

One step forward and two steps backward at the Institute of National Remembrance?

Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska

In January 2012 I wrote a letter to Professor Andrzej Paczkowski, until recently head of the Institute of National Remembrance's Board of Directors, expressing my concern about discontinuation of the *IPN Bulletin*, a bimonthly publication of the Institute dedicated to the events of recent Polish history suppressed or distorted under communist rule. Professor Paczkowski answered me in a friendly way and assured me that members of the board hold a positive view of the new periodical intended to replace the *Bulletin*.

In April 2012 the new periodical replacing the discontinued *Bulletin*, *Pamięć.pl*, appeared in print. Its editor, Mr. Andrzej Brzozowski, announced in the introduction that the periodical intends to "respond to the challenges and needs of modernity." Since I was the last chair of the now-liquidated IPN College, I feel obligated to make public my impressions concerning this periodical.

Let us start with the "Calendar of Events" commemorating significant events in the month of April over the last several decades. In the first issue of *Pamięć.pl* the following events have been commemorated: Zdzisław Najder's assumption of directorship of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe in 1982, the signing of the Polish-Soviet agreement on the erection of the "Palace of Culture" modeled on Soviet architecture in 1952, the first broadcast of the underground radio "Solidarity" in 1982, the campaign against private shops and private trade launched in Soviet-occupied Poland in 1947, the forced relocation of Ukrainians from southeast Poland into the previously German northeast Poland in 1947, and the beginning of transports of Polish prisoners of war to their execution near Katyn in 1940. This last event is editorialized as follows: "Today one often hears that the elites of the Second Republic perished at Katyn." *One often hears?* Whose point of view does the editor of this publication represent? There is no mention of Janusz Kurtyka, director of the Institute of National

Remembrance who perished together with ninety-five others in a plane crash near Smolensk in April 2010. He was on his way to Katyn to honor its victims on the seventieth anniversary of their murder.

The first issue of *Pamięć.pl* does have an article on Katyn titled "The Katyn Crime," and its proclaimed goal is historical education. The article begins with the following sentence: "For a good part of Polish society the word *Katyn* is associated with martyrological boredom." Documentation for this opinion is provided by a quote from an anonymous Web commentator who allegedly stated that "if my child brought a Katyn album from school, I would raise hell with the school superintendent!" The address of the commentator's entry is not given. I have never heard of opinion polls confirming this kind of comment even though, as a sociologist, I am familiar with many public opinion studies concerning Katyn. It appears that the editors of *Pamięć.pl* are trying to create new facts by inserting into an authoritative publication comments from anonymous sources. A propaganda technique of quoting "Internet facts" from an unknown source seems to be at work here. The new periodical also features a conversation with Professor Paczkowski about IPN and what the interviewer calls "memory traps." He states that "everyone" practices the art of removing certain people and events from history; the result is that they cease to matter to historians. If so, one wonders whether the deafening silence regarding the fate of the late Janusz Kurtyka falls under the category of such removal?

Professor Marcin Kula's article "March 1968 as a Subject of Sociological Analysis" also elicits doubts. It so happens that in March 1968 I was an archeology student at Warsaw University and participated in the events to which Professor Kula refers. On March 8, 1968, I was present at University Square on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street; I was present in meetings of the Student Strike Committee and faced the police on Marszałkowska Street when students of Warsaw Polytechnic marched toward Warsaw University. I therefore approached Professor Kula's article with great anticipation. Professor Kula begins by announcing that the events of March 1968 took place "on several levels". According to him, March was the month of "ethnic hatred, specially of anti-Semitism; it was a period when one set of communist cadres was replaced by another; it represented a shift toward legitimizing a system that moved from socialist to nationalist ever so slightly." It was also "an injection

of chauvinism, a significant point in the history of Polish emigration, a period when communism turned against the intelligentsia, a period when democratic evolution (!?!—*BFR*) of the communist system was stopped.” Finally, it was “a consecutive chapter in the history of the world student movement.”

Professor Kula recounts many specific stories. He offers stories about baby carriages and diapers, imprisonment of protesters and fights between police and students in Poland’s larger cities, anti-Semitic slogans coming from the communist party apparatchiks that were, he states, “approvingly met by Polish society,” and the ensuing emigration of persons of Jewish background. Professor Kula remembers by name party leader Mieczysław Moczar, the Soviet “scientist” Trofim Lysenko, Marxist indoctrinator Adam Schaff [portrayed by Czesław Miłosz in *The Captive Mind*, *Ed.*], party leader Władysław Gomułka, the so-called revisionist Marxism, Marxist propaganda and society’s jokes about it, as well as the so-called *volks-dozents* (my recollection is that they were called “March dozents”). He is undoubtedly correct when he mocks the communist party accusation that “a few youths from communist families of Jewish background brought out thousands of young men and women into the streets,” but he does not say a word about what really brought thousands of youths into the streets: he says nothing about January 30, 1968, when the performance of Adam Mickiewicz’s *The Forefathers’ Eve* [written in 1834! *Ed.*] was closed in the National Theater because it contained lines that could be conceived as anti-Russian. He says nothing about demonstrations of students from Warsaw University and the College for Theater Performance who made the following demands: “We want to hear Mickiewicz’s truthful words, we want freedom without censorship, and we want our theaters open.” Professor Kula conceals the fact that on March 8, 1968, a student demonstration was called in defense of two fellow students expelled from Warsaw University: Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlejfer, both of whom came from Jewish and Marxist families and later became well known figures in Polish political life. The March 8 protest was the beginning of so-called March 1968 events in which one group in the communist party tried to push another group away from power. Without these crucial facts to which not only I but also other participants can testify, an analysis of what happened in Poland in March 1968 is neither trustworthy nor correct, unless the goal is to remove certain historical facts from memory, a goal that would be in clear

conflict with the Institute of National Remembrance’s charge. It is this Institute that Professor Kula’s article represents. Δ

This article was originally published in Polish as “Pułapki pamięci,” *Gość Niedzielny*, 17 May 2012.

Translated by permission.

Responsibility and bad taste

German journalist teaches Poles tolerance

Michał Karnowski

Quite a few German journalists take for granted the flattering words directed at them by fellow journalists from *Gazeta Wyborcza* [Poland’s leftist daily, *Ed.*]. Some of them were mightily surprised when they discovered that there are journalists in Poland who are not lying prostrate before them in spite of all the money poured into Poland by Germans, all the grants and fellowships meant to educate the locals. After all this, is it possible that not everyone has been properly trained? Alas.

Ms. Gabriele Lesser, a journalist representing, among others, *Berliner Tageszeitung* (the paper that used to vulgarly mock the late President Kaczyński), was truly irritated when she encountered in *Uważam rze* [a rightist Polish weekly, *Ed.*] an article by Sławomir Sieradzki about German correspondents in Poland and their manner of reporting. Appearing live on Polsat News, Ms. Lesser announced that she felt threatened by the article. In other words, when she expresses her opinions about Poles she merely practices freedom of speech, but when she herself is evaluated a coup against democracy is launched. Nasty Polish journalists! But Ms. Lesser overcame her fears and, during the same Polsat show, volunteered to explain to Poles the proper meaning of democracy and tolerance. She advised Poles to see themselves in the now-infamous BBC show [where a British sportscaster tried to discourage British football fans from going to Poland for EURO 2012 by saying that they might return in coffins, *Ed.*]. Ms. Lesser agreed with this view. Poland is a dangerous place for football fans, almost a death zone!

Incidentally, the British are in an awkward position for teaching others how to behave at football stadiums. The Manchester fans and their conduct have undermined Albion’s right to instruct others on how to behave in a civilized fashion at sports events. But even