

Maciej Łuczak

**Krótki
kurs PRL
według Barei**

**Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk
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A Short Course in Communist Poland According to Bareja Summary

Comedy films by Stanisław Bareja are very popular and many of them have gained the title of 'cult films'. They can be seen from a number of different perspectives. Certainly, they offer consistent, well-made and exhilarating entertainment. Bareja's films are also a loud voice of opposition to the hypocritical and ideologically deformed reality of communist Poland ('These films go further than the manifestos of our Workers' Defence Committee', opposition leader Jacek Kuroń would repeat). Above all, comedy films by Stanisław Bareja are extremely precise, even para-documentary records of everyday socialist absurdities and they form a robust compendium of knowledge about the late communist period. Bareja used his very distinctive and unique language of film narrative for the first time in his comedy 'Poszukiwany, poszukiwana' ['Man – Woman Wanted'], released in 1972. Then he gradually improved it and intensified the social message (the director's earlier works from the 1960s alluded to the typical poetic narrative of the pre-war cinema). The phrase 'new secular tradition' – ironically taken over by the director from the then propaganda – came into common use. This term described in a clear and concise way how the new socialist morality, which referred to the Soviet patterns and was a negation

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of centuries of traditional Polish values, was created and imposed on communist society. From the perspective of years, Bareja's films are therefore a very important source of knowledge about the communist era. It must be made clear – especially for younger viewers who did not live in the 1970s and 1980s – that the absurd situations, irrational laws and strange behaviour of characters shown in these comedies are real enough, or close to authenticity. This was due to Bareja's extremely keen sense of observation rather than his extraordinary creativity in using pure nonsense; he remembered minute details and used them to build a colourful film world. When carefully watching comedy films by the director of 'Miś ['Teddy Bear'], we can learn about the socialist economy of permanent shortage – ration stamps for basic consumer goods, black market activity, power outages, queuing committees, illicit trading in currencies, Pewex (a chain of hard currency shops) and moonshine production. Bareja's films also show – using real examples – how the communist propaganda functioned. His characters referred to the city of Katowice as Stalinograd and made a parody of the slogans that aroused horror in the past ('Say no to the secret eaters of sausages!'). Bareja's films (e.g. 'Teddy Bear') also contain clear allusions to the propaganda Soldiers' Song Festival in Kołobrzeg and the theatrical performance 'I Can't Come to You Today'. In his comedies, the director repeatedly denounced common manipulation of historical events, such as the Katyn massacre, the Warsaw Uprising and 3rd May National Holiday. As far as it was possible in the realities of contemporary censorship, Bareja made allusions to the repression apparatus – bugging private homes, jamming Western radio stations and prison sentences for telling political jokes. Finally, an attentive viewer will find in these films many clear allusions to real institutions, such as 'Trybuna Ludu', 'Rzeczywistość', Stowarzyszenie Patriotyczne 'Grunwald' ('People's Tribune' newspaper, 'Reality' weekly, Patriotic

Summary

Association 'Grunwald') and historical events (the famous rhetorical question asked by Edward Gierek, a Polish communist politician: 'Will you help me?' and the Jastrzębie-Zdrój Agreement). His films also portray real people, such as captain Andrzej Czechowicz, a communist super-spy, Albin Siwak, a representative of 'the party concrete', Adam Michnik, the icon of the opposition, Bohdan Poręba, a director of propaganda films and Bareja's opponent, as well as Ryszard Filipowski, his favourite actor. Comedies by Stanisław Bareja can be read as a very accurate reflection of the then historical reality and a grotesque representation of communist Poland.