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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UPHEAVALS IN SOCIALIST STATES (THE CASE OF YUGOSLAVIA AND POLAND AT THE TURN OF THE 1960s AND 1970s)

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this article is to compare the socio-political upheavals that occurred in the People's Republic of Poland and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This period witnessed events that were to some extent part of the general social unrest which also affected capitalist countries (the student protests of 1968), as well as events that were entirely specific to the countries included in this analysis, such as the post-March anti-intellectual and anti-Semitic campaign in the People's Republic of Poland, the December 1970 workers' protests on the Polish coast, and the so-called 'Croatian Spring' in Yugoslavia. Relying primarily on the comparative method, the authors analyse the influence of systemic factors (the system of government, the ruling elites, reform attempts or failures), social factors (the social structure, the sense of national distinctiveness), and cultural factors (efforts to preserve national culture and language, opposition to actions of the censorship apparatus) on the emergence and progress of events that took place in both countries in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The article also looks at how the governments reacted during these 'upheavals', what methods they adopted to end/suppress them and what political consequences followed.*

KEYWORDS: Croatian spring; students; 1968; workers' protests; mass movement; comparison.

1. Introduction

Scientific publications on the socio-political unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s typically adopt one of two perspectives. The first approach, grounded in national historiography, examines these events within the context of a single country (e.g., Eisler, 2006; Friszke, 2011; Fichter, 2016; Cuvalo, 2019). The second perspective, comparative in nature, analyzes simultaneous upheavals across different nations, highlighting similarities, differences, and interwoven causes and consequences (e.g., Pittaway, 2005, on specific social groups). Within Cold War studies, however, such comparative analyses often reinforce a simplified division between socio-political developments in capitalist and socialist states.

This study aims to compare the socio-political upheavals that took place in the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It adopts a historical-comparative perspective to examine the political and systemic forces shaping these events. While acknowledging protest dynamics, it does not engage deeply with social movement theory. Although frameworks such as resource mobilization (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), political process theory (Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982), and framing theory (Snow & Benford, 1988) provide valuable insights into collective action, they fall beyond this study's primary focus. Instead, this research explores the structural, political, and ideological factors that influenced state responses to unrest in socialist regimes.

This article contributes to existing literature by offering a comparative perspective on social unrest in socialist states—an area often overlooked in social movement studies. While much research focuses on opposition within the Soviet bloc or Western student movements, this study highlights the nuances of dissent in Poland and Yugoslavia. By integrating Polish and Balkan historiography, it provides a deeper understanding of how different socialist regimes navigated political crises, emphasizing systemic and geopolitical factors that shaped their responses.

Both Poland and Yugoslavia operated under socialist political systems—authoritarian, non-market economies—giving them certain structural similarities. However, significant differences also defined their political and social landscapes. The functioning of the Yugoslav federation contrasted with the centralized governance model of the PRL. Geopolitically, Poland was entirely dependent on the Soviet Union, while Yugoslavia maintained a more autonomous position. Socially, Poland's largely homogeneous population, in terms of ethnicity and religion (despite state opposition to religious influences), stood in contrast to Yugoslavia's diverse and multi-ethnic society. Additionally, the SFRY implemented economic reforms toward "self-governing socialism," a model that diverged sharply from Poland's centralized economy. Unlike Poland, Yugoslavia also permitted large-scale economic emigration to capitalist countries, a trend that began in the 1960s.

Taking these similarities and differences into account, the authors compare key episodes of unrest: the Polish student protests of March and June 1968, the so-called "Croatian Spring" (which followed the Polish protests), and the December 1970 demonstrations on the Polish coast. These events led to significant political shifts, including the removal of a new generation of Croatian politicians in Yugoslavia and the downfall of Władysław Gomułka in Poland. While these protests were part of the broader global phenomenon of the 1968 student movement, they were also shaped by specific regional developments, such as the crisis in Czechoslovakia and the aftermath of the Six-Day War. However, as this article primarily focuses on Poland and Yugoslavia, these broader influences are only briefly addressed.

Given the substantial progress made by Polish and Balkan historians in studying these events, this article does not engage in additional archival research. Instead, it draws on existing monographs, scholarly articles, statistical yearbooks, and press materials. The study employs historical-descriptive analysis, decision-making analysis, and comparative methods to examine the political and systemic factors shaping social unrest in both states.

2. The system of power

After World War II, Poland and Yugoslavia found themselves in the so-called Soviet sphere of influence. This geopolitical and strategic fact determined the formation of a new socio-economic and political system. Political power in both countries was seized by communist parties (the Polish Workers' Party, in Polish: PPR[1]; the Communist Party of Yugoslavia), which marginalized and gradually eliminated other parties from legal political life (Wiatr, 1970: 1239-1240). . The system was based on the police and security services, which targeted both real and imagined enemies of the system in both countries (Tomaszewski, 1992: 40-64; Brzeziński, 1964: 3-51; Fejtö, 1979: 5-20)

A significant difference occurred after 1948, when the Yugoslav leaders gathered around Josip Broz Tito decided to break free from Joseph Stalin and other Soviet politicians. Consequently, they opted for an independent way of shaping the system of people's democracy, which, however, retained the core elements of the previous system - it was based on the domination of the communist faction. Some systemic corrections began to be gradually introduced, initially in the social and economic spheres (the creation of the so-called self-governing socialism). Another important factor differentiating the Polish and Yugoslavian cases was the issue of an ethnic mosaic in the South Slavic country, which resulted in the formation of a federal state model with six union republics (Croatia was one of them from 1945 to 1991 with a considerable social and economic potential). (Bilandžić, 1985: 150-210; Zacharias, 2004: 105-156; Walkiewicz, 2000: 201-216; Wilson, 1979: 60-72)

Although Poland remained under the dominant geopolitical influence of the Soviet Union after 1948, the idea of the so-called „Polish road to socialism" championed by the long-time communist leader Władysław Gomułka (called also Comrade Wiesław) should not be forgotten. In many respects, this brought the search for a new model of a socialist state closer in both the Polish and Yugoslavian cases. It should also be mentioned that after the Tito-Stalin conflict broke out, the Polish communist leader acted as an arbitrator, attempting to

[1] Polish Workers` Party was a communist party in Poland from 1942 to 1948. In December 1948 the Polish United Workers` Party (Polish: PZPR) was founded through "unification of the Polish Workers` Party and the Polish Socialist Party".

engage in reconciliation efforts. After Gomułka was ousted from power by the pro-Soviet faction in the PPR centred around Bierut, one of the most serious accusations against the ousted leader was that he was following the Yugoslavian path and exhibited a rightwing nationalist deviation (Paczkowski, 1995: 213-223; Friszke, 2003: 152-162; Werblan, 2009: 53-63; Kemp-Welch, 2008: 35-42).

By the mid-1960s, both the Central and Eastern European countries had experienced more than twenty years of communist rule. In the case of Yugoslavia, it was symbolised by the leadership of Marshal Josip Broz Tito and his closest camarilla. In Poland, in turn, the era of communist leadership was bisected by the period of Stalinism, symbolised to a great extent by the Bierut-Berman-Minc faction (1948-1956), while in the preceding and following periods (after 1956) the party was headed by Comrade Wiesław, as Zenon Kliszko (his closest associate from the period of the German occupation, who did not renounce Gomułka after 1948) emerged as the number two person in the system of power. (Čavoski, 1990: 13-30; Eisler, 2014: 215-227; Prażmowska, 2016: 198-220; Bethell, 1969: 225-252; Lipiński, 2019: 129-149).

3. The first unrest

The main problems of the Yugoslav system stemmed from the prerequisites of failure of the (constantly reformed) economic system and growing ethnic conflicts (among which the Serbo-Croatian disputes, dating back to the Kingdom period, should be considered as pre-eminent). In Poland, in turn, the mid-1960s were symbolised by dashed public hopes related to the reformist programme of October 1956 defined as the Polish way out of Stalinism, offered by Gomułka as he returned to power after eight years. The agenda of the Polish October included the issues of greater internal autonomy from the Kremlin, regulating the stationing of the Soviet Army in Poland, accepting the dominant model of individual ownership in agriculture, services and crafts, developing a model for the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in social life, a certain degree of autonomy in the areas of culture and science. At the same time, Gomułka remained reluctant to carry out bolder economic reforms, even ones comparable to Hungarian managerialism or the Yugoslav self-government model. Hence, the 1960s were regarded as a period of „little stabilisation" in Poland's recent socio-economic history. Against this background, the solutions for economic reforms adopted in Yugoslavia in 1965 appeared to be more far-reaching and heading towards quasi-market solutions. (Jelavich, 2005: 397-413; Tanty, 2003: 315-316; Wilson, 1979: 107-117; Piasecki, Michalak, 2003: 45-51; Persak, Machcewicz, 2010).

The first signs of public discontent in Poland were symbolised by a letter from 34 writers addressed to Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, which raised the issue of paper supply for books and censorship. What outraged the communist authorities the most was not even the prominent names of the writers who signed the letter, but the fact that information about its submission to the Office of the Council of Ministers was quickly

made public by Western broadcasters, including Radio Free Europe. The response of the authorities to the Letter was rather disorderly. On the one hand, the Prime Minister received a delegation of literati and writers, promising to respond to the postulates submitted. On the other hand, however, a campaign was organised to promote the so-called Anti-Letter by a part of the literary community that was more favourably inclined towards the existing political system and the ruling elite. The inspirers of the letter, alleged or real, were put under pressure to withdraw their signatures, the circulation of their books was reduced and they were excluded from the state media (there were no private media then). And Melchior Wańkowicz, a pre-war writer and politician who decided to return to Poland in 1956, was even sentenced in court to several years in prison (although he was later pardoned due to his old age and poor health). The case was the first significant sign of a growing rift between the society and the ruling camp. (Eisler, 1993; Ziółkowska 1990; Kemp-Welch, 2008: 156-162).

The year 1966 symbolised the millennium of statehood, counted from the baptism of Mieszko I and his Czech wife Dobrawa. The solemn celebrations radically divided the communist authorities and the leadership of the Polish Episcopate with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński as the then Primate[2]. The ruling camp emphasized a special place of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) in the 1,000 years of statehood and a ceremonial session of parliament with a commemorative address by Gomułka was scheduled for 22 July – the Day of the Rebirth, the main holiday of the Polish People`s Republic (Polish: PRL). Official propaganda emphasized Poland's socio-economic successes, contrasting them with the Nobles' Republic and interwar Poland symbolised by Marshal Józef Piłsudski. Moreover, the geopolitical achievements associated with Poland's westward shift and its 500-kilometre-long access to the Baltic Sea were highlighted. The representatives of the clergy, on the other hand, placed a special emphasis on strengthening the Catholic faith in the nation through the nine-year Novena programme (1957-66) as a special period of spiritual preparation for the celebrations. Another serious point of contention was a planned visit of Pope Paul VI to Częstochowa, which the state authorities decided not to allow. (Dudek, 1995: 149-180; Zieliński, 2003; Żaryn, 2004; Micewski, 1994; Raina, 2000; Dudek, 1998).

4. The ruling elite

Political power in both countries formally belonged to parties (PZPR and SKJ respectively) as well as state authorities – the parliament and the government. The dominant position, however, was held by party

[2] In the background, there was also the issue of the November 1965 letter from the Polish Episcopate to the German Episcopate with its message of mutual forgiveness, which was severely criticised by the state authorities as interference in foreign policy matters.

institutions – central and voivodeship ones in Poland, federal and republican ones in Yugoslavia. Real power remained in the hands of the 100-plus-member Central Committee, which met several times a year and constituted the „party" equivalent of a legislative body. The day-to-day executive body, which took the most important decisions in the country, was the Political Bureau of a dozen or so members, which met several times a month. In addition, in Yugoslavia, a federal state, the importance of the republican elites should be taken into consideration – both in party institutions and organs of power. (Rokicki, Spałek, 2011: 27-61; Stola, Persak, 2012: 11-24; Zacharias, 2004: 259-274; Rakowski, 2000, 31-64).

Supreme power in the country was in the hands of the closest circles of Władysław Gomułka and Josip Broz Tito. In the case of the former, it included associates from the wartime conspiracy who did not dissociate themselves from him after his removal from power in 1948. For many years, the number two person was Zenon Kliszko, who held party positions (secretary of the Central Committee for ideology and culture) and parliamentary positions (deputy speaker of the Sejm, head of the PZPR parliamentary fraction). The closest associates of Comrade Wiesław also included Marian Spychalski, the head of the Ministry of Defence for many years, from 1968 the head of the collegiate presidency in the form of the Council of State, and Ignacy Loga-Sowiński, a long-time head of the trade unions (CRZZ). The influence of Bolesław Jaszczuk in the economic sphere and Ryszard Strzelecki in internal party affairs was growing from 1963 onwards. From 1968, the party leader looked for a successor by grooming the young faction – Józef Tejchma, Stanisław Kociołek, activists under 40 who had gained experience in youth organizations. It is worth noting that among the key politicians, little attention is paid to the then long-serving head of government – for 23 years from 1947 to 1970 – Józef Cyrankiewicz, who confined himself to diplomatic and administrative activities. (Raina, 1969: 122-126; Spałek, 2020: 469-477; Modzelewski, Werblan, 2017: 211-216; Siemiątkowski, 2018: 231-319; Widawska, 2007: 177-179; Lipiński, 2016; 158-168).

The party elite was officially a monolith, in line with the tenets of democratic centralism and principled obedience to the party leader. However, informal coteries started to form in the mid-1960s – factions aiming to create future leadership elites after Comrade Wiesław would leave office. The first coterie was centred around Mieczysław Moczar and dubbed the „partisan group". It referred to the partisan tradition of fighting the Germans in World War II in the People's Army, pragmatic relations with Home Army units. In the mid-1960s, it proclaimed the need to include the national elements of state tradition, it highlighted the saturation of the party apparatus with activists of Jewish nationality after 1944. It indirectly followed the Romanian strategy of forming national communism, initiated by Gheorghiu Gh. Dej and later continued by Nicolae Ceauşescu. This manifested itself in anti-Semitic slogans that erupted in the official propaganda language after the outbreak of the so-called Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab states (June 1967) and during the March 1968 student strikes. We write about these issues in another part of the article. The faction

included Franciszek Szlachcic and Grzegorz Korczyński. Wojciech Jaruzelski and Stanisław Kania also maintained close ties to the group. Another coterie was centred around the voivodeship party leader in Silesia, Edward Gierek, and was referred to as the „Silesian group". It was made up of middle-aged party and state activists, with a technocratic view of the country's socio-economic development. They started their party and state careers after 1945 in youth organizations, followed by the party and government apparatus. (Lesiakowski, 1998: 320-352; Ważniewski, 1991: 151-168; Rolicki, 2002: 145-151; Gajdziński, 2014: 110-122).

In Yugoslavia, Marshal Tito's closest entourage consisted of his comrades from the time of partisan warfare. The number two person for many years was Slovenian Edward Kardelj, responsible for the issues of the ideological basis of the post-war Yugoslav system, an important position was held by Serb Aleksander Ranković (until his dismissal in 1966), who supervised the security and police services. Croat Vladimir Bakarić was in charge of economic affairs, drawing up plans for economic reforms in Yugoslavia. Important posts in the federal administration were also held by Serb Petar Stambolić (head of the federal government during this period), Macedonians Lazar Koliševski and Kiro Gligorov. As Yugoslavia was a federal state, it is worth mentioning the republican elites. In the example of Croatia, a reform-minded republican leadership was formed in the late 1960s. In 1967, Savka Dabčević-Kučar became head of the republican government and Miko Tripalo was the party leader. They implemented the policy of the so-called Croatian Spring, which has been compared to similar socio-political processes taking place in Czechoslovakia at the time (the so-called Prague Spring). This is analysed in another part of this article. (Simić, 2011: 215-218; Woydyłło, 1991: 156-158; Pirjevec, 2018: 555-569; Bilandžić, 1985: 320-326; Matković, 2003: 345-351).

5. The social basis of student protests in 1968

The events which took place in 1968 in several countries with different political systems are often reduced to a common denominator – student protests against the established social and political order. The obvious fact of vigorous political activity by the generation born after the end of World War II obscures significant differences in the background, course and consequences of the 1968 events. These differences not only exist – obviously – between countries which functioned under different political systems (socialist vs. capitalist states), but also in countries which shared the same systemic foundations. In this context, it is interesting to compare the events in Poland and Yugoslavia. Both countries – as noted in the section of the article about the political system – were classified as socialist, although in practice they functioned in very different ways, not only in terms of Poland's dependence on the Soviet Union and the SFRY's different geopolitical

position. The social (and ethnic) structure and living standards of the population were different as well. According to Statistical Yearbook – Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had a population of about 18,5 million citizens at the beginning of the sixties. According to the 1961 census, Yugoslavia's ethnic make-up was as follows: Serbs – 7.8 million, Croats – 4.29 million, Slovenes – 1.58 million, Macedonians – 1.04 million, the Muslim population (mostly living in Bosnia) – 0.9 million, Montenegrins – 0.51 million people. In addition, 0.9 million Albanians, 0.5 million Hungarians, 0.18 million Turks lived within the borders of Yugoslavia and there were also much smaller numbers of Slovaks, Romanians, Bulgarians, Czechs and Italians. (Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije, 1970: 77). The mosaic of nationalities was complemented by religious differences overlapping the ethnic divisions (Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox). The dominance of the Serb population in the SFRY at various times generated fears of marginalisation of other ethnicities, also in economic and political terms. Such sentiments were also present in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, for example in the 1960s and 1970s, during the so-called „Croatian Spring".

The ethnic structure of the People's Republic of Poland was completely different. Before World War II, Poland was a multi-national and multi-ethnic country. According to the censuses conducted in 1921 and 1931 (the next one was scheduled for 1941), national minorities constituted 35% of the total population of Poland. The population losses during the war, the post-war change of borders, the shift of the western border (and the accompanying expulsions of the German population) and the loss of the so-called Eastern Borderlands to several Soviet Union republics made Poland an ethnically unitary state. Roman Catholicism was the overwhelmingly dominant religion (Bojar, 1997: 404-406).

In the mid-1960s, the generation brought up already in the socialist system was entering adult life in both countries, with no experience of conscious life in a different reality. In the case of Poland, the generation had lived as children through the Stalinism period (dated 1948-1956 in Poland), its last outburst in the form of a violent suppression of workers' protests in Poznań (in June 1956), as well as Władysław Gomułka's return to power in October 1956 and a gradual curtailment of the „achievements of the October thaw". Their experience differed from the so-called „broken flight" which was characteristic for people born in pre-war Poland, who managed to partially anchor their worldview in pre-war values and then had to adapt to a completely different reality, hostile to the previous system. (Świda-Ziemba, 2003: 13-15). Neither were they affected by the enthusiasm for building the new system, typical for some slightly older people, which in the Stalinist period was generated by mass participation, at one stage compulsory, in youth organizations controlled by the PZPR. They spent their teenage years and early adulthood in conditions described as Gomułka's „little stabilisation". For them, politics was above all ritualistic. They approached the issue of party membership in a pragmatic way, seeing it as a necessary condition for career development. Faced with no alternative to the party rule, or even the same ruling team, they mostly did not attempt to act outside the system. Retreat into

privacy and acceptance of the lifestyle imposed by the system were characteristic for this period. Interestingly, despite its political indifference, the generation showed its acceptance of socialism, probably also due to the lack of any alternative. (Kosiński, 2012: 189).

A common feature of both the societies was a steadily rising number of students between 1960 and 1980. According to the assumptions of the socialist system, university education was to be available to everyone, regardless of their social background, which contrasted with the elitism of higher education in the pre-war period (Mazur, 2009: 328; Šoljan, 1991: 132).

Data for Yugoslavia show that there were over 140,000 students in 1960, over 261,000 in 1970, almost 395,000 in 1975, and five years later the Yugoslav all-time high of almost 412,000 students was reached. Relative to the population of the Yugoslav state, it was one of the highest ratios in the world (Šoljan, 1991: 137).

In the People's Republic of Poland, there was also a huge increase in the number of students enrolled, although the total number of students never reached such a level relative to the total population as in the other country. In the period in question, the number of students in Poland was 165,000 in 1960, almost double that in 1975 (330,000), and the following years were marked by a steady upward trend (1975 – 468,000; 1980 – 466,000). The rising number of students was not matched by changes in the infrastructure related to higher education. In Yugoslavia, this was already evident in the late 1950s, when "several thousand students battled security forces in Zagreb over insufficient food at the university canteens" (Fichter, 2016: 102)

Other nuisances included "cramped dorms, insufficient scholarship funding, inadequate health-care, lack of heating, damp and damaged accommodations, meagre food, and crowded libraries" (Ibidem). In both countries, the basis of protests was different, although some similarities can be discerned. In Yugoslavia, the background for protests was created by reforms of the economic and political system initiated in the mid-1960s. This period is characterised as a controlled liberalisation of the system, accompanied by the previously limited possibility of formulating critical comments, greater freedom of print and expression, as well as the emergence of social and economic organisations. Not without significance was also the process of temporary trips for work to capitalist countries, which expanded the contacts of Yugoslav citizens with foreign countries. (Zacharias, 2000: 99) Such a situation could not take place in other socialist countries, including Poland. In individual Yugoslav republics (Croatian and Slovenian), conflicts stemming from economic issues were also brewing. The inhabitants of the wealthier republics, due to well-developed tourism and the aforementioned trips abroad for work, were able to generate more foreign currency inflows. The problem, however, was their accumulation by central banks, mainly located in Belgrade, and the policy of using these funds for the development of other republics (Ibidem; Pavković, 2000: 62).

The background for Polish protests were issues related to cultural policy, restrictions on creative work

and freedom of expression. After Władysław Gomułka halted the post-October 1956 changes, a small group of students and academics at the University of Warsaw (UW) organized the Political Discussion Club at the Socialist Youth Union of the UW in 1962. The initiators of the undertaking were Karol Modzelewski, a historian employed at the University, and Jacek Kuroń, an activist with the Polish Scouting Association. Meetings of the Club, which involved discussions on the political and social situation of the PRL by applying Marxist theory for analysis, turned into a forum for criticism of the absence of systemic reforms. Consequently, the club was dissolved in autumn 1963 and its initiators were subjected to surveillance by the security services. As a direct result of this initiative, Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski circulated the „Open letter to the Party" in March 1965, in which they criticised, from the Marxist perspective, the way the state was governed at the time. As it criticised the „party bureaucracy" which, according to the authors of the Letter, exercised power in the country rather than the working class, the document was seen as similar to the observations of Milovan Đilas (Friszke, 2011: 82-84, 203-222; Eisler, 1991: 97). The letter elicited a strong reaction from the authorities. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski were sentenced to 3.5 and 3 years in prison respectively for its distribution. Another consequence of the initiatives developing around Kuroń and Modzelewski was the emergence of the so-called „Commando" group. The name was given to an informal community of students from Warsaw who attended meetings and lectures conducted mainly at the University of Warsaw and shattered the propaganda narrative of the organizers by asking inconvenient questions concerning historical and socio-political issues (Eisler, 1992:104).

Its leading representatives were Adam Michnik, Jan Lityński, Jan Tomasz Gross, Barbara Toruńczyk, Irena Grudzińska, Henryk Szlajfer, Teresa Bogucka. Some of the „Commandos" came from communist families, their parents had held positions in the party apparatus in the past, some were of Jewish descent, which was later exploited by the party propaganda.

Even before the main events of 1968 began, there were some links between the circles in Poland and Yugoslavia involved in the subsequent protests. Leszek Kołakowski and Zygmunt Bauman, academics at the University of Warsaw, were members of the board at the journal Praxis „edited by university professors in Belgrade and Zagreb, which provided a platform for the discourses of the New Left". Kołakowski, as well as Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and Ernest Mandel, was also a frequent guest „at a summer school on the Croatian island of Korčula near Dubrovnik, where „hundreds of Yugoslav students were able to participate in discussions with them" (Kanzleiter, 2013: 84-100).

6. Major student protests in 1968 in Poland and Yugoslavia

The immediate trigger for launching student protests in Poland was the decision to remove the play „Dziady", a staging of a drama by Adam Mickiewicz, from the stage of the National Theatre in Warsaw. Paradoxically, the play was prepared as part of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the October Revolution, but because of enthusiastic reactions of the audience during scenes with anti-tsarist overtones, the representatives of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the PZPR perceived the play as essentially anti-Soviet. After the decision taken by the authorities, the last performance on 30 January 1968 was followed by a demonstration of students at the Adam Mickiewicz monument, which was dispersed by the police. Reports about the events were broadcast to Poland by Radio Free Europe and articles about the incidents were published in the Western press (Friszke, 2011: 526). The „Commando" community also collected 75 lists with signatures of 3,145 people protesting against the removal of „Dziady". The student protest was also joined by the Warsaw branch of the Polish Writers' Union, which at an extraordinary meeting adopted a resolution condemning the decision of the authorities, stating that it was one of the examples of „arbitrary and hidden censorship (...) threatening national culture" (Fik, 1989: 523-524).

On 8 March 1968, a rally was held at the University of Warsaw, during which slogans against censorship were interspersed with demands to stop repressions against students and reinstate student rights to Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer, who had been expelled from the university following a decision by the Minister of Education and Universities Henryk Jabłoński (Friszke, 2011: 553). The protest was broken up by police units and so-called „worker activists" – in reality plainclothes officers of various services who beat students and detained them on the University grounds. The following days saw a series of student demonstrations in most academic centres in Poland, including fresh rallies in Warsaw (at the University of Warsaw and the Warsaw University of Technology). (Na Antenie, 1968: 1-2)

In response to the events, the authorities refused to enter into any dialogue with the protesting students. Academic staff supporting the students' demands were dismissed from the universities (Eisler, 2006: 439-440).

Some academics decided to leave Poland, including Leszek Kołakowski, Włodzimierz Brus, Bronisław Baczko, Zygmunt Bauman, Jan Kott, Krzysztof Pomian, Paweł Korez. (Hillebrandt, 1986: 67). According to data quoted by Andrzej Friszke, from 8 March „2,634 people were detained across the country, including 625 university students, 380 school students, 200 unemployed, 960 workers and 330 white-collar workers" (Friszke, 2011: 64).

In Yugoslavia, the 1968 student demonstrations began on 2 June. The trigger was a police intervention during a rock concert that was taking place near dormitories in Belgrade. The events escalated after a rumour

spread that one of the students had been shot by the police. On 2 and 3 June, gatherings involving thousands of people took place in Belgrade, which were broken up by security forces. In response to the clashes, the University Committee of the Communist League decided to proclaim a seven-day strike. On the grounds of the Faculty of Philosophy, the strike leaders made speeches, lively discussions were held and demands to the authorities were formulated. From 4 June, in a gesture of solidarity, students in Sarajevo, Zagreb and Ljubljana started protests. (Fichter, 2016: 107; Zubak, 2013: 124).

As in Belgrade, discussions were held and demands were formulated at universities in these cities. As in Poland, the slogans proclaimed were not directed against socialism, but rather constituted an attempt to broaden the scope of freedom in expressing opinions about the situation in the country. There were clear references to Marxism and students in Belgrade even announced the establishment of „the Red University of Karl Marx", echoing the actions of Frankfurt students in May 1968 (Kanzleiter, 2013: 84).

Yugoslav students put more emphasis on the issue of „deformation of socialism" which aggravated inequalities instead of reducing them, leading to „unfair distributions of wealth and privilege; an overly bureaucratic repressive state" (Fichter, 2016: 110; Zubak, 2013: 32). Therefore, protests in both countries were not just an attempt to secure the interests of their own communities. Of course, as a result of the actions of security forces, condemnation of aggressive police behaviour was an important part of the slogans voiced by the strikers. The students also expressed their distrust of the media subordinated to the authorities. Another similarity between the two events were efforts to include the working class in the protests. In the case of Poland, some workers, especially young ones, sympathized with the students and even took part in demonstrations, as can be seen from the social profile of those detained. For the most part, however, workers remained passive and the authorities even took steps to include this group in propaganda actions against the „troublemakers" (e.g. by organizing so-called mass meetings in factories) (Eisler, 1991:401-403). In Yugoslavia, students also attempted to establish contacts with workers in order to get them involved in the protest (Fichter, 2016: 110).

The reaction of the Yugoslav authorities to the student protests in 1968 was different from that in Poland. The 1968 strikes in Yugoslavia ended after a public speech by Josip Broz Tito, who said that internal problems and a slow implementation of previously planned reforms were the reasons behind the protests. At the same time, he expressed the view that student demonstrations had also been joined by groups who wanted to exploit the situation for their own particular purposes. The situation was calmed down by Tito's assurance that the students' demands would be implemented and that he would personally resign if he failed to implement the reforms" (Ibidem: 109; Kanzleiter, 2013: 91).

7. Another dimension of the 1968 revolt

The 1968 student protests in Poland and Yugoslavia took place in March and June respectively. With regard to Poland, however, we can identify another process which was directly linked to the student revolt. It was an internal struggle within the PZPR that eventually turned into an anti-Semitic campaign. In Yugoslavia, another experience of 1968 was the awakening of nationalist attitudes in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, which evolved into a longer process called the „Croatian Spring". The main causes of this development were the same as those of the student revolt (liberalisation of the system, economic reform, limited opening to the West), but in Croatian conditions it was combined with a sense of marginalisation of Croats in the cultural sphere and the previously mentioned political and economic sphere (Zacharias, 1998: 139). This meant that, as Michal J. Zacharias emphasises, „the pro-Yugoslav attitude of students in Belgrade did not meet with much appreciation in Croatia" where „representatives of the intelligentsia and many members of the Croatian ruling apparatus emphasized the importance of national, i.e. Croatian issues, rather than social or all-Yugoslav questions" (Zacharias, 2001: 140).

As far as culture was concerned, this was reflected, for example, in efforts to preserve the distinctiveness of the Croatian language. On 16 March 1967, more than a dozen Croatian institutions and 130 representatives of the intelligentsia issued the Declaration on the Name and Position of the Croatian Literary Language (org. *Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika*), challenging the 1954 agreement which de facto recognised the existence of a common Serbo-Croatian language (Walkiewicz, 2017: 191-192). It was one of the harbingers of repeated efforts in the later period to highlight the distinctiveness of the Croatian culture, combined with accusations against cultural unification pushed by the Serbs as well as the „Croatian Yugoslavs" (Zacharias, 2000: 101). Another example was the question of how Croatian heritage was presented in Yugoslav textbooks. During this period, Croats felt that with regard to literature, the Yugoslav educational system gave more prominence to foreign than Croatian writers (Cuvalo 2019: 146, 162). In this respect, there was a visible similarity between the concerns of Polish intellectuals about the threat posed by communist censorship to Polish national culture and the Croatian efforts to preserve their national heritage.

Another significant threat articulated during the „Croatian spring" was the problem of temporary mass emigration of Croats. It was part of a broader trend of temporary trips for work made by Yugoslav citizens following economic reforms, but in the case of Croats it was of massive proportions. It is estimated that up to one million people could have left the SFRY for work in the early 1970s. Most of them were aged between 20 and 40, 70% of them were men. Of all Yugoslav nationalities, Croats were significantly over-represented, accounting for around 50% of the total number of the so-called Gastarbeiters (Ibidem, 138-139). Officially,

residents leaving for work in other countries (mainly Austria and West Germany) were not considered to be emigrants, as it was assumed that their trips were temporary. The Yugoslav state propaganda portrayed the trips as a sign of „liberalisation" of the system. In reality, it was supposed to solve the problem of unemployment resulting from economic stagnation, and also to increase the inflow of foreign currency into the country. However, the Gastarbeiters included not only lower-skilled workers from the poorer republics, but also better educated residents of the wealthier parts of Yugoslavia (Gregurović, Mlinarić, 2012: 101-102). With regard to the Socialist Republic of Croatia, data from 1970 indicated that „skilled and highly skilled workers accounted for 33,2% of all external migrants from Croatia, and workers with full secondary education for 5,7%" (Baućić, 1972: 16). Moreover „more than one half of the emigrants decided to take up employment abroad because they were dissatisfied with the living and working conditions within their own country" (Ibidem). These problems were a source of concern for Croats, who saw it as yet another proof of the „political and national disempowerment of the Croatian population" in the Yugoslav state (Zacharias, 2000: 105). They also feared the long-term social consequences of the trips, e.g. in the form of „a breakdown of traditional forms of family life" (Ibidem).

The turn of the 1960s and 1970s was marked by dynamic activity of social, educational and cultural organizations in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, including Matica hrvatska with its historical roots dating back to the first half of the 19th century (Damjanović, 2015: 3). These organizations did not represent a uniform political current; while advocating for national issues, they differed in the extent to which they supported liberal, democratic or nationalist ideas, including chauvinistic ones. The scope of their activity and broad public support made them known as the „maspok" mass movement (hrv. „masovni pokret"). (Zacharias, 2000: 100). As Wiesław Walkiewicz notes, the group of those who contested the existing order in the Socialist Republic of Croatia was also joined by „radio, television, the editors of the daily newspaper Vjesnik, as well as the Writers' Association" (Walkiewicz, 2017: 197).

Students also left their mark on the shape of the „Croatian Spring". From 1970, people who were elected to university bodies at the University of Zagreb not only did not have the support of the authorities, but also took up their positions despite no approval from the federal authorities. Thus, Dražen Budiša, Ante Paradžik, Ivan Zvonimir Čičak were elected to various student bodies. The election of Ivan Supek as Rector was seen in a similar way. These personnel changes were a clear political signal from the academic community. It was consistent with the „maspok" activities and made it clear to the authorities that students and the academic staff were in favour of actual implementation of the previously announced reforms (Cuvalo, 2019: 204-205). The federal authorities also did not accept unannounced mass meetings at the University (e.g. on 27 March 1971) and a November 1971 strike (Rusinow, 1972: 8).

The changes in the Croatian party leadership that came in the late 1960s were beneficial to the moderate part of the „maspok". Savka Dabčevic Kućar became the chairperson of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia, Pero Pirker became the secretary of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee, and Miko Tripalo was appointed as a member of the Executive Bureau and then of the Presidium of the SKJ. They belonged to the young generation of party members who supported a decentralisation of the political system. As Michal Zacharias notes, the leadership of the SKH was sympathetic to some of the national postulates expressed by the „maspok", while using „party, communist phraseology" when formulating their own, similar opinions (Zacharias, 1999: 94; Zacharias 2000: 108). Kućar, Pirker and Tripalo gained significant public support in Croatia but had no influence on the military, police or security service. Over time, Josip Broz Tito's attitude to their activities also changed, which ultimately proved to be a decisive factor (Zacharias, 1999: 114).

Data relating only to Matica hrvatska points to a rapid growth of this organization. At the end of 1970, it had about 23,000 members, in 1971 – already 41,000 (Zacharias, 2000: 100). In spring 1971, the association was publishing two magazines, „Hrvatski Tjednik" and „Hrvatski Gospodarski Glasnik". The former dealt mainly with cultural, social and political issues, the latter with economic issues (Rusinow, 1972: 3). Other magazines published by the association during the entire „Croatian Spring" period included „Kritika", „Kolo" and „Dubrovnik" (Branđolica, Šegvić, 2019: 719).

Matica hrvatska undertook various types of activities, suggesting e.g. new economic concepts. The then member of the presidency and economic secretary of Matica hrvatska Šime Đodan "proposed changes that were considered incomprehensible at the time: the break-up of all federal finance and foreign trade institutions, the formation of all separate financial systems of federal units, the formation of central banks units and co-ordination anticyclical economic policy and protection measures with appropriate (but not defined) central organs of the SFRJ" (Borak, 2004: 328; Pavković, 2000: 62). The proposed changes were part of a wider and previously exposed dispute over the development model of Yugoslavia. Croats favoured The Adriatic development concept, which prioritised the expansion of transport infrastructure to broaden the scope of cooperation with the West via the Adriatic and bring greater economic openness to the world. Due to the geographical location of the Yugoslav republics, the main part of the project would be situated in the Socialist Republic of Croatia. The main competing model was The Donava development concept promoted by Serbian economists. It would favour the development of "production of electricity, basic chemicals, basic iron and steel, basic non-ferrous metals, machinery and equipment, agriculture and food industry". This would lead to support primarily for the central regions of Yugoslavia. (Borak, 2004: 325-326).

8. Political solutions

The process known as the „Croatian Spring" was terminated on the initiative of Josip Broz Tito using the police, military and special services. The action was taken in response to a week-long strike by students at the University of Zagreb, which began on 22 November 1971 and was also supported at other Croatian universities. The demands of the protesters mirrored those previously put forward by the „maspok" (Kanzleiter, 2013: 92). Tito first decided to get the Croatian leadership (Savka Dabčevic Kućar, Pero Pirker, Miko Tripalo) to resign, which happened in December 1971, and then ordered a purge in the SKH, as a result of which „by April 1972, 741 members had been excluded, 131 had been removed from office, while 280 activists had resigned" (Walkiewicz, 2015: 243.) On 12 December, arrests of protesters began, involving more than 500 people (Kanzleiter, 2013: 92). As Michał Zacharias reports citing data from Marek Veselica – a „maspok" activist – a total of about 32,000 people were subjected to various types of repression (arrests, loss of work, interrogations). Matica hrvatska, as well as its publications, were closed down (Zacharias, 1999: 120).

In Poland, the repercussions of the 1968 student protests, due to their scope and significance, can also be considered as separate processes. In this context, Jerzy Eisler mentions the following in addition to the student events: „the struggle of the party leadership against »revisionism« in the intellectual circles, as well as actions dismantling the last achievements of October in the field of culture, science and art"; „factional struggles in the leadership of the PZPR: the fight of the »partisans«, under the patronage of Mieczysław Moczar, against the group of Władysław Gomułka and the »Silesians« led by Edward Gierek"; „the anti-Semitic campaign, its consequences and political and social costs" (Eisler,1991: 9). The anti-Semitic campaign itself (called „anti-Zionist" in the official press) had a dual purpose. On the one hand, it was aimed at some of the „Commandos" and intellectuals who had become involved in the March events, on the other hand it was a pretext for carrying out purges in the PZPR, government offices, editorial offices and the military. The situation that emerged inside the party had all the hallmarks of a struggle for influence between different informal factions in the PZPR (Stola, 2000: 7-9, 186-187; Nowak-Jeziorański, 1968: 1-2).

The propaganda cliché used for public protests against the PRL authorities was again employed against the opposition, as it was claimed that the protests were usually inspired by agents of foreign countries. The media onslaught unleashed in Poland in 1968 caused thousands of people of Jewish origin, party activists and officials as well as intellectuals to flee Poland (Osęka, Zaremba, 1999: 205).

There is no such clear link between the 1968 events in Poland and the turn of 1970/1971 as there was between the 1968 student protests in Yugoslavia (including primarily the SRC) and the „Croatian Spring". A

serious socio-political crisis occurred in December 1970, but with a different background than in 1968. An increase in food prices, announced shortly before Christmas, triggered a wave of workers' strikes and demonstrations in the Tri-City and other coastal centres – Szczecin, Elbląg, and then in other regions of the country. The political authorities led by W. Gomułka decided – on the basis of information about a threat to the lives of intervening policemen and soldiers and the looting of shops – to use police and military force. At the same time, heavy military equipment – tanks, amphibious vehicles – was sent to the Tri-City and Szczecin. Demonstrations gained in strength in the subsequent December days (starting from 14 December). Demonstrators set fire to the buildings of local party committees in Gdańsk and Szczecin. There were regular fights in city streets. According to official data, from 14 to 20 December 1970, 45 people were killed and more than 1,100 injured on the Coast. An initiative was launched among middle-level activists (S. Kania, E. Babiuch, F. Szlachcic) to force the resignation of the then party leader and his closest associates, responsible for the crisis. They were supported by J. Tejchma, W. Jaruzelski and J. Cyrankiewicz. The PZPR party authorities were encouraged to take radical political action by politicians from the Kremlin. A special letter sent to the PZPR Central Committee urged bold political decisions to end the ongoing fighting and street demonstrations. At the same time, it was suggested in informal talks – for example, between Soviet Prime Minister A.Kosygin and Deputy Prime Minister P. Jaroszewicz – that the Soviet authorities would not agree to a party nomination of Mieczysław Moczar, who was considered too nationalistic (Eisler, 2000: 50-92; Dudek, Marszałkowski, 1999: 169-217; Głowacki, 1990: 17-77).

Internal and geopolitical circumstances favoured the candidacy of another contender for the leadership of the PZPR – Edward Gierek, who was elected new party leader at a meeting of the Central Committee on 20 December 1970. He made changes to the top party and state leadership – Piotr Jaroszewicz became the new head of government. The state's previous social and economic policy was criticised. Promises were made to improve the living conditions and adopt a more dynamic strategy for the social and economic development of the country. A new generation of party activists came to power in Poland, with no experience in the pre-war KPP, having started their careers in the post-war reality in youth organizations and the PPR apparatus (Tejchma, 2006: 9-26; Eisler, 1991: 289-336).

In view of the above, the long-term effects of Poland's 1968 should rather be sought in the later period. Some of the actors of the March events, then students or young academics, became involved in opposition organizations in the second half of the 1970s (the Workers' Defence Committee, the Committee for Social Self-Defence „KOR") and in the early 1980s participated in the formation of what was officially a trade union, but in reality a huge social and political movement – „Solidarity" (Eisler, 1991: 441-443). The impact of March 1968 on the subsequent views and activities of many of its participants in the public sphere was so

significant that Polish historians point to the emergence of a distinctive category of the „March 1968 generation" (Ibidem: 441; Osęka, 1999).

9. Conclusions

The aim of the article was to compare the causes, course and political consequences of the socio-political upheavals that took place in the People's Republic of Poland and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Even though both countries belonged to the group of socialist states, they differed significantly. The differences resulted from the adopted model of economic system (Polish centralism - Yugoslav socialist self-governance), the structure of the countries (unitary - federal state), a diverse social structure (ethnic and religious unification - multi-nationality and multi-religiousness), the possibility of travelling abroad (Yugoslav guest workers), the scope of Soviet influence on foreign and domestic policy (the PRL's dependence), efforts of some in the party apparatus to bring about a controlled change of the system (in Yugoslavia).

The events of 1968 in both countries (in Poland in March, in Yugoslavia in June) were to some extent part of the general stream of student protests that took place in many cities around the world. In the case of Poland and Yugoslavia, due to their political system, also important were students' efforts to expand the scope of freedom of speech, care for national culture, expressions of the need to reform the system. Significantly, the slogans that appeared in both countries in 1968 were not directed against socialism, they should rather be seen as calls for the creation of a non-bureaucratic form of the socialist system. They came from the academic communities of young Marxist scholars, which intermingled in both countries through such initiatives as the Korčula summer school. The reaction of the authorities to the 1968 student protests in the countries covered in this article was different. In the PRL, the authorities decided to violently break up the demonstrations, arrest and convict the initiators, expel them from universities. A further consequence was an anti-intelligentsia campaign laced with anti-Semitism, which also resulted from factional infighting inside the party. In Yugoslavia, the events of 1968 alone did not lead to such dramatic consequences. The so-called „Croatian Spring" left a greater mark on internal relations in that country. Reforms initiated in the mid-1960s, changes in the Croatian party leadership to bring in younger and pro-decentralisation activists, extensive contacts with the capitalist world (Gastarbeiters) and an underlying conviction among the Croats that they were discriminated against economically, culturally and politically led to the emergence of a mass movement seeking greater freedom for the republics within the federation. In this case, however, the movement was crushed by Josip Broz Tito, the

reformist leadership was dismissed, and activists from social and student organizations were subjected to various forms of repression.

The 1968 student protests in Yugoslavia and the „Croatian Spring" were possible because of the controlled „liberalisation" of the system initiated in the 1960s. In the PRL, the authorities did not take such action. There is no direct link between the 1968 student protests and December 1970 in the PRL. The workers' protests on the coast, brutally suppressed by the authorities, had an economic background (an increase in food prices). These events eventually led to the ruling team being replaced, with Edward Gierek taking over at the helm of the communist party.

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