

“Contraband, bribes, drugs and big bucks:

Polish port cities on the eve of Solidarity and under the Martial Law"

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On December 17, 1980, many families in Poland were one week away from celebrating the most hopeful, the most expectant Christmas since the end of the Second World War. 'The Carnival of Solidarity' was in full swing and the newly formed, 'independent and self-governing trade union' was marching from one milestone victory to another. The ranks of *Solidarność* swelled to several million within weeks after the signing of the August Accords. The eyes of the world were upon its charismatic leader Lech Wałęsa gallantly confronting the communist colossus. With the Soviet troops bogged down in Afghanistan and Leonid Brezhnev a shadow of his former self, guaranteed support from the Polish-occupied Holy See and words of encouragement from Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher - everything seemed to portend that the new year must usher in a change. A year later, on December 17, 1981, nine bodies of fallen miners from the striking *Wujek* shaft were lying cold in a morgue, victims of a ruthless pacification of the day before. *Solidarność* was being swiftly crushed under the Martial Law and its activists already locked in a detention camp. That day found many without a clue about the fate of their loved ones, fearing for their lives, facing the saddest Christmas in Poland since the war.

Also on December 17, 1980, the Gdynia headquarters of the Polish Oceanic Lines (PLO), a major maritime freight carrier servicing Polish foreign trade, was alarmed by an unusual message from its agent in Hong Kong. "Considerable amounts"¹ of heroin had been discovered on the PLO merchant ship m/s*

* m/s - one among several abbreviations that the Polish merchant fleet used to introduce the name of its ships (motor ship).

¹ "Sprawa operacyjnego rozpracowania, kryptonim "Apokalipsa"[...]", 1980-1981, "Teleks Nr. 50/80 z dnia 18.12.1980", Komenda Wojewódzka MO; [in:] Sprawa operacyjnego rozpracowania kryptonim "Apokalipsa" [...], Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Gdańsku; IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 5.

Jastarnia-Bór by the Hong Kong customs officers. As the *Hong Kong Standard* was quick to report, considerable turned out to be an understatement. Twenty one kilograms of the narcotic were hidden under one hundred tons of animal bone meal that the ship carried to Japan: "a record heroin cache", "the largest ever haul [...] worth \$38 million".² "The black brigade",³ Hong Kong's special operations squad was stirred into action by the discovery of a halved ten-dollar bill found in a log book carried by one of the ship's officers. That particular 'bookmark' had already been recognized as a trademark of Bangkok dealers, who had earned a notorious reputation among customs services around the world.⁴

An investigation codenamed *Apocalypse* carried out by the Gdańsk police led to a conclusion that the drug must have been supplied in Bangkok by a local "businessmen" known as "Mr. U" with the assistance of at least two seamen from the Polish ship.⁵ Mr. U had visited Poland for the first time in 1979 and apparently was sufficiently impressed by the charms of the sister of a sailor he had befriended to reciprocate with an invitation for a ride around Bangkok in his Mercedes-Benz.⁶ The rendezvous was set for December 1980. The two Polish seamen promised to deliver the drug to Western Europe - either Rotterdam or Antwerp.⁷

The deal was sealed two months earlier, in October 1980, somewhere in Tricity.* A visit from two South Asian gentlemen in a touristy cafe was nothing unusual in that cosmopolitan port metropolis and definitely not in the fall of 1980. Tricity was still brimming with foreign press correspondents who had flocked to report on the strikes of August. Attention focused on the political aftermath of the birth of *Solidarność*, officially registered in Gdańsk on September 17. Tricity had turned into a pan-national center

² Marçal Joanilho, "Record heroin cache seized", *The Hongkong Standard*, 17 December 1980. A copy can be found in: IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 7. According to information from an expert of the US Drug Enforcement Administration, that particular sort of heroine belonged to "Group 3" and thus its black market was lower - 8 million USD. [After:] "Wniosek o wszczęcie postępowania przygotowawczego w sprawie przemytu ładunku narkotyków na statku PLO m/s "JASTARNIA BÓR", Gdańsk, 21.2.1981; IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 135.

³ "Notatka Służbowa", Gdańsk [illegible] 1983; IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 145.

* The urban system centered around three cities: Gdańsk, Sopot, Gdynia.

** Bibuła - the Polish term for the underground press, the samizdat.

⁴ "Doniesienie: Sprawozdanie z podróży na statku "Jastarnia Bór" do portów Dalekiego Wschodu w dniach 21.10.80 r. do 4.03.81r."; 10.05.1981; IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 141.

⁵ "Wniosek o wszczęcie postępowania przygotowawczego w sprawie przemytu ładunku narkotyków na statku PLO m/s "JASTARNIA BÓR", Gdańsk, 21.2.1981; IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 135.

⁶ "Notatka Służbowa", Gdańsk [illegible] 1981; IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 147.

⁷ "Wniosek o wszczęcie..."; IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 135.

of oppositional activity. Committee elections, demonstrations, spreading leaflets and *bibuła*,** personnel rotation in the Politburo or the Cold War turning hot in Afghanistan - developments of similar caliber were on the agenda. A routine shipment of fodder was bound to pass unnoticed. The *m/s Jastarnia Bór* left its home port on October 21. For the ship's captain, accompanied by his wife and son, that was the last deployment before his retirement.⁸ Unexpectedly, the goodbye voyage turned sour in Hong Kong. Some of his officers evidently saw the opportunity to earn some serious cash as too good to miss.

A few weeks earlier, on August 15, 1980, the second day of 'work stoppages' at the Lenin shipyard, a Polish cargo ship *m/s Wadowice*, named after the hometown of the recently elected pope John Paul II, returned home from its cruise to the Danish port of Aarhus. As Szczecin's police found out the next day, soon after the ship's arrival to Aarhus "the local police arrested several Danish citizens for the possession of one hundred cigarette cartons" (ca. 1000 packs). The detained claimed that all the packs were delivered by the Polish ship. As the entire crew refused to disclose the identities of the smugglers, the case made into the local court, which was quick to fine the Polish state-run carrier PŻM [Polish Maritime Shipping] with a fee of ca. 16.000 dollars. The court proceedings delayed the ship's departure by three days, allowing the *m/s Wadowice* to return just in time for the strikes. But while their colleagues from the PLO were getting ready to join the strike in Tricity, the PŻM officers had to "hold negotiations" with the Danish side to cancel or at least reduce the fine they had to pay for the sailors' cigarette contraband. Aarhus was just one among thousands of similar 'slip-ups' in a business that had been underway for decades.⁹

The opportunities offered by the life at sea had not remained foreign to the young adepts of the Maritime Academy of Gdynia for long. In 1981, while some of their peers were organizing sit-down strikes and demonstrations, ninety seven young sailors returned from a six week voyage around the world with leather jackets and other fashionable apparel worth ca. eight million PLN. "The average worth of merchandise per one student was 82.250 PLN" with wares worth more than 100.000 PLN officially cleared

⁸ "Doniesienie: Sprawozdanie z podróży..."; IPN Gd 0046/714/DVD, l. 141.

⁹ "Notatka służbowa; dotyczy: handlu papierosami marynarzy ze statku "WADOWICE" w porcie duńskim Aarhus", z dnia 16.08. 1980 [in:] "Korespondencja Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie oraz inne materiały dotyczące polskich marynarzy i statków", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, IPN Sz 0012/499/1, l. 118.

by twenty three young seamen.¹⁰ At the time - during the period of the Martial Law period - that sum was more than shipyard workers could hope to earn for years' worth of labor.

The struggle of *Solidarność* and the imposition of the Martial Law sparked a generous inflow of humanitarian aid to Poland from around the world. Much of it was genuine charity for those in need, some of it CIA- or Vatican- sponsored support for the anti-communist opposition and some of it - camouflaged merchandise. The Polish diaspora in Finland, for example, formed a "charity organization" named YPOF and relied on its contacts among Polish seamen to ship "charity packages for the people of Poland" which consisted chiefly of objects such as: chocolate, coffee, pantyhose, nylon jackets, i.e. the classics of maritime contraband.¹¹ When the m/s *Wróżka* [Fairy] visited Norway's Lillesand, a local compatriot entered the ship pleading the captain to help him to "ship some charity donations, which he would like to bestow upon an orphanage in Police, a small town near Szczecin. The donation contained 340 pairs of "jeans" [sic] and two bags of used clothing for kids and teenagers. The captain agreed. Soon afterwards, the crew came to an agreement that they would divide the "jeans" between themselves and donate what remained to the orphanage. [...] After the captain found out, he categorically prohibited to accept any charity donations from [that person] and ordered the donations to be taken out from the ship."¹²

Other sailors approached the issue of humanitarian aid rather differently, some with indignation at the very notion that Poland was in need. For example, as the m/s *Huta Zgoda* [The Steelworks of Friendship] anchored at the French port of Caen in July 1983, two customs officials entered the ship and approached its chief steward. The crew's initial anxiety stirred by the unexpected visit dissipated as it turned out that the French officers brought with them charity donations from the French people. This time it was real aid "addressed to the poor in Poland [...]. We know that in Poland people die of hunger, suffer from

¹⁰ "Notatka na temat spekulacyjnych praktyk w środowisku załóg polskich statków morskich", Warszawa, 17.08.1982, Główny Urząd Ceł, Biuro V; Korespondencja Wydziału II Komendy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie i Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca przestępstw ujawnionych przez funkcjonariuszy (...), 1982-1988; IPN Sz 0012/497/1, l. 279-280.

¹¹ "Notatka Służbowa dot. darów z Helsinek na statku m/s "A. Borowy" band. PRL /PLO/ na nabrzeżu Czechosłowackim", z dnia 21.03.1983, [in:] "Korespondencja Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie oraz inne materiały dotyczące polskich marynarzy i statków", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, IPN Sz 0012/499/1, l. 271.

¹² "Notatka Służbowa Dot. rozmowy z kapitanem statku m/s "Wróżka" /PLO/ nab. czeskie", Szczecin 1985-08-11, [in:] "Charakterystyki marynarzy PLO", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, 1962-1985, IPN Sz 0012/497/24, l. 469.

poverty and have no clothes to wear", the Frenchmen said. "The officer laughed at those words, but accepted the donations nonetheless." The undercover agent on the ship, in his after-action report to the SB,* criticized the captain for his lack of firm response to the words of the Frenchmen, which - in his opinion - slandered Poland's reputation. "It would be useful to instruct the captains and other officers", the agent suggested, "to assume a more critical attitude upon accepting the donations. In this case, the officer did not bother to reply with a comment that would correct the mistaken view of the Frenchmen".¹³ Indeed, the idea that Poland was in need of material help might have seemed absurd to an officer on a merchant ship servicing a line to a wealthy western port, not to mention the political officer watching after him.

The few anecdotes sketched above are just a few, perhaps particularly symbolically and contextually charged, among thousands of similar tales encapsulating the social tensions of real existing socialism. Not everyone in communist Poland was interested in joining *Solidarność*, many party members joined opportunistically, many resisted while others abused the worsening circumstances, including the introduction of the Martial Law, for personal gain. Just a few smuggled printing presses for the samizdat publishing while many more smuggled 'jeans' or liquor. Crowds gathered in churches to pray for the John Paul's recovery after he was assassinated. But many strayed from their path back home, after the mass was over, to meet with an SB officer to inform on the 'ideologically hostile' behavior of their neighbors. Some received hard currency in return for such services.¹⁴ Many of the 'indifferent' were nested firmly in the nomenklatura, but most were 'gray' citizens intent on maximizing their material well-being and adapting to the variable political winds. These remarks are hardly revelations. What has never been studied, however, is the way that the aggregate outcomes of operations like the ones described above - operations based on various methods of siphoning off from the foreign trade flow passing through the port cities - had created a vast shadow economy which in turn was an important source of the outrage, indignation and power behind *Solidarność*. It is also little known that the shadow economy grew dynamically in particular in the late

* Służba Bezpieczeństwa, the secret police, roughly the Polish equivalent of the KGB.

¹³ "Notatka Służbowa dot. darów przyjętych przez ochmistrza ze statku m/s "Huta Zgoda" [...] od francuskich celników", z dnia 25.07.1983, [in:] "Korespondencja Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie oraz inne materiały dotyczące polskich marynarzy i statków", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, IPN Sz 0012/499/1, l. 235-236.

¹⁴ See: Sławomir Cenckiewicz, *Sprawa Lecha Wałęsy*, (Poznań: Zysk i S-k), 2008, 55-57.

1970s and during the Martial Law. Black market operations such as 'contraband' and 'speculation' were not only formally illegal and contrary to the overtly confessed ideology, but they had widened the socio-economic inequalities which in turn became an important part of the frustration that made the shipyard and other 'land' workers take to the streets again and again.

This article presents two sides of the black market coin. The first part explains the mechanisms governing the shadow economy of Polish port cities, focusing on maritime contraband, customs violations and corruption fueling the 'frenzy of speculation' in the 'parallel', extra-state distribution circuit. I characterize its main actors as well as provide the best evidence available indicative of its dimensions. Secondly, I trace how the not-always-underground consumption of the fruits of the underground enrichment was perceived by those who were not invited to the table, shipyard workers in particular. I argue that the second economy of port cities has so far remained a missing element of our understanding of why *Solidarność* came to be and what it represented. In other words, the two sides of the black market coin could not exist without each other and both need to be studied in order to understand how and why communism collapsed.

Working in the west-bound foreign trade shipping had remained one of the most lucrative professions available under the real existing socialism, from its imposition till its demise, for the managers, officers, sailors and related occupations. Sailors who served on the ships visiting western (and third world) ports received the *dodatek dewizowy* – a bonus to the regular salary dispensed in hard currency. It is estimated that even in the autarchic years of Stalinism, this supplement alone,¹⁵ if converted into zlotys on the black market,¹⁶ provided more purchasing power than a normal salary.¹⁷ But it made no sense to simply exchange it on the black market back into zlotys. The standard procedure was thus to acquire western consumer goods in ports like Hamburg or Antwerp, picking products that were not available and sought after on the domestic market such as 'jeans' or rock albums. After successfully smuggling the goods through

¹⁵ Usually between 10-30 USD, with sums up to 100 USD for senior officers on long haul voyages.

¹⁶ The official PLN-USD exchange rate was fixed at 1:4. The black market rates varied, but were much higher, upwards of 1:20.

¹⁷ According to a detailed survey, this statement was true of the entire 1948-59 period. Sławomir Borowicz, *Polskie Linie Oceaniczne w Latach 1951 - 1978 : Studium Ekonomiczne* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1980), 289.

customs, the sailors would visit a *komis*: a semi-legal private commission/pawn shop, largely tolerated by the regime after 1956. At the store, hard currency (USD and DM were preferred) was received for the goods, which in turn, through various channels, entered the alternative distribution circuit. In 1964, for instance, the aggregate value of the hard currency supplement distributed among Polish sailors amounted to 1.369.000 USD. According to official statistics, less than 300.000 USD had been spent in the stores specially designated for the purpose of supplying the sailors abroad such as the *Baltona*. At the same time, throughout 1964, various legally operating private shops in Tricity had (officially) acquired goods from the returning sailors worth ca. 5.640.000 USD. This amount, not inclusive at all of the underground operations, was fourfold the value of all hard currency supplements distributed among the sailors that year.¹⁸ These two balance sheets alone demonstrate that for each single dollar received by a sailor, he returned with goods worth at least three dollars more, even when he operated just within the boundaries of what was tolerated by the regime.

There were three main channels of 'liquidating' western goods, obtaining and consuming hard currency: the pawn shops (*komisy*), street forex-money changers (the *cinkciarze*) and prostitutes. The number of *cinkciarze* was estimated to reach at least five hundred in Tricity in 1971 and was "probably much higher".¹⁹ "As long as you are not caught with hard cash in hand, there is practically nothing they can do to you" – a journalist was told bluntly by a local *cinkciarz* - "and it is not easy to catch us. *Dewizówka* [the special police unit targeting hard currency speculation] knows virtually everyone [engaged in that business] and often raids our premises. But the doorman is usually on our side and quietly lets us know when trouble is brewing." The fact that the police knew "virtually everyone" or that one *cinkciarz* had continued his operations even after suffering through thirteen detainments allows for a hypothesis that the *dewizówka* must have been instrumental in providing cover for this illegal business, an unsurprising conclusion given the abysmally low wages of the officers operating in the streets.

¹⁸ After: S. Sumiga, Szkodzą dobremu imieniu ogółu, „Tygodnik Morski” 1965, nr 7.

¹⁹ J. Olszewski, Waluciarze i Przemycnicy, „Trybuna Ludu”, nr 129, 9 May 1971.

Port towns are (in)famous for their entertainment districts and Tricity was no exception. No area compared to Hamburg's Reeperbahn, but what Tricity offered in its stead was, for example, a high-rise "universally known as the house of dollar prostitutes".²⁰ According to a secret investigation carried out after the 1970 massacre, the dollar prostitutes purchased their apartments in the high-rise thanks to the dollars dispensed by the members of the provincial National Council [Rada Narodowa], who relied on their services. The Gdańsk police estimated that 1.220 prostitutes in Tricity were officially 'registered' – under surveillance and occasionally cooperating with the secret police. This occupational group was split into two distinct categories: hard currency prostitutes and regulars. The former "would not even look at you"²¹ if domestic currency was presented. It was also estimated that up to 50.000 sailors from the capitalist world, mostly from West Germany and Scandinavia, visited Tricity annually leaving behind up to 4.000.000 USD, acquiring currency and services mostly through the *cinkciarze* and dollar prostitutes.²²

In an another report prepared by the Gdańsk Persecutor's Office, two deputy prosecutors reached the following conclusion with respect to the links between the business of maritime contraband and the underground economy:

"All serious investigations of the forex-contraband violations conducted by the investigative organs of the Gdańsk Voivodeship point to connections of the criminal element [of the Tricity area] with persons busying themselves with similar activities in other regions of the country. Such connections are self-evident due to the cyclical nature of the forex-contraband activities lying at the core of such operations [related to the cyclical nature of maritime trade in- and outflows] [...]. The maritime routes [and] the large merchant fleet create very opportune conditions for performing such violations. It is precisely these conditions and the high profitability of forex-contraband operations that are conducive to the presence of ever-growing groups of persons who work nowhere and busy themselves with such operations professionally."²³ Furthermore, the "[p]orts

²⁰ "Sprawozdanie zespołu badającego problemy społeczno-ekonomiczne wybrzeża gdańskiego", AAN, XII-1795, l. 55.

²¹ Piotr Włóczyk, Prostytutki i SB, „Historia Do Rzeczy”, Nr 9/19, September 2014, 15.

²² "Sprawozdanie zespołu...", AAN, XII-1795, l. 55.

²³ "Informacja o przestępczości przemytniczo-dewizowej w województwie gdańskim"; [in:] Informacja Prokuratury Wojewódzkiej w Gdańsku z dnia 23-04-1970 o przestępczości przemytniczo-dewizowej w województwie gdańskim, 1970, IPN Gd 0046/227/3/5, l. 7 and 19.

of Gdańsk and Gdynia create special conditions for the illegal forex turnover, if one considers that approximately 50.000 seaman sailing under capitalist colors arrive here per annum."²⁴

While *cińkciarze* and prostitutes belonged to the rhetorically decried underworld and often led a quiet life, there was nothing inherently anti-socialist in being a sailor. Yet it was a profession equally instrumental to the functioning of the second economy of the Baltic Coast. By the 1960s, *rodzina marynarska* [a sailor's family] became a byword for comfortable life and not uncommonly – for conspicuous consumption. But there were limits to how much smuggling could be done by individual physical sailors. Those limits were much higher in the foreign trade administration agencies such as the Centromor. It was an administrative unit responsible for managing Poland's foreign trade shipping.²⁵ Centromor boasted offices in Moscow and Varna, magazines in France and the UK, permanent representatives in Yugoslavia, Romania, Denmark, Norway and Finland and agents in sixty other countries all around the globe. C. Hartwig, an international forwarding agency, was a safe bet as well. Access to this executive level of managerial control was conditioned upon 'political screening', which limited the ranks of the club to no more than 2109 people.²⁶ Janusz Lewandowski, a student in Gdańsk in the 1970s and the EU Financial Planning and the Budget Commissioner (2010-2014), summarized the process:

The mechanisms of capitulation [to the regime] were quite simple and effective. Graduates of the trade-and-sea oriented schools made it into state-run companies such as the Polish Oceanic Lines, Polish Sea Shipping, Polfracht, Centromor, Navimor, advisory boards of the port administration. Office work was merely a step on your way to an overseas branch and that set you up in material terms for good. The entry ticket for advancement was the party card. And that was it.²⁷

²⁴ "Informacja o przestępczości przemytniczo-dewizowej w województwie gdańskim"; [in:] Informacja Prokuratury Wojewódzkiej w Gdańsku z dnia 23-04-1970 o przestępczości przemytniczo-dewizowej w województwie gdańskim, 1970, IPN Gd 0046/227/3/5, l. 8.

²⁵ In the early 1970s, Centromor was Poland's only firm managing ship export, one of the biggest of its kind in the world. According to the Lloyds Register of Shipping for 1972, Poland held sixth place globally in ship exports, after Japan, Sweden, West Germany, France and the Netherlands. This ranking did not take into consideration the quality, size or market value of the ships, nor the fact that most of them were 'exported' to the USSR. See: "Głos Wybrzeża", nr 66, 19 March, 1973.

²⁶ Sławomir Borowicz, *Polskie Linie...*, 138.

²⁷ Janina Paradowska, Jerzy Baczyński, *Teczki Liberatów* (Poznań: Obserwator, 1993), 119-120.

Lewandowski had chosen the academic path, which - in his words - was “a road to nowhere”, at least in terms of material welfare.²⁸

Living on the Baltic coast offered a quick graduation from “the school of comparative materialism.”²⁹ A resident of Gdańsk once exchanged cigarettes with his Swedish colleague only to find the Polish pack in a trash bin a moment later. He reflected: “we were not building socialism, we were building shit.”³⁰ But 'the West' did not treat some as well as it promised. A dockyard worker left Poland to settle in Hamburg in 1979 only to be bitterly disappointed. He had worked in Gdańsk for years filching peanuts from the deliveries he unloaded. “He could no longer derive extra income from work, which [in Hamburg] had turned into his sole source of livelihood.”³¹ The Tricity school of comparative materialism has left a lasting impression on Donald Tusk. The EU President remembered his youth in Gdańsk in the following manner:

“The awareness of how life looks like in the West was incomparably higher in Gdańsk than in any other city in Poland. This self-evident, unquestionable knowledge that the West is better led to an early attempt at reflection: why is it better? I do not remember when exactly, but certainly before the Martial Law, we have discovered that it is better not only because there are no Soviet tanks around, but also because there is private property.”³²

On the eve of *Solidarność* in 1980, a special council met at Ministry of Trade and Sea Economy. The Ministry's officials met with the representatives of the Central Customs Bureau [CCB] to discuss the growing problems of the "sizeable contraband and customs-, border- and currency violations in the sailor's milieu." The CCB officials had written similarly unsettling reports earlier - in 1973, 1974, 1977. All of them informed the Ministry of the "commercial purposes behinds the goods brought from abroad" by the sailors who cleared them indicating 'personal use' or 'gifts for family and friends'. Those goods, often western wares unavailable at home, were then 'liquidated' on the black market for a handsome profit and entered the alternative distribution chain. The sources of financing behind hard-currency purchases in western ports on

²⁸ Ibid., 120.

²⁹ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier : The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 105.

³⁰ Quoted in: Ibid., 105.

³¹ Wedel, Janine R., *Prywatna Polska* (Warszawa: Trio, 2007), 89.

³² Paradowska, Baczyński, *Teczki Liberalów...*, 50.

such a vast scale were "similarly self-evidently illegal". Those sources were, for example, "smuggling and 'inter-port transactions' [sic] along the voyages' route". "The result of such conduct" - the authors continued - "are the acute financial penalties, so well-known to the Polish shippers, which must be paid in numerous ports around the world in consequence of the contraband practices of the Polish sailors."³³ Some "old-school captains" captains, known among their crews as "liberals" or "good old pals" earned their reputation through "helping the crews to quietly settle the various disciplinary fines imposed on them due to customs violations."³⁴ The preference for the 'inter-port transaction' was motivated by the virtually complete inability of foreign authorities to execute fines from individual sailors - in most countries, collective penalties were levied on the ship-owner as they promised at least some chances of execution.³⁵ By using the 'inter-port transactions' outside of Poland, sailors escaped the only legal body that could potentially hurt them - the Polish customs and judicial authorities. The most popular route for inter-port transactions followed the Kiel Canal down to Hamburg, Bremen, Rotterdam and Antwerp. A specialized company named Zerssen supplied the crews along the Kiel Canal while Hamburg, Bremen and Rotterdam were serviced by the local polish diaspora.³⁶

What the authors of the report emphasized was that only a small part of goods brought and cleared by the sailors could have been purchased thanks to the *dodatek dewizowy** alone. The discrepancy between what the sailors "should have been" able to purchase had they relied exclusively on the hard currency bonus, is demonstrated by a curious case of a small cargo ship *m/s Ciechocinek*. The ship carried twenty three men and to Germany and France in the first 'martial law spring' of 1982. The seamen brought back and officially cleared goods amounting to over two million PLN, including 322 kg of roast coffee and 221

³³ "Notatka na temat spekulacyjnych praktyk w środowisku załóg polskich statków morskich", Warszawa, 17.08.1982, Główny Urząd Ceł, Biuro V; Korespondencja Wydziału II Komendy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie i Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca przestępstw ujawnionych przez funkcjonariuszy (...), 1982-1988; IPN Sz 0012/497/1, l. 277.

³⁴ "Notatka służbowa", Szczecin, dnia 25.05.1979, [in:] "Charakterystyki marynarzy PLO", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, 1962-1985, IPN Sz 0012/497/24, l. 314.

³⁵ "Informacja dot. działalności przemytniczej na statkach PLO", Warszawa, 06.06. 1968; [in:] Materiały dotyczące marynarzy polskich oraz statków płynących lub przebywających w portach w Ameryce Północnej [...], 1968-1988, IPN Sz 0012/498/163, l. 129.

* For more details on the *dodatek dewizowy*, the hard-currency bonus, please see the first 'fine print' paragraph on page 7.

³⁶ "Informacja dot. działalności przemytniczej na statkach PLO", Warszawa, 06.06. 1968; [in:] Materiały dotyczące marynarzy polskich oraz statków płynących lub przebywających w portach w Ameryce Północnej [...], 1968-1988, IPN Sz 0012/498/163, l. 128.

kg of chocolate. The total hard currency supplement they had received while embarking the ship equaled 743.55 USD, on average 32 dollars per capita. In other words, for one dollar received, a sailor returned with (on average) 2.688 PLN worth of merchandise. In April 1982, 2.688 PLN was worth at least five times the black market value of one dollar and more than twenty times its nominal value.³⁷ Thus the officially tolerated business of importing western consumer goods run at a rate of return of five; that is - if we rely on a conservative (and utterly unrealistic) assumptions that no smuggling took place and that the seamen were ripped off by the Tricity *ciniciarze* and pawn-shop keepers.

In the unlikely case that contraband was discovered by the customs officials abroad, this fact did not necessarily lead to penal consequences, particularly not if it happened in South America. "[T]he affected sailors often "came to terms" [sic] with the customs officials within their own capacity. In Buenos Aires, for example, the authorities detected "380 four-color pencils, 2 cameras, 10 cartons of US cigarettes [...], 15 boxes of cream" on the Polish m/s *Staszic*. "Despite such considerable amounts of requisitioned goods, the ship has paid no official penalty. It is highly likely that the officers had been bribed" - was the conclusion reached by the Polish intelligence. A similar outcome was highly likely with respect to the m/s *Szczawnica*, also in Buenos Aires. No official penalty had been registered despite the fact that the contraband included, among other goods, eighteen cans of fine Soviet caviar.³⁸ Even Scandinavian ports were not immune to corruption. On May 14, 1980, Norwegian customs officers detained a Polish sailor with eight bottles of vodka that he attempted to sell around the port area. He was fined with 500 crowns, but he had managed to avoid the fee, because - according to the ship's captain - "he kn[ew] many people in the Norwegian ports and thanks to that fact he has managed to appease the situation."³⁹

³⁷ "Notatka na temat spekulacyjnych praktyk w środowisku załóg polskich statków morskich", Warszawa, 17.08.1982, Główny Urząd Ceł, Biuro V; Korespondencja Wydziału II Komedy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie i Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca przestępstw ujawnionych przez funkcjonariuszy (...), 1982-1988; IPN Sz 0012/497/1, l. 279.

³⁸ "Informacja dot. działalności przemytniczej na statkach PLO", Warszawa, 06.06. 1968; [in:] Materiały dotyczące marynarzy polskich oraz statków płynących lub przebywających w portach w Ameryce Północnej [...], 1968-1988, IPN Sz 0012/498/163, l. 130.

³⁹ "Notatka służbowa; dot.: marynarza [...] ze statku m/s "Iwonicz Zdrój" /PLO/.", z dnia 15.05.1980 [in:] "Korespondencja Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie oraz inne materiały dotyczące polskich marynarzy i statków", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, IPN Sz 0012/499/2, l. 116.

The inherent institutional weakness of the Polish communist state, including the limited operational capabilities of customs and border protection units, need little comment. Given their low pay, poor esprit de corps, sparse and arbitrary oversight, it is not difficult to understand why many customs officers succumbed to the prospect of hard currency income for letting the contraband pass unnoticed. Forms of cooperation with the sailors differed. Normally - they involved turning one's head the other way or simply not appearing on time. The crews of a ship servicing Szczecin's steelworks in 1979, for example, were given an hour to "conduct illegal trade with foreign goods on a very large scale" before the officers appeared and performed their duties. The ships arrived at least once per week and the "procedure [was] always the same" - wrote a TW* Basia employed in the steelworks. "Bribery is currently widespread" - the agent continued - "each simple business of any kind necessitates smaller or larger bribes for workers responsible for distributing various work supplies. The managers are perfectly aware of this situation and give it a green light [...]. For example, one of the supply truckers of the Szczecin steelworks arranged 288 neon lamps [...] for which he received a bribe of 1500 PLN [...] Our society is in general displeased with this state of affairs, but everyone accepts it as there is no other way."⁴⁰

As m/s Gdynia was leaving Poland in January 1977, over three tons of copper worth 195.000 PLN were "detected" during a search. As the investigation revealed, three crewmembers "purchased" this copper from a "source of questionable provenance" and intended to smuggle it out of the country. Apparently, the three tons of material "were loaded onto the ship by means of a crane" while the ship was anchored at one of Szczecin's ports. It was only at a border checkpoint and thanks to "operational sources" (likely a secret agent) that the contraband was intercepted. The boldness of this operation and the successful utilization of the crane for illicit purposes indicate that the level of policing in Polish ports must have been perfunctory.

A month later, the m/s *Okrzeja* was found smuggling 100 boxes of whiskey in Karachi, Pakistan. The following fines were levied for that violation : 500 USD for the captain, 2500 USD for the chief

* TW - Tajny Współpracownik - lit. a Secret Co-Operator, an undercover informant working for the secret police, the SB.

⁴⁰ "Wyciąg z Meldunku TW "Basia" z dnia 19.10.1979.", [in:] "Korespondencja Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie oraz inne materiały dotyczące polskich marynarzy i statków", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, IPN Sz 0012/499/1, l. 18.

steward and 25.000 USD for the shipper. According to the investigation carried out by the PLO, 500 boxes (approx. 6000 bottles) were initially delivered with 400 of them "sold while the ship lied at the roadstead" off the Pakistani coast. Before leaving Poland, the crew loaded "considerable amounts of bronze stemming from illegal provenance" in Gdańsk and "exchanged" it for whiskey in Antwerp. "The legal proceedings by the Provincial Prosecutor's Office in Gdynia was [...] suspended until the reception of necessary documents from the PLO representatives in Karachi and Antwerp."⁴¹ As demonstrated in chapter X, such fines were usually left unpaid and if they were paid - they were virtually always covered by the ship-owner (i.e. by the Polish taxpayer) and not by individual perpetrators.

Delivering apparel considered fashionable east of the Iron Curtain promised high profits for those who could obtain it. Since fashion usually spreads eastward from Paris or Milan, what Poland could offer in return to Italian customers was silver foxes or rather - what remained after the animals were killed and tanned. "Silver foxes of suitable length [...] are very soft after being tanned properly, three pieces can be carried into a port per [head per] one passage. For that purpose - one wraps them tightly around the waist and fastens by means of a wide elastic band. A fox 70 cm. long from its tailbone to ears can be bought for 5.600 - 5.800 PLN at home. Such a fox in Italy reaches the sum [sic] of 70.000 liras. For this amount of money, one buys 8 kilograms of wool, mohair 100%, which can be then sold at home for 22.400 PLN." According to a TW 'What' - 30 foxes were smuggled out of Poland during a voyage to Italy in 1980 on the m/s *Kujawy*. "All this "sketchy" [sic] merchandise" - the agent wrote "is hidden somewhere in the engine room - impossible to be detected by the Customs Brigade - so I was told by the crew. [...] According to a conceited statement by one of the crewmembers [...] one can earn up to 80.000 PLN per month this way."⁴²

Three years earlier, in April 1977, the m/s *Żywiec* visited the French port of Rouen. The local customs officials discovered contraband of 89 fox furs worth 50.350 Francs. The ship was penalized with a

⁴¹ In a similar case on the m/s *Świdnica*, three sailors were fired after they were accused of "appropriating approx. 500 kg of non-ferrous metal to the damage of the Gdańsk Repair Shipyard" After: "Analiza dyscypliny pracy za 1977, KPD/77", Gdynia, dnia 9.9.1977, [in:] Korespondencja Wydziału II Komendy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie oraz Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca marynarzy polskich, 1974-1988, IPN Sz 0012/497/5, l. 75-76.

⁴² "Informacja Dot. Techniki przemytu towarów na wywóz z kraju.", z dnia 11.02.1980, źródło: tw. WHAT, [in:] "Korespondencja Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie oraz inne materiały dotyczące polskich marynarzy i statków", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, IPN Sz 0012/499/1, l. 44-45.

fee of 10.081 USD. The Szczecin Prosecutor's Office refused to commence legal action arguing that, based on the preliminary investigation, a "provocation from the French side cannot be excluded."⁴³ Several months later, also in Rouen, the m/s *Łódź* was found smuggling 148 boxes of whiskey as well as "90 films and 825 pornographic magazines" for which the skipper was penalized with a penalty of 100.000 Francs. "Further investigation led to a discovery of 26 watches, 44 boxes of whiskey, 95 pornographic magazines and 79 pairs of shoes."⁴⁴ Three sailors attempted to use the ship's prolonged stay in Rouen, resulting from "the negotiations with the Customs Office", to request asylum, but were rejected and had to be "repatriated to the country by air."⁴⁵

Altogether, just between January and September 1977, the PLO recorded 529 disciplinary violations, including 227 cases of contraband and 156 cases of alcohol consumption on duty. Seventy nine workers were fired in consequence of those violations. In a company employing ca. 10.000 workers at the time, such figures were bound to compel "[t]he highest party and state organs [to] dedicate a lot of attention to the questions of work discipline and recommend that the administrative bodies [of the PLO] should keep this issue at the center of their attention."⁴⁶ Among the more notable cases in the second category of violations, "the captain of the m/s *Teliga* was drunk during the entire three-month voyage to Africa" and the first officer of the m/s *Krynica* "had not managed to sober up before reaching Hamburg" on a several-day-long journey from Poland.⁴⁷

⁴³ "Analiza dyscypliny pracy za 1977, KPD/77", Gdynia, dnia 9.9.1977, [in:] Korespondencja Wydziału II Komendy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie oraz Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca marynarzy polskich, 1974-1988, IPN Sz 0012/497/5, l. 75.

⁴⁴ To prevent future violations, the PLO instructed its captains to "introduce stricter surveillance in order to prevent the carrying in of pornographic materials, particularly in Western-European ports." After: "Analiza dyscypliny pracy za 1977, KPD/77", Gdynia, dnia 9.9.1977, [in:] Korespondencja Wydziału II Komendy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie oraz Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca marynarzy polskich, 1974-1988, IPN Sz 0012/497/5, l. 80.

⁴⁵ "Analiza dyscypliny pracy za 1977, KPD/77", Gdynia, dnia 9.9.1977, [in:] Korespondencja Wydziału II Komendy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie oraz Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca marynarzy polskich, 1974-1988, IPN Sz 0012/497/5, l. 76.

⁴⁶ "Analiza dyscypliny pracy za 1977, KPD/77", Gdynia, dnia 9.9.1977, [in:] Korespondencja Wydziału II Komendy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie oraz Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca marynarzy polskich, 1974-1988, IPN Sz 0012/497/5, l. 78.

⁴⁷ "Tezy na naradę w PLO", undated/unsigned [in:] Korespondencja Wydziału II Komendy Wojewódzkiej MO w Szczecinie oraz Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie dotycząca marynarzy polskich, 1974-1988, IPN Sz 0012/497/5, l. 98.

The official consumer market in Poland was legendary within the Soviet Bloc for its inexplicable scarcities and long lines, especially for essentials such as meat or toilet paper. But customers lucky enough to be supplied by the other market were quick to refine their tastes. During one of (often prearranged) inspections, Gdynia's Customs Office clerks studied what kinds of products entered the Tricity market through unofficial channels. The contents of the twelve ships surveyed turned out to be not-exactly in line with communist austerity and the spirit of collectivism – 387 pairs of artificial eyebrows, 3.2 kg of artificial nails, 2.567 kg of artificial fur and 1.481 wigs.⁴⁸ Objects of this type are designed to be seen or at least to cover what is not meant to be seen. While terms such as contraband and black markets might evoke impressions of certain milieus happy to stay on the margins of public life, a closer look reveals that the category of staple contraband objects strictly overlapped with the objects promising the highest potential return and that category overlapped rather closely with objects meant for public consumption or display - apparel, adornments, cosmetics, perfumes, furniture, western limousines. The consumption of western alcohol and cigarettes was accepted in public and certainly did not diminish the consumer's prestige. Those who - in official phraseology - “adopted a petty bourgeois value system” and “fetishized money”⁴⁹ were also likely to make it shine. Only drugs and prostitution usually remained underground in the strict sense of the word, though with several prominent exceptions.

The economic role played by the Tricity area has been aptly summarized in a meticulous analysis prepared by the two deputy prosecutors of the Gdańsk Prosecutor's Office, Eugeniusz Ożóg and Tadeusz Markowski: “[t]he purchase of forex assets from all over the country and their inflow into the Coast [here: Tricity] and vice versa, the distribution of contraband smuggled through maritime channels back to the country takes place through an extended network. This type of organized crime is highly deleterious since it destabilizes the domestic market equilibrium and disturbs the state's planned management of forex

⁴⁸ “Operational Report” Untitled/Undated [1970s], ANN, GUC 30/78, l. 1-14.

⁴⁹ “Informacja o wynikach kontroli kompleksowej województwa gdańskiego przeprowadzonej w dniach 16-28 I 1984”, AAN, KC PZPR, WA, LI/3, l.4.

reserves."⁵⁰ The goal of the report was to convince Warsaw that it needs to pay serious attention to the problem of the Baltic coast shadow economy because it drained the precious reserves of hard currency and fed the pockets of 'parasites', 'profiteers' and 'speculators'. The authors also suggested that special stores should be created to "capture the citizens' surplus hard currency reserves" - an idea already in action in the USSR and GDR.⁵¹

The skills, knowledge or patronage required to plug into the high revenue stream of the shadow economy were not easy to be found. One had to be well-versed in the art of navigating the convoluted convertible/inconvertible currency exchange regimes right on the fault line of the Iron Curtain. For those bold enough to confront the Curtain, crossing the line, in one piece and with contraband hidden ingeniously enough, classic arbitrage premiums awaited. The politically-generated price differentials between East and West remained so high and stable also because it was far from easy to move goods from one world to another. The connections between black market profits and the Soviet-type security apparatus emerged immediately after the war.⁵² In Poland and elsewhere, they remained hardly visible and were actively suppressed by the Party until the 1970s. By the mid-1970s, however, some of those connections made into the letter of law. In Poland, a ministerial decree issued in 1975 is a good example. Its full name read: "Decree nr 58 by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Sea Economy of July 11, 1975, with respect to removing the customs inspection duty from certain persons crossing the state border". The decree was passed quietly - its legal status was designed in such a way that it did not have to be voted through the *Sejm*. The title said it all, and who the "certain persons" were - it was explained by the appendix: "twenty five highest state office holders" and "members of close family (partners, children)". The list included top police and justice functionaries as well as professors of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Antoni Mączak, a

⁵⁰ "Informacja o przestępczości przemytniczo -dewizowej w województwie gdańskim"; [in:] Informacja Prokuratury Wojewódzkiej w Gdańsku z dnia 23-04-1970 o przestępczości przemytniczo-dewizowej w województwie gdańskim, 1970, IPN Gd 0046/227/3/5, l. 25.

⁵¹ "Informacja o przestępczości przemytniczo -dewizowej w województwie gdańskim"; [in:] Informacja Prokuratury Wojewódzkiej w Gdańsku z dnia 23-04-1970 o przestępczości przemytniczo-dewizowej w województwie gdańskim, 1970, IPN Gd 0046/227/3/5, l. 28.

⁵² For a general direction of my argument, see a similar argument made about China in: Xiaobo Lü, *Cadres and corruption : the organizational involution of the Chinese Communist Party*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, c2000), Preface.

historian who did not let that decree pass unnoticed, aptly characterized it as a "classic feudal *herrschaftsvertrag* aimed at legally securing the inheritance of privilege for the ruling class."⁵³

Decree Nr 58 raised the consumption of privilege in the world of really existing socialism to a new level of security and permissiveness. As noted by a renowned historian Jerzy Holzer, Władysław Gomułka had never failed to emphasize communism's egalitarian promise even if he failed to execute strict austerity from the nomenklatura. But after Gomułka, "it is legitimate to say" - wrote Holzer - "that communism has achieved one of its few ideological victories precisely in a sphere where practice was furthest removed from the declared slogans."⁵⁴ Gierek's new *enrichissez-vous* course was certainly enjoyed by the nomenklatura. For most other citizens, its most tangible effect was the shift to a two-currency regime in all but name. Polish citizens were now free to open a foreign currency bank account and many did – the total value of funds deposited in the special hard-currency PKO [State Savings Bank] 'A' accounts had reached one billion USD by the end of the decade. In everyday life, the new dual-currency reality was usually encountered through visiting one the PEWEX stores.

Jerzy Kochanowski, a leading expert on communism's black market, pithily captured the new developments and what it meant from the black market actors: "the hard currency supplying *cinkciarze* now began to lead a curious kind of pro-state activity."⁵⁵ In other words, as the overleveraged Polish state neared bankruptcy in the late 1970s, the *cinkciarze* emerged as a more reliable source of hard currency than the rather adventurist attempts to sell Polish manufactures in the west. As long as the citizen's goal was to eventually consume his dollar income in a state-run PEWEX store, his earlier method of obtaining hard currency remained irrelevant.⁵⁶ In 1977, 60 percent of Polish 'export' revenues were acquired through 'internal export' – PEWEX stores, PKO hard-currency accounts and similar institutions designed to capture the (still nominally illegal) hard currency reserves from the second economy.⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly, "[e]very kid

⁵³ Bronisław Geremek, eds. *Biedni i Bogaci : Studia z dziejów społeczeństwa i Kultury, Ofiarowane Bronisławowi Geremkowi w sześćdziesiątą Rocznicę Urodzin* (Warszawa: Wydawn. Nauk. PWN, 1992), 203.

⁵⁴ Jerzy Holzer, *"Solidarność", 1980-1981 : Geneza i Historia* (Warszawa: Krąg, 1983), 55.

⁵⁵ Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi Drzwiami : "Czarny Rynek" w Polsce 1944-1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Neriton", 2010), 86.

⁵⁶ G. Kurkiewicz, „Change money”... czyli dolary dla operatywnych, „Czas” 1978, nr 41; R. Czerniawski, Gra w Zielone, „Prawo i Życie”, 1983, nr 15.

⁵⁷ Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi Drzwiami...*, 269.

growing up in the Polish People's Republic in the 1970s learned this fundamental rule early on: there are two kinds of money - real and Polish."⁵⁸

Days after the December 1970 massacre, a secret *Commission for investigating the socio-economic problems of the Coast* was brought to life. Its final report was circulated among top party echelons in February 1971. The conclusion read:

"There exists a strict link and dependency between [...] the phenomena of criminal and hard-currency activity, the sailors' frequent contacts with 'the Western style of life' and the existence of an impressive world of private wealth on the Coast and the demoralizing influence of that lifestyle [...] on a certain group of younger workers, especially those poorly paid. This influence is reflected both in recruiting some of them into that world, e.g. as dummy *cinkeciarze* [those actually initiating street transactions, the most vulnerable job] as well as evoking, among a considerable group of workers, hatred of the world of wealth and resentment of the authorities who tolerate it. All of this has certainly played its part in the December 1970 events."⁵⁹

Another secret report on "[t]he threats to internal stability in the country in July 1978", prepared by the Ministry of Internal Security, emphasized the overwhelmingly negative social perception of the 'commercial' and PEWEX stores. The ubiquitous character of such perceptions made it "justified to claim that there do exist social divisions in terms of 'categories', 'castes', 'haves' and 'have-nots' [...] [and many consider that] that the stores are designed for privateers, thieves and hustlers. It is often emphasized that the situation contradicts socialist principles."⁶⁰ A similar attitude found reflection in the original Twenty One Postulates of August 1980 – the workers did not want to see domestically manufactured 'shortage goods' sold in the PEWEX stores.⁶¹ Tadeusz Fiszbach, a high party apparatchik, read the shipyards' mood well when he promised that "the excessive enrichment of certain individuals" would be curtailed, hoping to appease the crowds.⁶² After signing the August Accords, the regime did introduce some measures to make the life of black market actors more difficult. However, the incentives for the emergence of black markets in the first place were rooted too deeply in the system's overall design. Furthermore, the party's leadership

⁵⁸ W. Orliński, Dzieci Peweksu: Muzeum narodowe kultury masowej, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 20 December 2000.

⁵⁹ *Sprawozdanie zespołu...*, AAN, Sygn. XII-1795, l. 57.

⁶⁰ "Informacje MSW o zagrożeniach bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego w kraju w lipcu 1978 r.", 7 VIII 1978, AAN, KC PZPR, XIA/815, l. 11.

⁶¹ Edward Jarecki, *Stocznia Gdańska Im. Lenina : Życie Społeczno-Polityczne w Latach 1945-1984* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1985), 225.

⁶² Wystąpienie tow. Tadeusza Fiszbacha, „Nowe Drogi” nr 9/1980, 30-31.

encountered increasing resistance from its own security apparatus, which had all incentives to tolerate, control as well as initiate and profit from black market operations.

A rank and file sailor and a shipyard worker such as Lech Wałęsa were likely to share a similar background in terms of social origins and formal education. Their nominal wages were also similar. However, as it was put by a local expert A. Tymowski, "looking at official wages alone is plain stupidity since it does not account for access to shortage goods, inflation and illicit income".⁶³ Raising nominal wages with purchasing power increasingly determined by the range of goods available exclusively in the second economy or the 'commercial stores' led to hidden inflation, shortages, lines and frustration. The relationship between west-bound sailors and other social groups whose access to foreign currency and goods was less straightforward was anything but harmonious. The nature of the animosity was encapsulated by a joke told by a first officer on a Polish ship while leaving the port of Świnoujście in the 1970s: "You are lucky, gentlemen, that the price of bread in Poland did not increase this time."⁶⁴ It was an unambiguous reference to the December 1970 protests, sparked by the news of food price increases, which grounded some ships for a week or more. Told by a well-to-do officer embarking on a long voyage around the world, including Canada and Japan, expressed both contempt for the 'landlubbers' who earned so little they had to worry about the price of bread as well as a degree of annoyance at their cyclic outbursts of frustration that could put the maritime business to a halt.

As the sailors' purchasing power and access to western goods stood out even more in Poland under the Martial Law, the envy of their compatriots grew proportionately. Police departments in the port cities were flooded with denouncements from disturbed citizens. One of them personally visited a police station in Szczecin in May 1982, to report on the sound of firearms in action he had heard coming from an apartment occupied by a sailor. In addition, he informed the police that the sailor "lived beyond his means

⁶³ A. Tymowski, Hierarchia zadań polityki społecznej a ruch związkowy, „Więź” nr 11/12, 1980, 28.

⁶⁴ "Doniesienie ag." by tw. ps. K. Wisławski, "Szczecin, dn. 01.08.1974; [in:] Materiały dotyczące marynarzy polskich oraz statków płynących lub przebywających w portach w Ameryce Północnej [...], 1968-1988, IPN Sz 0012/498/163, l. 142.

despite his young age. He change[d] cars very often, most probably imported from abroad."⁶⁵ Similar reports, usually mentioning imported western cars and other coveted goods, were filed *en masse* in Szczecin and Tricity, in particular under the Martial Law.

This divergence in accessibility to high-end goods is visible when comparing household supply in 'essential' and 'luxury goods'. The disparities in the supply of 'essential goods' (of the 1970s) such as TV sets or refrigerators between groups defined as 'intelligentsia' and 'workers' were insignificant. When it came to cars, the difference was already noticeable: only every fifth working family owned one while one in four among intelligentsia families did not. Working families normally did not possess a phone at home while only each third intelligentsia family did not. Suburban dacha ownership was similarly characteristic – ownership rates of 2 and 11 respectively, sailing yachts – 0 and 5 percent. These figures indicate that the regime had indeed achieved a degree of success in making basic goods accessible, but the more 'commercial' a good was, the larger the disparities between the abilities to obtain it.⁶⁶

It was not intelligentsia, however, that most workers saw as a group to be blamed for the worsening situation. Telling data emerges from surveys conducted by a local sociologist Marek Latoszek. One of them found that 71 percent of workers saw intelligentsia as a group close and friendly to them, 23 percent thought differently. Traditional axes of class conflicts and discriminatory factors such as educational level "have receded into the background in light of the common disapproval of abusing the universally accepted norms of success in life and against the kinds of career paths popular today."⁶⁷ Furthermore, nominal income differentials between lowest and highest paid employees of the Lenin Shipyard, for example, were unremarkable by contemporary standards – they reached a maximum of 10:1, with differences between senior physical workers and top executives closer to 5:1. Those relations are visible in the original Twenty-

⁶⁵ "Notatka Służbowa", z dnia 05.05.1982, [in:] "Korespondencja Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie oraz inne materiały dotyczące polskich marynarzy i statków", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, IPN Sz 0012/499/1, l. 238.

⁶⁶ Marek Latoszek, *Więzi i Przejawy Integracji w Grupach i Zbiorowościach Społeczeństwa Gdańskiego Pod Koniec Lat Siedemdziesiątych* (Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański, 1987), 238.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

One postulates, in which the workers demanded reducing the highest legally allowed differential from 6:1 to 3:1.

The primary source and target for resentment was the so-called 'private initiative' which "was usually associated with ostentatious wealth that had often been acquired illegally."⁶⁸ In a similar survey conducted in 1974, 60 percent of the respondents pointed to the "private initiative" and 15 percent to the wealth of "the people of the margins"⁶⁹ as reasons for their dissatisfaction. Private initiative has also been mentioned as the easiest path to the riches, followed by top state offices and frequent travels abroad. Travelling abroad was seen particularly lucrative by those "who could use their head" and were "too poor to spend holidays at home."⁷⁰ Wealth was associated not with education, skills or hard work, but with "dishonesty, cunningness and dealing under the table."⁷¹ The respondents neared a consensus that "qualifications, honest work or thrift do not guarantee achieving a stable level of material well-being."⁷² Social stratification was of course one among many reasons contributing to the causal nexus leading to *Solidarność*, but a vicious circle of systemic conditions transformed that particular source of discontent into a powerful sense of injustice that kept the flame of *Solidarność* burning especially bright on the Baltic coast.

Martial Law saw a return of measures remembered well from the Stalinist years. Two months before its introduction, on October 12, 1981, the Council of Ministers established yet another regulatory body: The Central Anti-Speculation Commission. With a slightly different name and more gentle instrumentarium, the Commission was to achieve the objectives so ardently pursued by its much-feared, legendary predecessor: The Special Commission for Liquidating Economic Abuse and Sabotage, 1945-1954. The Commission's local branch was created in Gdańsk already in March 1981. Under the Martial Law, special 'activist-worker' brigades were mobilized, of course on a 'voluntary basis', to fight with

⁶⁸ Marek Latoszek, *Więzi i Przejawy...*, 255.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁷⁰ See: J. Kochanowski, "Jesteśmy za biedni, aby urlop spędzać w kraju" - masowa turystyka i nielegalny handel w latach sześćdziesiątych XX wieku. Perspektywa polska. „Rocznik Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych” nr 68, 2008, pp. 125-150.

⁷¹ Marek Latoszek, *Więzi i Przejawy...*, 256.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 257.

'speculation'. While the Baltic coast had been a peripheral object of interest for the first Stalinist commission, which focused primarily on the areas of the former General Government, it emerged as number one in 1981. In 1982, the number of 'activists' participating in various 'control actions' in the Gdańsk Voivodeship equaled 6920 while in the Warsaw Voivodeship – 2902, the Katowice Voivodeship – 3173, both with much larger populations than the Gdańsk Voivodeship. In the peripheral eastern voivodeships the numbers were as low as 35.⁷³ These figures indicate that, even if participation in the brigades had been 'encouraged from above', the new 'anti-speculation' line of the regime must have been met with considerably authentic response in Tricity.

The quality of communist egalitarianism on the Polish Baltic coast on the eve of *Solidarność* was captured by an incident that took place when a Chinese ship Hui Yang visited Szczecin in early May, 1980. The Poles invited the ship's captain to participate in the local May the First parade and festivities, but he refused. The SB agents were bound to report on such an unusual incident and they did: "[t]he captain of the ship motivated his decision by arguing that they [in China] have real communism where there are no differences between the captain and the crew, while we have capitalism because an engineer or a captain is a person of much higher status and [enjoys] more respect than a worker. In this difference, the Chinese perceives a class difference, which [in his opinion] is a characteristic trait of capitalism." The SB officers who read that report described it as "objective" and the agent who wrote it, TW Janek, as "trustworthy".⁷⁴

Martial Law saw a return to some of the blunt weapons of governance from the Stalinist arsenal. But a full-blown return to Stalinism was certainly not desired by the leadership nor the cadres. After the brief military interlude in Poland, the ways of the shadow economy spread throughout the entire Bloc and by the late 1980s - they ruled supreme. The centrally planned economy had stopped functioning everywhere apart from the planners' cabinets. Before 1980, however, the socioeconomic profile of the Polish Baltic Coast was unique compared with the rest of Bloc. Various black market phenomena did exist virtually

⁷³ "Brygady antyspekulacyjne 1982-1987", AAN, URM 32/178, l. 32-34.

⁷⁴ "Informacja", z dnia 19.10.1979. źródło: tw. Janek, [in:] "Korespondencja Wydziału II Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie oraz inne materiały dotyczące polskich marynarzy i statków", Wojewódzki Urząd Spraw Wewnętrznych w Szczecinie, IPN Sz 0012/499/1, l. 41.

everywhere, but their scale and distinct urban/spatial concentration on the Polish Baltic coast was outstanding. The mechanisms and relationships described in this chapter are important in so far as they uncover a little known story that differs from most other accounts of the origins of the Polish anti-communist opposition and its traditional themes such as: the role of the Catholic Church, nationalism and anti-Russian sentiment, the role of KOR intellectuals and dissidents, the systemic inefficiency of Soviet-types economies, 'the Gorbachev factor' or the role of Western support and its ideological emphasis on human rights. Due to the nature of my subject, its significance was perhaps less immediately obvious to many contemporary observers and has remained such for historians. With the archives now more fully open, its extensive dimensions and impact should be appreciated and analyzed.

In conclusion, it is worth reflecting that all the traditional forms of Polish resistance to foreign domination, such military uprisings, conspiratorial and dissident activity, often served to strengthen the communist regime. The Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and the anti-Semitic, anti-intelligentsia purge of 1968 are the two most prominent examples. What happened on the Baltic Coast in December 1970 and then again in 1980 was entirely different and caught the regime by surprise. To reduce it to a crude binary, the peculiarity of the Baltic coast can be imagined as a difficult coexistence of 'ideal Marxist' (big concentration of labor in heavy industry) and 'ideal laissez-fair' (unregulated outcomes of multiple private exchanges) conditions rubbing against each other (the wrong way) while being inextricably depended on each other for livelihood. In more concrete terms, some people were toiling on the factory floor building ships while others were making lots of money thanks to what was illegal at the time. Since many of the Gdańsk-built ships were 'exported' to the USSR, the shop floor labor in them was perhaps not far from what Marx understood as alienation. The contraband of fashion or stimulants was worlds apart from Adam Smith's moral sentiments. But nothing was 'normal' in the Polish economy at the time. In a world where honest work 'led to nowhere', it took some not-exactly-elegant types of operations to blow that world apart. Those operations were at the core of an engine of economic growth expanding from within the margins imposed by the central planner. Would any kind of 'honest' or 'legal' business have the capacity to undermine the regime's grip on the economy and society?

The usage of the morally-charged terminology such as 'speculation', 'profiteering' or 'contraband' so widespread in this dissertation stems from the nature of the archival evidence and all the opprobrium heaped on 'capitalism' by Marxist-Leninist ideologues. A closer look at the black market of port cities in Poland shows that it was a remarkably peaceful environment, with little violence often associated with similar milieus or the kinds of 'entrepreneurial violence' that became all-too-visible in the post-Soviet space after the USSR collapsed. What most contrabandists, prostitutes or money changers did was providing goods and services that were in high demand and hard to obtain and were rewarded accordingly. A comparative look at the Baltic coast of the GDR and the Soviet Union shows that the incomparably lower levels of black market activity there contributed to the regime's ability to maintain control over citizens more comprehensively and for longer. The level of control that the Stasi and KGB held over any aspect of life in their respective societies was extraordinary and the port cities were monitored with ruthless scrutiny. True, those playing the black market game were not interested in bringing down the regime and for a good reason - the income level of seagoing professions declined nominally, not to mention relatively, after 1989. On the other side, many apparatchiks hoped they could profit from its operations while retaining a comfortable level of control. In a society constructed according to a Marxist blueprint, but governed by the law of unintended consequences, black markets were not only hardly conducive to the regime's stability, but more subversive than most authors have so far conceded. In this Gordian knot of paradoxes, contradictions and economic relations turned upside-down, the black markets did make social inequalities even more unfair and blatant, facilitated corruption and indirectly led to casualties and repressions, but ultimately - to the regime's collapse as well. I leave it for the readers to decide how to distribute the signs of moral evaluation in this particular episode of Cold War history.