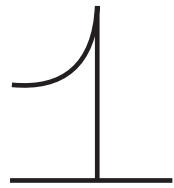




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— Tomáš Kasper

Transitions in the Way Germans and Polish-German Relations Were Presented in the Primary Schools of the Polish People's Republic

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Abstract The aim of the article is to show the changes in the perception of Germans and Polish-German relations in the education of the People's Republic of Poland. This problem is related to the changes in the domestic politics of post-war Poland and both German states. The paper is devoted to the evolution of the perception of Poland's western neighbor from the post-war period to the end of the Polish People's Republic, i.e. until 1989. The study presents the beginnings of the anti-German narration, caused by war trauma, which

has intensified since 1949 due to pressure which has been exerted by communist government. The next part shows in which places the end of Stalinism and the takeover of power by Władysław Gomułka softened the perception of Federal Republic of Germany. The next phase was opened by the recognition of the western border of Poland by the Federal Republic of Germany on December 7, 1970. This event entailed a gradual liberalization of the recognition of the German problem in the curricula. Undoubtedly, this tendency deepened in the decade of Edward Gierek's rule due to the problems of the Polish People's Republic with the repayment of foreign debt, partly also in West Germany. In the early 1980s, the establishment of The Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarność brought a new quality. Thanks to them the methods of showing Germans (and Polish education as a whole) started a slowly evolution to eliminate the communist propaganda. The school subjects which received the most attention were history, German language, Polish language and geography, because during these lessons the issues related to Germany were most often discussed. The work was created on the basis of selected textbooks and curricula.

Keywords Polish People's Republic, education, primary schools, Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic

An education system is one of the key elements of every modern state. It exerts an enormous influence on most citizens, often shaping their worldview on specific topics in a permanent manner. This is particularly apparent when it comes to issues affecting every resident of a given country. Undoubtedly, one such topic is the way in which young Poles' views on Germany were formed. Using primarily school course-books, this paper aims to show the changes in how Germany and Polish-German relations were presented in primary education in the Polish People's Republic (PRL). It also offers some interesting observations from the works of Zbigniew Mazur, Joanna Wojdon, and Zofia Zasacka. Finally, books authored by Stanisław Mauersberg, Krzysztof Kosiński, and Henryk Składanowski provide much-needed information about the reality of Polish primary schools in the People's Republic of Poland.

A communist country strives to gain total control over education. In accordance with models originating from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), school was to play one of the most important roles in the practice of propaganda-ideological methods. Therefore, schools and the form of education provided in them were exploited throughout the existence of the PRL. Here, I would like to stress that between 1945 and 1989, the Polish state had a virtual monopoly on education, which was strictly compulsory (Żaryn, 2009, p. 117, p. 119). Naturally, this significantly increased the possibility of creating an appropriate vision of the world among subsequent generations of Poles living in the socialist reality.

First Years After World War II (1944–1947)

To understand the transitions in how Germans were presented in postwar primary (general) education in Poland, an outline must first be given of the state of this stage of education immediately after World War II.

As mentioned above, one of the characteristics of a communist state is total and precise control over all stages of education, thus the Polish communists made it one of their key objectives to subjugate the education system and restructure it. This undertaking was, however,

rendered secondary to other fundamental changes, such as the implementation of agricultural reform and the nationalization of industries and banks (Składanowski, 2004, p. 74). Nonetheless, drawing on the example of the education system in the Soviet Union and the schools of the Związek Patriotów Polskich (Union of Polish Patriots, ZPP) located within its borders (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 27),¹ the Polish education system was rebuilt, though bringing it under complete control proved to be a difficult task in the existing circumstances.

The first reason for this was a shortage of teachers resulting from losses incurred during World War II; throughout Poland there was a need for some 30,000 teachers (Mauersberg, 1974, p. 73), a deficiency so pronounced that it could not possibly be overcome in a short time. In other words, the communists had to accept that, for some time at least, schools would continue to be staffed with people who were not politically indoctrinated and could present to their pupils a vision of the world that was different from the communist one.

The second reason was a shortage of paper, which in the early post-war period in Poland could be felt at every turn.² This meant that new school coursebooks based on Marxist-Leninist teachings could not be quickly implemented, leaving schools to either choose from prewar books devoid of the desired ideology or forego the use of such teaching aids altogether. In turn, the practice of giving up coursebooks required a greater transfer of knowledge directly from teachers, and this proved to be tricky, because many of them could present their pupils with a view of history that was quite different from the official one.

1 Związek Patriotów Polskich (*The Union of Polish Patriots*, ZPP) – an organization founded by the Soviets in June 1943 that strictly followed their instructions. It refused the right to exercise authority of the legal Polish government that moved to the United Kingdom. Despite being completely dependent on the Soviet authorities, ZPP was the only institution that could provide financial, cultural, and educational aid to Poles in the Soviet Union (Brzoza & Sowa, 2006, p. 534).

2 This problem was serious enough that in the course of the archival research pertaining to Polish documents between the years 1944 and 1948, many of them proved to have the form of handwritten leaflets, for example, which were often produced on the back of German documents.

The first mandates on primary teaching programmes appeared in September 1944 under the title *Wytuczne organizacji publicznych szkół powszechnych w roku szkolnym 1944/45* (Guidelines for State Primary School Organization in the School Year 1944/45). These guidelines called for a radical increase in the number of hours of history, geography, and Polish language classes. The scale of this increase is evidenced by the fact that never again in the subsequent history of Polish primary education was the number of hours of history classes as high as it was following the war (there were as many as seven hours of history classes each week). The reason for this increase was the profound lack of knowledge in these subjects amongst young Poles resulting from a total ban on the teaching of history and very limited geography and Polish language classes in the General Government (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 27; Jakubowska, 1986, p. 102). In Polish lands annexed by the Third Reich, the situation was even worse, as the number of Polish schools was radically reduced there (Jastrzębski, 2017, pp. 56–57).

This is important for the discussed topic, as most anti-German propaganda statements were made during Polish language classes, geography classes, and history classes (Wojdon, 2001, p. 325). One might argue that the anti-German attitude became the core of all humanist subjects in schools. For instance, Polish language classes were expanded to include topics such as Polish-German relations, the Nazi occupation, the defence of Warsaw in 1939, and the Polish Army's fight against the Third Reich in the east alongside the Red Army (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 27). As for new elements in geography classes, tremendous focus was placed on the changes to Poland's western border. Here it is worth mentioning that this matter was also addressed during history classes, Polish language classes, biology classes, and even during maths classes (Wojdon, 2001, p. 29).

As for rhetoric, statements such as 'to every Slav, every German is a bad man' and 'for Poles, Germans are the worst and the oldest enemies' (Sarnowska, Tropaczyńska-Ogarkowa & Podolak, 1947, p. 141) were nothing extraordinary. At the time, works of strong anti-German character were common; for example, Antoni Słonimski's poem entitled

Przekłète, in which the lyrical ‘I’ lists all the wrongs he and his loved ones suffered at the hands of the Germans during World War II and curses everything related to the Germans (Mauersberg, 1974, p. 65). In the first years after the war, the German people were also characterized as a fifth column (Mazur, 1995, p. 150).

Most texts depicting Polish-German conflicts appeared in the 1940s, with the majority of them concerning the Polish September Campaign of 1939 and fights in the west in 1940 (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 200). Amongst contemporary collections of children’s stories, one can find titles such as *Ku lepszemu przyszłości* (Towards A Better Future) and a book with a chapter entitled *Odwieczna walka z zalewem germańskim* (The Eternal Struggle With The German Flood), which is specifically dedicated to fights with the Germans (Szyper & Wojeński, 1947). Moreover, literary texts claiming that Silesia had always been Polish appeared in the Polish primary education system until 1972 (Zasadzka, 2000, pp. 179–180). It is telling that even parts of ancient works describing German barbarians that were studied at school had no accompanying explanation, suggesting that ‘the predecessors of Germans’ behaved precisely the way they were depicted by hostile ancient Roman historians (Wieczorkiewicz, 1946, p. 22).³

Interestingly, there were also situations where internal affairs were viewed through the prism of the so-called German issue. Among the topics to be addressed in history classes in 1945, we find ‘The reunification of Polish lands and the restoration of the kingdom in 1320 during fights with the German enemy in external and internal affairs’ (Course hours and syllabus for the 1945/46 school year for primary schools and the first grade of lower-secondary schools of general education, 1945, p. 77). At times, the Germans were even presented as a causative factor, such as in the gradual formation of a specific national awareness in the Middle Ages (Jakubowska, 1986, p. 164).

3 Obviously, one cannot call the Germans the predecessors of only the modern German nation; however, this simplified model existed in the collective awareness of those lacking a historical education.

A Western European reader might consider it interesting that words such as ‘Nazism’ and ‘national socialism’ are nowhere to be found in any postwar coursebook. They were diligently avoided because the associations evoked by the word ‘socialism’ could be positive only in the new reality, thus the term was repeatedly replaced with ‘fascism’.⁴

German language classes were not abandoned despite the fact that all of the aforesaid processes were initiated by collective wartime trauma. The language was still taught at many schools focusing on practical communication skills (Wojdon, 2001, p. 248).

The situation changed drastically in 1949 when the communists managed to take complete control of the Polish education system despite numerous obstacles.

Prior to the Formation of the Two German States (1947–1949)

The first major change in Polish primary education resulted from Poland embarking on the path of Stalinism and the country’s transformation into a totalitarian state. This entailed significant adjustments to the education system and, consequently, also influenced the subject addressed by this paper.

In 1947, the communists managed to largely overcome the two problems that had prevented them from assuming complete control over primary education. Accordingly, the ministry modified the teaching of subjects that were of key importance to the government, namely, the Polish language, history, biology, and geography, whereas a special censorship committee ensured that these changes found their way into coursebooks; however, a fundamental transformation of syllabuses and the implementation of new coursebooks did not occur until 1949 (Kosiński, 2000, pp. 158–159). It should not be forgotten, though,

4 For instance, in a coursebook from 1951, the presence of the word ‘socialism’ in the national-socialist ideology is explained to pupils as follows: “To delude the masses, German fascists called themselves ‘national socialists’, though their programme was a contradiction of socialism” (Missalowa & Schoenbrenner, 1951, pp. 256–257).

that until at least 1951 a problem plaguing the Polish school system was a shortage of coursebooks (Kosiński, 2000, pp. 159–160).

Another factor at play was that the Soviets themselves monitored the ideological correctness of coursebooks. An example is the text *Oshib-nochnyje uchebniki* authored by N. Dajri and included in the 1949 Soviet scientific periodical *Voprosy Istorii* (Questions of History). This educator criticized the contemporary Polish history coursebooks quite harshly, namely for their failure to grasp Marxism and appreciate the class conflict. He suggested relatively detailed corrections when it came to how specific historical events were presented so that the vision of history shown in the books was more consistent with that promoted by the Soviets.⁵

The following method was employed in history coursebooks to reach the required level of ideological correctness: coursebooks for the fourth grade in primary school, which is when history is introduced as a separate subject, were written by Poles; coursebooks for grades five through nine were authored by Poles and Soviets, and the history coursebooks intended for lower-secondary schools were penned by Soviets only. In the coursebooks written by Soviet authors, the history of Poland's statehood was often nonexistent, and the content of these publications was heavily steeped in the communist interpretation of history.⁶ Such practices continued until 1956 (Fik, 1996, p. 246).

Teachers had to undergo compulsory ideological training, and the process of preparing teacher candidates was also set within a suitable framework. Consequently, the most independent teachers were quickly fired in that period, while those who were loyal to the communist regime received promotions (Kosiński, 2000, p. 315; Zasadzka,

5 For instance, Dajri criticized the disproportion between the length of descriptions of the French Revolution and the October Revolution in favour of the former, a difference he considered appalling.

6 One can find, for example, regrets that Poland and Bohemia were baptized by 'non-enlightened and barbaric Germany' instead of by the 'culturally advanced' Byzantium, which was perceived as the reason for the 'inhibited cultural growth in western Slavdom' (Kosminski, 1950, p. 60).

2000, pp. 28–29). Additionally, all teachers were required to join the Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego (Polish Teachers' Union, ZNP). Over time, female teachers were also asked to become members of the Liga Kobiet (Women's League) in addition to their ZNP membership. It became a responsibility of head teachers to ensure teachers' affiliation with the ZNP. This meant that even if a teacher was not directly affiliated with the communist party, they were a member of an organization controlled by the communist party. If these measures proved ineffective, then school employees who were disobedient to the authorities were sometimes arrested (Kosiński, 2000, pp. 154–156). Head teachers were treated in much the same manner.⁷ This solved the problem of children being exposed to a different worldview through their experience in educational institutions. Additionally, in 1948 all private schools were closed down, thereby ensuring that the communist state held the desired monopoly on education (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 28).

As for the syllabus, the most extensive transformation took place in history classes. For instance, the activities of medieval Polish rulers could be assessed positively only if said rulers fought against the Germans (Fik, 1996, p. 245). Consequently, great emphasis was placed on teaching about the Early Middle Ages, when representatives of the early Piast monarchy confronted both the emperor and the heads of various German states.

Another reason for this approach was that in the era of the first Piast rulers, Poland had virtually the same borders as in the times of the PRL. In this way, the previous existence of Polish statehood in the so-called Recovered Territories was showcased or, alternatively, the previous presence of Slavs in these areas was strongly accentuated

7 The head teacher position could only be held by a person who enjoyed the confidence of the communists. The first replacements of prewar head teachers with 'dependable people' occurred in 1947. In 1949, teachers at a given establishment could not say in who was appointed as a head teacher. From 1951 onward, individuals acting as head teachers were gradually stripped of the primary responsibility of coordinating and managing the life of their schools. Instead, they were employed as inspectors sent by 'the management' (Kosiński, 2000, pp. 121–122).

(Radliński, 1947, p. 105; Wuttke, 1949, p. 226; Czekańska, 1951, p. 213; Czekańska, 1953, p. 189; Czekańska, 1954, p. 164; Wuttke, 1957, pp. 192–193, 237; Hoszowska, Szczechura & Tropaczyńska-Ogarkowa, 1946, p. 16; Czekańska, 1959, p. 116; Brzozowska & Kanikowska, 1969, pp. 194–195, 196–200; Mityk, 1975, pp. 134–135; Czekańska, 1980, pp. 147–150). This trend proved quite stable and continued for nearly the entire existence of the PRL, eventually leading to a situation where everything related to Poland's westward expansion was automatically considered a laudable act of patriotism (Radziwiłł, 1996, p. 334).

The Polish-German conflict was presented in schools as eternal, and each of its subsequent episodes was said to have been provoked by the Germans. Naturally, Polish victories in these struggles were considerably magnified (Kosiński, 2000, p. 172). Furthermore, Poland's western border was presented as the only border with an approaching threat to Polish statehood (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 90). Meanwhile, the Germans were presented as the ideological successors of Prussia and the Teutonic Order. The average student had no possibility of learning that, over the centuries, their fatherland engaged in conflicts with often incomparable German states of a different ethnic composition, encompassed different territories, or had different international statuses (Mazur, 1995, pp. 199–200; Wojdon, 2001, p. 30).

Polish students were also taught about the phenomenon of Poles being employed by German owners of manufacturing plants and mines, which was presented as pure exploitation (Wojdon, 2001, p. 30). The depiction of the history of cities and towns in the Recovered Territories was exceptionally poor. A good example is the city of Gdańsk. In this case, the description of the development of the city spanned the period from the Republic of Poland under the Jagiellons to the situation preceding the outbreak of World War II, the destruction inflicted on the city during the war, and its swift reconstruction; the remainder of the city's history goes unmentioned (Wuttke, 1949, pp. 229–230; Wuttke, 1950, p. 225; Kondracki & Richling-Kondracka, 1951, pp. 235–236; Wuttke, 1957, pp. 192–193, 210; Missalowa & Schoenbrenner, 1951, p. 52). Interestingly, it was at this time that certain historical figures of German nationality were first cast in a positive light. Examples include

Emperor Otto III, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Ernst Thälmann (Wojdon, 2001, p. 22; Kormanowa & Schoenbrenner, 1951, p. 68, 256). Moreover, a certain rhetorical alleviation took place; coursebooks on medieval history no longer contained headings such as ‘Germany’s extermination policy towards the subjugated nations’ (Jakubowska, 1986, p. 215).

Although the German language was still taught at many schools, the very objectives of teaching this subject were biased by ideology. Now pupils were expected to not only communicate in German but also praise the successes of the PRL, and words such as *Vorarbeiter* (foreman) and *Wiederaufbau* (reconstruction) were introduced to the vocabulary. The vast majority of the information appearing in these books pertained to the German Democratic Republic (GDR); there is hardly any mention of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) or Austria (Wojdon, 2001, p. 248, 250).

Likewise, texts about Polish-German struggles during World War II were altered. Although initially they mainly concerned the September Campaign in the year 1939 and the engagements of Polish troops in Western Europe in 1940, the focus began to shift towards the series of battles fought by the Polish army assembled in the USSR, from the Battle of Lenino to the Fall of Berlin (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 96).⁸ There were also certain modifications to the way the Polish language was taught. The subject was expanded to include numerous historical topics, such as the conquests of Bolesław the Brave (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 78).⁹ Throughout the discussed period, the material losses suffered by the Poles due to the robber economy implemented by the Germans

8 In May 1943 in Sielce on the Oka river, the Soviets began forming the First Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division, which was subordinate to the ZPP in terms of ideology. Over time, these troops grew into two armies. The Polish First Army actively participated in the Fall of Berlin in 1945 (See: Brzoza & Sowa, 2006, pp. 534, 539, 544, 549–550).

9 The greatest emphasis was placed on Bolesław the Brave’s takeover of Milsko and Lusatia, which belonged to the Empire in 1002, as well as the conflict with Henry II concerning these lands (Szczer, 2002, pp. 64–70).

in the occupied areas were even mentioned in physics and chemistry coursebooks (Fotyma & Ścisłowski, 1948, p. 4; Bąkowski, 1949, p. 204).

The Stalinist Era in Poland (1949–1956)

Although in 1949 Stalinism was still gaining momentum in Poland and there was nothing to suggest that the totalitarian system was nearing its end, the way in which the Germans were presented in coursebooks changed radically. This was due to the establishment of the GDR. The existence of this state provided yet another reason to teach German, and the anti-German rhetoric was significantly reduced and limited to only three subjects: history, geography, and the Polish language (Wojdon, 2001, p. 30). Additionally, the view of Polish-German relations through the prism of nationality was considerably diminished. Aspects relating to classes came first;¹⁰ thus the role of enemy was taken from the German people and reassigned to the German ‘bourgeoisie’, that is, dukes, knights, emperors, and, later, major landowners, industrialists, and politicians. However, this view was inconsistent, as only the Poles (or in a broader sense the Slavs) were the ones who were bullied (Jakubowska, 1986, p. 250; Mazur, 1996, pp. 44–45, 82).

The fact that the FRG was part of the free world and the GDR was an Eastern Bloc state posed yet another challenge for the entire Polish propaganda apparatus, including those elements affecting education. According to the communist authorities, from then on a Polish citizen was expected not only to hate and fear the FRG but also nurture feelings of fondness and trust towards the GDR.¹¹ It should be stressed, however,

10 Similar trends arising from increased ideological pressure can be observed throughout the official Polish historiography of the time (See: Małczyńska, 1950/1951, pp. 221–222).

11 This was particularly visible in the core curriculum. In the core curriculum for history classes from the year 1970, the topic *Geneza Niemieckiej Republiki Demokratycznej* (The Genesis of the German Democratic Republic) was divided into the following problems: *Radziecka strefa okupacyjna w Niemczech* (The Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany); *Działalność niemieckich antyfaszystów* (The Activities of German Anti-Fascists); *Reformy społeczne i odbudowa gospodarki* (Social Reforms and the Rebuilding of the Economy); and *Powstanie NRD (1949) – pierwszego w dzie-*

that in contrast to Poland's relationship with other Eastern Bloc countries, there was no mention of brotherhood between the GDR and the PRL. Obviously, in line with the dominant narrative in the education system at the time, the GDR was an ally, albeit of secondary importance (Mazur, 1995, p. 82, 84).

This resulted in the introduction of the term *granica pokoju* (the border of peace) to the primary school syllabus in reference to the PRL-GDR border (Wojdon, 2001, p. 30; Staszewski, 1950, pp. 73–74; Kwaśniewicz et al., 1956, p. 179). No other Polish border was referred to using this term. Additional operations directed at primary school pupils with the aim of strengthening the bond between the PRL and East Germany included, for instance, systematic meetings and the exchange of letters between Polish scouts and East-German pioneers (Wojdon, 2001, p. 30). During classes, the two contemporary German states were compared, and it should come as no surprise that in this narrative the GDR was always presented as significantly better, whereas the FRG was shown as a morally degenerate and highly aggressive state. This trend continued for quite some time (Kosiński, 2000, pp. 181–183; Staszewski, 1950, pp. 73–74; Missalowa & Schoenbrenner,

jach Niemiec państwa robotników i chłopów (The Founding of the GDR /1949/ – the First Workers' and Peasants' State in the History of Germany). In turn, the part dedicated to West Germany covers the following topics: *Proces w Norymberdze* (The Nuremberg Trials); *Odejście od realizacji układów poczdamskich* (Abandonment of the Implementation of the Potsdam Agreements); *Powstanie NRF przejawem zimnej wojny* (The Founding of the FRG as an Aspect of the Cold War); *Rola NRF w globalnej strategii imperializmu* (The Role of the FRG in Global Imperialism); *Pozycja gospodarcza RFN we współczesnym świecie* (The Economic Position of the FRG in the Modern World); *Rewizjonizm i militarizm zachodnioniemiecki* (The Historical Revisionism and Militarism of West Germany); *Zimnowojenna polityka Adenauera i jego epigonów* (The Cold War Policy of Adenauer and His Epigones); *Rządy wielkiej koalicji* (The Rule of the Grand Coalition); and *Utworzenie rządu Brandta* (The Founding of the Brandt Government) (Program nauczania liceum ogólnokształcącego. Historia, 1970, p. 38, 40).

1951, pp. 322–323; Czeakańska & Radlicz-Rühlowa, 1965, pp. 144–145; Czeakańska & Radlicz-Rühlowa, 1976, p. 158).¹²

Contrasting starkly with the image of a revisionist West Germany dependent on the USA, the GDR did not undermine the new border. Moreover, there was a practice of making accurate accusations on a regular basis regarding the insufficient, cursory, and superficial denazification of the FRG. Interestingly, the main protagonists of contemporary texts for German language classes were Polish families, and their stories were usually set in Poland (Wojdon, 2001, p. 249).

Another characteristic of these changes is the significant increase in the number of ‘good Germans’. More and more individuals, particularly from the ranks of leaders of the GDR,¹³ were included in this group. Additionally, new pro-Polish collectives emerged, such as those comprising residents of German cities and towns who enthusiastically welcomed the Poles fleeing to France after the unsuccessful November Uprising (Markowski, 1961, p. 155; Baranowski et al., 1950, p. 293). Thus, exceptional individuals were no longer the only ones who could be considered ‘good Germans’.

It is worth noting that Joseph Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953, did not initially result in an easing of the pressure on the Polish school system. On the contrary, indoctrination continued to gradually intensify, though this partly took place in areas unrelated to the topic of this paper (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 132).¹⁴ Nonetheless, certain reevaluations were

12 To provide an example, we can cite characteristics of the FRG included in the coursebook by Missalowa and Shoenbrenner from the year 1951, which is often cited in this text. In the FRG, ‘the personnel of the new depredating imperialist army is being formed. A new Hitlerism is being established, a focus of new international crimes. This wickedness is orchestrated by the key warmongers, the American imperialists’.

13 Here I am referring to cases such as the use of the words ‘our friend’ to describe the president of the GDR, Wilhelm Pieck (Missalowa & Schoenbreener, 1951, p. 233).

14 These changes were instigated by a postulate presented by Żanna Kormanowa at a meeting of the board of education in 1954. The crux of her speech was an expectation that ideological elements would be incorporated into the teaching of science. As a result, propagandistic content began appearing in the teaching of

unavoidable. In 1954, a general national teaching efficiency test was conducted in Poland. It was subsequently determined that the acquisition level for ideological content was unsatisfactory, thus a decision was made to further reduce factual content in favour of intensified indoctrination (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 133).

The changes in Polish education triggered by the Soviet dictator's death did not become visible until 1956.

Under Władysław Gomułka's government (1956–1970)

The direct cause for serious changes in Polish education was Władysław Gomułka's seizure of power in October 1956 and the resulting fundamental shifts in internal policies. It is one of the most important timeframes in the history of Poland, as the country's political system became considerably more relaxed from then onwards. This period highlighted the transition from the totalitarian system to an authoritarian one. Furthermore, owing to the policy of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who offered the Eastern Bloc countries a somewhat greater degree of freedom, the PRL was no longer a vassal state and instead assumed the status of satellite.

Although merely 'threatening' people with the spectre of the Germans undoubtedly served to strengthen their sense of insecurity (and consequently the position of power of the authorities), the anti-German attitude in Polish primary education weakened significantly. Newly introduced coursebooks had fewer comments, and their narrative was more objective (Wojdon, 2001, p. 204). Though still notable, the anti-German attitude was in decline.

German language coursebooks provide the most vivid depiction of the transition from the totalitarian period to Gomułka's authoritarian rule. The texts in these books no longer centred on Polish families as their protagonists, with the stories instead set in the GDR. There was also a definitive shift in focus back to the practical side of language

subjects such as mathematics, physics, and biology; sadly, it came at the expense of actual substance.

learning, even though elements relating closely to events in the PRL were still included. Compared with other foreign language courses, the teaching of the German language contained the highest concentration of propaganda elements (Wojdon, 2001, pp. 251–252).

The reason behind the lessening of ideological pressure on the school system, and consequently the adoption of the anti-German attitude, was a desire to restrict propaganda and convey more knowledge. Considering these changes, one should remember that they were top down in nature and implemented in a highly deliberate manner by the communists, who exercised absolute control over the extent to which (and the areas in which) the reform was to be executed. Nevertheless, these changes were most important for the Polish education system in the second half of the 20th century, thus they also represent a turning point in the discussed topic.

This progress was not without certain setbacks; in 1965, a special censorship division was founded and tasked exclusively with controlling the content of coursebooks (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 135).

Under Edward Gierek (1970–1980)

Another period that brought significant changes in how the Germans and Polish-German relations were shown in Polish primary education is the tenure of Edward Gierek's government. Władysław Gomułka lost power in December 1970 as a result of protests, strikes, and riots that had mainly broken out in the port cities of Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin, and Elbląg.¹⁵ The timeframe for the events described below begins in 1970, not because of the power shift but due to the warming-up of Bonn-Warsaw relations due to the recognition of Poland's western bor-

15 In December 1970, high price rises were introduced for basic necessities. This caused protests and strikes, which mainly broke out in cities on the Polish coast. Some cities saw several tens of thousands of protesters. The military was tasked with stifling the protests. As many as 27,000 soldiers, 550 tanks, 750 armoured personnel carriers, and 2,100 vehicles actively participated in this operation. Additionally, the intervention involved roughly 9,000 policemen and other state enforcement officers (Eisler, 2010, pp. 2–6).

der by the FRG.¹⁶ Yet another important element relating to the discussed topic is the debt policies of Western European states, including the FRG, during the time of Edward Gierek, which also impacted how the Germans and Polish-German relations were presented in the school system in the PRL.

The first fundamental change to be implemented further eased the pressure on attaining goals in education and worldviews (Zasacka, 2000, p. 37). The school system could again reduce the number of ideological and propaganda elements in its practices in favour of a more informative approach. Positively assessed groups of Germans were mentioned in coursebooks, namely the German socialists who had demanded the end of World War I and the German soldiers who had shown solidarity with that stance (Kopczewski, 1971, pp. 105–106). This meant that entire groups that were cast in a positive light operated not in some distant past but only about fifty years or so before the coursebooks were published, a relatively recent timeline. Thus, individuals of German nationality who were active when pupils' grandparents were still alive, before the founding of the allied state of the GDR, were shown in a favourable light. In the 1970s, the narrative about the eternal Polish identity of Silesia began to subside as well.

Despite the liberalization described above, in 1972 the Instytut Programów Szkolnych (School Programme Institute) was founded. The personnel employed at the institute consisted of 'party consultants' acting as censors who participated in the coursebook writing process (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 135). Here again the authorities had complete control over the areas and extent to which the propaganda message was to be eased in the school system.

16 Diplomatic negotiations regarding this issue continued until February 1970. Both sides gave up all territorial claims and acknowledged the inviolability of each other's borders. Furthermore, Poland allowed Polish citizens of German nationality to leave for West Germany. An agreement specifying these decisions was signed in Warsaw on the December 7, 1970, by Chancellor Willy Brandt and Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz (Sowa, 2011, pp. 361–363).

Final Decade of the PRL

The final transition in the way Germans and Polish-German relations were presented in the primary schools of the Polish People's Republic was initiated by Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy 'Solidarność' (the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union 'Solidarity'). From the early 1980s, syllabuses no longer pursued any ideological objectives, and the purpose of school was to educate citizens without imposing the 'right' worldview (Zasadzka, 2000, pp. 39–40). In general, coursebooks became much more objective and attractive despite many of them still containing certain forms of journalistic propaganda (Wojdon, 2001, p. 204; Zasadzka, 2000, pp. 141–142).

The way in which the FRG was presented changed radically. Although the country was the target of continued criticism, the arguments in the narrative underwent a fundamental shift. To a large extent, the practice of presenting historical issues was abandoned, and the contemporary problems of West Germany were moved to the forefront. The presented problems of the FRG included the inflow of foreign capital, demographic issues, and the absence of food self-sufficiency. At the same time, the country's economic power was shown in relatively blatant terms (Golec, Nowak & Przesmycka, 1987, pp. 119–121, 123–124).

As for history, the nation-focused approach was abandoned. This was because the national phraseology was virtually adopted by Solidarność, thus anything of a national nature was explicitly associated with opposition (Mazur, 1995, pp. 97–98). It should be noted that at the end of the existence of the PRL, a coursebook by Halina Manikowska and Julia Tazbirowa was published that provided an honest description of Polish-German relations in the Middle Ages while also showing elements of peaceful cooperation and conflicts in which Poland was the aggressor (1989, pp. 55–59).

Visible changes occurred in Polish language classes too. In the 1981/1982 school year, minor changes were introduced in the list of recommended books, and then the list was significantly expanded in the subsequent school year (Zasadzka, 2000, p. 39). In turn, German coursebooks no longer contained propaganda, so there was much more room for descriptions of the FRG, Austria, and Switzerland (Wojdon,

2001, p. 252). Nonetheless, coursebooks for subjects such as civil defence training continued to be highly dogmatic. Even in 1987, they still included descriptions of NATO as the greatest opponent to the PRL (Kusztelak, 1987, p. 6), and the USA and FRG were consistently presented as NATO leaders in the postwar communistic propaganda in Poland.

Summary

The extremely negative outlook on Germans in Poland in the first years after the end of the war should be considered a form of trauma for the entire nation. This understandable fear and aversion were skilfully manipulated by communists, who fuelled these emotions and kept them alive in official communication, including school curricula, essentially until the very end of the existence of the PRL.

This exploitation of wartime experiences to push the contemporary political agenda intensified with the establishment of the totalitarian system in Poland. Significant changes were implemented in 1949 due to the founding of the two separate German states, and to some degree the situation in Germany forced the introduction of new content in the syllabus. At the time, authors of coursebooks were facing the challenge of showing that the citizens of the 'fraternal' German state were supposedly free from the terrifying legacy of the Third Reich. Consequently, the entire anti-German rhetoric was suitably toned down, and the image of East Germany was even elevated.

Yet another transition occurred due to the fall of the totalitarian system and its replacement with authoritarian forms of rule. The anti-German attitude was rendered less stringent due to a direct political decision and was a side effect of reduced propaganda and dogmatism in the school system as well as in other areas of public life in Poland.

In turn, the way in which German matters were presented during the decade of Edward Gierek's government was, to a considerable extent, controlled in a top-down fashion; nonetheless, owing to the greater openness of the PRL (e.g. the introduction of foreign loans and licences, more frequent travel abroad by Poles), the system also became somewhat more relaxed. The changes in how the Germans were perceived were intentional and should be linked to the

recognition of Poland's western border by the FRG and the latter's agreement to grant loans.

In the 1980s, changes in the syllabus were forced by *Solidarność*. School became a place that was gradually less and less ideologized, and that had a positive impact on the image of the Germans. It must not be forgotten, however, that the FRG faced constant criticism due to its membership in NATO and close cooperation with the United States, which was accused of imperialism.

The anti-German rhetoric in Polish schools was a consequence of the horrible experiences of World War II, the exploitation by the communists of lingering fears, and the conflict in the Cold War era between countries on either side of the Iron Curtain. It was not until after 1989 that a more profound change in how the Germans were depicted in the Polish education system could take place.

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