials easily noticed that the Pope avoided using socialist terms in his speeches (except for the official protocol). He said Poland instead of the Polish People's Republic or referred to its western neighbour as Germany. The analysed report voices a major concern over a close rapport between John Paul II and the youth, which was expressed in spontaneous gestures, words or mutual singing of Catholic movements songs.<sup>27</sup> It was an utter absurdity to say that the organizers of the pilgrimage (the Polish Episcopate) used church services to disseminate propagandist remarks among children and their parents. Many hours of preparations, rehearsals for the liturgy, singing, etc. caused the authorities anxiety. However, they did not perceive or did not want to perceive the visit as a religious event, instead it was compared to a political rally that had a clear intention. It is fully understandable that dioceses that were to host the Pope wanted to prepare themselves perfectly for the occasion. Crowds were gathering well in advance to the main celebrations and therefore priests had to be appointed to manage this time leading to the Holy Mass properly. It was an extremely tough task to accomplish, especially in terms of logistic and religious aspects. In my humble opinion, both the state and Church were fully aware of the importance of this event as well as its possible outcomes. As it transpired in analysed documents and accounts, political officers even gasped in bizarre astonishment at an efficient organization of the religious celebrations. It was spotted that lay acolytes had been charged with reading excerpts from the Bible. It was also wrongly assumed that the Gospel passages had been intentionally chosen to contain political overtones, which was impossible as the liturgical calendar did not give too much freedom in this matter.<sup>28</sup> Despite the fact that the direct impact of the papal visit on the army was undermined, an abundance of reports,

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<sup>26</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 126.

<sup>27</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 127–8.

<sup>28</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 129–30.

telegrams and analyses proves that the authorities did not fully neglect threats that could have crept into the ranks of the Polish People's Army. One of the most important elements that affected the participants, including those gathered in front of TV sets, was a careful selection of people who approached the Pope in an offertory procession. In this case, officers rightly referred to symbolism of both delegations and gifts they carried. The church authorities consciously chose delegation members that would appeal to the anti-communist opposition and be accepted by the rest of society. Therefore, most often they represented various social groups such as actors, youths or scouts. In Poznań, for instance, they were veterans of the Greater Poland Uprising (1918-1919), soldiers of the 'Poznań' Army. In Cracow and Wrocław, this honour was given to miners in full dress, with attached decorations and prisoners of concentration camps, wearing characteristic 'striped uniforms' that evoked the worst war memories.

### **Political and educational training in the Polish People's Army after John Paul's II pilgrimage**

The aforementioned comprehensive analyses of the Pope's homilies, symbolism of his gestures and crowds' responses, were developed to indoctrinate and instruct many social groups. The political and educational training for the Polish People's Army was executed repeatedly and its subject matter was determined by GZP WP. Such a syllabus had to be prepared well in advance and reflected a current political course. The trip of John Paul II to his homeland in June of 1983 caused anxiety among the senior staff of the National Defence Ministry, whose main task was to maintain high discipline in the ranks of the army. Both sides of the political dispute, i.e. the opposition and authorities of the Polish People's Republic, interpreted outcomes of the pilgrimage in their own subjective way. Opposition activists claimed that the papal message reflected their actions, whereas communist leaders underlined a peaceful character of the speeches and call for social peace. Despite their self-proclaimed success, GZP WP records reveal a certain dose of uncertainty about the long-term effects of the Pope's visit to Poland. GZP WP Propaganda and Agitation Board tried to extensively review all papal addresses, especially in terms of world-view and patriotic education. A final outcome of this review were conclusions that would be later used for ideological and educational work. Communists made attempts to undermine the Pope's words based on his alleged use of special propaganda techniques that further intensified the magnitude of the messages.<sup>29</sup> Military analysts wanted to discredit the pilgrimage at all costs, and regarded its religious dimension as a well-orchestrated performance, whose only goal was to incite as many Catholics as possible to rebel against the official authority. The interpretation of John Paul's II speeches was basically

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<sup>29</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 159.

limited to three aspects. First of all, the Pope's attitude towards martial law and the anti-governmental opposition was scrutinized. They were inquiring how the so-called national reconciliation concept looked like according to the Church. Additionally, the Gospel and its message to the working class were reviewed. At the same time, Catholics' moral principles were evaluated against their usefulness in a socialist state. The Catholic interpretation of the Polish history was compared with the official one. Senior commanders saw the Pope's message to the youth as a priority. They were appointed to prepare classified materials that would become basic guidelines for conducting propagandist activity in the military.<sup>30</sup> At this point, it is worth mentioning the fact that a reaction was instant – just a few days following the visit, specific tasks came to be implemented. By all means, this sense of urgency was to blot out young soldiers' recent memory of the papal words. Already on July 25, 1983, a document entitled *Wnioski do pracy ideowo-wychowawczej po II wizycie papieża w Polsce* (Guidelines for ideological and educational work after the Pope's second visit to Poland) was published. It determined three areas of instruction that radically affected training programmes in all corps of the Polish People's Army. The first area concerned a training and teaching activity. A number of instruction hours was largely increased and a part of the curriculum concerning soldiers' outlook on life modified. So let's take a closer look at these changes. Firstly, the number of hours of the so-called political classes was raised from 16 to 22 for compulsory military service soldiers, it increased by two hours for warrant officers and by four hours for professional non-commissioned officers. Secondly, there were other interesting subjects that were added to the programme. All of them were devoted to the activity of the Catholic Church in Poland and its attitude to the current policy implemented by the communist authorities.

“Directions and conditions of the evolution of the Catholic social doctrine; Catholic Church towards socio-economic problems in People's Poland; Catholic and Marxist interpretation of human freedom and dignity; Catholic concept of Polish history”.<sup>31</sup>

The aforementioned subjects were taught through lectures by uniformed (or civilian) members of the political apparatus and aimed at discrediting activities of the Church. By criticizing religion, an attack was launched on clergy and religious practices were blamed for cultivating superstitions. Church teachings, focused on tradition and centuries-old values, were associated with lack of modern thinking. Fresh

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<sup>30</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 160–1.

<sup>31</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 176: “Kierunki i uwarunkowania ewolucji katolickiej doktryny społecznej; Kościół katolicki wobec problemów społeczno-gospodarczych w Polsce Ludowej; Katolicka a marksistowska wykładnia wolności i godności człowieka; Katolicka koncepcja historii Polski”.

conscripts, very often coming from distant corners of the country and small villages, were vulnerable to such propagandist efforts. For many of them, the military service was a perfect opportunity to leave their home towns for the first time or have a once in a lifetime travel by train. In many cases, compulsory military service was a real adventure that provided, for instance, an opportunity to acquire a driving license, being a ticket to a better life beyond barracks. Promoting an atheistic lifestyle among the young, poorly-educated people, was depicted as a breath of modernity. Janusz Wrona aptly notices that after the hostilities had ceased, about 70 per cent of population lived in rural areas. In addition to their characteristic attachment to faith, peasants also developed religious rituals, related to family tradition.<sup>32</sup> In his memoirs, Józef Maria Ruszar describes military service in a unit notorious for strict discipline. Commanders of the Polish People's Army attached the cadet of the Reserve Officers School to this unit in response to his oppositional activity. His diary describes events of 1978-1979, which was a period of great euphoria and hope caused by the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as pope. Apart from his own experiences, Ruszar gives account of the commanding staff reaction to Wojtyła's nomination. The appointment of a Polish bishop by the College of Cardinals was viewed as a sheer coincidence rather than an intention. This is how one of the most crucial moments in the Polish People's Republic history was presented in *Żołnierz Wolności* and *Trybuna Ludu* magazines. Officers were deeply interested in a backstage life of the newly elected pope, although this curiosity had to remain hidden out of their sense of duty to the communist homeland.<sup>33</sup>

The Polish People's Army comprised two types of servicemen, compulsory military service soldiers as well as so-called professional soldiers, including officers (senior and junior), warrant officers<sup>34</sup> and non-commissioned officers. A training programme, especially the ideological one, was adjusted to a particular corps. While in the case of professional soldiers, it was possible to observe individuals' behaviour over time and verify their usefulness for the army and political activity, conscripts did not leave that much time for such a thorough analysis. What is more, their commanders were aware that after the completion of service, they would return home and their attitudes would be influenced. John Paul's II pilgrimage brought about also some changes in a syllabus of officer schools. At the end of 1983, curricula of socio-political subjects were revised and such versions were supposed to be implemented in the next academic year. The guidelines specified that it was necessary to form the right model

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<sup>32</sup> Wrona, 2019: 227.

<sup>33</sup> Ruszar, 2017: 62-3.

<sup>34</sup> Warrant officers corps was a separate corps in the PRL Armed Forces in 1963-2004, between the corps of officers and professional non-commissioned officers. As a result of joining NATO, it was attached to the senior non-commissioned officers corps. This was due to the lack of warrant officers in western armies. In fact, warrant officers were highly qualified technicians, who were required (initially) to have completed secondary education.

of a candidate for professional service. The vast majority of military units used to hold special classes and seminars on social, religious and political aspects related to the papal visit. Prior to and in the course of the pilgrimage, all communist authorities of the army held individual talks with members of the Polish United Workers' Party. The primary goal of such meetings was to evaluate "the effectiveness of party work in shaping attitudes of members and candidates for PZPR".<sup>35</sup> However, it was hard to assess the mood prevailing among the commanders and staff of the Polish People's Army just on the basis of such talks. Throughout the communist period in Poland, there had been many attempts to implement new, different from pre-war, professional patterns within the army, political apparatus and state administration. For example, the so-called secular rituals were introduced as an alternative to Catholic customs and traditions. It is natural that a strictly hierarchical institution such as army involves moving up the career ladder. For this reason, a significant number of soldiers, especially officers, tried to give up on religious practices (at least seemingly), and thus they followed the aforementioned communist pattern. Another secular model was to appeal to ordinary citizens as it was implemented under cover of modernity. Among other things, people were encouraged to participate in secular celebrations, where they could receive attractive gifts, resembling contemporary gadgets. An official ban on attending church services was imposed not only on the military but also militia and Security Service (SB). Families of officers and soldiers were to serve as socialist role models, broken away from religion. Judging by today's standards, the so-called secular baptism that was promoted under Gierek's rule, looked very exotic.<sup>36</sup> Situations, when officers received sacraments or observed religious practices under cover of darkness and in remote parishes, have gone down in the history of the Polish People's Republic society. High standing of the Church in Poland and attachment to centuries-old tradition were much stronger than temporary advantages offered by communists.

Military communist authorities were constantly indoctrinating and monitoring PZPR members and candidates who worked in various institutions. Secular attitudes, being a prerequisite for a successful career, were promoted with meticulous attention. This concerned not only soldiers but also their families and civilian employees working in military units. Additionally, the framework programme for the Study of Propaganda Theory and Methodology at the Military Political Academy<sup>37</sup> was expanded by world-view issues. Wider access to the mass media, including the western ones, made it necessary for communists to interpret the teaching of the Church, especially all addresses issued by the Polish Episcopate. In order to launch such massive training,

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<sup>35</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 177: "skuteczności pracy partyjnej w zakresie kształtowania postaw światopoglądowych członków i kandydatów PZPR".

<sup>36</sup> Wrona, 2019: 216.

<sup>37</sup> Military Political Academy named after Feliks Dzierżyński – an institution educating political officers for the Polish People's Army.

a highly qualified officer staff, with unwavering communist ideals, was needed. Undoubtedly, the Pope's pilgrimage to the country made the authorities update the political and educational aspect of instruction in the Polish People's Army. The evolution in political training was not solely limited to ideological issues, but it also included methods of social engendering that were allegedly being used by priests to attract large numbers of believers. It warrants attention that GZP WP had designed the whole programme as well as coordinated and monitored its execution. It seems that at a certain point indoctrination was equally important as combat training of particular tactical units. Political officers of various ranks were a crucial element of the process and in consequence, they required elaborate preparation in this domain<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, it came as no surprise that a comprehensive programme of professional development for lecturers of officer schools and training centres that taught subjects related to historical policy had been drawn up. Moreover, GZP WP outlined methods of "educational work with soldiers' families and principles of supporting the Organization of Military Families". Commanders of military units and political authorities of the Polish People's Army were charged to administer work. Political officers were acutely aware of huge interest in the Pope's visit among not only soldiers but also their families. This situation called for a response in the form of the intensified and reviewed programme of communist indoctrination.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusions

The imposition of martial law was a huge blow to freedom and respect for human rights. Although it was formally suspended, the situation within the country was still very tense. The top leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) was afraid that the papal visit could spark strikes and street riots. The First Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee, General Wojciech Jaruzelski could not allow the army to rebel against the official authorities in such a tough moment. As mentioned before, the command had been preparing themselves for the pilgrimage since spring of 1983. The most common preventative measure used at that time across the army was agitation by political officers of various ranks. It was well-known that introducing censorship on the Pope's addresses was out of the question, however it would be possible to interpret them in line with the communist rhetoric. The papal teaching about love of one's neighbour, respect for human rights or calls for peace was manipulated. Communists opposed the historical policy, which, in their view, grossly exaggerated the contribution of the Church to shaping the history of Poland and Europe. A quick and precise analysis of the Pope's visit by a specially established department of GZP

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<sup>38</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 178–9.

<sup>39</sup> CAW WBH, MoN, GZP WP, 344/92/756, k. 180: "pracy wychowawczej w środowisku rodzin wojskowych oraz zasad[y] wspierania Organizacji Rodzin Wojskowych".

WP entailed educational changes in officer schools and compulsory military service training. The initiatives that were undertaken regarded not only soldiers but often their families. Planning free time by the Organization of Military Families, usually on Sundays, automatically kept people away from religious practices. The Polish People's Army was subject to a special ideological supervision. Attitudes that were in line with standards of a communist army were widely promoted. Officers who were reluctant to comply with communist rules used to be either side-lined or even discharged from service at most. Obviously, the vast majority of servicemen respected the imposed principles, although another Pope's pilgrimage could have shaken these proportions. The Armed Forces of that time were supposed to be a stronghold of socialist values, promoting an atheistic-modern lifestyle of soldiers and their families. A significant number of the military staff was certainly guided by opportunism, especially at the time of the 'Solidarity' carnival.<sup>40</sup> Officially, they did not disclose their true opinions. Commanders were certainly aware of this, and therefore they were justifiably preparing themselves for the pilgrimage and its possible implications.



Fig. 1. Pope John Paul II arrival at Okecie airport in Warsaw. June 16, 1983. (photo by L. Zieliński, National Digital Archives, Warsaw, Poland 3/53/0/1/13)

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<sup>40</sup> Carnival of 'Solidarity' – a period from August 1980 to the introduction of martial law on December 13, 1981 – known for relaxed grip on civil liberties and censorship.

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