

TURNING POINT. AUGUST 1980 AND SOLIDARITY



**INSTITUTE
OF NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE**

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Crowd assembled at gate 2 to the Gdańsk Shipyard during the August 1980 strike. Photograph by Kazimierz Maciejewski.



Shop window decorated to commemorate an anniversary of the October Revolution, 1978. Photograph by Bogusław Nieznalski.



Organized by the Free Trade Unions of the Coast, independent celebrations of an anniversary of the massacre of strikers in December 1970 outside gate 2 to the Gdańsk Shipyard, 1979. AIPN Gdańsk.

The Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in Gdańsk on fire, December 1970. AIPN Gdańsk.

BEFORE AUGUST 1980

The genesis of August 1980 was the collective memory about the December 1970 massacre (mostly on the coast) and the activity of the sparse yet determined opposition groups, such as, the Workers' Defense Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR), the Free Trade Unions of the Coast (*Wolne Związki Zawodowe Wybrzeża*, WZZ Wybrzeże), the Student Committee of Solidarity (*Studencki Komitet Solidarności*, SKS), the Movement for Defense of Human and Civic Rights (*Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela*, ROPCiO), the Confederation of Independent Poland (*Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej*, KPN), and the Young Poland Movement (*Ruch Młodej Polski*). One factor that affected the course of events was the economic crisis and the fact that the citizens could not achieve their life ambitions which had been aroused in the early 1970s. Another factor that incited the Poles to fight for their freedom was Karol Wojtyła's election as the Pope in 1978 and his pastoral visit to Poland in 1979.



AUGUST 1980

Early July 1980 saw an increase in prices of meat and meat products sold in stores and factory canteens. That triggered spontaneous strikes in workplaces in the south and east of the country, mostly in the Lublin region. The protests quickly subsided after the authorities' negotiations with the staffs on strike. The latter were promised that their economic demands would be met. Meanwhile, a strike broke out at the Gdańsk Shipyard on 14 August 1980 in defense of a dismissed WZZ Wybrzeże activist, Anna Walentynowicz. Called off after two days, it was then continued as a solidarity strike at the insistence of delegates from other workplaces which supported the shipyard strikers' demands. The protesters established the Inter-House Strike Committee, which formulated 21 postulates, with the most important ones regarding establishment of truly free and independent trade unions and commemoration of the victims of the December 1970 massacre. The protest was led by Lech Wałęsa.

Gate 2 to the Gdańsk Shipyard during the August 1980 strike. Photograph by Kazimierz Maciejewski.



Delegates of the staffs on strike registered in the Inter-house Strike Committee assembled at the Gdańsk Shipyard. Photograph by Kazimierz Maciejewski.



Strike Committee at the Railway Works Company 12 in Gdańsk. Photograph from Andrzej Osipow's collection.



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SOLIDARITY STRIKE

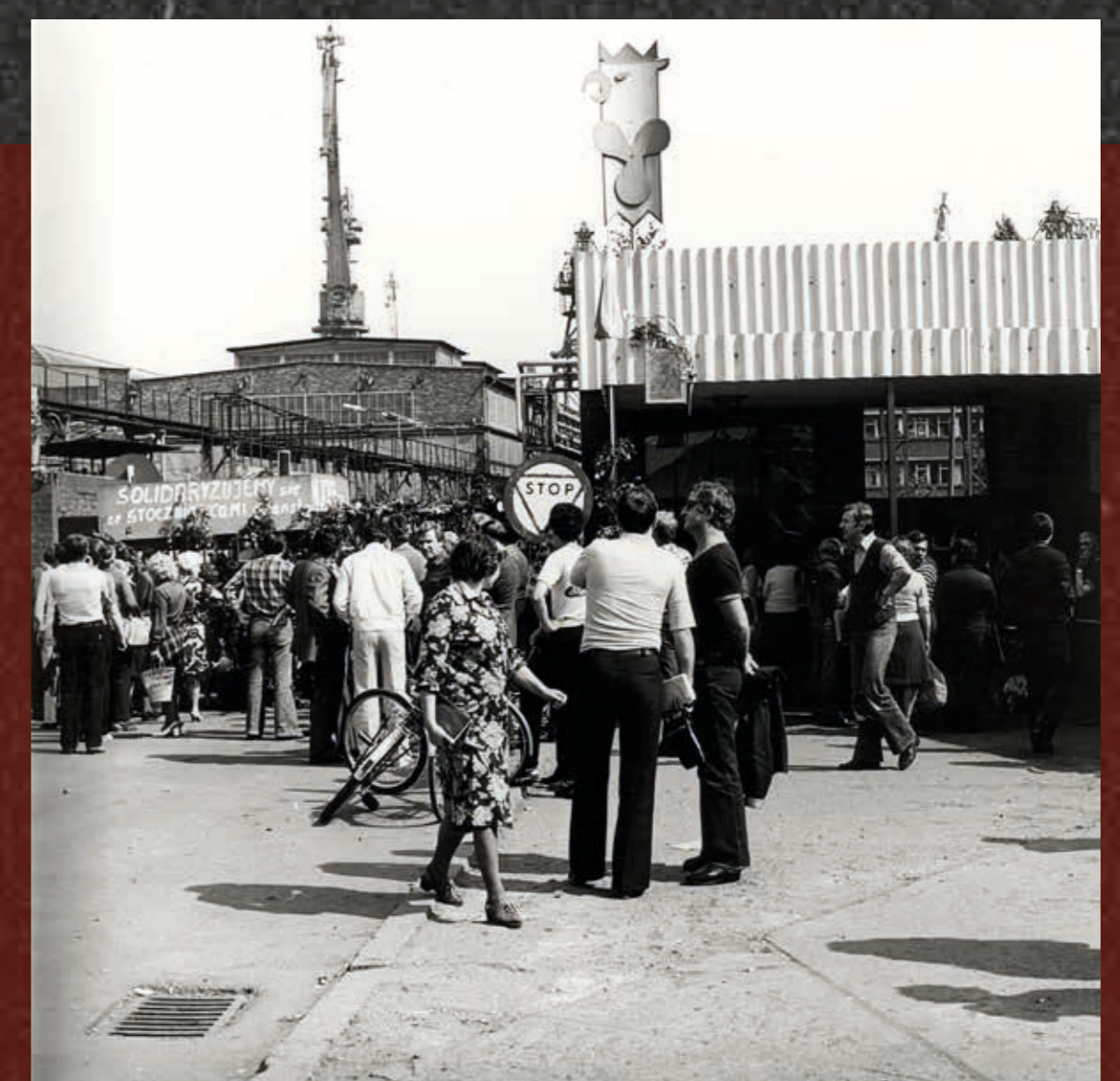
The Inter-House Strike Committee at the Gdańsk Shipyard associated approx. 800 workplaces from Gdańsk Pomorania. City strike committees were established in Elbląg and Szczecin. 26 August 1980 saw the commencement of strikes in Lower Silesia, while the mines in Upper Silesia stopped operating on 29 August. The protests were also joined by workplaces in other towns and cities. Pressured by the strikes, the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland agreed to the establishment of free trade unions. Agreements were signed in Szczecin, Gdańsk, and Jastrzębie-Zdrój on 31 August 1980, 31 August, and 3 September respectively.



Activists of the Presidium of the Inter-House Strike Committee at the BHP Hall at the Gdańsk Shipyard. Standing by the table in the foreground are Anna Walentynowicz and Lech Wałęsa. August 1980. Photograph by Kazimierz Maciejewski.



Strikers at a hard coal mine in Jastrzębie-Zdrój, August-September 1980. Photography by Władysław Morawski.



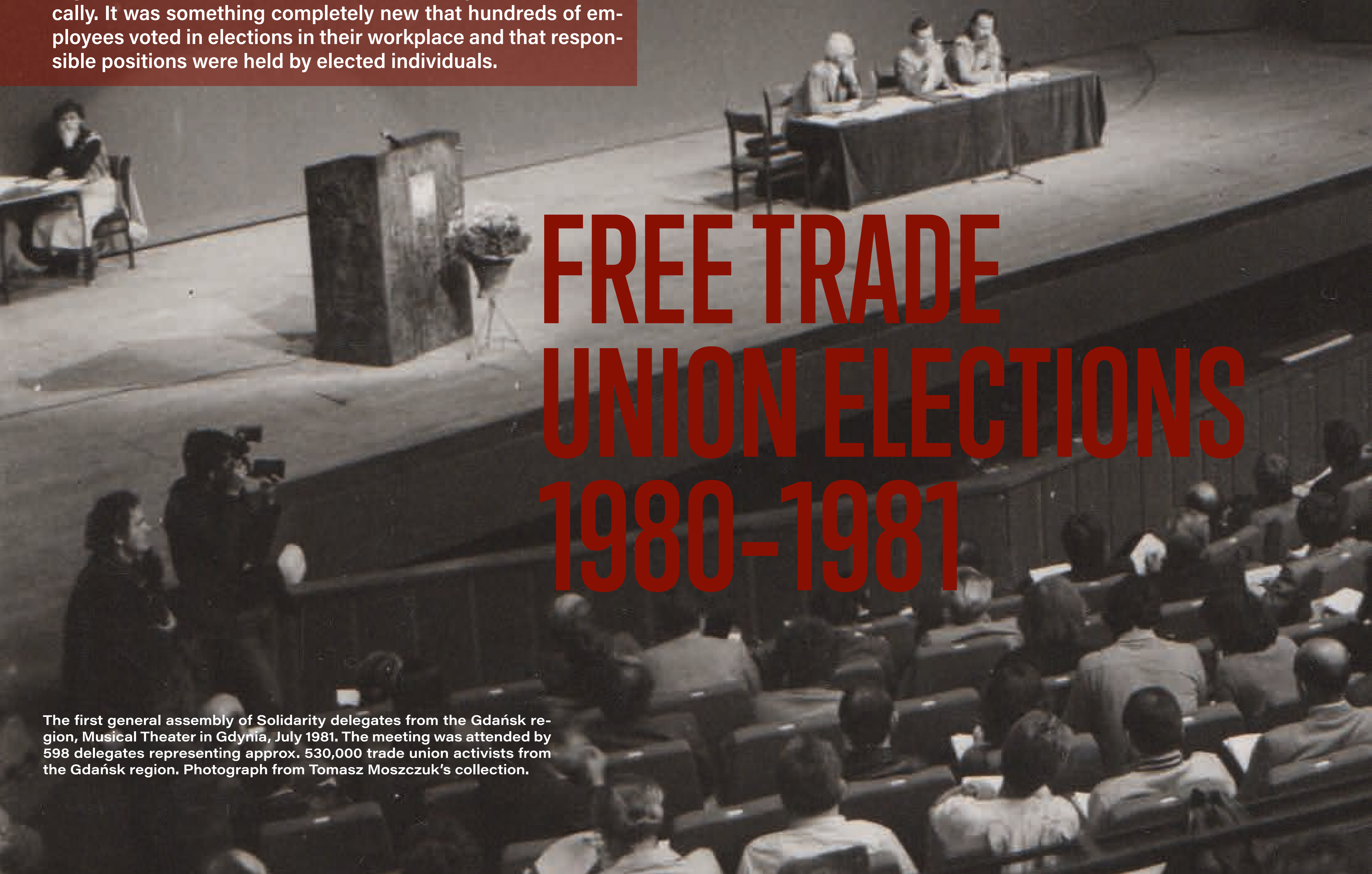
Gate to the Adolf Warski Shipyard in Szczecin during the August 1980 strike. Photograph by Zbigniew Wróblewski.





1 walne zebranie delegatów regionu gdańskiego

The formation of the free trade union, and actually of the great social movement, led to Poles' heightened activity in the political and social dimension, which was unprecedented in communist Poland. Until then no trade union, association, or organization had elected its authorities freely and democratically. It was something completely new that hundreds of employees voted in elections in their workplace and that responsible positions were held by elected individuals.



FREE TRADE UNION ELECTIONS 1980-1981

The first general assembly of Solidarity delegates from the Gdańsk region, Musical Theater in Gdynia, July 1981. The meeting was attended by 598 delegates representing approx. 530,000 trade union activists from the Gdańsk region. Photograph from Tomasz Moszczuk's collection.



Election to the Solidarity in-house commission at the Puck Mechanical Production Plant, October 1980. Photograph from Jan Piotrowicz's collection.



The First National Congress of Solidarity Delegates was held in two rounds at the Olivia Hall in Gdańsk in September and October 1981. The Congress was attended by 896 delegates from 38 regions, who represented nearly 10,000,000 Solidarity members. Photograph by Bogusław Nieznalski.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Since early September 1980 Solidarity had been not only a trade union, but also a social movement encompassing all spheres of social and political life. Such an institutionalized form of opposition to communism was unprecedented in the Eastern Bloc. The freedom momentum led to the establishment of independent organizations associating farmers and students: the Rural Solidarity trade union and the Independent Students' Association.

The agreement signed with a government commission on the night of 18–19 February 1981 at the Railroaders' Center in Rzeszów (former building of the Provincial Council of Trade Unions) ended the farmers' strike. On the left: Jan Kułaj (vice-president of the strike committee) and Lech Wałęsa. Photograph from Zbigniew Frok's collection/AIPN Rzeszów.



Negotiations at the Katowice Steelworks, October 1980. Solidarity Trade Union Dąbrowa Górnicza Cell.

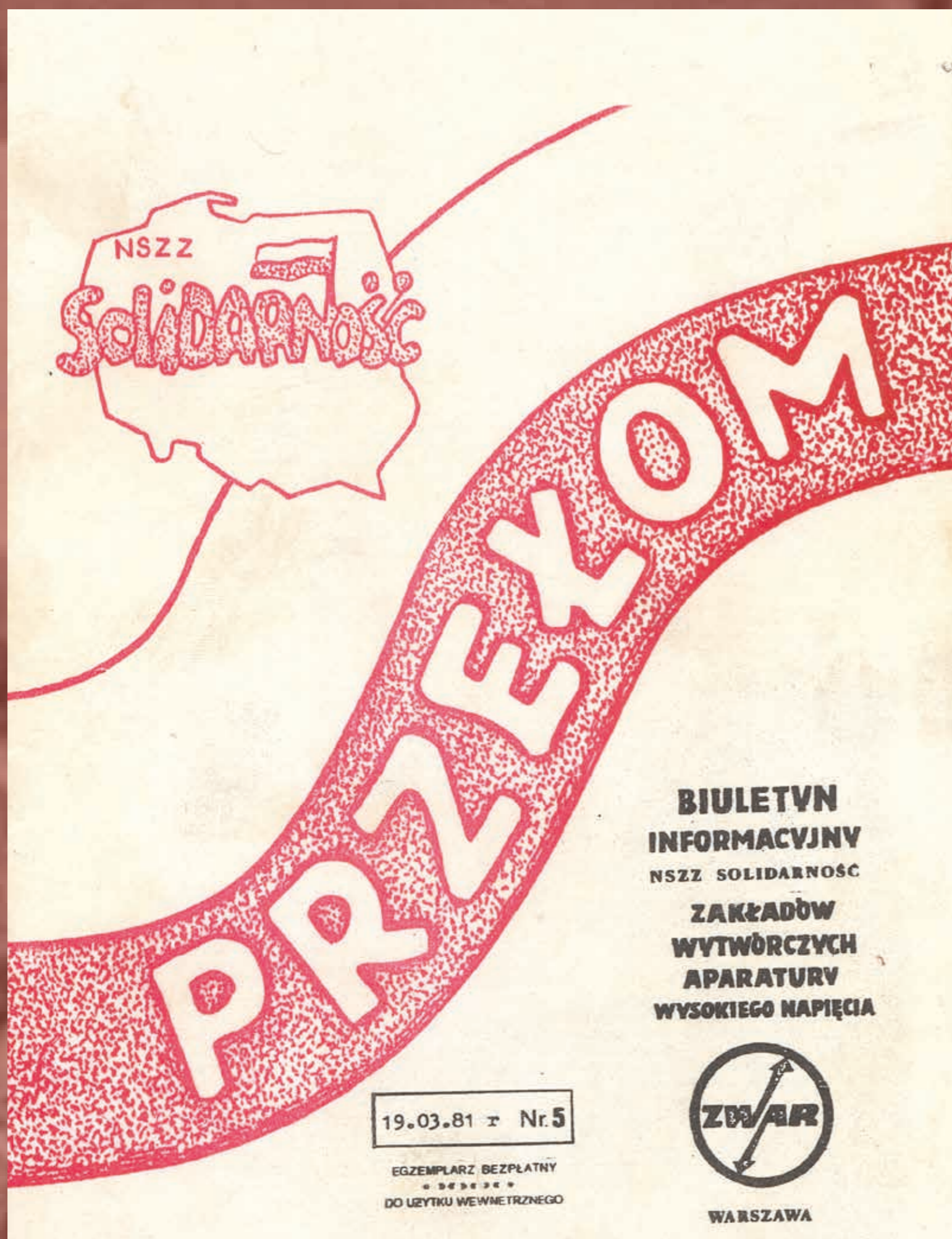


Unveiling of the monument to killed participants of the June 1956 protests in Poznań, 28 June 1981. Photograph by Jan Kołodziejcki.





The ceremony of naming the Gdańsk Repair Shipyard after Józef Piłsudski, 10 November 1981. Photograph from Anna Walentynowicz's private archive.



The *Przełom* news bulletin published by the ZWAR high voltage equipment factory in Warsaw. Photograph from Zbigniew Wołoczniak's collection.

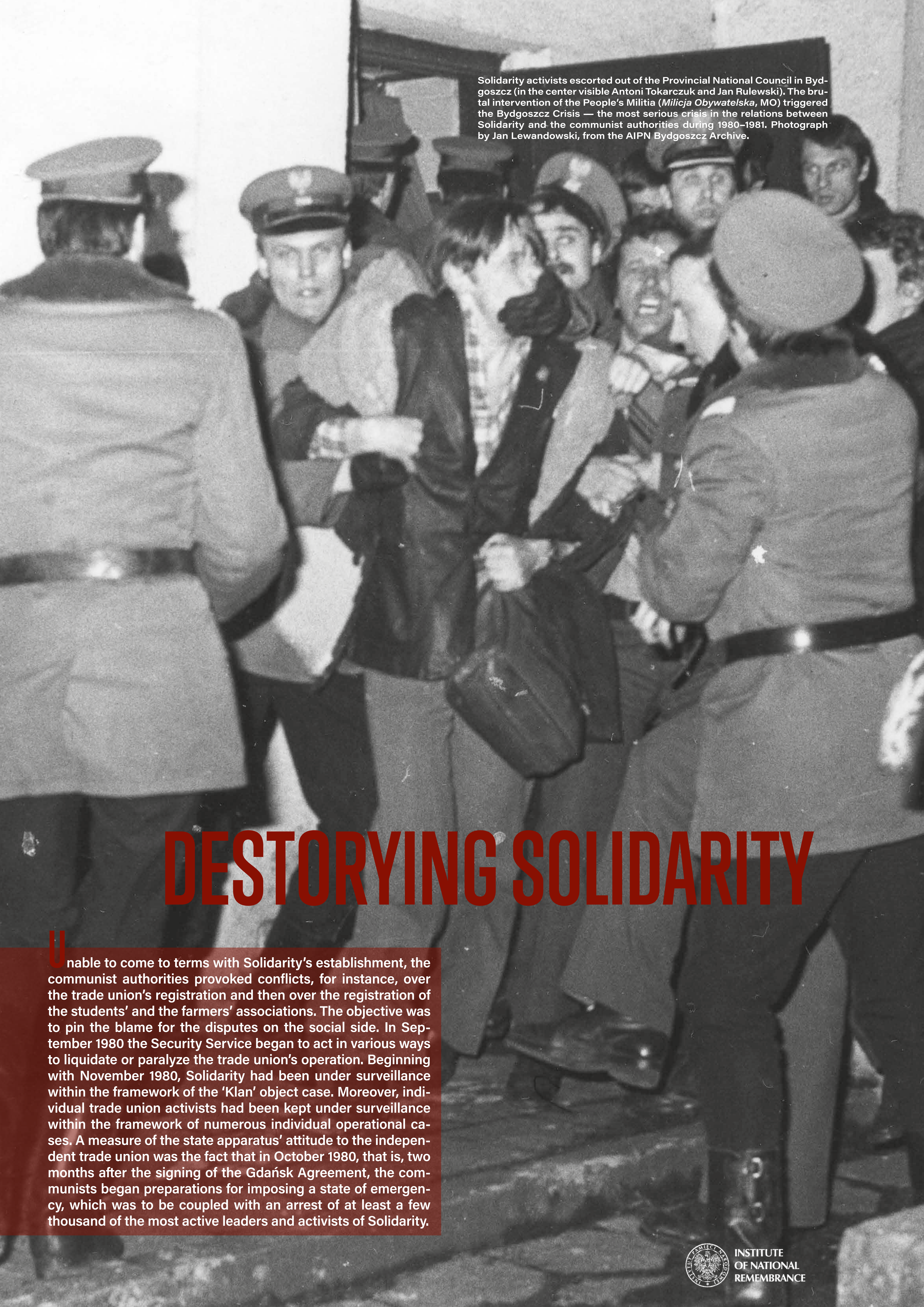
Victory Day celebrations in Lębork co-organized by the local Solidarity commission. Photograph from Zbigniew Wołoczniak's collection.

The Solidarity revolution was accompanied with manifestations of the civil society. Independent publishing developed on an unprecedented scale. Edited independently by the employees, trade union news bulletins and periodicals were published in workplaces and institutions. The trade union members conducted cultural, educational, self-educational, and scholarly activity. Many valuable and pro-liberation initiatives were undertaken in cooperation with the Church. All that meant that aside the official life in the People's Republic of Poland there was also a different and independent one, which was not controlled by the regime.

OBJECTIVE: FREE POLAND



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Solidarity activists escorted out of the Provincial National Council in Bydgoszcz (in the center visible Antoni Tokarczuk and Jan Rulewski). The brutal intervention of the People's Militia (*Milicja Obywatelska*, MO) triggered the Bydgoszcz Crisis — the most serious crisis in the relations between Solidarity and the communist authorities during 1980–1981. Photograph by Jan Lewandowski, from the AIPN Bydgoszcz Archive.

DESTROYING SOLIDARITY

Unable to come to terms with Solidarity's establishment, the communist authorities provoked conflicts, for instance, over the trade union's registration and then over the registration of the students' and the farmers' associations. The objective was to pin the blame for the disputes on the social side. In September 1980 the Security Service began to act in various ways to liquidate or paralyze the trade union's operation. Beginning with November 1980, Solidarity had been under surveillance within the framework of the 'Klan' object case. Moreover, individual trade union activists had been kept under surveillance within the framework of numerous individual operational cases. A measure of the state apparatus' attitude to the independent trade union was the fact that in October 1980, that is, two months after the signing of the Gdańsk Agreement, the communists began preparations for imposing a state of emergency, which was to be coupled with an arrest of at least a few thousand of the most active leaders and activists of Solidarity.



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MARTIAL LAW



Members of the Military Council of National Salvation, with Wojciech Jaruzelski (wearing sunglasses) standing in the middle. Jaruzelski was the Council's leader, an initiator of the martial law and the main person responsible for the communist crimes committed during that period. National Digital Archives.



Pacification of the Katowice Steelworks, December 1981. Solidarity Trade Union Dąbrowa Górnicza Cell.

With the imposition of the martial law, the power in the country was assumed by an extraconstitutional organ called the Military Council of National Salvation (*Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego*, WRON). Strikes and gatherings were outlawed, the operation of trade unions and most social organizations was suspended, a large number of workplaces and institutions were militarized, curfew was introduced along with passes for leaving one's place of residence, telephones were disconnected, and correspondence was overtly censored. Rammed down gate 2 of the Gdańsk Shipyard, 16 December 1981. AIPN Gdańsk.

On the night of 12-13 December 1981 the communist authorities declared martial law. During the first couple of hours the Security Service apprehended over 3,000 Solidarity activists, including Lech Wałęsa and Andrzej Gwiazda, along with leaders of other independent organizations. The total of nearly 10,000 people had been interned until December 1982. The trade union members who were not interned acted in defense of the internees and against the attack on the legally operating trade union. Strikes were organized in a hundred and a few dozen workplaces in Poland. The National Strike Committee was formed in Gdańsk.



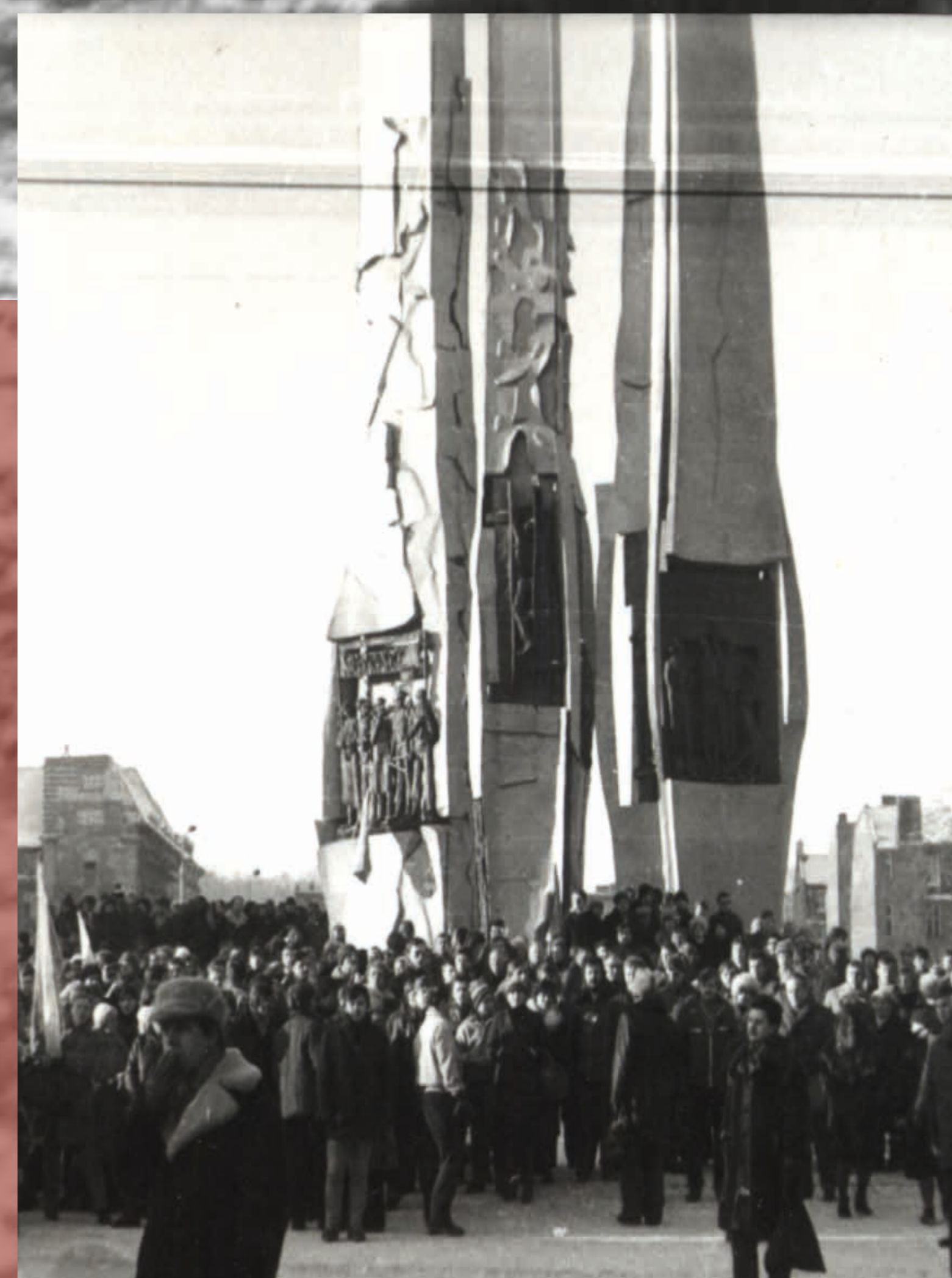
Most of the protests were pacified by the military and the MO in the course of several days. The most dramatic events took place during the breaking up of the strike at the Wujek mine in Katowice, when 6 miners were killed and another 3 died in hospital. During 16-17 December 1981 demonstrations and street fights took place in Gdańsk, with the number of their participants estimated at 100,000. To suppress the protests, the Militia used ball cartridges, which killed Antoni Browarczyk. The strike at the Piast mine lasted the longest, with the miners remaining underground until 28 December 1981.

Pacification of the strike at the Wujek mine during the first days of the martial law. A miner carried on stretchers by his colleagues after being shot with a ball cartridge by MO functionaries. Silesian Freedom and Solidarity Center in Katowice.

PROTESTS



Strike at the communications equipment factory in Świdnik, 14 December 1981. It was pacified on the night of 15-16 December 1981. Photograph by Sławomir Smyk/Solidarity Trade Union Central-Eastern Region Board in Lublin.



Crowd of Tricity inhabitants assembled spontaneously at the monument of the Fallen Shipyard Workers after the pacification of the strike at the Gdańsk Shipyard, 16 December 1981. AIPN Gdańsk.



RESISTANCE



Street fights in the Nowa Huta quarter of Cracow, 1 May 1983. AIPN Cracow.



Lines outside stores.
Photograph by Bogusław Nieznalski.

Independent Solidarity march on Piwna Street in Gdańsk, 1 May 1982.
Photograph from Andrzej Adamczyk's collection.



The strikes and protests against the imposition of the martial law continued until October 1982. They were organized, for instance, on 1 and 3 May 1982, 31 August 1982, and 11-12 October 1982. Led by Bogdan Lis, Zbigniew Bujak, Władysław Frasyniuk, and Władysław Hardek, the Provisional Coordination Commission of the Solidarity Trade Union was established in April 1982. As sign of protest against the martial law many people wore resistors pinned to their clothing, placed burning candles in windows, and boycotted the television. Radio Solidarity aired its first broadcasts. Due to severe repressions such as long prison sentences and the internment of most trade union leaders, only a very small percentage of Poles engaged in organized resistance after 1983. Moreover, everybody had to cope with the everyday hardships such as the badly-stocked stores and long lines.



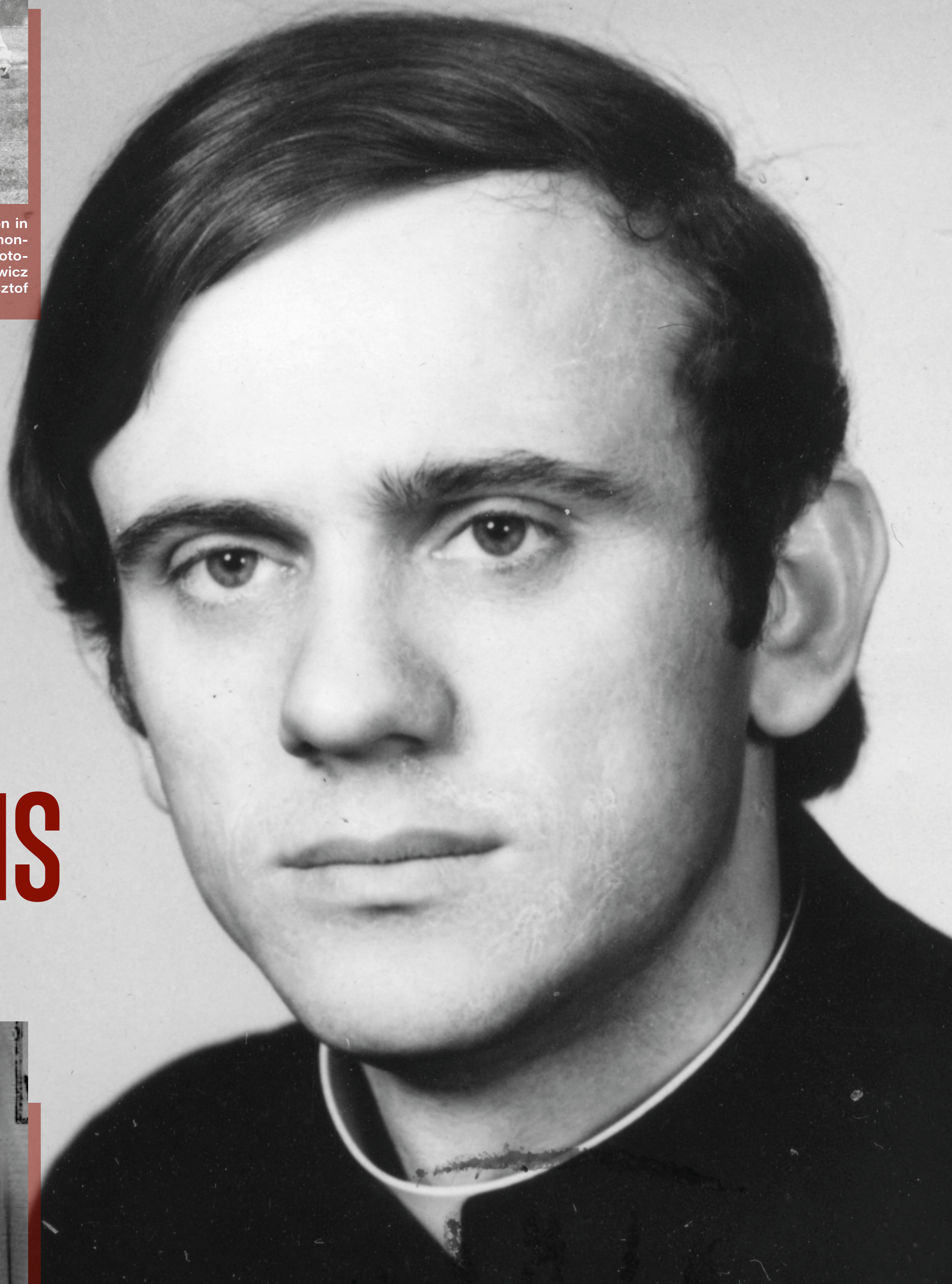


On 31 August 1982 during a Solidarity demonstration in Lublin MO and ZOMO functionaries killed three demonstrators and wounded about a dozen more. In the photograph: fatally wounded in the head, Michał Adamowicz carried by demonstrators. Photograph by Krzysztof Raczkowiak.

VICTIMS



Jan Samsonowicz, a Solidarity activist at the Medical Academy in Gdańsk, in July 1981 elected to the Gdańsk Region Board. In June 1983 his body was found hanging from a fence of the soccer pitch of the shipyard workers' sports club. AIPN.



Father Jerzy Popiełuszko's passport photograph. His murder committed by SB functionaries in October 1984 is a symbol of the Polish communist state authorities' violence against the independent movement. AIPN.

1989 saw the formation of the Sejm Special Commission for Investigation of the Activity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Rokita's Commission), which concluded that as many as 88 of 122 cases of unexplained deaths of opposition activists during the martial law were connected with the activity of the Ministry's functionaries. Approximately 1,200 people were sentenced for 'political crimes' such as underground activity and organization of strikes or demonstrations. It is difficult to estimate the number of people who were fired for political considerations. Approximately 2,650 people were encouraged or forced to leave the People's Republic of Poland with a 'one-way passport', that is, without a right to return.



SECOND SOLIDARITY

The imposition of the martial law was to destroy Solidarity and erase it from the pages of history. A lot suggested that that could be done, particularly during 1985–1986, when the number of underground activists and printers and distributors of periodicals was very small. The situation changed with John Paul II's 1987 pastoral trip to Poland, which had a similar effect as the one in 1979. The Poles realized that there were more people who thought in similar way and were not ashamed of their faith and patriotism. Strikes broke out in May and August 1988. Though conducted on a smaller scale than in 1980, they did influence on the communist authorities' decisions connected with the Round Table talks, which, against the communists' will, eventually led to the gradual dismantling of the system and the reinstatement of Polish independence.

Flowers at the monument to Fallen Shipyard Workers laid by members of the Gdańsk Shipyard Strike Committee during the strike, 31 August 1989. National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk.



March from the Szczecin port to a Mass at the Cathedral after the end of the strike, 3 September 1988. Photograph by Jarosław Kaczorowski/State Archive in Szczecin.



Mass in the Gdańsk quarter of Zaspá celebrated by John Paul II, 12 June 1987. Photograph by Bogusław Nieznalski.



Shipyards workers outside the building of the directorate of the Gdańsk Shipyards during the August 1980 strike. Photograph by Kazimierz Maciejewski.

SOLIDARITY IN FIGURES

According to official data, in August 1980 approx. 700 workplaces (700,000 people) were on strike.

Approximately 800 workplaces were registered in the Inter-Home Strike Committee at the Gdańsk Shipyards, while its Szczecin counterpart associated 360 enterprises and institutions.

The number of Solidarity activists during 1980–1981 is estimated at 9,000,000–10,000,000 people.

Approximately 2,000 people engaged in the opposition activity during the martial law.

The total number of underground members is estimated at 45,000 people.

The number of activists of the second Solidarity (post-1989) is estimated at 1,500,000 people.

SOLIDARITY



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