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The Solidarity Collection of Polish Clandestine Publications at the British Library

Abstract: This article describes the history and content of the British Library's Solidarity Collection of Polish clandestine publications. Over the past forty years, the British Library's curators have collected Polish samizdat publications as valuable documents attesting to the struggle for freedom of speech faced with prevalent censorship. Although named after the Solidarity movement, the collection encompasses clandestine publications and ephemera from the 1970s until the end of the communist rule in Poland. A big part of the repository are donations of items smuggled to the West during the Cold War period. As of today, the collection includes 1759 books, 831 periodical titles and 548 ephemeral publications, encompassing various materials, from political posters and pamphlets to flying university lectures and postcards.

Keywords: Solidarity, samizdat, dissent, Polish Collections abroad, Polonica, British Library, grey literature, underground publications.

Słowa kluczowe: Solidarność, drugi obieg, Polonica, British Library, szara literatura, wydawnictwa podziemne.

„Z Badań nad Książką i Księgozbiorami Historycznymi” – Udział zagranicznych recenzentów w ocenie publikacji; Stworzenie anglojęzycznej wersji wydawniczej publikacji; Digitalizacja tomów archiwalnych rocznika w celu zapewnienia otwartego dostępu do nich przez Internet oraz wdrożenie i utrzymanie cyfrowej platformy redakcyjnej – zadanie finansowane w ramach umowy nr 653/P-DUN/2019 ze środków Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego przeznaczonych na działalność upowszechniającą naukę.

Introduction

The British Library's Solidarity Collection is a collection of Polish clandestine publications, known in Polish as drugi obiegi ("second circulation") or bibuła (literally "semitransparent blotting paper"), or, in Russian, samizdat ("self-publishing"). It encompasses monographs, periodicals, and ephemera published by underground publishers in the People's Republic of Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. The collection, although relatively small, offers British readers an insight into the publishing activity and struggle for freedom of speech of the Polish opposition under the communist rule. Although named after the Solidarity movement, it incorporates clandestine publications produced by different opposition groups active from the beginning of the 1970s until 1989, including "Wolność i Pokój" (Freedom and Peace) movement, Pomarańczowa Alternatywa (Orange Alternative), Komitet Obrony Robotników – KOR (Worker's Defense Committee), and many others. To this day, Polish samizdat publications constitute one of the most powerful symbols of opposition's struggle for freedom of thought. Having contributed to the development of democracy in Poland, they make an important part of Eastern European writing and print culture.

The development of Polish samizdat is closely connected to the history of strikes and demonstrations in the People's Republic of Poland. In the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, a series of protests was organised by Polish blue-collar workers against the country's communist rule. The protesters were frustrated by state corruption and poor economic conditions, which were further worsened by increased food prices introduced by the government in December 1970 and June 1976. In 1980, the workers from the Gdańsk Shipyard demanded higher wages and new rights, including the right to form independent trade unions. The protests resulted in the establishment of Solidarity on 31 August 1980 and its official registration on 10 November 1980, making it the first Polish trade union that was fully independent of the Communist party¹. The movement soon broadened its programme to include, among others, the release of political prisoners and limitations of the extent of censorship. Thanks to the Solidarity's activism, independent publishing was not illegal for the first time in the history of the People's Republic of Poland, and state media openly acknowledged its existence².

¹ C. Barker, *Poland, 1980-81: The Self-Limited Revolution*, [in:] *Revolutionary Rehearsals*, ed. C. Barker, London : Bookmarks, 1987 ; *Solidarność, wielopłaszczyznowy ruch na rzecz demokratyzacji i głębokich reform ustrojowych PRL*, [in:] *Encyklopedia PWN* (1997-2020) [on line] <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/3977446/solidarnosc.html> [accessed on 12.10.2020].

² W. Bolecki, *Getting around Polish Censorship 1968-89*, [in:] *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries*. Volume 3: *The*

However, after martial law was declared in Poland in December 1981, Solidarity became an illegal organisation and conducted its activities clandestinely until 1989. Following negotiations with the Communist Party, its representatives were allowed as candidates in the first free elections. Thanks to a successful ballot result in August 1989, Solidarity led a coalition cabinet and its leader, Lech Wałęsa, was the first democratically elected President of Poland.

History of samizdat in Poland

The phenomenon of samizdat was prevalent in Eastern Europe³. In Poland, the history of clandestine publishing can be traced back to the partition period in the 19th century. Underground publications were an important tool for the resistance movement during the Second World War and the appearance of the first ‘second circulation’ publications resulted from the establishment of the Main Office for the Control of the Press in 1945, Publications and Public Performances (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy Publikacji i Widowisk), whose censors closely controlled Polish media and cultural and publishing institutions. The production of Polish samizdat, copied mainly by using typewriters, was intensified after the student protests of March 1968. Some of the participants of the student strike began to mock the language of the propaganda, thus making Polish samizdat not only a political but also a literary phenomenon. After protests in June 1976, the second circulation publishing occurred on a larger scale, with some underground activists gaining access to duplicators. Workers’ Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników -- KOR) started issuing “Biuletyn Informacyjny” (Information Bulletin) and “Komunikat” (The Message)⁴. The establishment of the Solidarity movement in August 1980 marked another peak in the number of samizdat publications – approximately 2000 underground books and 3000 journal titles published by the Polish opposition until December 1981. For comparison, the largest independent publishing house, Nieocenzurowana Oficyna Wydawnicza — NOWA (Uncensored Publishing House), published 100 titles between 1977 and 1981⁵. With the introduction of

making and remaking of literary institutions, eds. M. Cornis-Pope Marcel, J. Neubauer, Amsterdam - Philadelphia : Benjamins Publishing, 2007, pp. 136-137.

³ P. Sowiński, *Zakazana książka. Uczestnicy drugiego obiegu 1977–1989*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 27-30; W. Parfianowicz-Vertun, *Creating Central Europe in Polish and Czech Samizdat*, [in:] *Understanding Central Europe*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 43-51.

⁴ Komitet Obrony Robotników, “Komunikat”, Warszawa : KOR, 1976-1980, Sol.421; idem, “Biuletyn Informacyjny”, Warszawa : [s.n.], 1978-1980, Sol.753; J. Błażejowska, *Papierowa rewolucja. Z dziejów drugiego obiegu wydawniczego w Polsce 1976-1989/1990*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 292-293.

⁵ G. Waligóra, *Niezależna prasa przed powstaniem NSZZ Solidarność*, [in:] *Papierem w sys-*

the Martial Law on 13 December 1981, independent publishing became illegal again⁶. While many publishing centres connected to the Solidarity movement were dissolved and their printers arrested, new independent publishing houses were founded and new periodicals, such as “Wezwanie” (The Summons), “Arka” (The Ark), “Kultura niezależna” (Independent Culture) soon appeared, giving evidence to the prevalent support for the opposition movement⁷. According to the estimates of the Polish Security Services, between the years 1982 and 1987, 406 underground publishers printed 2361 titles, most of them issued in a circulation of 2000–3000 copies.⁸ However, many publications were printed in much greater numbers and in several editions. For example, *Obywatel a Służba Bezpieczeństwa*, a brochure by Jarosław Chojecki and Roma Wojciechowski, first published in 1978, reached an impressive circulation of 40 000 copies⁹.

The underground publishing in Poland amounted to more than the typical samizdat in terms of the scale of the enterprise: the phenomenon encompassed a whole industry of printing and a booming network of distribution. As all printing presses and typewriters were registered and controlled by the state, the samizdat publications were reprinted across illegal publishers and duplicators and secretly distributed among supporters of the opposition. This affected the quality of these publications: often plagued by typographical errors and printed on poor quality paper, they testify to the insufficiency of financial means of its creators, as well as to the need to look inconspicuous. Engagement in the clandestine publishing involved a great risk for the underground publishers, which could result in arrest, losing a job, and, in the 1980s, long prison sentences¹⁰. Many clandestine publications were sold by publishing house agents directly to buyers such as students. Another option available to the members of the opposition was to purchase books from improvised shops located in private flats¹¹.

tem: *prasa drugoobiegowa w PRL*, eds. M. Marcinkiewicz, S. Ligarski, Szczecin 2010, pp. 26-33 ; W. Bolecki, op. cit., p. 136.

⁶ M. Jastrzębski, E. Krysiak, *Avoiding Censorship: The “Second Circulation” of Books in Poland*, “Journal of Reading” 1993, vol. 36, issue 6, p. 471.

⁷ “Wezwanie : niezależne pismo literackie”, Warszawa : [s.n.], 1982-1989), Sol.191; “Arka”, Kraków : Arka, 1983-1995, Sol.292; Komitet Kultury Niezależnej, “Kultura niezależna”, Warszawa: Wydawn. Przedświt, 1984-1990, Sol.367.

⁸ *Solidarity and other Polish clandestine publications in the British Library*, London : British Library, Reference Division, Department of Printed Books, 1985, p. 1; P. Sowiński, op.cit., p. 55; W. Bolecki, op.cit., p. 137.

⁹ J. Błażejowska, op.cit., p. 260; *Obywatel a Służba Bezpieczeństwa : poradnik życia społecznego w PRL*, [Warszawa] : Nowa, 1980, Sol.258u.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 294.

¹¹ W. Bolecki, op.cit., p. 136.

History and content of the British Library's Solidarity Collection

The Solidarity Collection makes part of the British Library's Slavonic Collections. It is the second largest repository of Polish clandestine publications on the British Isles (the largest one being the Polish Library in London). A large collection of Polish samizdat posters is held at the Victoria and Albert's Museum.

The collection was begun in the late 1970s by a British Library curator, Hanna Świdorska. Most of the material arrived at the library via anonymous donations from Polish people who smuggled illegal prints while travelling to Western Europe. A significant contribution was made by former Polish curators, who brought numerous underground publications during their visits to Poland. After the fall of communism in 1989, the British Library was able to include purchased items in its collection. The first acquisition occurred in 1990, when approximately 900 items were bought from Marek Szyszko, a private collector from Lublin. The items have kept the name 'Szyszko' in the description in the catalogue. In 1999, the Library received a donation from Marek Garztecki, consisting of about 4000 underground periodicals. Garztecki was a Polish journalist working for the Solidarity Information Office in London and an editor and publisher of "Solidarność News", which was later renamed "Voice of Solidarity", and then "The Bloc". He worked as a journalist for, amongst others, "Polityka", "Przekrój", "Jazz Forum" and "The Times", and as a foreign correspondent for Rzeczpospolita and TVP (Polish Television). After he had returned to Poland, he started a career in diplomacy and has worked as Polish ambassador to Angola and chargé d'affaires in Kenya¹².

Furthermore, a small number of ephemera was acquired in 2007 from John Taylor, an activist of the Polish Solidarity Campaign in London. In 2010, the Library was offered about 1700 periodicals and 500 books by the Polish Library in London¹³. The collection items occasionally feature in the British Library's exhibitions, such as the exhibition "Works of George Orwell in the languages of Eastern Europe" in 1984¹⁴.

As of today, the Solidarity collection includes 1759 books, 831 periodical titles and 548 ephemeral publications, all of which are accessible to the public¹⁵.

¹² Marek Garztecki entry on Wikipedia, [online] https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marek_Garztecki [accessed on 11.12.2020].

¹³ M. Szkuta, *Solidarity Collection*, (post on the European Studies blog of British Library; 31.08.2015), [online] https://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/european/2015/08/solidarity-collection.html?_ga=2.192632867.843323322.1544621392-1149033494.1542811704# [accessed on 12.10.2020].

¹⁴ H. Świdorska, *Polish Collections in the British Library*, [London]: British Library, Humanities and Social Sciences, 1990, p. 6.

¹⁵ M. Szkuta, op. cit.

For comparison, it is estimated that between 1976 and 1990 the underground publishing in Poland produced around 5000–6000 books and pamphlets and 3000–4000 periodical titles¹⁶. The collection items are grouped under a shelf mark with the prefix Sol., which is followed by a number from 1 to 911. Periodicals are located at Sol. 1–199 and Sol. 271–911, books at Sol. 200–270, and ephemera are stored at Sol. 274 under the collective title “Collection of Polish underground ephemeral publications”. Most records of the Solidarity Collection include “Polish samizdat publication” in their description¹⁷.

The Solidarity collection encompasses a variety of material, such as newspapers, pamphlets, political cartoons, photographs, factory news-sheets, posters, postcards, the “flying university” lectures, as well as books by authors such as Kazimierz Orłoś, Tadeusz Konwicki, and Marek Nowakowski, who wanted to avoid censorship in Polish state publishing¹⁸. Some of the widely read Polish authors’ books could not be officially republished in Poland because they had emigrated to the West. In such a case, samizdat publications were the only way for Polish readers to read books by authors such as Witold Gombrowicz or Czesław Miłosz, whose popularity soared after he had won the 1980 Nobel Prize in Literature¹⁹. The collection also encompasses translations into Polish of works by George Orwell, Joseph Brodsky, and Kurt Vonnegut²⁰. Noteworthy publications include *Folwark zwierzęcy* (Animal Farm) by George Orwell and *My* (We), a Polish translation of a dystopian novel by Yevgeny Zamiatin²¹.

¹⁶ M. Jastrzębski, op. cit., p. 471; J. Błażejowska, op.cit., p. 260; M. Marcinkiewicz, S. Ligarski, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Papierem w system...*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁷ M. Szkuta, op. cit..

¹⁸ For example: Kazimierz Orłoś, *Historia “Cudownej meliny”*, NOWA, 1988, Sol.227d); Tadeusz Konwicki, *Mała apokalipsa*, Toruń : Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza TON, 1981, Sol.253p; idem, *Wschody i zachody księżycy*, Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krąg, 1982, Sol.260s ; idem, *Rzeka podziemna*, Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krąg, 1984, Sol.240j; Marek Nowakowski, *Zapiski na gorąco*, Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Czarciego Licha, 1983, Sol 200a; idem, *Raport o stanie wojennym*, Kraków : Biblioteka Obserwatora Wojennego, 1984, Sol.228x; idem, *Rachunek*, [Warszawa] : Przedświt – Warszawska Niezależna Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, [1984], Sol 245a; idem, *Życiorys Tadeusza Nawalanego, czyli Solidarność ma głos*, [Warszawa] : Oficyna WE, [1983], Sol.243g.

¹⁹ For example: Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdynand*, Kraków : Krakowskie Towarzystwo Wydawnicze, 1983, Sol.217; idem, *Kosmos*, [Warszawa] : Klin, [1980], Sol.251n; Czesław Miłosz, *Światło dzienne*, [Poland] : Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, [1981?], Sol.223n; idem, *Zdobycie władzy*, [Warszawa] : NOWA, [1980], Sol.253m; idem, *Traktat poetycki ; Traktat moralny*, [Warszawa] : Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, [1978], Sol.221i.

²⁰ For example : George Orwell, *W holdzie Katalonii*, translated by Leszek Kuzaj, [Kraków]: Oficyna Literacka, 1985, Sol.208b; idem, *1984* [translated by Juliusz Mieroszewski], Kraków : KOS, 1981, Sol.250; idem, *Folwark zwierzęcy*, Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Głos, 1983, Sol.212q; Josif Brodski, *Wstęp do poezji*, translated by Stanisław Barańczak, [S.I.] : Oficyna Literacka, 1985, Sol.245g; Kurt Vonnegut, *Matka noc*, translated by Lech Jęczmyk, Gdynia : Petit, 1989, Sol.230d.

²¹ George Orwell, *Folwark zwierzęcy*, translated by Teresa Jeleńska, [Kraków] : Oficyna Literacka, 1985, Sol.257; Eugeniusz Zamiatin, *My*, translated by Barbara Sentencja, Warszawa : Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1985, Sol.201b.

Readers of the British Library can also access Polish émigré literature, which was read by the Polish Diaspora in the West and occasionally smuggled from abroad to the People's Republic of Poland, although these books are not part of the Solidarity Collection, but are integrated into the general holdings²².

The Solidarity Collection includes the most significant "second circulation" periodicals published in Poland, such as "Strajkowy Biuletyn Informacyjny Solidarność" (Solidarity Strike Information Bulletin), published by workers of the Gdańsk shipyard,²³ and "Nieregularnik Ruchu Wolność i Pokój 'A cappella'", a journal of the Freedom and Peace Movement, an opposition group established in 1985 that advocated for human rights, pacifism, and environment protection²⁴. Another noteworthy publication is "Przebiecie Pały" (Going to extremes), a satirical journal published by Ruch Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego (Movement for an Alternative Society), an anarchist organisation, and Pomarańczowa alternatywa (Orange Alternative), an anti-communist underground movement active in Wrocław in the 1980s²⁵, and "Zapis" (Record), the first clandestine literary magazine in the People's Republic of Poland²⁶.

The ephemeral material held at the British Library (Sol. 274) evolves around subjects that were banned from the official Polish media and could not be discussed in public²⁷, such as the funeral of Jerzy Popiełuszko, protest against the war in Afghanistan or commemoration of the Katyń massacre of 1940 and the 1970 protests. Many flyers express protest against price rises, call for end to the political imprisonment, or discourage citizens from voting in the state-orchestrated elections, like the "Mało nas, mało nas i ty ośle chodź do nas!" [There are very few of us and you, donkey, come and join us!] poster discouraging citizens from voting in the 1984 elections. Some of the most important items are founding declarations of independent political organisations, like the "Wolność i Pokój" movement. Part of the collection items is dedicated to events boosting the morale of the political opposition,

²² For example: Julian Strykowski, *Wielki starch*, London : Index on Censorship, 1980, X.0909/2067(14); George Orwell, 1984, translated by Juliusz Mieroszewski, Paryż 1953, 12653.a.22; Tadeusz Konwicki, *Rzeka podziemna, podziemne ptaki*, London : Aneks, 1985, YC.1986.a.568 ; Kazimierz Orłoś, *Trzecie kłamstwo : powieść*, Paryż : Instytut Literacki, 1980, X.909/88029.

²³ J. Błażejowska, *Drukarnia – duża szpilka, która kłuje*, „Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej” 2010, issue 9/10, pp. 35-44.

²⁴ P. Sowiński, op. cit., p. 52; "Solidarność : strajkowy biuletyn informacyjny", [Gdańsk : Stocznia Gdańska], 1980-1989), Sol.103; "A Cappella : nieregularnik Ruchu "Wolność i Pokój"", Gdańsk : [s.n.], 1986-1989, Sol.480.

²⁵ "Przebiecie Pały : pomarańczowa alternatywa", Łódź : [s.n.], 1988-1989), Sol.585.

²⁶ "Zapis : poezja, proza, eseje, felietony", [Warszawa] : Nieocenzurowana Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1977-1981, Sol.799.

²⁷ W. Pelpliński, *Cenzura jako instrument propagandy w PRL*, [in:] *Propaganda w PRL – wybrane problemy*, ed. P. Semków, Gdańsk 2004, pp. 14-21.

for example Pope John Paul II's visit to Poland in 1987, the winning of the Peace Nobel Prize by Lech Wałęsa in 1983 or participating in the 1st May demonstrations with Solidarity. Some material expresses criticism of the Polish society in a humorous way, like Andrzej Mleczek's cartoon mocking the low quality of work of Polish workers, or flyers condemning alcoholism and binge drinking. Noteworthy items also include a copy of the poem "For Eve, My Daughter of 12" by Jadwiga Piątkowska, the poet of Solidarity, with her hand-written letter to Maciej Pietrzyk, an actor, singer, and voice of the Solidarity movement, on the back side of the poem (Sol.764). The collection also encompasses voting instruction material from 1989, encouraging the vote for Solidarity in the first semi-free elections. Among the most significant items are posters "Być zwyciężonym i nie ulec to zwycięstwo" (To be won and not to surrender is victory) and "Nie ma wolności bez Solidarności" (There is no freedom without Solidarity).

Of great significance is the artwork related to the Solidarity movement, in particular works by Jerzy Janiszewski, a creator of the font *solidaryca* (Solidaric), which was commonly employed in the movement's posters, as well as a designer of the iconic Solidarity logo, in which a Polish flag grows out of the letter "n" of the "Solidarność" word. The logo symbolised individuals united by a common cause. The British Library's collection also includes his famous poster, "21 x tak" (21 x yes), created on occasion of the 21 demands issued by the Interfactory Strike Committee in Gdańsk on 17 August 1980 to the Polish government, including the right to establish independent trade unions, to strike, and to freedom of speech.

The future of the collection

Currently, the content of the Solidarity collection is not fully known to readers and a search in the library catalogue does not yield satisfactory results, as large parts of the material are ephemeral prints, which are stored in one file and lack proper description. To make the collection more accessible to the users, two collection guides are going to be published: a short guide, which will be available online, and a more detailed guide, which we would like to make available to readers in print form. The short guide will provide an overview of the stored material to increase public awareness of the Solidarity Collection. The printed guide will include a comprehensive description of the items, which will be of use by scholars researching the history of independent movements and underground publishing in communist Poland in the years 1976–1989, and the Polish contributions to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989. This will enable researchers to gain greater insight into the collection, since as of today the only way of learning about its content is through a catalogue search.

Fig. 1. A telegram-like sticker saying: “Stay at home / stop / Gorbachev votes instead of you anyway / stop”. Created either in October 1985 for the parliamentary elections, or in June 1988 for the election of the National Council. ©British Library.



Fig. 2. A leaflet mocking an electoral list of candidates: “Candidate no. 1 ... the Polish United Workers’ Party, Candidate no. 2 ... the Alliance of Democrats, Candidate no. 3 ... the United People’s Party, Candidate no. 4 ... the Christian Social Association.” ©British Library.



Fig. 3. A 1981 advert of the journal “Serwis Informacyjny Komisji Zakładowej NSZZ «Solidarność» przy UAM w Poznaniu”. ©British Library.

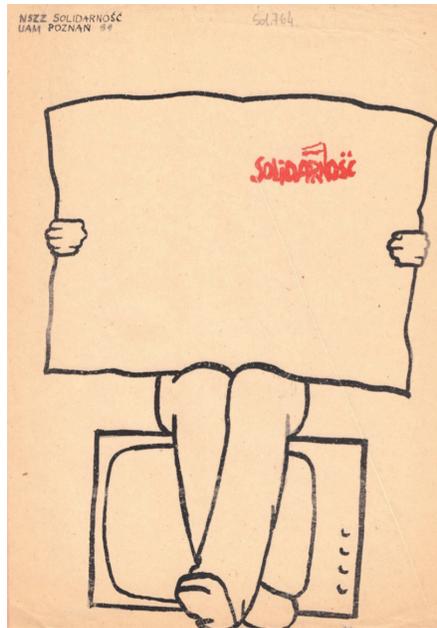
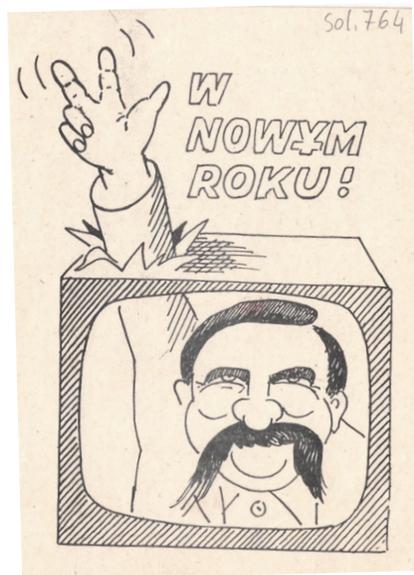


Fig. 4. New Year's wishes with a portrait of Lech Wałęsa. Created in the 1980s. ©British Library.



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