

# Why it's so important for Poland to have a free media

Neo-fascists enjoy impunity under Law and Order party

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The need for media in Poland to remain free is critical. Without them, people in Poland and abroad might never know about scandals which government-controlled media do not report.

After Poland shed the shackles of Communism in 1989, it was agreed to form the Institute of National Remembrance, a historical institution, designated as custodian of archives and documentation pertaining to behaviour of organizations and individuals during the Nazi occupation and Communist rule. It is charged with the responsibility of clearing some individuals of charges of collaboration, while naming some others as being secret collaborators of Nazi occupants or Communist UB (later SB) the dreaded secret political police. The institute, whose Polish acronym is IPN, was declared a non-party political institution of historical research and for many years it stood up to this standard.

Since the "Law and Order" party came to power, many directors of key institutions, as well as judges in high courts have been replaced by people enjoying the trust of those in power. IPN today is looked upon by many as an extension of the ruling party, carrying out its policy of "historical politics." The government announced some sweeping changes in its historical attitude, trying to appeal to national pride, by playing down or even keeping silent about events which place some Poles in a bad light, while promoting military victories and martyrdom. In this, the government and its institutions often wink to extreme right groups who organize marches through towns with banners calling for white power and a Catholic Poland only for Poles. Neo-fascist groups like the Radical National Camp (ONR) today enjoy impunity for such actions and rhetoric in a country which endured Nazi occupation and on whose soil most of the Holocaust was carried out. We know about this only because the still free Polish newspapers and TV expose such government attitudes.

Only a few days ago, Polish public opinion was shocked by news exposed by the free media. Tomasz Greniuch, an ex-member of the ONR, who had been caught at least twice giving the Nazi "Heil Hitler" salute, which is outlawed in Poland, was elevated to the position of head of the IPN Chapter of Wrocław, a major city in southwest Poland. A bulletin published by the "Never Again" Association, a non-government organization documenting and fighting xenophobia, anti-Semitism and discrimination in Poland states: "Among the auctions removed from the Allegro site after a recommendation by our Association was a book, titled 'The Road of a Nationalist' by Tomasz Greniuch, the short-lived director of the Wrocław chapter of the Institute of National Remembrance. The book contains praise of fascist movements. In this publication the author revokes the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, according to which a 'world government' was supposedly heading for a destruction of Poles and Poland 'in the time of Zionist triumph, when the idea of globalism presumes the enslavement of all the nations of the world into one superpower under the aegis of the world diaspora.'"

He also praises the Belgian SS officer Léo Degrelle, sentenced in absentia to the death penalty for collaboration, as well as Corneliu Codreanu — the creator of the Iron Guard, the Romanian fascist organization which murdered Jews. Greniuch was the creator and spokesperson of the National Radical Camp in the Opole region of Poland. His many years' extreme nationalist activity have been documented in the "Brown Book" monitoring publication by the "Never Again" Association. In 2005 he co-organized a march to commemorate the anti-Jewish pogrom in the town of Mysłowice of 1936 and a year later he made the "Heil Hitler" gesture in the student club of the Opole University. He was the mentor and co-organizer of the so-called Independence March in Warsaw.

As a result of protests within Poland and abroad, he resigned. This is just one example of the critical significance of maintaining free media, without which the public might not have learned about the scandal. This event should be made known to the Canadian public at large. Without strong worldwide support, Polish free media will have to struggle to survive or suffer the same fate as in Victor Orban's Hungary.

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