

Wolne Związki Zawodowe

<https://wzz.ipn.gov.pl/wzz/the-free-trade-unions/3418,The-Free-Trade-Unions-of-Upper-Silesia.html>
17.04.2024, 22:26

The Free Trade Unions of Upper Silesia

In the second half of the 1970s, Upper Silesia was a difficult area for people who wanted to conduct any opposition activity. Upper Silesian workers did not stand up to fight for their rights, and did not pay with their blood during the disturbances of December 1970. So they had no memories of the authorities' violence, such as were still burning along the coast. The wide dispersion of the plants & factories (particularly the larger ones, employing hundreds or thousands of people) made it difficult to maintain contact, and the problems were increased by the lack of support from the intelligentsia. And indeed, the activities of the KOR/KSS KOR or ROPCiO did not find too many supporters in this region; surprisingly, however, an impulse to create trade unions independent of the government did come out of Upper Silesia, more specifically from Katowice.

Kazimierz Świtoń repeatedly insisted in interviews and memoirs that the evolution of his

attitudes had been greatly influenced by the Communist government's crimes of 1956, 1970 and 1976. At the same time, the many conversations he had on socio-political topics with the clients in his workshop allowed him to answer the question of how to take effective action in the interests of the working people. He decided that it was not worth getting involved in party or political activities, but that the focus should be on reforming the trade unions.

Towards the end of 1976, he tried (unsuccessfully) to join the KOR. The first action in which he participated was a May 1977 hunger strike organised by the KOR in the Church of St. Martin in Warsaw, in defence of the workers of Radom & Ursus and members of the opposition who were still imprisoned. After it ended he joined ROPCiO, and he made his apartment into a 'consultation and information' point for the movement. He was immediately subjected to various forms of persecution: he was deprived of the right to drive; his permit to conduct handicraft (and thus his livelihood) was taken away; he was expelled from the Democratic Party; bugging devices were installed in his apartment; he was placed under continuous observation by the SB, arrested for 48 hours, and his apartment was subjected to searches. People who came to his consultation point were also stopped and intimidated. In this situation, Świtoń had the idea - according to what he said during his next hunger strike at the end of December 1977 in Warsaw - of founding a Committee of Free Trade Unions. However, at this point it should be stressed that discussions among the pre-August

opposition activists about whose idea it was to create the Committee are still going on today: some of them say it was the idea of Leszek Moczulski, who they say inspired Świtoń; others say that Świtoń's idea was taken over by Moczulski.

Anyway, it was Świtoń who, in his apartment on Mikołowska street in February 1978, convened the first Working Committee of Free Trade Unions [KWZZ]. Fixing the exact date, however, causes some difficulties. Kazimierz Świtoń always claimed that it was 23 February, while the 3rd Division of the SB in Katowice moved the date back two days to 21 February (on the 22nd a report was sent to the 3rd Department of the Interior Ministry stating that Świtoń had convened the KWZZ on the previous day). Świtoń's interpretation is favoured by several factors. First, as the creator of the WZZ and a person who was strongly emotionally linked to it, it is likely that he remembered the day of its creation well. Secondly, the meetings of interested parties from ROPCiO and WZZ were always held at his place on Thursdays, and 23 February was a Thursday. Thirdly and finally, it appears from messages from observations carried out at that time every day by B Division that no-one came to the Świtońs' place on Tuesday 21 February, but on Thursday the 23rd almost all the signatories to the memorandum of the WZZ's founding document met at his place: Roman Kściuczek, Ignacy Pines and Władysław Sulecki. The solution to this matter is probably to be found in the documents concerning Tadeusz Kicki, a lawyer who had been interested in making

contact with Świtoń. Kicki had an appointment to meet him on 23 February, when he was supposed to present the statutes of the organisation (drawn up on the basis of the model Świtoń had brought from Moczulski). Moreover, a meeting was scheduled on that day for all five people who had declared their desire to join the WZZ. Previously, on 21 February, Świtoń was supposed to meet Kicki, but the latter had been frightened by the SB, and did not go through with meeting Świtoń. The latter in turn, and without speaking to anyone, had telephoned ROPCiO and the KSS KOR in Warsaw (which is how the SB knew about this) about setting up a Working Committee of the WZZ in Katowice, and gave the names of its founders (as Kicki later claimed). Two days later, he did indeed gather the signatures of the people mentioned above - with the exception of Kicki, who, after another conversation with SB, did not come to Katowice, and announced to Świtoń on 24 February that he was withdrawing from anti-state activities.

According to the founding principles of its organisers, the WZZ was to be independent of the state unions, and its job was to offer a real defence for the workers from exploitation. In its founding document, it pointed out that the workers' living conditions were becoming harder and harder, and their earnings were disproportionately low in relation to their hard work. The WZZ's decision-making body was to be a quorum of all the members, and its headquarters was to be Świtoń's apartment.

A few days after Kicki withdrew from working with the WZZ, Ignacy Pines also resigned. He did

continue to attend meetings at Świtoń's place, but no longer as a member of the Union. The resignation of these members was of course brought about by the SB, and was intended to discredit both the idea of the union and Kazimierz Świtoń himself. Despite this, in spring 1978 Zdzisław Mnich from Bielsko-Biała, Stanisław Tor from Krakow and Świtoń's son Jan joined the WZZ; all of them were met by repression from the SB, either directly or at its inspiration. They were detained for 48 hours, punished by the minor courts, searches were carried out in their homes, and their meetings disrupted by workers' groups organised by party committees. In April 1978 Bolesław Cygan was abducted to a forest and beaten by 'unknown assailants'. Władysław Sulecki was moved onto a schedule of part-time work (this involved lower wages), put on the night shift and closely monitored. An attempt was made to force him to emigrate; in order to save his family from disintegration, Sulecki agreed to leave for West Germany (4 March 1979), but until he left Poland he continued his membership of the WZZ. Roman Kściuczek was punished by the court for such trivial matters as not having a backlight for his house number, or failing to remove the snow from the ground around the building. In October 1978, he was taken into custody for refusing to demolish a building on his land. In March 1979, Świtoń was sentenced to a year in prison for allegedly beating four policemen in October 1978, but the ruling was deemed invalid, and the founder of the Silesian WZZ did not go to prison in the end. Eventually, the SB brought about an irreversible breakdown in the relationship between Kściuczek and

Świtoń, who broke off contact with each other in mid-1979. By that time, only Kazimierz and Jan Świtoń were really conducting any activity.

The actions taken by the SB, the Communist party and the judiciary effectively restricted the opportunities for the members of the WZZ to act. Despite this, they succeeded in preparing and distributing appeals to the public (the WZZ's appeal to workers and employees, the 'Appeal to the Polish world of work', the 'Appeal to the employees of the Citizens' Militia and the Security Service', the 'Open letter to Catholic members fighting with the Church against the Communist party', and the 'Open letter to the miners and their families'), as well as working with the monthly publication *Ruch Związkowy* [The Union Movement]. In addition, they tried to keep in touch with the Coastal WZZ. In 1980, after the August strikes, Kazimierz Świtoń began to work with Solidarity (MKR Huta Katowice). Taking the view that the WZZ had fulfilled its role, Świtoń dissolved the organisation and closed the ROPCiO consultation point on 4 September 1980.

Prepared by Anna Badura

Based on archive material, and J. Neja, *Śląski casus WZZ* [The Silesian case of the WZZ], *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* [Bulletin of the Institute of National Remembrance] 2008, no. 4, pp. 8-20; *Wolne Związki Zawodowe z perspektywy trzydziestu lat. Materiały pokonferencyjne, Katowice, 21 lutego 2008 r.* [The Free Trade Unions from the perspective of thirty years. Post-conference materials, Katowice,

21 February 2008], ed. J. Neja, Katowice 2008.

Powiązane informacje

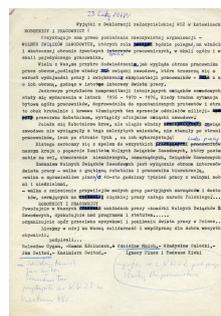


WZZ Górnego
Śląska

21 II 1978



Intro



Exceptions from
the WZZ founding
declaration in
Katowice, 23 II
1978; IPN Ka 854