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Poland's anti-tobacco advocacy – a historical outline

Mateusz Zatoński

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK

ABSTRACT

The post-war anti-tobacco movement in Poland was founded in 1960 in the form of the Interministerial Committee for Limiting Smoking at the Ministry of Internal Trade, which by 1964 was transformed into the Social Committee for Limiting Smoking. In 1974 the Committee was instrumental in convincing the Minister of Health to issue a decree banning smoking in healthcare facilities and in Ministry of Health offices. However, both the decree and the broader work of the Committee brought few results, as tobacco consumption in Poland increased almost fourfold, from 1000 cigarettes per adult in 1949, to 3600 cigarettes in 1979. In 1979 the Committee was transformed into the PTP – Polish Anti-tobacco Society. This energized the movement – the system of monitoring smoking trends in Poland was improved, collaboration with healthcare, educational and religious organisations was improved, and more the engagement with the media became more pronounced. However, the PTP was unsuccessful in convincing politicians to introduce comprehensive anti-tobacco legislative measures. In the 1990s the anti-tobacco movement in Poland coalesced around the Health Promotion Foundation. The Foundation ran a very successful health promotion action, The Great Polish Smoke-out, and lobbied politicians for a comprehensive anti-tobacco law. This succeeded in 1995, when the first Polish Anti-tobacco Law was passed by the Parliament, and amended in the following years. The Polish anti-tobacco legislation which, among other provisions, limited smoking in public places, and introduced the largest health warnings on cigarette packaging in the world, was called by the World Health Organisation an “example to the rest of the world”. The success of Polish anti-tobacco efforts can provide a useful blueprint for developing countries which today face similar challenges to Poland 25 years ago.

KEY WORDS: smoking, history, tobacco control, health advocacy, Poland.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Mateusz Zatoński, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street, London WC1E 7HT, UK, phone: +44 7415 240 171, e-mail: mateusz.zatonski@lshtm.ac.uk

The topic of Polish anti-tobacco efforts could be of considerable interest to public health experts around the world. The success of Poland, which from a country with the highest smoking prevalence in the world in the 1980s, turned into a regional leader in tobacco control in the 1990s, can be a useful blueprint for developing countries which today face similar challenges to Poland 25 years ago. This paper offers a short historical outline of the anti-tobacco movement in Poland.

The founder of the post-war anti-tobacco movement in Poland was a rather unlikely figure. Alfred Jaroszewicz was a secret service operative before World War II. After the war, during the purge within the ranks of Polish communists, he was arrested and spent 8 years in

prison. After his release in 1956 Jaroszewicz moved to London. His stay in England coincided with the publication of pioneering studies of English and American scientists on the causal relation between smoking and lung cancer and cardiovascular diseases, as well as the onset of the debate about the stricter regulation of tobacco products in these countries. Jaroszewicz must have been strongly influenced by this new information on smoking harm, because soon after his return to Poland in 1960 he established the Interministerial Committee for Limiting Smoking at the Ministry of Internal Trade, of which he was director. In 1964 Jaroszewicz's organisation was transformed into the Social Committee for Limiting Smoking [1].

Archival documents indicate that in the first decade of its existence the activity of the anti-tobacco movement in Poland was limited to the internal struggle for influence between its central authorities and its regional branches, Jaroszewicz's attempts to obtain the status of higher public utility for his organisation from the government (which would mean higher public subsidies), and the production of anti-smoking leaflets [2].

The Committee's activity increased somewhat in the 1970s, when Bogusław Kozusznik, a former Vice-minister of Health, became its President. It was partly thanks to the efforts of the Committee that in 1974 the Minister of Health issued a decree banning smoking in healthcare facilities and in Ministry of Health offices, and calling on the rest of the public administration to introduce similar restrictions [3]. Despite, or maybe because of the progressive nature of this legislation, it was widely ignored. The authorities were fully aware of this, which was confirmed by governmental analysis of the legislation's implementation from the mid-1980s [4]. Undoubtedly, the Committee was unsuccessful in shaping healthier attitudes towards smoking among Poles. Tobacco consumption in Poland increased almost fourfold, from 1000 cigarettes per adult in 1949, to 3600 cigarettes in 1979 [5].

In 1979 the Committee was transformed into the PTP – Polish Anti-tobacco Society. The system of monitoring smoking trends in Poland was improved, and from 1980 the Cancer Institute in Warsaw began conducting annual studies on smoking prevalence among different socio-demographic groups. PTP collaborated with healthcare and educational institutions, providing them with anti-tobacco literature and organising anti-tobacco lectures and talks throughout the country [1]. The anti-tobacco advocates in the 1980s were also able to involve media more actively in disseminating information about smoking harm. One manifestation of this was the weekly radio show “Before you light up – listen up” in Channel 2 of the Polish Radio, and numerous articles about the negative effects of smoking in the popular “Evening Express” newspaper. From 1988 Poland participated in the World No Tobacco Day. PTP also collaborated closely with medical organisations and religious groups (the leaders of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Poland, Stanisław Dąbrowski and Prof. Zachariasz Łyko, were particularly involved in the fight against smoking in this period). What might seem puzzling from today's perspective is that the PTP also collaborated with the state tobacco industry. It was hoped that this co-operation will help to push the producers to supply the market with less harmful and carcinogenic cigarettes [6, 7].

The PTP frequently released official declarations of collaboration with state institutions. In 1984 PTP's President Bogusław Kozusznik wrote that “visits paid to the representatives of the state authorities always constituted a positive and inspirational element in the history of the

movement” [1]. Some senior politicians were personally very involved in the anti-tobacco movement, including the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Health, General Dr. Jerzy Bończak. Despite this, the PTP was unable to persuade the decision-makers to introduce legislation which could help arrest the development of the smoking epidemic in Poland. Two attempts were made in the 1980s, in 1983 and 1988. In both cases the legislative proposals originated from the Ministry of Health, and in both cases they contained very progressive proposals suggested by the PTP, including a ban on smoking in many public places, bars, restaurants and trains, a ban on the sale of tobacco products to minors, introduction of health warnings on cigarette packages, and the creation of a significant anti-tobacco fund. Unfortunately, in both cases the policymakers failed to pass the legislation [8, 9].

The contrast between the unprecedented scale of smoking in Poland and the unwillingness to address it using legislative means on one hand, and between the complete understanding of the health and social harm of smoking in the scientific circles in Poland on the other, can be surprising. Polish specialists, such as Tadeusz Górski, or Józef Granatowicz in Poznań, the founder of Poland's first smoking cessation clinic, already in the 1960s and 1970s, led pioneering research on the treatment of tobacco addiction using drugs with central action on the brain's nicotine receptors [10]. Organisations such as the PTP or the Polish Medical Association collaborated closely with public health experts from western countries and already in the early 1980s organized international conferences devoted to the protection of children and adolescents from smoking [11]. Legislative proposals of the PTP from this period were strikingly similar to the Anti-tobacco Law passed several years later and enacted in 1996 [12]. And yet, at the same time the authorities made decisions which deepened Poland's tobacco epidemic, such as the introduction of ration stamps for cigarettes in 1981, which were given to every adult citizen. This decision led to an increase in the number of smokers by one million in the following year [13]. The opposition anti-communist movement had a similarly carefree attitude to smoking. During the first countrywide convention of Solidarity delegates in October 1981 the news was broken that the government is intending to increase cigarette prices. Lech Wałęsa, the Solidarity leader, to great applause of the delegates and in the presence of the Minister of Finance, announced that if the rise is not stopped, “We'll have a riot. We can control it, but whether you can control us, I doubt that” [14].

It is hard to understand the dissonance between this theoretical understanding of what needs to be done with smoking in Poland, and the lack of political will to introduce these measures. In the 1980s tobacco consumption in Poland oscillated around 3500 cigarettes per person

TABLE 1. Timeline of key events

1960	The Interministerial Committee for Limiting Smoking at the Ministry of Internal Trade is established by Alfred Jaroszewicz. After four years it will be turned into the Social Committee for Limiting Smoking (SKZPT).
1966	The first smoking cessation clinic in Poland is funded by Józef Granatowicz in Poznań.
1974	The first study on the attitudes of Poles towards smoking is conducted. It indicates that between 65% and 75% of men aged between 20 and 60 years old are daily smokers (among women the figure is around 20%). The Minister of Health issues a decree banning smoking in healthcare facilities and Ministry of Health facilities.
1976	<i>World Smoking and Health</i> publishes an article by Józef Granatowicz on the use of cytosine for the treatment of nicotine addiction.
1979	SKZPT is turned into the Polish Anti-tobacco Society (PTP).
1981	Due to shortages the government decides to introduce cigarette rationing. Every adult is entitled to 8 cigarettes per day. This leads to an increase of smokers in Poland by 1 million in the following year.
1982	Studies show that 30% of Polish women smoke – an increase by 10% from 1974. This is the highest smoking prevalence among women in Polish history.
1983	The Ministry of Health prepares a legislative proposal to reduce smoking prevalence in Poland. Its provisions include a ban on smoking in workplaces, the creation of an anti-tobacco fund of 2.5 billion złoty. The Ministry of Finance blocks the passage of the bill.
1984	The Second Antismoking Symposium of Socialist Countries on the “Protection of children and adolescents from smoking” is organised by Dr. Tadeusz Górski in Łódź and attended by experts from Scandinavia. The delegates issue an appeal to the government to strengthen the anti-tobacco legislation in Poland.
1985	Scientists from the USA (Cooper <i>et al.</i>) publish a series of articles on the growing premature mortality of men in Poland and the role of smoking in this trend.
1987	The Central Statistical Office informs that after a period of stagnation, life expectancy among males in Poland has decreased in the previous year.
1988	Poland participates in the World No Tobacco Day for the first time. At the initiative of the PTP the Ministry of Health prepares an anti-tobacco bill proposal. The bill would include a ban on smoking in many public places, the creation of an anti-tobacco fund from 5% of the cost of each cigarette package sold, reducing the content of toxic substances in tobacco products, shaping the prices of tobacco products as to reduce smoking prevalence, developing educational anti-tobacco programs. The bill is never passed.
1989	Tobacco consumption among adult Poles amounts to 3286 cigarettes per person per annum. According to WHO statistics this is one of the highest levels in the world.
1990s	The tobacco industry every year spends \$100 million on tobacco advertising in Poland. It is expected, that by the year 2000 smoking prevalence in Poland will grow by 10-20%. The level of excise tax on cigarettes is increasing. However, by the end of the 1990s it is still stands at just 47% of the price of tobacco products (the EU minimum is 57%).
1990	WHO estimates that half of all premature deaths among men in Poland is a consequence of smoking. November: The first international summit of tobacco control leaders in Central and Eastern Europe is organised in the town of Kazimierz. The Declaration of Kazimierz is issued, calling on the governments to introduce legislation measures which would address the problem of smoking in the region.
1991	The Health Promotion Foundation is founded by Prof. Witold Zatoński. It coordinates the celebrations of the World No Tobacco Day in Poland. It also organizes the popular Great Polish Smoke-out, the main prize of which is a visit to Rome and an audience with Pope John Paul II. Every year over 500,000 Poles credit the action as the reason for attempting to quit smoking. From 1992 the Honorary President of the Foundation is Cardinal Józef Glemp the Primate of Poland. July: The Sejm rejects a legislative project proposed by MPs on creating a tax on tobacco products as an additional source of financing for the Ministry of Health to treat tobacco and alcohol related diseases. Instead, the Sejm passes a resolution calling the government to increase by 25% the level of the tobacco sales tax and using them to treat tobacco-related diseases. October: The Senate, represented by Senator Maciej Krzanowski, proposes to the Sejm a resolution calling for a bill that would address the health consequences of smoking.

TABLE 1. Cont.

1992	July: A debate is held in the Sejm regarding the privatisation of the state tobacco monopoly. The legislative debate continues until the end of the first term of the Sejm. Senator Adam Struzik initiates the legislative process for a bill that would address the health consequences of smoking. The draft of the bill includes banning tobacco advertisement, introducing information on the negative effects of smoking on cigarette packets, and the ban on smoking in some public places and public transport. The bill does not make it to the Sejm before the end of the Parliamentary term.
1993	April: The Sejm passes the law against unfair business practices. It does not contain the amendment of MPs Andrzej Łukomski and Jerzy Matyjek introducing a ban on the advertisement of tobacco products in the press (the amendment is voted down by the Senate).
1994	September: The Sejm rejects the bill on the State Tobacco Monopoly (proposed by MP Ryszard Bondyr). October: The Sejm accepts the appeal of MP Grzegorz Marciniak calling the government to prepare by the end of 1995 a comprehensive anti-tobacco programme and modify the tax policy to decrease the sale of cigarettes. The Sejm also appeals to press publisher not to advertise tobacco products. During the 9 th Tobacco or Health Conference in Paris the resolution is accepted recommending the introduction of anti-tobacco strategies to the governments of Central and Eastern Europe.
1995	The process of privatisation of state tobacco plants by transnational tobacco companies begins. November: The Sejm passes the Law for the Protection of Health from the Consequences of using Tobacco and Tobacco Products (supported by MPs Seweryn Jurgielaniec and Jan Kopczyk). Its provisions include a ban on smoking in healthcare facilities and educational facilities, closed rooms in workplaces and offices etc. It introduces a text warning on smoking harm covering 30% of the tobacco packets, and a warning covering 20% of tobacco billboards. The amendment of senator Mieczysław Wyględowski banning the advertisement of cigarettes is not accepted. December: The bill is vetoed by the outgoing president Lech Wałęsa.
1996	January: President Aleksander Kwaśniewski pulls back Wałęsa's veto and signs the Anti-tobacco Law. November: The Sejm rejects the proposal of the Committee for Transport, Communications, Trade and Services to change the Anti-tobacco Law. The proposal called for decreasing the size of health warnings on cigarette packets from 30% to 4%.
1997	April: The Sejm rejects the proposal of the Committee for Transport to amend the Anti-tobacco Law by decreasing the size of the health warnings on cigarette packets and billboards. May: The MPs initiate a project of an amendment to the Anti-tobacco Law which would make it necessary for outlets selling tobacco products to display information about the ban on smoking under 18 and warnings about smoking harm. The debate is cut short by the end of the Parliamentary term.
1998	Poland introduces the largest health warning in the world on cigarette packets. In the index of anti-smoking climate in Europe prepared for the European Commission, Poland takes the top spot, ahead of Sweden and Great Britain. Poles believe, that the government should do even more to limit smoking. Smoking prevalence in Poland decreases by 10% since 1990. It is the first steady and stable decrease of smoking prevalence in Poland and Eastern Europe since World War II.
1999	Transnational tobacco companies control over 90% of the Polish tobacco market. The tobacco excise tax increases by 30%. October: The Parliament passes the complete ban on advertising in Poland (bill initiated by MP Andrzej Wojtyła). In addition, a provision is added on dedicating 0.5% of the tobacco excise tax on financing programmes tackling tobacco-related diseases.
2000	December: Cigarette adverts disappear from all street billboards in Poland.
2001	December: Cigarette adverts disappear from the Polish press.

per year and in this period Poland was the country with one of the highest levels of smoking prevalence in the world [15]. Both the production and the sale of cigarettes were a state monopoly, and the prices of cigarettes were kept on a low level. The World Health Organization

estimated that half of all premature deaths among Polish men at this time were linked to smoking [16].

The situation in Poland after the regime change of 1989 did not augur well for the future of public health in the country. Transnational tobacco compa-

nies quickly entered the Polish market. They invested \$100 million annually on publicity of their products, conducted aggressive lobbying among politicians, and kept cigarette prices low. The American company R.J. Reynolds, the producer of Camel cigarettes, in the early 1990s built an ultramodern cigarette factory in the town of Piaseczno outside Warsaw. It became the symbol of the expansion of transnational tobacco companies into Poland. Internal documents of the tobacco industry indicate that the development of Central and East European markets was their strategic priority, especially as in many western countries a decline in smoking prevalence has been observed for some time already. Tobacco companies predicted that in the 1990s the sale of cigarettes in Poland will increase by between 10% and 20% [17, 18].

Yet, contrary to those predictions, the collapse of communism was followed by a decline in cigarette consumption by 10%. Some of the most progressive anti-smoking laws in the world were passed by the Polish parliament in the 1990s, prohibiting smoking in workplaces, banning tobacco advertisements and introducing the largest health warnings on cigarette packs in the world [12]. The factory built by R.J. Reynolds in Piaseczno went bankrupt just a few years after its opening.

The harbinger of change was the summit of Central and East European anti-tobacco advocacy leaders in Poland in November 1990. The conference on “A Tobacco-Free New Europe” was organized by the PTP, under the patronage of Lech Wałęsa, and in collaboration with the International Union Against Cancer and the American Cancer Society. The conference culminated with the Kazimierz Declaration, a call by the delegates to the Polish government, and other governments of the region, to implement comprehensive anti-tobacco legislation and strengthen tobacco control programs. The Polish health advocates, coalesced around the newly formed Health Promotion Foundation¹, focused their effort on lobbying politicians to achieve this goal. From this point on, a change could be observed in the approach of policymakers to the problem of smoking in Poland [19].

Legislative proposals aiming at tackling smoking harm quickly began to appear in the Parliament. In 1991 the Sejm (lower chamber of the Parliament) passed a resolution calling the government to increase the level of the tobacco products sales tax, and spending the extra income on the treatment of tobacco-related diseases. Throughout the early 1990s the debate on the privatization of the Polish tobacco industry both sides heavily

employed health arguments. In October 1991 the Polish Senate (the upper chamber of the Parliament), represented by senator Maciej Krzanowski, proposed to the Sejm a resolution calling for a bill that would address the health consequences of smoking. In July 1992 senator Adam Struzik initiated the legislative process for such a bill. In October 1994 the Sejm accepted an appeal by MP Grzegorz Marciniak, in which the MPs he urged the government to present a comprehensive anti-tobacco programme. The culmination came in November 1995, when the Sejm passed the Law for the Protection of Health from the Consequences of using Tobacco and Tobacco Products. The Anti-tobacco Law was strongly supported throughout the legislative procedure by the Sejm Health Committee and its chairman, MP Seweryn Jurgielanec. After a brief delay linked to the veto of the outgoing President Lech Wałęsa, the Law was restored, at the urging of the anti-tobacco advocates, by the incoming President Aleksander Kwaśniewski. It was implemented in May 1996².

The Anti-tobacco Law, amongst others, limited smoking in public places, established the first governmental programme to reduce smoking prevalence in Central and Eastern Europe, and, most importantly, introduced the largest health warnings on cigarette packaging in the world [12]. The World Health Organisation declared that the Polish Anti-tobacco Law is an “example to the rest of the world” [20].

Of course one might, and should, ask why the legislation wasn't passed sooner than in 1995 and why a ban on tobacco advertisement was introduced only in the year 2000. It must however be underlined that the legislation, and the broad social anti-tobacco movement that developed around it, have completely changed the attitudes of Poles towards smoking. As a result, it helped to turn around the negative health trends Poland has been experiencing in the previous decades³. Over 500,000 Poles declared every year that the Great Polish Smoke-out organized by the Health Promotion Foundation helped them to make a quit attempt [19]. In a report prepared by the European Commission in 1998 Poland was ranked as the country with the best anti-smoking climate in Europe [21]. Poles expected that the government will as much as possible to decrease smoking prevalence in Poland. The Anti-tobacco Law both helped fulfil these expectations, and served to continue building the health literacy of Poles.

DISCLOSURE

Author reports no conflict of interest.

¹ The PTP was dissolved in the early 1990s as the new regime cut the funds for the sponsorship and support of social organisations.

² Transcripts of Parliamentary debates were obtained in the Archive of the Polish Sejm (www.sejm.gov.pl) and the Archive of the Polish Senate (www.senat.gov.pl).

³ The second half of the 20th century in Poland has seen a dramatic increase in the sale of cigarettes and in smoking prevalence. This has led to a health catastrophe, as evidenced by the increase in lung cancer mortality. In the 1990s this negative trend was reversed. One of the most important reasons for the improvement of population health in Poland, and in particular the reduction of tobacco-related diseases, was the legislative action of the Polish Parliament and the introduction of the Anti-tobacco Law. In the last decade the steady decreases in smoking prevalence and lung cancer have been continuing in Poland.

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