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<https://wzz.ipn.gov.pl/wzz/wstep/3502,Intro.html>
2018-11-19, 10:35

Intro

40 years of the Committee for Independent Trade Unions for the Coast

On 29 April 2018 we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the announcement of the Founding Declaration of the Committee for Independent Trade Unions (WZZ) for the Coast in Gdansk. In the Founding Declaration of WZZ of the Coast of 29 April 1978, Andrzej Gwiazda, Antoni Sokołowski and Krzysztof Wyszowski wrote: "Broad democratisation is an absolute necessity today. The society must fight for the right to democratically manage its State. All its layers must gain the opportunity to self-organise and create social institutions that honestly implement their rights. Only authentic social unions and associations can save the state, as only through democratisation does the road lead to the integration of the interests and will of the citizen with the interest and strength of the State. These tasks are carried out by existing social institutions, such as the Committee for Social Self-Defence KOR (Polish: *Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej KOR*), the Movement for Defence of Human and Civic Rights (Polish: *Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela*), the Society for

Scientific Courses (Polish: *Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych*), and Student Committees of Solidarity (Polish: *Studenckie Komitety Solidarności*). Remembering the tragic experiences of December 1970, based on the expectations of numerous groups and communities on the coast, we are taking on the Silesian initiative to create independent trade unions^u. Today, on the eve of 1 May, a holiday that for over 80 years symbolised the struggle for workers' rights, we establish the founding committee of the Independent Trade Unions for the Coast. The goal of Independent Trade Unions is to organise the defence of the economic, legal and humanitarian interests of employees. Independent Trade Unions declare their help and care for all employees, regardless of their beliefs or qualifications".

Outlined explicitly in the Founding Declaration, the concept of the Tri-city WZZ's activities beyond any divisions and the will to provide real help to workers, caused great anxiety both in Moscow and for the highest representatives of Polish People's Republic's authorities. Through the reports of Piotr Kostikov, who in 1964-1980 was the head of the Polish Section of the Department for Communication with the Brotherhood Parties of Socialist Countries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland, we may find out more about Moscow's unrest. Kostikov wrote: "From Poland came the phrase: 'bus opposition', all its strength would fit into one bus and, of course, it shall be removed. Our evaluation was quite different. For example, in [April] 1978 we had already noted the establishment of the

Independent Trade Unions Founding Committee. We then learned that independent papers were distributed informing that the Security Services (SB) had already made arrests. This scared us. More so than the previous activities of the Workers' Defence Committee, and the—noble, yet isolated—activity of junior and senior representatives of intellectual circles among the workers of Radom, Ursus and other towns affected by repressions after June 1976. Our security police reported about the activities of Kuroń, Michnik, Modzelewski or Moczulski, but these reports did not make a strong impression, as if they had become commonplace, although they gave a new dimension to socialist countries. Our Polish friends completely downplayed these phenomena and advised us not to pay much attention to any trivial press attacks on anti-socialist forces. [...] But the news about the Independent Trade Unions really alerted our bosses. [...] They formulated a thesis: this movement is dangerous, even the names themselves—independent trade unions or workers' defence committees are dynamite. The movement is dangerous as it takes people back to the beginning of the century, to the roots of the social revolution. This unbelievable thesis was formulated as early as in the 1970s. It expressed a fear of... revolution. It was not just a theory, within the Soviet Union, there were orders to step up reprisals, observation, and the prosecution of forces taking action against the Soviet State. We had not even given a moment's thought to independent trade unions yet, but the forces have already been set up."

During one teleconference with the Ministry of Interior, General Adam Krzysztoporski appealed to the heads of provincial SB structures not to underestimate the threat of independent trade unions, even if the influence of WZZ activists on workers was not yet particularly strong. For this reason, in the first period after the establishment of the WZZ in Silesia and the coast, the authorities focused on activities aimed at preventing the establishment of initiative groups in other regions of the country. We know from the Ministry of the Interior that attempts to create a WZZ were made in 1978, among others in Gryfino near Szczecin, in Wałbrzych, Gmiechów, Łódź, Kraków, Radom and Częstochowa. In all those places—as MSW officers assured—these attempts were limited or thwarted by the Security Services. The idea was also to cut all the contacts between the WZZ founding groups.

The WZZ, however, was set up and it survived—a phenomenon that was mainly based on the novelty of the adopted method and concept of a political fight against the communists. It was not only about moving away from strictly underground activity and empty talk about the need to involve workers in anti-communist activities. It was the ending of this "bus opposition" and the adoption of the trade union idea modelled on Western "trade unions" that was at stake. In the Polish People's Republic, it was supposed to result in the organisation of a professional independent trade union movement joining everyone employed in specific workplaces (therefore, membership in the WZZ was conditioned by employment). The aim was to fight

for specific issues based on the provisions of labour law, Labour Code, Health and Safety and Convention No. 87 of the International Labour Organisation, that the People's Republic of Poland was a member of.

Such ideas must have disturbed the Warsaw "bus opposition" and led to a programme-related dispute with the KSS KOR left-wing community focused around Jacek Kuroń, which in the texts of its leader (e.g. *Thoughts on the action programme* of 1977) and his closest companion - Adam Michnik (*New Evolutionism* of 1976), adhered to the communist idea of workers' self-government, workers' committees and ideas of influencing the regime's trade unions. Lenin's, and then the Gramscian principle of mastering the majority by the minority seemed the only possible way to change social relations in the PRL.

In the 1980s, Ludwik Dorn aptly diagnosed this problem: "In the thinking inspired or genetically derived from Marxism-Leninism, the idea of workers' councils remains in the closest connection with the experience of a party gaining power that constitutes a negligible minority and remains deprived of opportunities in democratic conditions. This is the experience of the Bolshevik Party and the Russian Revolution of 1917. In 1917, Lenin opposed the emerging soviets (above all the Petrograd Soviet) to the Provisional Government, the "direct initiative of the people's masses" to the republican-democratic form of government. Under this system, the Bolsheviks were deprived of the opportunity to gain power, and Lenin was a consistent believer in the notion that "the fundamental issue of any revolution is the

question of power in the state." Leszek Kołakowski, on the other hand, focused on the doctrine of Antonio Gramsci, who described the concept of factory and workers' councils as a technical procedure connected with the taking over of power, as follows: "The idea of workers' councils plays a great role in his reflections from the "L'Ordine Nuovo" era. The councils cannot be replaced by parties or trade unions. They constitute the proper form of the organisation in the communist society of producers and the main body for the liberation of the proletariat. The councils do not make the party superfluous: the party remains a tool of communist education and an organizer. The councils, however, not only govern the production process, but are also the proper body of the proletarian dictatorship: the councils emerging in a capitalist society are the model of the future proletarian state, which is why their uprising opens a new era in the history of mankind. The party is not to be their "ready superstructure" or control instance, but to cooperate in the process of liberating the proletariat and accelerating the revolution."

Hence, initially, Kuroń was sceptical about Gdansk's ideas. However, he had to capitulate, and he was forced to give up a few days before the creation of the WZZ, whereas the decision had already been made by Wyszowski, Gwiazda and Sokołowski. Independent trade unions emerged, becoming a programme-based model for fighting Communism. The Great Strike of August 1980, the establishment of the Inter-Factory Strike Committee (Polish: *Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy, MKS*), the

adopted negotiation strategy and then the establishment of Solidarity were only a confirmation of the validity of the concept assumed in 1978. There is no doubt that it was primarily thanks to WZZ activists that the strike at the Gdansk Shipyard was saved along with the most important—the first—postulate of the MKS regarding the need to establish a trade union independent from the Communist Party. Most of the 'August' heroes originated from the WZZ Founding Committee: Anna Walentynowicz, Alina Pieńkowska, Ewa Ossowska, Andrzej Gwiazda, Bogdan Borusewicz, Jerzy Borowczak, Lech Kaczyński, Krzysztof Wyszowski and many more. It was thanks to them that the idea of "Solidarity" was born as a national movement aimed at fighting communism. This is probably why Adam Michnik once said that "Solidarity" in 1980 was created "without us and against us". Fortunately.

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^u The first Independent Trade Union was founded in Upper Silesia in February 1978 upon the initiative of Kazimierz Świton.