

Review
the monograph „Wolność przede wszystkim. Sprzeciw, bunt, opozycja PRL-NRD”. Kinga Hartmann (ed.) Görlitz-Wrocław, GAJT 2014. 415 p.

Three years ago a book came out under the title „Freedom primarily. Demur, defiance, opposition. Polish People’s Republic – German Democratic Republic” (Vor allem Freiheit. Widerstand, Revolte, Opposition. DDR-VR Polen”) published by GAJT publishing house in two language versions. This is a composite work of the German and Polish researchers edited by Kinga Hartmann, teacher, the author of the plan of Polish language teaching in German schools. This academic-educational publication was carried out as part of Saxony Education Agency’s project “Citizens for freedom. Moral courage in the time of dictatorship. Saxony and Lower Silesia 1945-1989”. The project and the publication were funded by Regional Operational Program of cross-border cooperation Poland-Saxony 2007-2013.

The publication consists of five main thematic parts always compiled by two authors from Germany and Poland. The following chapters are titled: 1. Administration against society, 2. Decency of value, 3. Enemies of the people, 4. Helping hand, 5. Resistance and rebellion. Each of them presents his own national point of view to historic case and developing processes in his country. The effect of this compilation is a presentation of historical truth and likelihood of presented hypothesis. At the beginning two authors Krzysztof Popiński and Nancy Aris introduce the readers into a ideological sphere and political determinants of communist authorities in the Polish People’s Republic and in the German Democratic Republic. Political order after the Second World War which emerged was a result of a conference in Potsdam in July 1945. During earlier wartime conferences, the allies had accepted the incorporation of the cities of Lwów and Wilno into the Soviet Union. Both of them had strong historic links to Polish culture. Polish access to the coast was consolidated by the incorporation of part of Eastern and Western Prussia. The authors showed how the population of both nations changed dramatically. Most notably, from having been a multicultural, multireligious state, Poland became a national state. The community was depleted by Nazi genocide, Soviet displacement and arrests, emigration and fighting. At the same time German residents suffered from lacking of food and were dispossessed, nationalized in imitation of Soviet community. Enemy and victim experienced similar humiliations with different intensity.

The subsistence of the individual in this inhuman circumstances is the main objective of research in the second chapter. Kinga Hartmann and Teresa Korsak describe living of Polish society in a new reality. Marion Brandt draws the creation of a new citizen under long standing control. The parts three and five are dedicated to the opposition in both totalitarian states. A lot of opposition groups since the beginning of the postwar time were called and characterized. The regimes in German and Poland were unwilling to note the need for dialogue between the regime and representatives of the population. In reality, the situation was changing fast when Mikhail Gorbachev became the First Party Secretary in the Soviet Union. The leaderships of the underground Solidarity, many dissident intellectuals and German government with Erich Honecker on top did not believe that the communist regime would collapse. Ehrhart Neubert tried to emphasise the changes in the perception of the reality by the German people

and their reaction for the fall of the Berlin Wall. On the other hand Grzegorz Strauchold and Krzysztof Popiński focused on the main historic stages of development inside of resistance movement since the first strikes on the Polish coast in 1970 to the Round Table Talks and first independent election in 1989.

Łukasz Kamiński and Marion Brandt researched external factors of development of the oppositions and social rebellion in both countries. Many lots of Polish soldiers who did not come back to their homeland were presented as well as support of western countries in the fight against communist misinformation and propaganda. The authors noted financial supporting institutions of the Polish opposition. The very similar supporting function for East German citizens fulfilled Federal Republic of Germany. The free and independent mass media, political parties and community organizations were window to the world for resistance movements in the German Democratic Republic. The Solidarity Movement connected both nations in fight for independence. In this period of time new friendships developed and are mentioned today by previous citizen of the German Democratic Republic chancellor Angela Merkel.

The book makes a good example of historical experiences of both neighbors Poland and Germany. Poland's recent history has been a record of the struggle for independence and a search for a model of state. The desire for independence and the need to define the boundaries of the national state were accompanied by a search for a just relationship between citizens and the state, which was to represent their interest. Since the fall of communism the establishment of a free market economy and acceptance of the democratic model of representation were the two most important conditions for Poland being included in the community of the developed European states.

The combination in one title of two social realities in very similar oppressive political systems claims attention and makes impression. The book in question contains ten texts, some of them are written in a form of essay and the second part is presented as a typical historical research work. Noteworthy is a great amount of documents, pictures, CVs, quotations of speeches, explanations of terms and occurrences placed in this publication. Many unknown photos are used for the first time, and it was very difficult to gain them. The extensive bibliography confirms a command of source literature.

The greatest advantage of this book is its didactic value and the comparative formula of two parallel separate worlds, where the life stirred trials and tribulations and the moral courage were a great challenge. The plurality of new information, photos not found in other books is an added value and can be an inspiration for historians.

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