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## **“ENGLISH WARMONGERS” AND THE POLISH PRESS\***

Joanna Witkowska's book appears to be the most exhaustive, and the most focused, study to date to investigate the image of the United Kingdom in the Polish press during the period of Stalinism. Because of the particular political conditions that characterized this period, such a study has to become a study in propagandistic distortion. Research in this area is still needed, even if Polish anti-Western propaganda of this period has had quite a number of students. No book-length publication, however, seems to have taken as its subject this particular aspect of the communist propaganda effort.

The time frame for the study are the years 1948-1956, which are often adopted as the time boundaries of the period of Stalinism in Poland. For this period, the author draws the relevant material from three Polish publications: “Trybuna Ludu”, which was the daily press organ of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – PZPR); the daily “Żołnierz Wolności”, directed mainly at the members of the Polish armed forces, and the satirical weekly “Szpilki”. The study discusses both written texts and cartoons that were carried by these publications, but the emphasis is put on written messages. The method of investigation is purely qualitative.

When dealing with a relatively long period of investigation, difficult choices have to be made regarding which publications to select. Studying a daily over a period of several years may yield an overwhelming wealth of ma-

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\* J. Witkowska, *The Image of the United Kingdom in Poland during the Stalinist Period*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2009. Pp. 174.

terial. The three titles selected can be argued to offer sufficient representation of the national press of the period. However, to increase the comprehensiveness of the picture, an additional source of primary material could be a local or regional publication, such as the daily "Gazeta Poznańska" or "Gazeta Pomorska", an examination of which would offer insights into how, in the conditions of a highly centralized media system, the propaganda campaign was carried out at the local level. Deciding not to, the author could be expected to define explicitly the scope of her interest to be the national press.

The secondary sources referred to in the study are varied and sufficient. The study uses both Polish and foreign literature on the subject and incorporates it well into the general course of the argument.

The study certainly benefits from the author making use of archival material preserved at the Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archives of New Records) in Warszawa. Previously secret, the material was helpful for the author in writing about the methods of propaganda; it also offered a glimpse into the "fears, doubts and failures" of the propagandists (p. 11).

The contents of the book is organized into Introduction, five chapters, Conclusion, Appendix, and Bibliography. The book ends with a Polish summary.

The Introduction presents the aim and scope of the study and defines some basic terms, as they are used in the work. These definitions concern the concepts of "propaganda", "Stalinism", and "newspeak". The Introduction also contains a brief commentary on the use of the adjective "English" in the discussed propaganda to stand for its "British" referent.

Of the chapters of the book, Chapter One discusses the Cold War as the complex milieu in which the analysed media activity was taking place. Chapters Two to Five discuss aspects of the created image of the United Kingdom: Chapter Two speaks of the presentation of the British as warmongers; Chapter Three analyses the use of the theme of Britain as a ruthless colonial power; Chapter Four focuses on the criticism of the Labour Party; and Chapter Five discusses the criticism of capitalism in Britain, particularly as it defined British domestic affairs. The Conclusion concentrates on the lack of effectiveness of the discussed propaganda. The Appendix contains nine reproductions of cartoons with anti-British elements taken from the weekly "Szpilki".

In the study the author shows her ability to draw convincing conclusions regarding the investigated historical reality, including the difficult question of the effectiveness of the discussed propaganda effort (pp. 77-78, 135-149, and elsewhere). She also proves to be able to make well grounded generalizations when exploring the vast collected material. Another strong point of the study is the analysis of the linguistic form of the propaganda messages, seamlessly incorporated into the overall design of the study. Also, the discussion of propaganda techniques, while scattered across the text, is revealing and satisfying.

The ideological and geopolitical dimensions of communist anti-Western propaganda, however, part of which was the discussed anti-British press propa-

ganda in Poland, while referred to in the study (as on pp. 20-23, 44, 87 or 135-136), should be presented more systematically and perhaps be given more prominence. Likewise, the study would benefit from the inclusion of more commentary regarding any temporal changes in the content, form or volume of the propaganda in the period under investigation – similar to what can be found in this respect on pages 49-50.

There are some language and editorial imprecisions or inadequacies – such as the different English renditions of the name of Archiwum Akt Nowych used in the book. It is also a pity that the title of the book does not state explicitly that the study will focus on the image of the United Kingdom in the Polish press; instead, it promises an all-encompassing perspective. Still, inside, the reader will find valuable scholarship; the study certainly adds to our knowledge of the period, and in particular, of an important aspect of communist anti-Western propaganda of the time.