

# Wolne Związki Zawodowe

<https://wzz.ipn.gov.pl/wzz/the-free-trade-unions/3421,The-Coastal-Free-Trade-Unions.html>  
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## The Coastal Free Trade Unions

Despite intense operational activities by the security services to prevent the creation of an anti-Communist organisation, on 28 April 1978 Andrzej Gwiazda, Antoni Sokołowski and Krzysztof Wyszowski signed a 'Declaration of The Founding Committee of the Free Trade Unions [WZZ] of the Coast'. As in Upper Silesia, many people in the Tri-City had perceived the need for an organisation, independent of the state, which would defend employees in their disputes with the employers, and fight to improve working conditions. The announcement of the creation of the Coastal WZZ was originally scheduled for 1 May 1978, but a report of that event was made by Jacek Kuroń on Radio Free Europe on 29 April 1978. The author of the Declaration was Krzysztof Wyszowski. The newly formed union could count on moral and material support from the KSS KOR, but still retained its full independence.

The Coastal WZZ's activities were focused primarily on education and discussions, often in small groups, in the homes of trusted persons, or

in the forest. A very important part of these activities involved providing legal and financial help for people laid off from work for their activities in the WZZ.

Most of those meetings were dedicated to matters currently concerning the workplace, such as an analysis of a new pay system in the shipbuilding sector, or cases of gross violations of safety regulations. Bogdan Borusewicz gave a series of lectures on recent history, while Lech Kaczyński discussed labour law, with particular emphasis on methods for self-defence against repression by the security services and the workplaces' managements.

One of the Coastal WZZ's first activities was the organisation in Gdansk on 28 May 1978 of a working meeting with the editorial board of *Robotnik*, the biweekly journal of the KOR. The SB tried to nip this new opposition initiative in the bud, and nine people were arrested as a result of their operations. The harshest repression was meted out to Błażej Wyszowski, who while defending the recently arrested Anna Młynik was severely beaten, accused of obstructing the police in the execution of their duties, and sentenced just two days later to two months' detention. Wyszowski's case united all the opposition groups in the Tri-City. Two statements in his defence were issued, signed by activists from the WZZ and the SKS. On 30 May 1978, at a joint meeting attended by about 30 people from all the opposition groups in the Tri-City, the decision was taken to start a hunger strike in the apartment of Błażej's brother Krzysztof Wyszowski. The first group of hunger strikers were Krzysztof

Wyszkowski, Bogdan Borusewicz in Gdańsk and Józef Śreniowski and other KOR activists in Łódź. The prayers for the detainee organised by Magdalena Modzelewska and Bożena Rybicka in the Basilica of St. Mary's, which dozens of the faithful attended, made a particularly strong impression.

A specific feature of the Tri-City's opposition, and at the same time its greatest asset, was its ability to undertake actions despite its internal differences. On the coast in the late 1970s, apart from the Coastal WZZ, the opposition groups included the Movement of Young Poland [RMP], the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights [ROPCiO], the Workers' Defence Committee [KOR] and the Student Solidarity Committee [SKS]. The WZZ and the KOR were the voice of the workers, while the WZZ, RMP and SKS spoke for the students and the young intelligentsia.

The opposition was distinguished by its adherence to the free exchange of views, a community of values, cooperation in distributing leaflets and independent newspapers, and their joint participation in organising the independent celebrations of anniversaries such as the adoption of the Constitution of 3 May, 11 November and December 1970. There was an informal division in the preparation of these celebrations: the RMP organised the celebrations of 3 May and 11 November, and the Coastal WZZ arranged the commemorations of December 1970. All the groups participated, regardless of their affiliation.

The ceremonies commemorating the victims of

December 1970 on the coast were an important part of the Coastal WZZ's activity. These were preceded by extensive information activities, which involved representatives of all the opposition groups in Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot. Every year the commemorations were attended by rising numbers of the Tri-City's citizens, despite intensive sabotage on the part of the security services. Neither searches of the homes of active members of the WZZ, SKS, RMP and ROPCiO, 48-hour arrests, nor the confiscation of the independent journals had any effect.

The Security Service [SB] could not and did not want to passively observe the anti-Communist activities of the Tri-City's residents, which were becoming increasingly effective and encompassing an ever wider range of people. The SB had a wide range of measures of intimidation, repression and surveillance at its disposal. Its standard measures included discrediting activists in the framework of operational affairs, installing bugging devices, opening mail, and watching houses & apartments. 48-hour detentions without charges became common (especially on the eve of the celebrations commemorating the victims of December 1970), as did house searches (often without the required order from a prosecutor), beatings by 'unknown assailants', criminal penalties meted out by the judiciary, and harassment in the workplace. The SB also resorted to threatening the activists' family and friends, trying to force them to change their attitude or withdraw from active participation.

However, the foundation of the Security Service's operations, as it is for every secret service around

the world, was undoubtedly the use of personal sources of information. The inner core of the Coastal WZZ's leadership was infiltrated by a very dangerous secret collaborator nicknamed 'Antoni', who turned Edwin Myszcz, an employee at the Gdańsk shipyard and the editor of *Robotnik Wybrzeża* [The Coastal Worker], to work for the SB. 'Antoni' informed the SB of the activities which the opposition planned in the Tri-City on a regular basis.

From the beginning of their activities, the founders of the Coastal WZZ shared a belief in the need to issue their own periodical. In August 1978, the first issue of *Robotnik Wybrzeża* appeared. The title referred to the journal *Robotnik* [The Worker] issued by the original Polish Socialist Party and published by Józef Piłsudski. *Robotnik Wybrzeża* was published irregularly from August 1978 to May 1980; a total of seven issues were printed during this period.

An unwritten rule prevailing among the Coastal WZZ's activists was that they were obliged to publish articles in *Robotnik Wybrzeża*. The journal's editorial staff included Joanna Duda-Gwiazda (who contributed introductions, feature articles and editing), Anna Walentynowicz (articles about the working conditions in the Gdansk shipyard), Alina Pienkowska (articles about the industrial health service), Maryla Płońska (technical editing), Bogdan Borusewicz (articles concerning the repression of the WZZ), Andrzej Bulc, Andrzej Gwiazda and Krzysztof Wyszowski.

The periodical did not completely resist

surveillance by the state's security bodies. In June 1979, issue number 4 of *Robotnik Wybrzeża* was edited by Edwin Myszcz, the secret collaborator with the SB.

The two-year period in which the Coastal WZZ operated was marked by the Communist government's repression of its members and associates. One such action was the sacking of Anna Walentynowicz from the Gdańsk shipyard. The protests in her defence became the excuse for an outbreak of strikes in August, which were followed by the creation of the trade union movement, independent of the Communist authorities, officially registered under the name of Solidarity. Essential experience was gained during this time, which was also a key period in creating the structures of the anti-Communist opposition. Looking from a broader perspective, one can see in Solidarity both the cause and the effect of the activity of the WZZ, its sense of community, its determination, its belief in its success, combined with its conviction about the rightness of the path which the activists had chosen.

During that two-year period, the WZZ succeeded in consolidating the opposition. A press independent of the government had been started; and increasingly popular patriotic celebrations commemorating the victims of December 1970 on the coast, the celebration of the adoption of the Constitution of 3 May, and the recovery of Poland's independence - all of which were resisted by the Communist Party - were organised.

At the same time, arrests and intimidation at the workplace, inspired by the security services, increased in number: in the best case those targeted were transferred to other jobs, and in the worst cases they were sacked. The targets of the repression included Anna Walentynowicz, Andrzej Bulec, Andrzej Kołodziej, Jan Karandziej, Andrzej Butkiewicz, Mieczysław Klamrowski and Lech Wałęsa. It was in the face of such harassment that the greatest achievement of the WZZ became clear - its impact on the thinking of the ordinary workers, awakening a feeling of empathy with their colleagues, and ending the habit of simply looking helplessly at the actions of the government.

*Prepared by Karol Lisiecki*

## Powiązane informacje



WZZ Wybrzeża

29 IV 1978



Intro



**Declaration of the  
Founding  
Committee of the  
Free Trade Unions  
of the Coast from  
29 IV 1973**