

The audience and reception of the films from the Profil Film Unit in 1982–1989

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The subject of this article is an analysis of the distribution, attendance results and reception of feature films made by the Profil Film Unit in 1982–1989. The Profil Film Unit was the second film group (alongside Iluzjon, headed by Czesław Petelski) to be reactivated by the cinematography management after martial law was declared in Poland. The artistic director of Profil, Bohdan Poręba, enjoyed the trust and support of the Party authorities, linking his allegiance to communist dogma to his activity in the nationalist ‘Grunwald’ Patriotic Association. Profil’s productions were boycotted by a large part of the acting community (also due to an appeal by the ‘The Solidarity Stage and Film Artists’ published in the newspaper “Tygodnik Mazowski”), and some of the films made by this unit in the 1980s clearly followed the guidelines of the cultural policy of the Polish United Workers’ Party. The following questions will be answered: How did the political circumstances outlined above affect the distribution and reception of the films made by Profil? What attendance results did the films produced by Profil achieve and to what extent did they differ from the cinema ticket revenues of the films produced by other groups? How was the activity of the Profil Film Unit and the financial results achieved evaluated by the Supreme Board of Film Affairs? How were the productions of Profil received by film critics in the daily press and magazines?

KEYWORDS: Film Unit, Profil, reception, distribution, audience, financial results, Polish United Workers’ Party

From the very beginning of its existence (in 1975), the Film Unit Profil, managed by director Bohdan Poręba, struggled with the label of a ‘regime’ unit, due to being supported by the authorities and implementing their cultural and historical policy. The artistic director himself provided evidence to justify this statement on several occasions, not only through the films he made (such as *Where the Water is Clean and the Grass is Green* [1977]), but also through his social[1] activities

[1] In October 1979, Bohdan Poręba and some of the artists associated in Profil signed “List 44” (full name: “Voice of the discussion before the 8th Congress of the Polish United Workers’ Party”). This document should be regarded as a declaration of submission to the then ruling authorities (“everything important, significant and permanent in culture has been done under the Party’s leadership”) and a voice of protest against anti-communist centres and organisations (including the Workers’ Defence Committee and the Movement for Defence of Human and Civic Rights), the works of Sławomir Mrożek and Witold Gombrowicz, the overrepresentation of Western art with the

omission of popularising the work of artists representing socialist ideas, allowing creative and cabaret units to ridicule the system, and finally against ‘the distribution of such film works as *Man of Marble*, *Without Anaesthesia*, *Hospital of the Transfiguration* or *Provincial Actors*’. The signatories of the letter complained about a lack of tolerance on the part of the creators standing in opposition to socialist ideas (they gave as an example the attitude towards the environment of the producers of the film *Where the Water is Clean and the Grass Green*), calling this phenomenon a provocation. (Cf. *Z tajnych archiwów. Gil, Krzywołocka, Poręba: Wyrażamy głęboki niepokój o dalszy*

and membership of the Commission for Film Approval (he was very critical of, for example, Stanisław Bareja's comedy *What You'll Do When You Catch Me* (1978), or – later – Ryszard Bugajski's *Interrogation* (1982). When, during the 'Solidarity Carnival,' thanks to an agreement between the Polish Filmmakers Association and the Ministry of Culture and Art, it was possible for the artistic directors of film units to be chosen by the filmmakers themselves, the community decided to liquidate Profil in 1981 (along with Czesław Petelski's Iluzjon Film Unit and Ryszard Filipiński's Kraków Film Unit, whose managers were also considered politically involved and supported communist ideas). At the same time, Poręba became active in the notorious nationalist 'Grunwald' Patriotic Association.[2] In February 1982, when the communist authorities decided to reactivate film production, two units that had been liquidated a year earlier – Iluzjon and Profil – began operating again. In January 1983, The Solidarity of Stage and Film Artists issued a statement encouraging a boycott of those film groups, drawing parallels between them and Polish Television.[3] In fact, this was merely a sanctioning of the prevailing mood, since the managers in the above-mentioned creative units had already been ostracised by the community, while the term 'party unit' had become permanently attached to Bohdan Poręba's unit.[4]

In the period under discussion, Profil made more than 50 movies for the cinema and over a dozen TV productions, both medium-length films and series comprising several episodes. The description of the reception of each title could be the subject of a doctoral dissertation, so a selection was necessary for the purposes of this article. At the outset, all productions made by Profil on commission from Polish Television were rejected, for two main reasons. Firstly, although Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Zbiorów Programowych TVP S.A. (the TVP Programme Documentation and Collection Archive) retains a lot of interesting material concerning the rejected productions (e.g., a set of reviews of scripts and all their versions, various production materials, among which there are *Detailed plans* and *Organisational and economic reports on production*), it does not have reports of pre-release screenings.

rozwój socjalistycznej kultury polskiej, "Polityka" 1993, no. 35, pp. 20–21).

[2] Cf. P. Gasztołd-Seń, *Towarzysze z betonu. Dogmatyzm w PZPR 1980–1990*, Warszawa 2019. The achievements of Poręba's predecessors in implementing nationalist inemanto inema films or TV series are described in: M. Kunicki, 'Optimism against All Odds': *Polish National Identity in War Films of Jerzy Passendorfer*, "Sprawy Narodowościowe" 2017, no. 49; M. Kunicki, *Poland's Wild West and East: Polish Westerns of the 1960s*, [in:] *Popular Cinemas in Central Europe: Film Cultures and Histories*, eds. D. Ostrowska, Z. Varga, F. Pitassio, London – New York 2017,

pp. 157–172; P. Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci. Obraz II wojny światowej w kinie polskim*, Bydgoszcz 2013.

[3] Cf. *Solidarność artystów sceny i filmu w.s. bojkotu*, "Tygodnik Mazowsze" 1983, no. 40, p. 3.

[4] The boycott of the unit and of Bohdan Poręba among established actors lasted almost until the end of the 1980s, an example of which is Grażyna Szapołowska, who in 1988 rejected a proposal to act in the film *Penelope* (1988; directed by Bohdan Poręba). Cf. <<https://www.filmweb.pl/person/Gra%C5%BCyna+Szap%C5%82owska-425/trivia>>, accessed: 27.02.2022.

Secondly, the films and TV series produced by Profil were rarely the subject of press reviews. In each case, at most a few articles were written about them, and in some, only one article was published in “TV Ekran” magazine.[5] However, there is still a large pool of titles. I have therefore decided to distinguish the most important currents in the programme activity of Profil and to discuss the most representative titles – Bohdan Poręba’s film *The Crash Off Gibraltar* (1983) and two ‘anti-Solidarity’ films by Roman Wionczek, *Dignity* (1984) and *Time of Hope* (1986).

The Crash Off Gibraltar (1983) was the first film made by Bohdan Poręba after the reactivation of Profil in 1982. The story of the last years of General Władysław Sikorski’s life, his activities in exile and his co-operation with the leaders of the three superpowers – Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt – aroused considerable controversy even during shooting. In December 1982, “*Życie Literackie*” published an article by Olgierd Terlecki, a soldier in the 2nd Polish Corps during the war and later a journalist for Krakow magazines. Terlecki strongly protested against the fact that Jerzy Klimkowski, from the Krakow periodicals, had been engaged as a consultant in the *The Crash Off...* Jerzy Klimkowski, who had been General Władysław Anders’s adjutant since 1941 and a supporter of the theory that Sikorski’s death was caused by the British secret service, and that the plane crash was ordered by Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt; the reason for that were the numerous commitments concerning the shape of post-war Poland which the aforementioned leaders had made to Sikorski, and the fears of a Polish-Soviet agreement which the general was supposed to have created. Terlecki was an opponent of this type of theory. In his works, he repeatedly tried to prove that the cause of Sikorski’s death was an unfortunate accident. He also referred to Klimkowski as the leader of an “idiotic and completely misguided rebellion against Sikorski,”[6] while Poręba reproached him for his ignorance of the views and past of Anders’ former adjutant, claiming that if a director “does not know this, so much the worse for the director and for all of us,” adding “Firstly, this is about historical truth. Secondly, the director does not invest his own money in his film. All Polish taxpayers are investing their own money.”[7]

Together, due to the subject matter and plot, I would like to discuss two films by Roman Wionczek – *Dignity* (1984) and *Time of Hope* (1986). The screenwriter of both films was Jerzy Grzymkowski, the literary manager of the Profil film unit and a member of the Polish United Workers’ Party since its formation. Before he became a writer and scriptwriter, in the early years after the war he was a soldier of the Internal Security Corps and then a member of the Citizen’s Militia. After

“Cut the long story short” or briefly about the films

[5] As an aside, both the content that appears in this magazine and its political orientation also deserve serious study.

[6] O. Terlecki, *Jak kura na pieprzu*, “*Życie Literackie*” 1982, no. 44.

[7] Ibidem.

leaving the service, he started working at Huta Warszawa, where he also wrote his first stories. Asked by a journalist from the weekly magazine *Film* about his literary achievements, especially novels set after World War II, he acknowledged: "I am aware of [...] one-sidedness, but I will not change. I have never tried to present a wide panorama. First of all, I knew very little about that side. I saw them only in passing, for a while, or when they were already in our hands. [...] That is why in my books this other side is only a background. [...] It may sound terrible, but those people are still enemies to me." [8] In response to another question, he added: "I don't think the socialist realism is a bad thing. It has been degenerated." [9] The plot of *Dignity*, which is truly socialist realist in content and form, was based on an event from November 1981 involving Józef Topolski, one of the workers at the POLMO plant in Krosno. At that time, he presided over the trade union supported by the party management, the activity of which was opposed by workers connected with Solidarity. As a result of conflict with these trade unionists, Topolski was taken out of the factory in a wheelbarrow. Grzymkowski reconstructed this event, describing it using the example of the Szostak family of workers, and used this story to discredit the members of Solidarity in the eyes of the audience and to propose the thesis that workers are manipulated by advisors from the intelligentsia. *Time of Hope*, in turn, was a continuation of *Dignity*, set at the beginning of martial law. With this film, Grzymkowski and Wionczek wanted to show this historical period from the Party perspective, arguing that the introduction of martial law introduction led to a stabilisation of the situation in a country plagued by division and polarisation, as well as improving working conditions for the working class.

Assessments by the pre-release screening committee

At the pre-release screening of *The Crash Off Gibraltar*, which took place on 14 December 1983, there were people who were for the most part unequivocally identified with the Party, including Jan Dobraczyński, the chairman of the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth; Ryszard Frelek, who in the 1970s was a member of the Sejm of the People's Republic of Poland and a member of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party; officials from the Cultural Department of the Central Committee, comrades Zygmunt Janik and Jan Kasak; "party writers" Jerzy Jesionowski and Kazimierz Koźniewski; the film critic of "Trybuna Ludu," the press organ of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party; Zbigniew Klaczyński; and the artistic director of the Iluzjon Film Unit, Czesław Petelski. It would seem, then, that *The Crash Off Gibraltar* would be accepted without further discussion. Indeed, almost all the auditors awarded Poręba's film the 1st Artistic Category, with one exception. The second category was awarded by Kazimierz Koźniewski, and it was he who attacked both

[8] J. Smagowski, *Nie patrzę przez szybę. Rozmowa z Jerzym Grzymkowskim*, "Film" 1984, no. 7, p. 4.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 5.

the film and the director during discussions. The writer and journalist had several meetings with General Władysław Sikorski and, during one of them, had a longer conversation with him, so he was a competent person when it came to assessing this figure and the way he was portrayed in the film. He also served in the Polish Army in the West. Koźniewski stated that Sikorski “was physically and mentally different from the character we saw on the screen.”^[10] He also questioned the way in which Marshal Philippe Pétain of France was portrayed, who in the first version of the film was a stuttering old man, which, according to the auditor, contributed to “lowering the dramatic value of that moment and which is completely unnecessary.”^[11]

However, other opinions of the participants in the screening were radically different. Everyone who spoke congratulated Poręba on his achievement, saying that he had made perhaps his best film. For example, according to Jan Dobraczyński, “of all the films that dealt with such difficult issues, this one deals with authentic historical events, and shows them in an accessible but artistic and educational way.” He added, “It should be noted that this was an exceptionally necessary film, it is good that it was made, and it was made in such a way that it can boldly compete with other historical films, because it is a very good film.”^[12] Comrade Jan Kasak, in turn, drew attention to the extraordinary topicality of *The Crash Off...*, for in his view, Poręba had made a film about a divided nation, while at the same time calling for integration and preventing a further split in society. Kasak also encouraged Poręba, after the anticipated great success of this film, to make a film about Władysław Gomułka, who, in his opinion, also had great merits during World War II and “was one who fought all his life, was a great Pole and a great communist, so I would see some analogies in this.”^[13] Major Tadeusz Bednarczyk, one of the founders of “Grunwald” Patriotic Association, also took part in the audition on behalf of the “Sikorszczacy” uniting. He stated that “the film is the peak achievement of the People’s Republic of Poland.”^[14]

Unfortunately, the reports from the pre-release screening of *Dignity* have not survived, either in the library of the National Film Archive (where most documents of this type are stored), or in the archives of Polish Television. From the scraps of preserved documents, all we know is that the film received the first, highest artistic category. Fortunately, the transcripts of the pre-release screening of *Time of Hope* have survived. This took place on 10 July 1986 and returned a series of positive opinions about the work presented; Wionczek and Grzymkowski were congratulated above all for having the courage to take up the subject of martial law, for having blazed a trail in the portrayal of that period by

[10] *Stenogram z posiedzenia Komisji Kolaudacyjnej Filmów Fabularnych w dniu 14 grudnia 1983 r.*, National Film Archive, A-344, item 347, p. 3.

[11] *Ibidem.*

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 5.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 14.

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 10.

Polish cinema, as well as for the specifically understood honesty and reliability. This should not come as a surprise, since the participants of the screening were mostly Party members, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the Polish Army, as well as representatives of editorial offices known for their sympathies with Bohdan Poręba's team or for their support for the authorities. Director Janusz Zaorski (director of *The Mother of Kings* [1982]) was also due to appear at the meeting and take part in the discussion, but, as he himself admitted, "The beginning of the film is such that an armoured personnel carrier passes through the frame and the title appears. Is this what *Time of Hope* was supposed to look like? I was supposed to take part in the pre-release screening, but immediately after that horrible shot I left, furious." [15] However, despite the fact that the participants of the screening were positively disposed towards Wionczek's vision of the beginnings of martial law, some comments were made about *Time of Hope*. Jerzy Jesionowski suggested the director should consider "cleaning up the dialogue, as it can only irritate future viewers, even if we assume that the film will be shown on television." [16] Professor Bronisław Gołębiowski was perhaps the harshest in his criticism of the authors; he stated that "such a film is necessary, but it is quite far from what I would like to see on this subject," [17] while another representative of Warsaw University, Professor Henryk Jankowski, complained in turn about the excess of journalism. However, what was binding and very important for the reception of the film by representatives of the regime were the words of Colonel Krzysztof Majchrowski, a representative of the Ministry of the Interior and deputy director of Department III of this ministry, who regarded the production under discussion as "an artistic film" and "fair by reaching for the artistic truth." [18] Not surprisingly, this film also received the first artistic category.

Press reception

Tracing the press reception of *The Crash Off Gibraltar*, one can come to three conclusions. Firstly, that just as the film community was divided into a faction opposing Poręba and one supporting him, so were journalists similarly polarised. Secondly, that *The Crash Off...* was measured against *Polonia Restituta* (1980), and the film was judged by comparing it to Poręba's previous work. And thirdly, that the screenplay's author, Włodzimierz Tadeusz Kowalski, received the greatest criticism. Some reviewers found fault with the adoption of a similar convention to that used in *Polonia Restituta* and the Television Theatre series *Before the Storm* (1977; directed by Roman Wionczek), [19] namely, the numerous scenes of Sikorski talking to representatives of

[15] R. Dajbor, *Jak u Barei, czyli kto to powiedział*, Warszawa 2019, p. 108.

[16] *Stenogram z posiedzenia Komisji Kolaudacyjnej Filmów Fabularnych w dniu 10.VII.1986 r.*, National Film Archive, A-344, item 502, p. 2.

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 4.

[18] *Ibidem*, p. 8.

[19] More on this production: J. Grzechowiak, "Przed burzą" – koniec lat trzydziestych według Ryszarda Frelka i Włodzimierza Tadeusza Kowalskiego, [in:] *Wrzesień 1939. Filmowe teksty i konteksty*, eds. B. Giza, T. Lubelski, Warszawa 2021, pp. 279–305.

the world's superpowers or military commanders, while others claimed that both the scriptwriter and the director suffered from the disease of "everythingism," wanting to include too many topics and problems in one film. As Maria Malatyńska wrote, Kowalski "realised the thing in such a televisual manner, as if it was meant for at least a dozen episodes." [20] Janusz Zatorski emphasized this issue even more strongly. In his review, he noted: "Poręba's mistake lies in the fact that for years, he has been stubbornly staging long, drawn-out, vivid historical pictures. In them, he wants to show everything and everyone, or tell everything about everything. And maybe even a little bit more. [...] As a result, although we see a lot on screen, we learn little of the truth about history. All these figures, paper-like, rigidly posed, speaking in sentences from appropriate transcripts, are boring, bland and schematic." [21] A consequence of the adopted convention, in turn, was the large number of supporting characters – the film's cast alone numbers about 80 people, plus numerous episodic characters. Hence, there were suggestions that not every viewer of the film would be able to recognise the individual characters and understand the relationships between them. This issue was raised by Zygmunt Kałużyński, among others: "The film consists of a few military parades and dozens of high-level conversations involving about two dozen generals and colonels, whose names appear in the tone of «you know who this is,» while you don't know at all. For example, I, in whom Sikorski took a moderate interest, still cannot make out who are all those Kukiels, Klimeckis, Mareckis, Mitkiewicz, Kopanskis, and Ambassador Kot, and Attaché Rettinger, etc." [22]

Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz also wrote a negative review, but for him, his observations on the production of *The Crash Off Gibraltar* became a starting point for broader reflections on films made in the convention of the "theatre of fact." In an ironic article, he criticised this formula and the methodology of selecting the main characters of such productions. He wrote: "The bigger the hero, the more money you can spend on him, showing him in one or even two series. Heroes who are exiles and wanderers are especially good [...] because then you can shoot them all over the world [...]. A historical and sanctified figure also becomes a delicate blackmail trick in the face of possible objections from producers or criticism: Don't like Sikorski? Don't like Copernicus? Don't like Waryński? Well, well, interesting..." [23] Toeplitz also condemned the "textbook" scripts for those productions, based mostly on historical publications or archive materials, the templated and superficial nature of the dramas' characters and the resulting plot solutions, as well as the introduction of well-known family plots concerning the main character's biography.

[20] M. Malatyńska, *Katastrofa w Gibraltarze*, "Echo Krakowa" 1984, no. 202.

[21] J. Zatorski, *Dostojny komiks*, "Kierunki" 1984, no. 47.

[22] Z. Kałużyński, *Śmierć generała*, "Polityka" 1984, no. 40.

[23] K.T. Toeplitz, *Parodia*, "Polityka" 1986, no. 20.

Olgierd Terlecki was critical of the film from a different point of view: he noticed numerous historical errors, one of which was very significant. It concerns a scene set in the Soviet Union in 1941, during which Colonel Zygmunt Berling visits General Sikorski, who is ill. He shows him a map of Poland's future borders, concluding with the words: "There is a great opportunity. Poland with Wrocław and Szczecin, the Recovered Territories, for which Długosz prayed. General, you have to be Chrobry to make such a decision. You have to take a decision for an entire nation, for whole centuries. May God give you such strength and determination." [24] He also claims that General Anders is an advocate of breaking the agreement with Moscow. Olgierd Terlecki argued that "Colonel Berling did not show Sikorski any school map, nor did he inform on Anders [...]. Moreover, this whole scene is pure fiction, as Sikorski did not talk to Berling at all." [25] Referring to this scene, Włodzimierz Tadeusz Kowalski claimed that "this scene was not in the script, it was created at the shooting stage." [26] It was, therefore, an invention of Bohdan Poręba, who wanted to use this part of the film as an example to show Sikorski's orientation towards Moscow and his blessing of the future territorial arrangement of the liberated country.

Naturally, *The Crash Off Gibraltar* also met with almost unambiguously positive reviews, although today the names of the authors of these very articles come as no surprise. Zbigniew Klaczyński was one who spoke positively about another of Poręba's achievements, emphasising, among other things, the successful recreation of an era brought to an end by the outbreak of World War II, the peculiarly spectacular imagery, based on the recreation of French, British or American scenery on the screen, but also specific references to the present day, which he found in the film. Klaczyński justified this with the following arguments: "What I mean here is not only an interesting differentiation of the image of the pre-war political elite, but also something like the opposite. Namely, the formation of the thinking of these ultimately very different people, most of whom, regardless of the purity of their intentions and the breadth of their horizons, were under no circumstances able to go beyond the dogma of distrust and hostility towards the Soviet Union. This conditioning, not devoid of deep historical and class considerations, did not allow them to make a realistic assessment of the situation of the country, nor even of their own situation, which in the further course of events was to turn them into pathetically ridiculous figures of leaders and ministers of imaginary governments. But before this happened, they fatally influenced the fate of still-active generations. After all, it was London that imposed on the Home Army the suicidal policy of two enemies, and it was London that inspired

[24] The beginning of the last sentence of Colonel Berling's question comes from Ksawery Pruszyński's article *Wobec Rosji*.

[25] O. Terlecki, *Katastrofa w Gibraltarze*, "Życie Literackie" 1984, no. 41.

[26] E. Duraczyński, W.T. Kowalski, *Lubimy przegranych?*, interviewed by K. Kreutzinger, C. Dondziłło, "Film" 1984, no. 51, p. 4.

the tragedy of Warsaw. The specific topicality of the film is therefore not just a reviewer's trope." [27] Czesław Dondziłło also found a lot of value in *The Crash Off Gibraltar*. The *Film* reviewer saw in Poręba's film a polemic against the Polish Film School, and especially with the notion of heroism it presented. Dondziłło also found the film's portrayal of the background of foreign policy during World War II, the atmosphere in the London government and the growing dislike of the protagonist among those in émigré circles to be a plus. And although Dondziłło acknowledged that *The Crash Off Gibraltar* had a few shortcomings, mainly in terms of staging, "the most important thing is that the film is there, that it fills in one of the blank spots in our history." [28] Among the articles supporting Poręba's achievement were some written months before its premiere. *Dziennik Ludowy* published an article by Tomasz Czabański on 25 January 1984 (over seven months before *The Crash Off...* was released). Although he was not a professional film reviewer, he felt obliged to inform his readers that Bohdan Poręba's film was "a patriotic work," "deeply, sincerely, truly patriotic," [29] and was distinguished by numerous artistic qualities, including excellent direction, superb acting, musical composition and very good editing. Czabański also added that "despite the ominous complaining of some – God forbid! – critics and the pressure of some – let's say it in a gentle way – circles not particularly fond of patriotism, the film was made, was enthusiastically received at the first screenings, and will soon be released." [30]

Roman Wionczek's *Dignity*, on the other hand, despite its unambiguous ideological message, received positive reviews at times, whose authors found certain values in Wionczek's film. Elżbieta Dolińska, despite criticising the journalism and listing other shortcomings of the film, described the role of Jerzy Aleksander Braszka with warm words. Giving her opinion, she said, "There is something very real and captivating in his unhurried movements and simple, sometimes clumsy, and always far from thrilling eloquence. This character is the most successful of all; it is simply a convincing psychological portrayal of a man with the courage to speak out for unpopular causes and who is true to himself. Other characters are much poorer, drawn in one-dimensional way. The further away from Szostak's rationale, the more schematic the figures become." [31] Małgorzata Karbowskiak [32] and Małgorzata Dipont [33] also found Braszka's creation to be one of the film's high points. However, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the latter critic's review, as it offers an interesting perspective on the fact of making *Dignity*, but also on the fact of saturating the film with an unambiguous world-view charge. According to Magdalena

[27] Z. Klaczyński, *Dramat w Gibraltarze*, "Trybuna Ludu" 1984, no. 213.

[28] Ibidem.

[29] T. Czabański, *Katastrofa w Gibraltarze*, "Dziennik Ludowy" 1984, no. 22.

[30] Ibidem.

[31] E. Dolińska, *Przesłanie*, "Film" 1984, no. 49.

[32] Cf. M. Karbowskiak, *Godność*, "Głos Robotniczy" 1984, no. 272.

[33] Cf. M. Dipont, *Godność*, "Życie Warszawy" 1984, no. 265.

Dipont, “it is good [...] that this film was made, because it should open the way to other productions presenting different points of view from that period, and more broadly, from our times.”^[34] Well, of course, films about the early 1980s were indeed made in the later years of the decade; not all of them, however, had the chance to have an audience, often being shelved and gaining a chance to be distributed only when the system was clearly on the verge of collapse. Tadeusz Szyma from “Tygodnik Powszechny” had an unequivocally negative reaction to *Dignity*. According to Szyma, the peculiar way in which the titles of film reviews were written in the magazine (each article was entitled with the discussed item in inverted commas) came “in aid of fulfilling the extremely unpleasant duty of reviewing something as awful as Roman Wionczek’s production, concocted according to Jerzy Grzymkowski’s fictionalised and timed paper.” He added, “*Dignity* in inverted commas – that’s all the criticism needed of the horrendous talk of the «one spectator troupe,» which is a kind of continuation of the former «one actor theatre» called «eref».^[35] The enumeration of further flaws in the film and the association of the main actor of *Dignity* with Ryszard Filipiński’s theatre resulted in interference by the censor and the deletion of the more irritating fragments, which was reflected in the article itself.

Tadeusz Szyma also addressed the issue of attendance in his review. As he himself writes: “When I went to the Światowid cinema in Nowa Huta out of my reviewing duties (which can sometimes be downright torturous and extremely embarrassing), I found no one at the second screening on the second day. The cashier told me, however, that the film will meet the situation with dignity, being in the programme for four more days.”^[36] Staying with the issue of the film’s attendance in cinemas, it is worth noting one thing – some film journalists, especially those of a pro-Party bent, tried to cast a spell over reality and report high interest in *Dignity*. In “*Gazeta Krakowska*,” Witold Rutkiewicz stated straightforwardly: “Not only us critics found the film so valuable and important that it is worth showing it to cinema audiences before its screening on small screens. This view was fully shared by the cinema management, who decided to run a series of screenings to confirm or disprove the thesis that *Dignity* would turn out to be the contemporary film the audience had been eagerly awaiting. As I write these words, audiences in three provincial cities have voted in favour of the film, watching it in packed auditoriums. Now, after more copies have been made, it has been directed to other centres.”^[37] These words are contradicted both by excerpts from a memo of the Department of Culture and the attendance data in the table. Janusz Skwara’s review is also astonishing, as the critic juxtaposed *Dignity*

[34] Ibidem.

[35] T. Szyma, ‘*Godność*’, “*Tygodnik Powszechny*” 1985, no. 5.

[36] Ibidem.

[37] W. Rutkiewicz, *Zobaczcie koniecznie!*, “*Gazeta Krakowska*” 1984, no. 274.

with *No End*, Krzysztof Kiesłowski's 1984 drama set during martial law. In Skwara's eyes, *No End* was a polemic work with Wionczek's film, but he did not expect both films to have high attendance figures due to the tastes of audiences at the time, who appreciated comedies, musical films and science fiction. In Skwara's eyes, *Dignity*, despite some flaws, was an important work, 'if only for the reason that it broke a taboo, a conspiracy of silence surrounding the political events taking place in Poland'. Skwara added, "And he tried to see it not from the perspective of the exasperated Solidarity movement, but from that of an ordinary, simple activist who carries the burden of professional and party responsibility." [38]

Much less has been written about *Time of Hope* than about its predecessor. And, in fact, most reviewers were critical of the film. Only the reviewer for "Sztandar Ludu" agitated viewers with his words: "This film should absolutely be seen by everyone, regardless of their attitudes and views. And even if it will not always meet with approval, or convince everyone, everyone will find in it a piece of their own experience, a fraction of the truth about themselves and their times. And that is a lot." [39] Other than this, all critics turned their backs on the film, finding numerous flaws and imperfections in it. Even Janusz Skwara complained, writing: "The issues raised in *Time of Hope* have no less genre weight than in *Dignity*. And yet, the film is not received with such commitment and temperament as before. Art is governed by specific conditions, it must also change, adapt to a specific reality. Meanwhile, the director made a mistake. He tried to tell the story of martial law using the same language as he had used previously to describe the adventures of the feuding trade unions in 1980. This proved too weak to convince the audience. They became less involved in Szostak's drama and waved many events aside." [40] Other critics shared Skwara's stance, differing only in the degree to which they criticised the film. Tadeusz Sobolewski was probably the one to hit *Time of Hope* hardest. In his review, he asked: "I wonder to whom this pretend life itself a fable about a stupefied family, representing the whole range of «typical» attitudes and all factions of relationships, a fable about an evil world in which only the functionaries stand out for their impeccable manners, could appeal." [41] Indeed, more than five years after the introduction of martial law, probably even the most hard-line supporters of socialist ideology had to acknowledge, watching Wionczek's film, that the propaganda used in it was exaggerated. And Sobolewski's words that "*Time of Hope* is an interesting phenomenon for film historians – an example of late socialist realism" can only be agreed with.

[38] J. Skwara, *W stronę polityki*, "Argumenty" 1985, no. 26.

[39] (leg), *Czas nadziei – czas refleksji*, "Sztandar Ludu" 1987, no. 55.

[40] J. Skwara, *Coś z życia*, "Argumenty" 1987, no. 12.

[41] T. Sobolewski, *Czas nadziei*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 1987, no. 10.

Audience figures for
films from the Profil

Film Unit

Production costs and distribution results for Profil Films made in 1983^[42]

Title	Production cost (in zł)	70 mm copies	35 mm copies	16 mm copies	Screenings	Attendance	Average attendance per screening
<i>Closer to the Sky Every Day</i>	17,831,700	-	32	-	3,685	253,477	69
<i>Tribute to a Gray Day</i>	34,201,100	-	36	-	2,512	107,311	43
<i>House of St Casimir</i>	26,008,300	-	21	-	724	40,419	56
<i>The Crash Off Gibraltar</i>	113,000,000	-	23	-	3,229	315,708	98
<i>The Day of the Hummingbird</i>	23,864,600	-	26	-	1,259	58,883	47

Attendance and receipts for films of the Profil Film Unit 1984–1987^[43]

Title	Production cost (in zł)	Attendance	Receipts, national (in zł)	Receipts, international (in zł)
<i>Romance with the Intruder</i>	41,541,000	77,000	2,702,000	3,622,000
<i>Alabama</i>	28,625,000	1,216,000	83,303,000	629,000
<i>Dignity</i>	14,000,000	72,000	2,200,000	-----
<i>Maturing Time</i>	32,031,000	1,011,000	35,656,000	-----
<i>Cuckoo in a Dark Forest</i>	38,430,000	34,000	1,308,000	430,000
<i>Devil's Luck</i>	30,266,000	150,000	7,427,000	35,000
<i>Crumbs of War</i>	30,622,000	14,000	450,000	4,025,000
<i>Indebted to Death</i>	35,755,000	132,000	5,567,000	3,796,000
<i>In the Shadow of Hatred</i>	29,068,000	65,000	2,331,000	517,000
<i>Manager</i>	34,916,000	179,000	9,953,000	-----
<i>The Golden Train</i>	143,100,000	190,000	13,546,000	-----
<i>Episode in West Berlin</i>	50,940,000	100,000	4,808,000	4,301,000
<i>The Golden Mahmudia</i>	59,057,000	88,000	3,309,000	46,000
<i>On the Banks of the Niemen</i>	70,897,000	5,733,000	304,132,000	92,000
<i>Time of Hope</i>	42,440,000	31,000	1,314,000	-----
<i>The Republic of Hope</i>	13,921,000	77,000	14,000,000	

[42] Compiled on the basis of: *Mały Rocznik Filmowy 1984*, Warszawa 1986, *Mały Rocznik Filmowy 1985*, Warszawa 1986 and *Ocena Zespołów Filmowych 1983*, Archive of Modern Records, collection: Supreme Board of Film Affairs, file 5/45, p. 19. Due to a lack of precise lists taking into account ticket receipts, this value has been omitted. The last three columns describe the values after one year of distribution of particular titles.

[43] Compiled on the basis of: *Ocena merytoryczno-programowa Zespołów Filmowych*, Archive of Modern Records, collection: Supreme Board of Film Affairs, file: 2/103, pp. 30–31, *Filmy kinowe i telewizyjne zrealizowane w Zespołów Filmowych w latach 1984–1987. Zestawienie*, Archive of Modern Records, collection: Supreme Board of Film Affairs, file 2/275, pp. 18–21. The three titles with the highest values in particular categories are marked in bold.

Title	Production cost (in zł)	Attendance	Receipts, national (in zł)	Receipts, international (in zł)
<i>Pan Samochodzik and the Unearthly Mansion</i>	51,173,000	401,000	17,895,000	-----
<i>Seagulls</i>	44,822,000	101,000	6,408,000	-----
<i>The Black Feet</i>	48,887,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Three Steps from Love</i>	48,316,000	164,000	16,000,000	-----
<i>Between the Cup and the Lip</i>	103,238,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Dzikun</i>	61,000,000	190,000	21,000,000	-----
TOTAL	1,053,045,000	10,025,000	553,309,000	17,493,000

The first films which the Profil Film Unit made after being reactivated during martial law did not bring stunning attendance results, in fact, often drawing very low numbers of viewers, and thus failing to recoup the money spent on their production. The highest score in terms of audience interest was achieved by *The Crash Off Gibraltar*, discussed in this article, although Bohdan Poręba could hardly have been satisfied with the figure quoted in the table. There were two reasons for such low ratings: the involvement of the political artistic director and the fact that Profil was considered a “regime” ensemble (which, incidentally, also had an impact on the problems of finding actors willing to act in Bohdan Poręba’s and his directors’ films), and the poor artistic quality of the films which were made there.

Today it is difficult to guess what the fate of Profil would have been had *On the Banks of the Niemen* not been produced. Perhaps it would have been liquidated as a loss-making ensemble, just like Czesław Petelski’s *Iluzjon*, which ceased to function at the end of 1987, when the term of the film units expired. It is a fact, however, that it was the film adaptation of Eliza Orzeszkowa’s novel that saved Profil from probable liquidation, because the other films, in most cases, did not bring profits from distribution. The exceptions were two productions from 1984: Ryszard Rydzewski’s *Alabama* and (with a slight surplus in relation to the production costs) Mieczysław Waśkowski’s *Maturing Time*. The profits in these two cases were influenced by a number of issues: taking up drug-related themes (these two productions were pioneering in this respect), not devoid of a moralising and didactic charge; erotic scenes with the participation of Maria Probosz, a popular actress of the young generation at the time; and a musical score consisting of songs by popular rock bands and performers (in the case of *Alabama*, Urszula and Budka Suflera; in Waśkowski’s film, Klaus Mittfoch and Lombard). The receipts from the distribution of Zbigniew Kuźmiński’s *The Republic of Hope* also exceeded production costs, but this was only because the film was edited from the material of the *Republika Ostrowska* TV series (1985), which affected the budget. Therefore, at the end of 1987, Profil could boast the following results: “Average attendance at a screening,

120 viewers; average income from a screening, 6,365 PLN (these are the two second results among the eight units)."[44] A better result was achieved only by *Zodiak* by Jerzy Hoffman, which, with a modest production in terms of numbers, introduced two box office hits: *Travels of Mr Kleks* (an audience of just under 8.5 million) and *H.M. Deserters* (an audience of just over 5.7 million).[45] It is also worth noting that the 22 films made by Profil during the period under review put Bohdan Poręba's team in first place in terms of number of productions. Profil, as the evaluation committee of this institution noted, "never once exceeded the planned costs by more than 5%, while 6 times it made savings above 10% and 17 times below 10% of the planned costs." [46] However, such good management of the budgets entrusted to it was not appreciated by the evaluators, as it provoked accusations of inaccurate financial planning of the productions.

Analysing the themes and genres of the films made by Profil in the 1980s, it is clear that the unit was looking for ways to break away from the reputation of a "Party" unit supported by the authorities. This does not mean, of course, that in this decade it did not take up contemporary themes seen from clearly defined world-view positions, or historical issues – such works still constituted a major part of its output. However, it also tried to reach out to a different kind of audience, as exemplified by its films for children and young people. In 1986, Profil released three such films (apart from *Pan Samochodzik...* also *The Golden Mahmudia* by Kazimierz Tarnas and *The Black Feet* by Waldemar Podgórski), and a year later, one (*Dzikun* by Andrzej Barszczyński). Although these films were of great artistic merit and did not bring in big audiences, Bohdan Poręba decided to continue this line in subsequent years. Thus, in 1988 and 1989 there were *Pan Samochodzik and the Secrets of Prague* by Kazimierz Tarnas, and *The Hawk Wisdom* by Vladimir Drha; both films were made in co-production with Czechoslovak cinematography. However, regardless of these attempts, Profil was unable to overcome one very serious weakness – the imperfect directing staff, composed mostly of average (to put it mildly) filmmakers. It was the most significant problem throughout the entire period of the company's existence.

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[45] Cf. Ibidem, p. 51.

[46] Ibidem, p. 34.

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