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Włodzimierz Suleja, March '68 - rebellion against communist dictatorship

March has a special place among all "Polish" months. It was for the first time, not counting the student anti-communist conspiracy of the early fifties, that young people reacted against the imposed system. This authentic generational rebellion included not only students, although they were the most visible group.

Young workers and high school students took part in rallies and mass demonstrations (over 20,000 people in Gdańsk), also in places where - like Tarnów or Legnica - there were no universities.

It was a rebellion against communist rule and ubiquitous mendacity. After all, the most verbalized call: "The Press lies!" was a manifestation of opposition. It was omnipresent on banners, inscriptions on walls or street asphalt, disseminated throughout the country by means of leaflets prepared in private homes. It was also the young people, most often blue-collar workers, who had the courage to shout out the words of protest and support for student protests during official propaganda mass gatherings.

March was also marked by a shameful anti-Semitic campaign prepared by the government. It was seemingly aimed at those who had once built the system and held significant posts in the party-state apparatus. However, it affected nearly twenty thousand people, not only Poles of Jewish origin, and forced them to leave Poland.

The youth protest, although it survived in some centers (Wrocław) until May, was suppressed extremely brutally. The demonstrations were pacified with clubs and water cannons, prison cells were full, students were expelled en masse, whole faculties were closed down, and the most disobedient individuals were sent to the army. The representatives of the intelligentsia, especially artists who decided to back the protest, also paid the price for their support. Relations between the government and the church authorities also became more strained, as the bishops voiced their support for the persecuted.

March 1968 is an unusual month. Although the youth liberation movement was indeed pacified, it foreshadowed further protests. Bigger and stronger, to later result in the memorable August.

Włodzimierz Suleja

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