THE CENSORSHIP INTERFERENCE IN TELEVISION SERIALS AND SERIES DURING MARTIAL LAW IN POLAND (1981-1983) – HISTORICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

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Rezumat
Ingerinţa cenzurii in serialele și serialele de televiziune în timpul legii marţiale în Polonia (1981-1983) – context istoric și juridic


Cuvinte-cheie: Republica Populară Poloneză, cenzura în Polonia comunistă, legea marțială în Polonia, seriale și seriale de televiziune, televiziunea poloneză.

Summary
The censorship interference in television serials and series during martial law in Poland (1981-1983) – historical and legal context

Throughout the period of the People's Republic of Poland, political and systemic solutions were undemocratic. There was the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows (GUKPPiW), whose name was changed in July 1981 to the Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows (GUKPiW). On 13 December 1981, the communists (under the leadership of General Wojciech Jaruzelski) introduced martial law, which was abolished on 22 July 1983. The state authorities tried to stop the development of Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”. Society, including the makers of television serial and series, has been subjected to even tighter control. Preventive censorship had a negative impact on the development of cultural and artistic life. The aim of this article is to show the mechanisms of operation of Polish censorship (also in the historical and legal context), which had an impact on the broadcast of programs on Polish Television during martial law (1981-1983).

Keywords: Polish People's Republic, censorship in communist Poland, martial law in Poland, television serial and series, Polish Television.

During the wave of workers' strikes in August 1980, the communists ruling in Poland began to consider the possibility of imposing martial law. The authorities wanted to stop social unrest and lead to the liquidation of the emerging and growing democratic movement (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”). Finally, on the morning of 13 December 1981, a speech was broadcast on radio and television, in which General Wojciech Jaruzelski announced the introduction of martial law throughout the Polish People's Republic. However, the military coup began before midnight when telephone connections were blocked. The introduction of martial law also meant the internment of almost seven thousand social and political activists, the suspension of the activities of social organisations, the restriction of freedom of movement and the introduction of a curfew. Citizens were banned from strikes and demonstrations, and workplaces were militarised.

Considering the legal order in force at that time, even in communist Poland, the introduction of martial law was a coup d'état. The forma-
Censorship, under communist control in Poland, was a phenomenon of state authorities’ supervision of information (including cultural, but also entertainment) intended for dissemination. Censorship in the communist era was preventive in nature, so it eliminated undesirable content before it was published in the media. Censorship was carried out by the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows (GUKPiW) established by a decree of 1946 [2], whose name was changed in July 1981 to the Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows (GUKPiW). The decision of GUKPiW could be appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court since 1981 [20]. However, in the course of proceedings before the administrative court, only the legality of this decision could be assessed, i.e. compliance with the applicable regulations on issuing such decisions. The court could not take evidence in this regard.

During martial law, the basis for interference in television serials (“produced by film units for television broadcasts with a more concise version shot for a cinema release” [14, p. 66]) and television series (“characterized by simpler and more schematic narratives, lower production values and quicker shooting time” [14, p. 66] and in addition series were mostly produced by the television or its associated entity) was the Act of 31 July 1981 on the control of publications and shows, as well as the legal acts of 12 December 1981: the decree on martial law and the ordinance of the President of the GUKPiW. The last of the aforementioned legal acts provided, inter alia, that the decision refusing to issue a permit was final and could not be appealed against to the administrative court [24]. Censorship most often referred to the aforementioned act of July 1981, which stated, among other things, that using the freedom of speech and printing in publications and shows, it was not possible to:

- undermine the independence or territorial integrity of the Polish People's Republic;
- call for the overthrow, revile, mock or humiliate the constitutional system of the Polish People's Republic;
- undermine the constitutional principles of the foreign policy of the Polish People's Republic and its Alliance;
- make war propaganda;
- incite or praise the commission of a crime;
- violate the religious feelings and feelings of non-believers;
- promote national and racial discrimination;
- promote morally harmful content, in particular alcoholism, drug addiction, cruelty and pornography [20].

Martial law in Poland was lifted on 22 July 1983, although it was suspended on 31 December 1982. On the basis of a query in the Archives of New Records in Warsaw, it can be assumed that until the end of 1982 Polish Television did not submit to censorship any television serial or television series that might raise any doubts from the point of view of the Communists. The authorities of the state television broadcaster themselves largely control the content of the broadcasts in political terms. On 31 December 1982 martial law had not yet been formally lifted, but those responsible for the content of television programmes carried out with the intention of broadcasting content which, from the point of view of the communists, could have a negative impact on Polish society.

Confidential information on the interventions made in January 1983, prepared by the Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows in Warsaw (ref. no. DIN-pf-052/1/83), contains descriptions of three production – television serials and television series – although the draft report mentions four films, which suggests that the documents are incomplete). The serials and series were presented by the Editor-in-Chief of Film Programs of Polish Television.
The five-part serial entitled “Zamach stanu” (in English: “Coup d'état”) directed by Ryszard Filipski (he also played the lead role in the serial) was not allowed to air on Polish Television in 1983. The serial (made by Film Production Studio “Iluzjon”) is about the political breakthrough caused by the May Coup in 1926, and the action, covering the years 1925-1935, presents the mechanism of the coup d'état, the struggle against parliamentarism, the pursuit of dictatorship, etc. The archival chronicles of the Polish Telegraphic Agency used extensively in the serial showed Józef Piłsudski, according to communist censorship in 1983, as a hero adored by the nation, the personification of the idea of freedom and independence, the reborn of the independent Polish state. In the opinion of the censors expressed in January 1983, the critical portrayal of Marshal Piłsudski in the plot layer of the serial was not very convincing [7, p. 22]. It is worth mentioning that the censorship was unfavorable about the serial entitled “Zamach stanu”, although Ryszard Filipski was associated with one of the factions of the Polish United Workers’ Party, which gathered activists described as national communists [10].

It should be also mentioned that in 1980 the director Ryszard Filipski made a narrative film under the same title (“Zamach stanu”), which had its premiere in April 1981, i.e. before martial law [22]. It is also important that the serial entitled “Zamach stanu” is listed in the database of The Leon Schiller Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Łódź with a production year in 1985 and a premiere date in May 1987 [23]. This may mean that after the censors’ remarks in 1983, the serial was completely re-edited in 1985.

In the serial “Popielec” (in English: “Ash Wednesday”) directed by Ryszard Ber in 1982, presenting the image of a village in the Rzeszów region during the Nazi occupation and the beginning of communist rule in Poland, the censors ordered in January 1983 the removal or shortening of particularly cruel, naturalistic scenes of murder and moral abuse of Germans against Poles, group rape of a young woman, etc. In addition, it was demanded to eliminate scenes with a song sung by drunken young people when Boleslaw Bierut came to power [7, pp. 22-23]. The censor’s objections were raised by the song entitled “Gówno w trawie zapiszczało” (in English: “Shit in the grass whistled”), which was a remake of the song “Serce w plecaku” (in English: “Heart in backpack”) intoned by soldiers of the Home Army (armed forces of the government of the Republic of Poland in exile in London). The song “Gówno w trawie zapiszczało” was widely known in the second half of the 1940s and enjoyed great popularity among the “cursed soldiers” (anti-Soviet and anti-communist Polish resistance movements). The piece of music was a form of disapproval for Polish communists sent to Poland from Moscow (including Boleslaw Bierut and Edward Osóbka-Morawski).

The nine-part serial (made by Film Unit “Silesia”) premiered in 1984. Before “Popielec” was broadcast on Polish Television, the serial received in 1984 a special mention of the International TV Film Festival “Teleconfronto” di Chianciano Terme (Italy) for “an original, rhetoric-free way of showing the life of the Polish countryside during the Nazi occupation” [15 – transl. from the Polish by W. A. Święch]. In the serial produced in 1982, the fate of the Polish countryside was shown in a way that differed from the narrative that had been in force until then (which was criticized by some recipients of “Popielec”). The serial showed characters trying to survive a difficult period of Polish history. Thus, people lost in the new reality often behave in a way that is far from the propaganda stereotypes of war heroism and sacrifice cultivated in earlier Polish cinematography. Despite censorship, some viewers continued to accuse the serial-makers of shocking brutality and eroticism [15].

Under the working title “Alternatywy 4” (in English: “4 Alternative Street”) in January 1983, Polish censorship took care of the nine-part comedy series directed by Stanislaw Bareja (it was probably a draft version of the production [7, p. 23], which was started even before the introduction of martial law), telling the story of the life of the inhabitants of one of the buildings constructed of large, prefabricated concrete slabs, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The censorship ordered the removal of fragments of the series concerning the activities of the anti-government opposition, e.g. meetings of the so-called “flying university” [7, p. 23] (a system of self-education in the form of lectures in private flats organised by anti-communist opposition activists operating illegally in Poland in the second half of the 1970s [9, pp. 6-28]). The censorship also ordered the cutting out of scenes depicting the surveillance of society by the Security Service (use of bugging, attempts to recruit a
building caretaker to cooperate with the Security Service) [7, p. 23].

Moreover, the control authority did not like the conversations, totally condemning the attitude of high-level activists of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the functioning of official propaganda, especially the Television Journal. According to Polish censorship, the discussions of the characters in the series tendentially and unilaterally exposed Polish-Soviet relations (the case of the Warsaw Uprising, isolation camps in the Soviet Union). An order to remove parts of the series was therefore issued [7, p. 23].

According to Polish databases, the year of production of the comedy series entitled “Alternatywy 4” (produced by Poltel, i.e. the Polish Television unit [17, p. 173]) is 1983 (although production began on 9 December 1981), but it had its television premiere only in November 1986 [1]. There is no doubt that the communist authorities were afraid of the film production of Stanisław Bareja, who, like no one else, was able to present the reality in the People’s Republic of Poland in “a distorting mirror”. The director ruthlessly exposed the functioning of the system and showed the absurdities of life in the communist state. The adventures of the characters of the comedy series “Alternatywy 4”, on the example of a neighborhood community in a pseudo-housing cooperative, showed on a microscale the mechanisms of action of the power, whose personification in the series is the caretaker [11, pp. 235-237]. The series entitled “Alternatywy 4” somehow replaced society in the expression of its collective experience. The authorities realized that Stanisław Bareja’s production was full of allusions and the director constantly “winked” at the viewer. Communists were aware of this, but the comedy was supposed to be “a safety-valve institution”, although scenes that showed directly and too clearly the pathologies of the communist system were removed from the series. For this reason, the aforementioned film production was broadcast on Polish Television at the beginning of the second half of the 1980s.

In 2014, it was reported that the Center for Documentation and Program Collections of the Polish Television made a digital reconstruction of the series entitled “Alternatywy 4”. The editing lists were compared with the content of the records available to Polish Television. On this basis, it was possible to find many censored fragments and indicate their original location in the series. Although the negatives for these fragments have not survived, scans from the positive have been inserted into these places. In September 2014, Polish Television started broadcasting a digitally reconstructed TV series directed by Stanisław Bareja [13].

The Editor-in-Chief of Film Programmes of Polish Television submitted to the Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows the series entitled in German “Hotel Polan und seine Gäste” (in Polish: “Hotel Polanów i jego goście”; in English: “Hotel Polan and its guests”) [7, p. 89] that was produced by Deutscher Fernsehfunk (German Television Broadcasting), i.e. the state television broadcaster in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). The script of the series was based on a biographical novel (“Bohemia – mein Schicksal”, Mitteldeutscher Verlag, Halle – Leipzig 1979) written by Jan Koplowitz. The writer and journalist, based on his own literary work, even prepared a script for the series together with Günther Rückner. The television series was shot in Poland in Kudowa-Zdrój [21], i.e. in the town where Jan Koplowitz was born in 1909 (at the time Bad Kudowa) [8, pp. 1126].

Information about interference in the series entitled “Hotel Polan und seine Gäste” (in the materials (ref. no. DIN-pf-052/4/83) of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows, this film production was entitled “Hotel Bohemia i jego gości”, that is in English “Hotel Bohemia and its guests”) was included in the report of censorship in April 1983 [7, p. 89]. The Polish office responsible for control described in the report that in the series was presented the story of a Jewish family involved in the events of 1914-1942. From the statements of the Zionists appearing in the third part of the series, opinions derogatory to the national dignity of the Arabs were removed [7, p. 89]. The following statement addressed to people associated with the communist movement was also questioned by censorship: “Where have you achieved anything? Where? Maybe with Asians or in Africa with bushmen with nose rings” [7, p. 89 – transl. from the Polish by W. A. Święch]. It is worth mentioning that the Six-Day War of 1967 caused the severance of diplomatic relations between communist states (except Romania) and Israel, and the Soviet Bloc began to support armed Arab terrorist movements, although it seems that the Polish People’s Republic did it to a limited extent [5, pp. 88-119].
The series entitled “Hotel Polan und seine Gäste” was broadcast in Poland during the gloomy period of martial law by Polish Television. In 2009, there were requests from the Kudowa-Zdrój local government and the Forum of Polish Jews to re-broadcast the series. However, there were legal problems in this case [21] (which is beyond the purpose of this article). However, it should be mentioned that already in the 1990s there were voices in Poland that the series was anti-Semitic in its meaning, although it was done in a hypocritical and perfidious way, referring to existing stereotypes [6, pp. 8-9]. Similar opinions also appeared in scientific publications outside Poland [3, pp. 68-86; 4, pp. 218-237].

As indicated in Article 83 of the Constitution adopted by the Legislative Sejm on 22 July 1952 (as amended): The Polish People’s Republic guarantees citizens freedom of speech, press, assembly and mass meetings, marches and demonstrations. The realization of this freedom shall consist in the provision for the use of the working people and their organizations of printing houses, stocks of paper, public buildings and halls, means of communication, radio and other necessary material means” [12 – transl. from the Polish by W. A. Święch]. Taking into account the results of the query in the Archives of New Records in Warsaw, the observance of the basic rights of citizens of the People’s Republic of Poland was a fiction throughout the entire period of the communist state, and even more so during martial law. In fact, censorship had power over film production. Even indirectly, because many creators used self-censorship for fear of losing its managerial position or work, which limited, gagged and destroyed free speech in filmmaking. It can therefore be assumed that many scripts of the serial or series found their place in desk drawers and were not realized.

In July 1981, the possibility of appealing against decisions of the the Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows to the Supreme Administrative Court was introduced. However, as indicated in this article, the administrative mode had certain limitations. In addition, constitutional rights have been restricted, among others, by Ordinance of the President of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows of 12 December 1981 on the rules and procedure for granting permissions for the distribution of publications and shows and the procedure for using printing plants, devices and apparatus during martial law [24]. In the case the censorship justified its decision, it did so in a general way. Only the editorial unit of the legal act on the basis of which the interference was made was usually invoked without a detailed explanation. The materials of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows thus show the true face of the communist era, in which an attempt was made to impose “the ideological muzzle” on cultural life, and citizens’ rights were an insignificant phrase, although sometimes, after a few years, a TV series, such as directed by Stanisław Bareja, was allowed to be broadcast, which was treated as “a safety-valve institution”.

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