



**European
Solidarity
Centre
Permanent
Exhibition**

anthology

edited by Jacek Kołtan, Ewa Konarowska

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Preface

Some events are simply unforgettable; of the fact that Solidarity falls into this category there can be no question. Solidarity brought with it the realisation of a dream shared by many, not only within Poland but also well beyond its borders—in places afflicted by authoritarianism, as well as those where democracy seemed to be functioning largely as it should. This dream amounted to more than the setting up of a strong trade union organisation, one defending worker rights. It also concerned something that underlies all types of social and political activity—a model of the world in which the social reality derives from the individual. Taken as an experience of freedom, the advent of Solidarity embeds in the memory a significant reference point – one which heightens sensitivity to any deficits of freedom that may arise in the future.

For this reason, the Solidarity story in this anthology is built of the accounts of those directly involved in the events, juxtaposed with an iconography portraying the great metamorphosis which has occurred since—one in which politics has become a natural element of daily life. Accompanying the accounts are classic articles dedicated to the history and culture of the opposition, as well as lesser-known essays, articles and historical documents; the main thread running through these being the socio-political changes of the 1970s and 1980s, not only in Poland but in Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. The materials collected here—mainly brought together and previously published by the European Solidarity Centre—sum up the scientific, publishing and archiving work carried out so far by that institution.

In this catalogue we aim to tell the story of a society of people who are ready at every turn to assess their situation anew and to build a culture of civic participation—one based on a concept of politics totally different from the one proclaimed at the time. The writings comprised by the anthology add up to a critical perspective, presenting a range of viewpoints, moments of crisis and tension, the greatness and weaknesses within many personal histories. And yet it is the readiness to build an alternative world—in defiance of the force of history, and of the political and economic order—that remains the primary motif. This is a world full of paradoxes: revealing strength within individual powerlessness; anti-political in the face of the inhuman politics of the state; one made up of people unrelentingly testing each new possibility that appeared upon the horizon under the onslaught of the official propaganda. This is also a time of getting to grips with new realities: confronting situations frequently being radically new, breaching established boundaries and establishing new ones.

The title of one of the essays in this collection, ‘Gdańsk is already in the future’, amounted to a symbolic demonstration that Solidarity had set new perspectives for the political culture of that era. The sense of this assertion is preserved if we treat the account of the Solidarity social movement as an inspiration for thinking about our contemporary, and very different, situation. It is no coincidence that the essay in question concludes with a word we consider fundamental to our story. That word is ‘imagination’.

JACEK KOŁTAN, EWA KONAROWSKA

The writings contained in this book are in most cases parts of a larger whole. All abridgments thereof, and also certain titles and headings, have been provided by the editors.

JAN SZYŁAK

toolmaker, quality controller at Predom-Metrix in Tczew, graduate of a vocational high school, 32 years old, married, two daughters

The strikes of July were followed by the hot of August events raises. They took place in several regions of Poland. They included a strike in my home town's largest factory, Polmo of Tczew. It was mostly about pay rise. The strike was short, the wages were raised and it all died down. In July Predom-Metrix in Tczew didn't go on strike. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that the management had started raising wages in April and continued through July. I didn't know a whole lot about the July strikes in other places in Poland because the mass media didn't give information about what was going on. And back then I hardly expected that more would come, something as momentous and important as August 1980.

I've been working at Predom-Metrix for more than eight years. The factory employs more than 1,500 people. I worked for seven years as a toolmaker, and currently I am a production quality controller. I am 32 years old, I have graduated from a vocational high school, and since 1973 I've been a member of the Polish United Workers' Party. I joined the party at a time of great expectations. You could say that I was full of faith

The Party Let Me Down

and hope. I was also active in the Union of Socialist Youth, and later in the Polish Socialist Youth Union.

Why did I join the party? I wanted to debate different aspects of life in our country, I wanted to have a say on issues concerning us, the employees of the factory, and to some degree our country as a whole. I believed that my voice, like the voices of other rank-and-file party members, would count. I also quietly believed that membership in the PUWP could help me get on with my life since this is what most people in party circles believed. But I must admit that I was disappointed on both counts. You couldn't speak out at party meetings because it would have given you the stigma of a brawler and a troublemaker. And even if some of our criticism was accepted, there was no follow-up, anyway. We mostly talked quietly and privately about what went wrong in the party and in Poland in general.

But I have to admit that I, and probably many ordinary party members, had no insight into various aspects of life in Poland. When the strikes started on the Coast, and I got to know the contents of the 21 Gdańsk Demands, when the power of the strikers was growing, I became convinced that now is the time when great changes in our country will be possible. So much for starters, now I'd like to move on to the chronology of the August events in my plant.

The director general has always said that his utmost concern is the factory's welfare. One of the Factory Strike Committee members said that if the director cares so much about the factory's welfare, it's hard to understand why he locked down the sleeping room, for in our opinion the factory's greatest resource is the people. Under the circumstances, if a lot of people sleep on machine platforms, they will fall ill, and the number of sick leaves will increase when work starts up again, so something doesn't add up here with the director's words and deeds. Presented with these arguments, the

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The beginning of the strike involves uncertainty and waiting
Photo: Stanisław Składanowski
European Solidarity Centre



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boss said that he wasn't going to dig his heels in and would hand over the key to the room. I was probably especially upset by the director's behaviour because I was the one to negotiate the access to the room with the chief of industrial guards, and also because fresh in my mind were the boss's words at the beginning of the strike that we should not be naughty because the strike would end one day.

We already knew that the talks in Gdańsk would carry on, and most of us believed that they would end well for us. We were fighting for a just cause, and we were growing in strength, and they needed to reckon with our strength. But disinformation kept on spreading and unnecessarily got on people's nerves. They say that two different newscasts were run on television, one for the Coast and the other for the rest of the country. What was the point? Was this supposed to prevent the spread of the 'plague' of democracy or serve some other purpose?

Friday, 29 August

After almost all the demands were agreed on, there remained the greatest controversy surrounding demand W-6, concerning the first secretary of the Enterprise Committee of the PUWP and his abuse of the right to use car vouchers. People demanded that the matter be cleared up.

A member of the Factory Strike Committee, who at the same time was the secretary of the local party organization, as well as department manager and a member of the editing committee that drew up the demands, defended the first secretary of the local communist party committee and said that we didn't know for sure what happened with those vouchers, that we had no proof, that maybe it would be better to phrase this demand in a general way, without naming the first secretary of the party committee. He also argued that maybe there were others who had committed similar abuses, and if we make this demand general, we will be able to expose all of them. There were differences of opinion about this man, but in the end we agreed to formulate the demand in general terms and now, when I look from today's perspective, I think that we made a mistake.

We learnt from various sources that the agreement would be signed soon. And the atmosphere of expectation was getting tense. The people were worn out by the strike and by waiting for an agreement. Every night, Factory Strike Committee members made the round of the sentries and saw that there was order and discipline in spite of the weariness and tension. People understood now that we must last until the end.

Saturday, 30 August

Our messengers working with the messengers of the municipal transport and long-distance coach services brought us the latest news. We already knew that the first two demands were signed, that the experts of both sides were working on the others, that Deputy Prime Minister Jagielski was going to Warsaw with the first two demands, so the Plenum of the PUWP Central Committee can approve them. When Deputy Prime Minister Jagielski didn't come back to Gdańsk that night as promised (at least, we had no information that he was back), probably all of us expected the worst. As I wandered around the departments that evening and talked to people, I could see that they were very anxious, but even so they were ready to persevere until the end. There was no information in the media when Deputy Prime Minister Jagielski was going to return to Gdańsk, so many people were listening to Western radio stations, to get any information whatsoever. We told our sentries to be even more watchful that night because we were afraid of a provocation by the security services, which could have been dangerous for us.

Sunday, 31 August

The tenth day of our strike came. From early morning we waited impatiently for news that talks on the Gdańsk Agreement were resumed and finished. It was Sunday and the last day of the month and I thought that the authorities would want us to go back to work at the beginning of the new month. At our morning meeting we adopted a resolution that as soon as the strike ends our Factory Strike Committee will be transformed into the Factory Founding Committee of the Self-Governing Trade Unions.

At the meeting there wasn't so much talk about the strike anymore, because we were discussing the future, i.e., the new unions and how to organize them. I don't remember if it was our messengers or the radio that brought the news that the talks were resumed in Gdańsk and that the remaining demands were being agreed on. And then came the television broadcast from the signing of the agreement between the government commission and the Inter-Factory Strike Committee in Gdańsk and the announcement of their joint communiqué. We watched it because there were several TVs in the factory. When we heard the words of this communiqué, it was a great joy for us that the strike was finally over and, most importantly, that the agreement was reached. And even though Deputy Prime Minister Jagielski said that there were no winners and no losers, we knew that this is our great victory because I'm sure that without the solidarity strike we would not have got even a fraction of what was in the agreement. No one would even have talked to us were it not for our firm, determined position.

Sometimes during the strike I wondered, what was up? It is said that power belongs to the people in our country, it's the people who have power, but the strikers are the people, so who did we, the strikers, go up against? It seems as if we were opposing ourselves. But it wasn't so. We protested against the government that forgot that it represents the people and should rule according to the people's will. It was also a protest by the working class, including party members, against the party authorities, who forgot that our party is called a workers' party. If those in power in the party turn against their own class, which they represent, then it is not a working class dictatorship, but the dictatorship of a certain group of people who are in power. The Polish United Workers' Party mustn't belong to the workers only nominally. And it will stop being workers' only in name when the workers come to have a deciding voice in it. This is what I was thinking during the strike, and I think that I wasn't alone in this.

now is the time
when great
changes in our
country will be
possible

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