

Solidarity

at Warsaw University's Department of Economic Sciences in the 1980s

1. Prologue

The direct impulse for writing these memoirs was the lecture of the *Anniversary Book* celebrating the 50th anniversary of Warsaw University's Department of Economic Sciences in 2003. The book contained a lot of interesting information but the 1980s in particular were not given a lot of attention. This may be because the book was prepared based on the materials of a late economic history professor, not very fond of "Solidarity", and his student, who began working at the Department somewhat later. Although writing memoirs is most suitable for retired persons, I decided that even if I lived to see the 60th anniversary of the Department I still would not have retirement rights, so why wait if the next *Anniversary Book* is to have a more complete description of this interesting period?

I was raised in a home with no reasons whatsoever – ideological, economic or historical – to sympathise with the socialist system. As a teenager I rebelled against many things but as far as political establishment was concerned I could agree with the older. I was not a revolutionist though and I usually did not manifest my views in public. The first opportunity to do so came as late as March 8, 1968 when I threw a chair from a 3rd-floor classroom window as a sign of protest. To say the truth I did not recall this incident, but during my secondary school classmate reunion in 2005 two people independently reminded me of it, so I guess it must be true. Unfortunately I cannot recall if by throwing the chair I was opposing the school principal's decision to lock up students in order for them not to merge with university students or the state authorities of that time.

The cultural policy of the Communist Party (Polish United Workers' Party, "PZPR") enabled me also to look differently at Adam Mickiewicz and his works, in which I started to see more than I did before. As a form of proclamation of patriotism I covered the back of the thick book of Mickiewicz's collected works with thin white and red stripes to make it stand out in our home library.

Then came the reading of *samizdat* publications, foreign editions of Orwell, the pre-war works of Słonimski and – if only to a small extent – copying books from the underground circulation. For this purpose I used an old typewriter in one of my aunt's house, since the typewriter rented from my father's office (who used it to write international air law agreement drafts, among other things) must have been registered by the secret police. Of course xerox machines were not available those days.

Studying economics in the years 1969-1974 did not provide too many opportunities to abandon the orthodoxy. I was passionate about the guest lectures of Tadeusz Kowalik, whose views do not seem too interesting to me anymore, but in the 1970s they were extremely subversive. Thanks to Krzysztof Hagemeyer, a year younger fellow student, I met professor Edward Lipiński. We would visit him with a group of friends at least once a year (usually on his birthday or name day) in his beautiful, old-fashioned apartment. Again, from today's perspective, I could well call his views a longing for "socialism with a human face", but at

that time they seemed fascinating. It was not until I spent a year at the University of Wisconsin in Madison (as a Fulbright scholar) in 1978/79 that I had my chance to really taste contemporary economics. Earlier, while working on my doctoral thesis, I used the well-equipped library of the Warsaw School of Economics, but it was more a matter of amateurishness than serious work from my part.

In the years 1972-1977 I was a mathematics student. It was a different world in every aspect. Meetings that would be organized in secret among economists were announced on a notice board for mathematicians. There were performances of "Salon Niezależnych" (a dissident musical band), and *Rajdowy śpiewnik matematyków*, a hilarious song book used by mathematics students which somehow had been copied, contained songs like "Telewizja pokazała, a uczeni podchwycili" (a caricature of the communist TV news programs). The last year of my studies coincided with the beginning of activity of KOR (Komitet Obrony Robotników, a dissident committee for the protection of workers) and the whole system seemed to be on the decline, though the common feeling was that this decline might last for generations to come.

2. The years 1980-1981

In the summer of 1980 I was busy taking care of my newborn child. With all the trouble surrounding buying the most basic articles it was a task which occupied practically all of one's free time. It strikes me then that at the same time I was able to prepare quite an extensive paper entitled "Rationality, optimization, and cybernetics. On the sidelines of mathematical-economic works of Oskar Lange". I was asked to do it by the dean's office on account of a conference to be held in honour of this most well-known Polish economist. I set about preparing the paper with an intention to study Lange's academic achievements with due respect. However I had read many international publications on rationality and efficiency previously and I was surprised to find that the works which could be seen as innovative in the Polish academic environment became less so viewed from a wider perspective. I was a bit disconcerted because of the critical tone of my conference presentation, which took place in the fall of 1980. But I had a clear conscience since preparing the paper came about in the summer, when the breakthrough seemed nothing more than wishful thinking.

I observed the strike at the Gdańsk shipyard from a distance, without comprehension of its historic significance. It was not until the August Agreements that I really woke up. I even recorded the radio transmission on a cassette player just in case everything went back to its previous order again and the state officials refused to acknowledge what we were just witnessing.

After 1st September a chaotic activity aiming at appointing new labour unions began in all institutions, including the Department of Economic Sciences at Warsaw University. The state did not sit by and watch, but tried to disorganise the social movement that was just arising. The name "Solidarity" practically did not exist yet. Local organisations, that could drift in any direction, were emerging. At universities the "Independent Self-Governing Labour Union for Higher Education and Scientific Workers" ("Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Szkolnictwa Wyższego i Nauki") was formed. The name was shortened to "Nine-letterer" since it was pretty difficult to use the full name in practice. In all this chaos there was some self-organisation around Lech Wałęsa – many people simply asked which union sympathised with the Gdańsk Strike Committee and did not want to join any of the other unions, so eagerly created by strange activists. After a short period of deliberation

and consulting friends I too joined the "Nine-letterer", whose structures were just being formed at Warsaw University.

I began to participate in university meetings with enthusiasm. I also agreed to play diverse administrative-organisational functions because many of the older and more seriously engaged members showed no will of fulfilling them. For example, together with a colleague from another faculty, a linguistic one if I remember correctly, we agreed to write down a detailed report from one of the national meetings of the "Nine-letterer" held in the main Rector's office. I remember our consternation over a stenographic record from a university in Częstochowa, where the report contained mainly the problem of transporting spoiled chicken and a demand that the union takes care of controlling trucks transporting poultry. When preparing the text of a union request later on, we found our way out by talking with diplomacy about the need to improve the provisioning of cities.

My idealistic view of the new movement led me to believe that it should be involved in all important social issues. I had just learned the notion of external costs shortly before and I was very much absorbed by the problem of environmental protection. I therefore had the opinion that "Solidarity" should engage in ecological issues and demand the internalisation of external costs (e.g. the shutting down of the most dirty plants). I had no knowledge then of American research proving the role of labour unions in preserving the production of arsenic which was taking a deathly toll on workers and their families. Nor did I know that almost throughout the 1990s labour unions in Poland would force governments to postpone the decision to stop the production of carcinogenic asbestos. I worked out a two-page text calling for the union's support for the internalisation of external costs and I tried with zeal to win over whomever I met. At one of the meetings I sat beside professor Henryk Samsonowicz, one other person to whom I presented my memorial. He read it, looked at me kindly and nodded his head.

After some time I realized that my thoughts on internalising external costs have no chance to arouse the interest of union members, while there were much more important issues at stake. Janos Kornai was an economics authority for me, so – inspired mostly by his concepts of suction and pressure in market disequilibrium – I wrote an article entitled "Za czym kolejka ta stoi?" ("This queue is for what?"), a title borrowed from one of the songs of that time. I wanted to publish it in *The Solidarity Weekly*. I even talked to Waldemar Kuczyński who was responsible in the editorial board for articles on economics. The board was delaying the publication though. The demand for a radical market reform may have been indigestible for the union, or perhaps the article was simply poorly written and the editorial board was too delicate to tell me so. In the end, some months later, Martial Law began and the matter dropped in a natural way.

In 1980, many new members entered the new union at the Department of Economic Sciences. The young were particularly happy with the presence of their professors, who were apparently risking their academic careers but nevertheless supported the anti-establishment social movement. In winter-time the new movement's organisation was formally established, and the "Nine-letterer" became a branch of "Solidarity". New local authorities had to be elected. The ones who had been leading the new union movement at the Department so far, Władysław Janowski and Dariusz Grabowski (professor Adam Runowicz's assistants), did not want to candidate. Dr. Tomasz Stankiewicz performed responsible functions at the university level. People began pushing one another into running for positions, but no one was eager to undertake the tasks that needed to be done. It turned out that I had the weakest nerves and was

the first person who agreed to become a candidate. The others sighed in relief and with just one abstention (my own) I was voted Secretary of the Departmental Commission. I suspect that anyone who agreed to run that day would have been elected. I was probably put forward because I had been open about my political sympathies for a long time, I had just obtained my doctorate and I had also interned at an American university previously, which suggested that I had had contact with modern science. Ms. Elżbieta Olszewska from the departmental library was elected as my deputy. This reflected the high involvement of library personnel in the formation of "Solidarity".

As I came back home late that night I was rather disapprovingly treated by my wife, who rightly suspected that my so far limited engagement in household tasks will be further limited due to union activity. Nevertheless I set to work with zest and soon I presented the Dean with some document containing union demands. I cannot remember the content but I do know that I was treating my mission very seriously. The Dean also approached the matter seriously and asked: "What should I do with this paper, wipe my ass with it?" I would not let him provoke me and replied that he would do whatever he found adequate. Apart from this incident though, our relations were quite proper.

Meanwhile, the state was constantly provoking "Solidarity" at the higher levels, and "Solidarity" responded as anticipated by the communist authorities. There was almost no week without someone being beaten or hurt in some other way. As a result, nearly every week the union would proclaim a strike, which at the university took the form of cancelling classes, rallying and preparing demands. For some reason it was decided that Thursday noon was the best time for this type of manifestations. As luck would have it, this was the time of my lectures or some other classes, so completing the scheduled programme became problematic. I appealed to the union authorities to vary the time of strikes, but I was not listened.

Together with a couple of friends we were voted delegates to University "Solidarity" meetings. Unfortunately, the University Commission was not able to maintain a relation with its constituency, which gradually resulted in catastrophic non-attendance rates at these meetings. I personally frequented them regularly, viewing it as my duty, but I too would identify the priorities of action differently. The non-attendance caused a chronic lack of quorum and an inability to adopt resolutions in the second half of 1981.

At Warsaw University's Department of Economic Sciences we held meetings whenever there was such a need, but I cannot recall any serious clashes. Only once a member voiced his disapproval for Lech Wałęsa's religiousness. Someone explained that the shipyard workers did not mind and the case was closed. No other ideological disputes emerged.

"Solidarity" was alive in the Department and engaged in matters of diverse calibre. From the 21st century perspective they seem irrelevant, but at the time a few dozen employees and even more students working for the Independent Student Union were passionate about them. Our magazine called *Everyday life after...* (*Życie codzienne po...*) gives a sample of the atmosphere of those years. The title was taken from a play prepared by The Movement Academy (Akademia Ruchu) entitled *Everyday life after the Great French Revolution*, performed in 1980. Even though I was not fully aware of the historic processes taking place I was aware of the fact that also in the most revolutionary of movements everyday life runs its own course and it is better to distance yourself from what you are participating in, no matter how involved you are. This is why our magazine differed from

other publications of this type. Serious matters were also mentioned but they never dominated the usually light tone of texts and illustrations.

In the years 1980-1981 xerox machines were under tight scrutiny. At the Department, the copying was handled by Józef Krzysztofik who joined the new union from the beginning. It was all too tempting to ask him to copy something uncensored, yet we never did, knowing that the risk of being caught was too great, and the consequences would be severe for his whole family. However, we were able to make use of Krzysztofik's artistic talent legally – he tirelessly worked out the graphic design of "Solidarity" posters and drew illustrations for our magazine. The distribution of *samizdat* publications did not involve the departmental copying room though.

Finally it was autumn 1981. The state's struggle with "Solidarity" intensified to the extent that the union proclaimed a sit-in in many factories. Warsaw University also discontinued its regular classes and began to occupy its buildings. Many people were sorry that classes were not being held. In order not to break the strike though some classes were organised as part of the "Strike Academy" whenever it was possible to link the subject to political issues. I remember giving some economics lectures myself among the students on strike who showed no particular interest in what I was saying. They wandered about in silence or burrowed into their sleeping bags, obviously trying to sleep off a more interesting event of the previous day.

Apart from academic lectures, participants of the sit-in at Warsaw University could enjoy more pleasurable events as well. One day we were entertained by Jerzy Markuszewski, well-known from STS (Studencki Teatr Satyryczny, a popular theatrical group). Some other time one of our employees and the author of economic history publications, professor Kazimierz Piesowicz, talked about his encounters with the censorship and how he tried to outsmart it. Romuald Kukołowicz, the advisor to the Primate and invitee of Dr. Katarzyna Tymowska talked about the struggles in the ruling camp. Despite the psychological tension, the overall atmosphere was good; sleeping on armchairs drawn together resembled a baptism of fire to the generation who did not have an uprising of their own. Viewed from today's perspective, our demands could not exactly be deemed fundamental (one of the main reasons for the strike was the refusal to step down by a mediocre rector of some minor university), but at the time we thought they were important, while the state was doing everything it could to punish the disobedient.

In early December "Solidarity" decided its demands were met and the strike was called off. The students were sent back home and the building at Długa Street emptied on December 11, 1981. I was highly relieved since I had felt responsible for the youth whose safety – as I believed – had been at great risk.

Having arrived back home I tried to catch up on my scientific work. On December 12, I was busy with some paperwork when I noticed that the bells of St. Stanisław Kostka church were ringing between 11 p.m. and midnight. It seemed a bit strange to me, but we went to sleep soon after midnight, not suspecting anything extraordinary. In the morning we were wakened by my parents-in-law who came running to check if I had been detained. They told us about WRON ("Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego", the military authority) and the pacification of the country. I was not particularly upset by the news and explained that one could expect almost anything from the ruling party but that "Solidarity" was too strong to be crushed. The first wake-up call came on December 16 and it was actually not caused by the

shooting of miners. I was waiting in line in a grocery store, pondering solemnly at the fate of the "Wujek" coal mine workers, while some women queuing along had a lively discussion on preparing vegetables. It was not until then that I realized "Solidarity" and society were not monolithic, and that issues which were life-and-death matters to my family, friends and union colleagues did not necessarily have to be of interest for the broader public.

3. Martial Law and the decline of the People's Republic of Poland

We spent the first days of Martial Law hiding what was there to hide in our homes, seeking contact with friends and studying the lists of those detained. Our Department was left in relative peace. Only one person – Wojciech Ostrowski, who was a student one year lower than I – was detained after a short period of hiding in people's homes in Żoliborz district. The organisational structure of "Solidarity" at Warsaw University was slowly being reconstructed, but we were strongly convinced that the state's strongest blow was yet to come, therefore we had to remain highly cautious.

All "Solidarity" activists – including myself – were to appoint their secret deputies in case of detention. Getting in touch with people without the possibility of using a phone and while all Warsaw University buildings were closed was quite a task but I managed to (individually) meet all of my colleagues whom I wanted to ask to fulfil this unique national duty. It turned out that someone's wife was pregnant, another person already had the secret police breathing down his neck, and so on, which made it clear that appointing my deputy would be a tough job. In the end I managed to convince Wojciech Otto, though he too could have used some arguments as an excuse.

The emerging conspiracy paved the way for a demand for knowledge which until then was not so useful. Everyone searched his family for former partisans, liaison officers etc. in order to get practical information on the rules that need to be followed in underground organisations. One of these rules is the rationing of information: everyone should know only their immediate superior and immediate subordinates so that in case of exposure they do not rat too many people. Another rule was to use authentication items which would be common enough not to raise any suspicion of the secret police, but unusual enough to identify a person.

From Dr. Tomasz Stankiewicz, who was a middleman between the delegatised Warsaw University "Solidarity" Commission and the delegatised Departmental Commission I received an order to see Dr. Bogdan Cichocki in his home for instructions. As a personal identification I was given a filter used to cover a washing machine hose. I was to have it with me at all times and use it to prove my identity if a secret activist were to question it. But no one ever did. Nevertheless I carried the 3/4 inch diameter filter in my pocket for quite a few years, certainly till the end of Martial Law. I was also told by Bogdan Cichocki to report to an indicated location at the indicated time for further instructions.

The mission was to take place in one of the apartment houses of Muranów district; I adjusted my watch and headed for the memorised address bravely. I arrived exactly on time to the seconds and I was let inside. Before the host managed to give me anything, there was someone pounding on the door. There was no doubt in my mind that it was the secret police, but the host remained cold-blooded, and just told me to sit down in a room and closed the door. It turned out not to be the secret police but another union member seeking instructions. The person coordinating the whole event had obviously sinned against conspiracy rules, because we were not supposed to meet in one place, especially that there was a third envoy to

follow shortly afterwards. The host tried to make it all up by separating the guests, so up to this day I do not know who else was appointed for the meeting at the same time as myself.

My mission was coming to an end. I was only supposed to do one more thing – provide my secret deputy, that is Wojtek Otto, with information on his meeting with some unknown conspiracy superior. After I was given the address (this time it was somewhere in Powiśle) I decided to check the place myself beforehand in order to make it easier for my younger friend to plan this risky meeting. This way I had the feeling my deputy was safer and that is where my conspiracy work ended. In later years I would sometimes help with the reproduction and distribution of *samizdat* publications, but I no longer participated in the administration structures of underground "Solidarity".

Looking from today's perspective I have the feeling that the state simply let us go at the Department or perhaps even at the whole University, concentrating instead on big industrial plants. Our conspiracy was so poor (as shown by the unprofessionally organised Muranów contact point for example) that had the secret police wanted, it could have detained us all, but fortunately this was not the case.

After a few weeks the University was reopened and we were able to meet in the building at Długa Street again. Despite shortening the holiday period the annual schedule could not possibly be completed, nevertheless the situation was beginning to head towards normalcy. The sole presence of those until recently fulfilling legal union functions, as well as small protests reminded of "Solidarity". At times it would be a poster that managed to hang some 15 minutes, at times it would be some *samizdat* publication passed on among trusted colleagues. I cannot remember any authority ever trying to get revenge on the activists of the delegatised "Solidarity" union. It seems our Department was different in this matter from many academic institutions, where the comeback of the *ancien regime* meant penal sanctions or milder forms of harassment.

The detained Wojtek Ostrowski was given permission to undergo medical assessment due to a decline in his health. I cannot remember how, but I was informed of this, and I agreed to help transport him to the hospital. It was an awkward trip during which the detainee was under the watch of a uniformed screw while I was taking care of Wojtek's mother; the four of us wandered around Praski Hospital until finally Wojtek returned to his lock-up after the assessment was completed. The screw had a liberal approach so we were able to talk freely.

The 1980s in general turned out to be relatively merciful for me. After 1956 the state rarely murdered anyone and (excluding the Martial Law period) it also showed restraint in putting its opponents in jail. The state preferred "financial incentives", and for those less corrupt it used the favourite tool of refusing to issue one's passport. Therefore it should have been no surprise to me when I was denied permission to attend a scientific conference in Prague in 1985. It was somewhat surprising for me though that a few months earlier I was allowed to go on a short trip to the US. If the state wanted to be a nuisance to me I could have been denied my passport earlier as well. I complained about my problems at the Dean's office and after a short while I was informed that I would be given the passport. One of our employees who worked for the District Committee of PZPR said it was someone's unwise decision which was possible to be reversed. I left for Prague both content and probably subconsciously disappointed, since I was included in the nomenclature of the District and not the Regional Committee of PZPR, not to even mention the Central one. Once again it could

be seen that the University branch of "Solidarity" was not of particular importance to the state.

As Warsaw University conspirators, we felt truly important and were preparing ourselves to repel the state's frontal attack which never came. At the time of intensifying confrontations I was visited by Tomek Stankiewicz who warned that the following night we should expect mass revisions and detentions since the orthodox communists (so-called beton partyjny) were determined to crush the University for good. We had some illegal publications at home so I immediately turned to my neighbour, Dr. Irena Rojowska, who – being a veterinarian – received dozens of visitors daily and gave me some leaflets every now and then. I thought she might help store my troublesome goods. She judged however that her flat was not safe but she pointed at her neighbour opposite the hall, Mr. Andrzej Hołoga, on whom the secret police should not be expected to intrude. After short deliberation he agreed that I leave my papers at his place for which I was very grateful. The raid did not come however, and once again our fears turned out to be exaggerated.

4. Epilogue

Due to my absence, I missed the strongest emotions related with the Roundtable Talks and June 4 elections – at that time I was at the University of Colorado in Boulder (once again as a Fulbright fellow). Soon upon my return, the Minister of the Environment in Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government offered me the post of head of the Economics Department. I accepted the offer, seeing it as my contribution in the realisation of what I had been fighting for as a "Solidarity" activist. At Warsaw University I was given a two-year sabbatical. At the Ministry I had numerous duties, of which some were related with political reforms and some with more down-to-earth matters. As part of the latter I was to watch over enterprises, of which the Minister of the Environment was the "founding body". As part of my job I had to contact trade unions.

The head of one of "Solidarity"'s sectoral chapters was the terror of all office workers, who – having roots in the old regime – were uncertain of their future and would agree to anything, only to act according to her will. I in turn had nothing to fear, thus failed to show the submissiveness and respect she expected. To repay me she stated in the presence of the Minister that "Director Żylicz treats people with contempt and did not find time for her because he preferred to read a newspaper". The accusation was of course false and seemed absurd to anyone who observed my work at the Ministry, so the accuser achieved nothing. For the first time I felt like a veteran using his past, who does not have to fear a labour union.

My "Solidarity" past reminded of itself once more in Gdańsk. In 1993, I was invited to a huge international conference dealing with environmental protection of the Baltic Sea. At the gala that took place in the Artus Court I was approached by some local union member who expressed his delight in meeting me. My last name is known in Gdańsk since one of my paternal uncle's sons was head of the University "Solidarity" in the years 1980-1981, and another one a union activist in the Shipyard. However my interlocutor went on to say that he also knew of a pretty shady person with the same last name at the Ministry of the Environment, where I responded that it was myself (mentioning my skirmishes with sectoral union members). He denied strongly, saying that it was impossible. I told him that no other person with the same last name worked for the Ministry of the Environment. My interlocutor denied again, yet, clearly saddened, said goodbye and disappeared. It became clear to me that a new kind of social conscience was emerging, according to which people were categorised as

correct or incorrect, and anything that did not match that stereotype caused confusion. Well, perhaps this is the way it has to be.

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Translation from Polish: Marta Żylicz