

**Poles in the UK from 6**

The Federation of Poles in Great Britain has been concerned about newspaper coverage which has sought to emphasise negative aspects of the Polish presence in the UK. In our view, the worst examples linked Poles with words and phrases like "feckless", "chancers", "race riots", "swamp the NHS", "fears for schools", "cut-price treatment", "push British graduates to back of the jobs queue", "killers, drug smugglers and rapists". We consider that this has made Poles living in the UK feel vulnerable and persecuted.

Some might argue that these robust headlines were aimed more at the British Government, its immigration policy and at the European Union. Fair enough. This implies therefore that Poles came into the firing line not because they were Poles but because they were the most visible symbol of those government policies that the Daily Mail has criticised.

The Federation remains critical however of the lack of reliable national and local government statistics on the number and impact of Poles in this country. We maintain that Poles have felt humiliated by the coverage and are vulnerable to numerous acts of overt hostility and even violence which they have experienced from a vociferous minority of UK citizens. There have been hundreds of cases of hate crime against Poles in this country recorded in the last 2 years, some leading to death or permanent injury, and we would not want these incidents to be encouraged by potentially inflammatory newspaper stories or headlines.

In some ways the heat is off now. A good proportion of Poles have either already returned or are planning to do so soon as the Polish economy improves and the Polish currency almost doubles in value against sterling. There is now more concern in the press and economic circles about the impact of their departure rather than of their arrival. Nevertheless a significant number are here and will continue to be here for some years. The need for sensitive reporting and sensitive headlines remains. □

**Press Complaints Commission****On the press - A tale of Poles and prejudice**

By: *Peter Wilby* - *The Guardian*,  
Monday 11 August 2008

In last Tuesday's Daily Mail, the lead letter, from the Federation of Poles in Great Britain, was headlined "Poles feel persecuted". The writer, Wiktor Moszczyński, complained about "newspaper coverage emphasising negative aspects of the Polish presence in the UK". Poles were linked to problems in the NHS and schools, unemployment among Britons, drug smuggling, rape and so on. They felt humiliated and

vulnerable; "hundreds of hate crimes against Poles, some leading to injury or death" had been recorded.

The letter did not name any offending newspaper and Mail readers could be forgiven for wondering why it was there, on a letters page that, as in most downmarket papers, is tucked away between TV listings and sport. In fact, it follows a long dispute between Moszczyński and the Mail and his letter (a longer version ran on the Mail's website) is part of a resolution brokered by the Press Complaints Commission. Though other newspapers run stories portraying Poles and other Eastern European migrants in a bad light - for example, Moszczyński has reported a Times column to the PCC - the Mail is by far the most consistent offender. Moszczyński's complaint listed 80 headlines since May 2006, but a trawl through the Mail online archive suggests he could have included many more.

Most of the stories were newsworthy and largely accurate. The objection is to the way they are presented and the drip, drip effect of continually highlighting the Polish connection. As Moszczyński puts it, they "ensure that the average Daily Mail reader's heart skips a beat each time with either indignation or alarm". The recent influx of East Europeans has allowed the Mail and other papers to revive their traditions of stoking xenophobia. Bigotry against black or brown people is no longer acceptable and may even fall foul of the law. The trick is to find substitutes. The Daily Express prefers "illegals", the Mail concentrates on "Poles".

The Mail's pieces, whatever the news that prompts them, portray an arcadian England sullied by rude foreign intruders, sponging off native taxpayers. "Here in Peterborough," writes Sue Reid, "a beautiful, quintessentially English city ... word of the government's largesse has spread quickly among ... the fastest-growing multi-ethnic community in provincial Britain." The headline is "The town the Poles took over". Fiona Barton enters the Polskie Delikatesy and, among the red cabbage and pickled cucumbers, can't make herself understood. "I feel like a foreigner, but this is not Warsaw, Krakow or Gdańsk. I am in Southampton."

Some stories are clearly intended to create indignation: "Polish migrants living in Britain claiming £21m in benefits for children left behind" and "Fears for NHS and schools as 1,000 Polish children are born EVERY month" are examples. Other stories are a touch more subtle. Any attempt by banks, supermarkets, pubs and publishers to cater for a growing Polish market is assiduously reported by the Mail, alongside stories about how police, firefighters and local authorities train a few staff to speak Polish or produce leaflets in the language. They are frequently preceded by the preposition "now", conveying the subtext "whatever next?"

When Poles are involved in road accidents, that is usually, according to the

Mail, because they can't understand English road signs. But when councils produce signs in Polish, that is a waste of taxpayers' money. One story contrasted Polish road signs here with a threat from the Polish government to "deport Britons who fall ill". In fact, only foreigners with such serious diseases as cholera and yellow fever would be refused treatment in Poland - because the country doesn't have the resources to cope.

In the Mail, Poles are blamed for the most unlikely things. "Beer prices set to rise as Polish lager sales soar 250%", screamed one headline as though the two were connected. Poles can do nothing right. Like many migrants, they make substantial remittances to their families at home - which might be thought admirable because it ensures the money reaches people who need it.

In the Mail, however, the headline is "Polish immigrants take £1m out of the UK economy". If Poles return home, the Mail presents it as desertion of the UK. Though it is not usually vigilant in defence of gays, the Mail reported the Polish deputy education minister's plans to fire teachers who promoted "homosexual culture".

Sometimes the paper's hatred of Poles fights with its belief that Britain is, in any case, going to the dogs, as when a teenage Pole returned home because, he said, schools in Poland are far superior. The Mail's implied verdict was that Poles had added insult to injury.

Moszczyński thinks the Mail has mended its ways since his approach to the PCC and says "there's not been much to complain about lately". To my mind, he is too generous. Polish immigration is still as hot a story as it was, but the Mail still loses no opportunity to tickle readers' prejudices. Last month, for example, it reported that two bus company bosses were jailed after faking documents to cover up safety breaches. Some drivers worked for up to 31 consecutive days without a break and 16 unsafe buses were found at the company depot. All credit to the Mail for reporting this example of employers endangering their workers and customers. The aspect it highlighted, however, was the company's employment of Poles. They were in the first sentence of the story and in the headline on the Mail's website (albeit not in the paper). A prominent tinted box detailed bus companies' "recruitment drive for Polish staff", when the industry's frequent flouting of health and safety regulations was surely more relevant.

The Mail is remarkably adept at detecting the talking points of middle England. That is the secret of its success. I don't deny - and neither does Moszczyński - that the Poles' arrival in large numbers genuinely caused resentment, some of it possibly justified, against government policies. But that does not excuse the Mail turning Poles into villains and dragging them gratuitously into every possible story. Like most journalists, I admire the paper's professional brilliance which, occasionally, is used to make points I agree with. That should not blind us to the truth: the Mail habitually uses what Tony Blair once called its "absolute and unaccountable power" to legitimise hatred and prejudice and debase public debate.

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**Radio Maryja from 6**

and soon almost every Polish congregation opened a Radio Maryja office. They organized the pledge drives which still finance the station.

Alms from his fans allowed Rydzyk to expand his propaganda empire. Now he oversees a TV station, a daily newspaper, a Catholic academy for young followers, and various foundations. Most of his 3 million listeners are women over 55, with not much education, who live in the countryside or small towns -- Poles, in other words, who failed to thrive after 1989 and still feel threatened by new post-Soviet freedoms.

They make up a significant voting bloc and when Poland elected its lower house of parliament and president last fall, Radio Maryja came down on the side of the right-wing populist Kaczyński brothers. Thanks to Radio Maryja's help, Lech Kaczyński is now Poland's president. His brother Jarosław regularly takes a seat behind the microphone at Rydzyk's station.

Under the Polish Pope John Paul II, the Vatican released lukewarm warnings to Radio Maryja about "self-restraint." But the German Pope Benedict XVI has stepped up efforts to control the intolerant rhetoric. Through his envoys he's let it be known that political engagement by priests is not sanctioned by Rome -- and this counts as a "serious warning" to Radio Maryja.

But the Polish national clergy can't just force Father Rydzyk into line. The 60-year-old priest belongs to the Order of Redemptorists, a missionary movement that stands outside the church's traditional power structure in Poland.

**Push for resignation**

In the meantime, critics of Radio Maryja expect to hear that Polish bishops will pressure Rydzyk to resign. An episcopacy meeting this week might make such a recommendation public. Whether it will be followed, of course, remains an open question. "The Radio Maryja problem won't go away overnight," says a church observer in Warsaw.

Benedict XVI was close friends with John Paul II, and many Catholics across Poland

still hold the new pope in high esteem. But after his move against Radio Maryja, Rydzyk's disciples dared to broach the matter of Benedict's nationality -- in hints cloaked by anti-Semitic broadsides. A religious philosopher named Bogusław Wolniewicz wrote in a piece for Rydzyk's newspaper to Radio Maryja fans: "I suspect that people now pressuring you are exploiting the fact that Benedict is German." The Third Reich had broken the German moral spine, he wrote, with the result that, "No one in the world fears being called anti-Semitic more than a German." For better or worse, Wolniewicz argued, a German Pope will be forced to punish any broadcaster accused of anti-Semitism.

Such rhetoric angers Tomasz Krolak from a Catholic news agency in Poland. He says, "Telling people that one pope works for the Poles while another pope serves the Germans has nothing to do with true religious faith."

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,413976,00.html> □

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