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Poland

# Death on the road to a workers' party

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**"The workers have lost their leader" wrote Magdalena Ostrowska in the daily "Trybuna" after the September 2005 death of Daniel Podrzycki, president of the free trade union "Sierpien 80" [1]** and candidate for the presidency of the Republic under the banner of the Polish Party of Labour (PPP), set up by this union. It is no exaggeration. The workers' movement has lost a militant who would have been able to become the leader of the Polish working class. The mass media forgot about it almost immediately, although the reasons given for the accident which took place on September 24, 2005 on the road between Katowice and Dabrowa Gornicza raise a number of questions.

Marcin Adam, a militant of the Communist Party of Poland, who was a member of the PPP's electoral committee writes, "From the first this accident seemed bizarre. According to the official police communiqué, Daniel's car turned on to the other road crossing the separation barriers. It is not normal. The accident was not caused by collision with others. The road is straight at this point.

"Daniel was an experienced driver. His BMW, although old, was in good technical condition and regularly maintained. What is more shocking, and perhaps most important, is the event which took place a month earlier.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Sierpien80.jpg>]

"The car lost a wheel. Happily that happened while climbing at a low speed (40 km/h) and there was no damage. It was then said that the wheels of Daniel's car had been unscrewed. This story was known from his collaborators, that's why we were keeping an eye on security questions. Overwork and a continual race against the clock were the daily lot of the PPP president in recent times, however, and that could mean that something was not noticed".

Boguslaw Zietek, the new president of Sierpien 80 and the PPP, does not believe the death of Podrzycki was an accident. "According to our information, it appears that Daniel was not able to cause the accident himself, the weather was fine that day and there were no problems on the road, his car was overhauled. Everything seems to indicate that someone cut across his path".

The newspaper *Fakty i Mity* said, "Will the police be capable of finding whoever was responsible for the accident? It would not be good to conclude that the accident was brought about by a dog which crossed the road...

"Those familiar with the site of the accident know that there could not have been a dog there. We are persuaded that someone has brought about the death of our comrade and independently of the bodies of investigation, we will attempt ourselves to explain the background to the accident".

If a candidate who makes the front pages of the newspapers died in such circumstances, they would have been analyzed attentively. But as a worker and a socialist, Podrzycki was an intruder among the candidates for the highest office of state. Thus it was simply noted that the intruder was out of the game.

"The conditions of this tragedy have not been and doubtless never will be clarified," wrote Jan Czarski in the monthly *Nowy Robotnik* [2]. "For it is a man who was an irritant for the regime and the elites, an authentic worker leader, who has died".

# Preserving trade union independence

It all began with the establishment of the state of emergency on December 13, 1981. Podrzycki, then a high school student, by instinct of solidarity with the workers organized in the trade union Solidarnosc had attempted - without success - to go to the Huta Katowice steelworks [3], occupied by workers and encircled by the army and police.

Czarski described his itinerary thus: "Because of his political activity he was expelled from school, for a long time he could find neither a school nor work. He did everything to survive - digging ditches, working as a builder's mate, and at the same time he was active in the underground. He was involved in the chaplaincy of the region's workers. At the end of the 1980s he made contact with Marian Jurczyk [4] and in his name he built the structures of Solidarnosc 80 in Upper Silesia, competing with Solidarnosc.

He was one of the rare militants in Solidarnosc who opposed Walesa's line then. The latter said then he wanted to rebuild the union, but a union which would not be strong, because a strong union would be an obstacle to reform.

To say in 1989 that Lech Walesa had betrayed the working class was blasphemy. Daniel suffered attacks, including insinuations that he worked for the political police - recalls Boguslaw Zietek, Podrzycki's closest collaborator and friend.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/podrz.jpg>]

Daniel Podrzycki

The collaboration with Jurczyk lasted several years. During this period Solidarnosc 80 became one of the most active union forces in Upper Silesia. The union was the organizer of the first serious strikes in the mines, which were to be closed down according to the plans of the time.

"At a meeting of the national Commission of Solidarnosc 80, held in the 'Wujek' mine, we had decided to organize a national strike. Many people who did not belong to Solidarnosc 80 but wished also to protest against the policy of the government, among others the rail workers, joined the movement. But in Szczecin it did nothing [5].

"This was a strike of Upper Silesia alone", says Zietek. It became clear that the roads of Jurczyk and Podrzycki were separating. "Two questions led to the separation. First Jurczyk was afraid of the Silesians and did everything to weaken the position of Daniel. Then we had a disagreement on the attitude to take towards the Olszewski government [6]

"This government fell in June 1992 after engaging in an anti-Communist campaign and attempting to take control of the process of privatization.]] We said that his government did nothing good because in particular it had supported the privatization of the FSM car factory [7]. On the contrary Jurczyk was disarmed before Olszewski".

## Struggle against privatization

At the founding congress of the free union Sierpien 80, Gabriel Kraus presented events thus: "The determining influence on the union's activity was monopolized by pressure groups inside the National Commission and by the workplace commissions which, while criticizing totally the policies of the government and regularly calling for a general strike, at the end of the day accepted it, orienting towards the best "arrangements" to the detriment of others.

"In a worsening situation for the workers and certain branches and sectors of industry, they accepted collaboration with the political authorities and the management in the broad sense." Here is "a characteristic example of a workplace, which for Solidarnosc 80 had a symbolic character and whose trade union commission had been the cradle of many key leaders of the union with a big influence on the policy and morale of the national Commission. We are talking obviously of the naval shipyard at Szczecin". This naval shipyard was in a critical financial situation and was close to bankruptcy. In 1992 it entered into negotiation with the creditors.

"There was a desperate attempt by our regional organization commission [in Upper Silesia, ed.] with a view to starting, here in the department of Katowice, a national general strike in solidarity with the strike led by our workplace commission of the FSM at Tychy. It should be stressed that this strike would be the first significant strike co-organized with other unions, grouped in the inter-trade union national negotiating and strike committee.

"Our coal mines were to begin it, although they were then in a worse financial situation than the naval shipyard. And at the call of the national commission and the regional organization commission they began it. However the naval shipyard in Szczecin did not go on strike. And unhappily that wasn't because the strike "didn't catch on". It was because of the conscious, not to say cynical particularism and opportunism of militants of "Solidarnosc 80" at the shipyard." The day of the meeting of the creditors, the workplace commission of Solidarnosc 80 suspended the preparation of the strike.

Moreover, in a sign of support to the restructuring programme for the shipyard, it assured for the second time to the directorate and the bank that it had abandoned its wage demands. "Such opportunism proved profitable for those of the employees who stayed in the enterprise after the draconian job cuts. A collaboration first with the Christian National Union [8], then the "presidential opening" on Lech Walesa [9], have borne fruit in the form of better wage conditions in the immediate and a tidy packet of shares.

"The rebellious workers of the FSM in Tychy have not won such conditions. One can even say that the price they have paid, as well as the miners who supported them through a national strike, has been consumed by the workers of the naval shipyard.

"For it is not certain that without this strike and without the preceding actions led by the regional organization commission in the department of Katowice, those in the naval shipyards would have been able to obtain what they have won. Such an attitude, adopted moreover not only by the workplace commission in the naval shipyards. had nothing in common with the idea contained in the name of the trade union. For it would be hard to see any solidarity there.

"But it is not a moral or material condemnation that is at stake here. What is at issue is a much more important question, that is of submission to the method, as old as the hills. employed by all dominant layers and bosses, expressed in the maxim "divide and rule", which leads to demoralization and finally paralysis".

It was thus, on a clear class basis, that Daniel Podrzycki and the radical activists of the regional organization commission and workplace commissions of the Silesia-Dabrowa region of Solidarnosc 80, split and founded the free trade union Sierpien 80. The new union rapidly received the support of the FIAT workers at Tychy [ex-FSM], the mines of Silesia, the Huta Katowice steelworks and became know for its determined and effective struggles.

## Victorious steel strike

The strike in the steel works, whose CEO was then Emil Wasacz, ex-president of Solidarnosc in the company and former activist in the Catholic movement Oasis, was particularly remarkable. Because of the aggressive policy of wage reduction implemented by Wasacz since 1991, the steelworks had the lowest wages in its branch and an absurd pay scale which led to those who had the highest wages winning the biggest increases.

Sierpien 80 then launched a struggle for increases in wages which would be equal for all. And it succeeded. Everyone won an increase of 200 zlotys, from the director to the sweeper. Janusz Kucharz, president of the workplace commission for Sierpien 80 recounted the struggle thus in the "Kurier Zwiazkowy" . [10]: ""Solidarnosc" totally ran the steelworks. As employer and as trade union, which claimed to have 5,500 members.

The wages policy implemented then in the steelworks - and which some years later was presented by Wasacz (in an interview in the daily "Zycie") as "necessary lowering of real wages", had led to the explosion of a dramatic strike. In particular a new wage agreement was demanded. The strike started on June 1, 1994.

The blast furnaces began, then, in the course of the four following days, the other departments joined them. On Monday June 6 there was the biggest meeting in the history of the steelworks (and perhaps even the biggest in the history of struggles in Poland), with 14,000 workers from a single enterprise participating. There was a strong tension between the strike committee (which involved 740 delegates from all sectors of the steelworks and whose presidium had 86 members) and the directorate on the site where negotiations should take place.

The directorate refused to negotiate for 14 days, not wishing to do so in the blast furnace department. On June 14 the delegation from the directorate came to the canteen of the blast furnace department. Inside there his highness CEO Emil. It was then that he said - as recorded on video - "It stinks here!" Thus after three years on the directorate, the Polish steel-maker had become foul-smelling for the former unionist. After numerous rounds of negotiation, on June 18 at 5h35 we signed an agreement putting an end to the longest and biggest steel strike.

The agreement completely destroyed the policies implemented until then by Emil, that is a policy of degradation of wages in the Huta Katowice steelworks. This was the beginning of the forward advance of workers' wages at the steelworks. Barely three months later, shamed and dragging his tail behind him, Emil Wasacz left the enterprise with his henchmen. The workers breathed again and their wages rose systematically every year to become the highest in the branch."

Zietek recalls in "Nowy Robotnik": "Since that time, Daniel established the position of "Sierpien 80" in the region and in the country, by realizing his vision of the union. He wanted a strong union, which would not be an intermediary between the workers and the employers; he did not want a union sitting astride of the barricades, but one that firmly represented the workers".

## Unity in defence of the coal mines

In December 2002 Sierpien 80, in common with the other unions active in the mines, signed an agreement with the government. "This agreement was a point of inflexion in the recent history of the collieries. The government wanted to liquidate the mines one after the others. But we obtained the establishment of the Company of Collieries, the biggest producer of coal in Europe, which managed well on the market.

It is in some way to the credit of Daniel, who succeeded in winning to his project not only the other trades unionists, but also the municipalities and the scientists. The result was the letter from the scientists to the Prime Minister Miller [

[11](#)] against the plans for closure of the mines”, says Zietek in “Nowy Robotnik”.

When the agreement was signed, Zietek explained in “Kurier Zwiaskowy”: “No miner has lost work. In the Company the collective agreements signed in the mining companies will continue to be applied. The government has not succeeded in taking the miners' rights from them. Yet in mid December the minister of the economy of the time, Jacek Piechota, spoke loudly of the need to deprive the miners of “barbórka”. [12](#)] and the fourteenth month. We have been able to block this.

Inside the Company the miners are covered by the previous collective agreements, which would guarantee them the realization of all the benefits which figure there. The first effect of this has been the payment of the fourteenth month in all the mines. The creation of the Company of Collieries, composed of all the mines, representing all the employees and their collective agreements did not correspond to the aspirations of the Minister of the Economy, who did not wish to respect the previous agreements.

The government also envisaged that at the time of the foundation of the Company, some of the mines would not be involved and that they would be thus automatically condemned to closure. These governmental plans were blocked by the agreement signed on December 11 in which, under the pressure of the union, the government had to accept all these guarantees. Of course the struggle for the miners was not over. But its first round led to the defeat of those who wanted to liquidate the collieries and deprive the miners of their gains.

It is worth remarking, that Solidarnosc did not sign this agreement which guaranteed to the miners employment and the maintenance of their conquests. The same Solidarnosc was responsible for the programme of liquidation of collieries carried out by the AWS [13](#)] in 1997-2001. In the framework of this programme, 20 mines were closed and 100,000 jobs were axed, while miners' wages were frozen for four years. Until the end “Solidarnosc” wanted to pursue the programme of AWS, which embodied every evil for the industry and the miners.”

After the death of Podrzycki, during the Fourth national Congress of the delegates of Sierpien 80, Boguslaw Zietek could state with pride: “Four years ago they wanted to carry through the plan of successive closure - between seven and twelve of them - of the mines, dismiss the miners and deprive them of their gains embodied in collective agreements. It is Sierpien 80 which took the head of the struggles against these aspirations.

“We organized the resistance of the unions; we convinced the municipal and scientific milieus to come to the defence of the collieries, side by side with us. Today the collieries have a future. Polish coal has a future. We have succeeded in defending the mines and the gains of the miners. Today, again workers are being taken on in the collieries. Mining schools have been opened - which was unthinkable not so long ago - which can train new managers for the branch; often these are the children of miners, but not always. The mines now have a future before them. That which for us was always obvious does not now provoke mocking smiles.

“I have no doubt that the turning point for the branch was the agreement signed with the government following a wave of struggles on December 11, 2002. It was a great success for the union, but also a personal success for Daniel, without which there would have been neither the governmental setbacks nor the agreement. Of course, the collieries still face new threats, above all now that the people who had already attempted to reform the branch in 1997-2001 with the known consequences, have come to power. We should oppose these threats.

“As much in the coal sector as in lignite, whose role is no less important, we should base ourselves on the principle that the potential of the extractive industry determines the energy independence of the country. The coal and lignite mines are a sector of strategic importance for the energy security of the country and as such should not be privatized in part or in any form. Their privatization would endanger the whole state economy. Privatization is also the biggest

threat weighing on the workers of this sector. "Sierpien 80" categorically says NO to all attempts to privatize the collieries. Neither will we accept a limitation on the extractive potential of Polish mines.

"The national economy like the states of the EU has an incessantly growing demand for energy, which opens good perspectives for Polish coal. The limitation of coal production capacities in Polish collieries would be an action detrimental to the interests of the Polish state and its economy. All attempts to make the miners pay the costs of restructuring of the branch are also unacceptable. We firmly oppose all attempts to limit miners' rights, embodied in collective agreements, and to all attempts to deprive miners of their pension rights".

## A laboratory of class-consciousness

Militants in other unions call Sierpien 80 an "extremist union", because it firmly defends the rights, dignity and interests of workers, that is it adopts a class attitude. This organization emerges favorably on the basis of the deep impasse and grave crisis of the current Polish union movement. The latter is very divided and characterized by a weak rate of unionization of employees and seriously low social credibility; in the terms of the leaders of "Sierpien 80", it plays the role of intermediary between the workers and the employers and is sitting astride the barricades.

It bends under the weight of a passive and impotent bureaucracy, often corrupted by capitalist businesses, and submits to the aggressively anti-worker policies of successive governments which protect capitalist interests, supporting the political parties of right and left which represent these interests and consequently regularly losing the class battles without a fight.

The whole history of Sierpien 80 constitutes a very significant contribution to the study and reflection on the conditions of development and evolution of consciousness and of current working class politics in Poland. We live in a country where a government supposedly representative of the working class crushed a workers' revolution supposedly in defence of socialism, burying the chances of its renewal and allowing capitalist restorationist tendencies to grow inside it.

Worse, the leaders of the independent workers' movement betrayed this revolution and this movement, allied themselves with imperialism and, in alliance with the restorationist wing of the 'Communist' bureaucracy, restored capitalism. The consciousness of the workers who constituted the social base of Solidarnosc and trade union organizations which emerged from it was torn apart by the contradiction between the feeling of victory in 1989 and the feeling of defeat stemming from the restoration of capitalism, the loss of social gains dating from People's Poland and the brutal restructuring, or rather de-structuring of the working class.

Hegemonic on the left, social democracy [\[14\]](#) became one of the spokespersons for the interests of capital, neoliberal globalization and Poland's participation in imperialist wars. During all this time no alternative political force was structured to the left of social democracy.

In the narrow milieus which identified with Marxism, identification with the interests of the working class did not go beyond expressions of faith. They led a chronic groupuscule life, remaining outside the real workers' movement and exerting no influence on it. The tendency to mask its own political impotence led to incredible extravagances like the accusation brought by one of these milieus against the leaders of "Sierpien 80" of having degenerated into a trade union bureaucracy.

"The secretary of the national Commission of the free trade union Sierpien 80, Boguslaw Zietek, took issue us in the

columns of "Wiadomosci Kulturalne", for [our political group] "embodies in its programme the most radical workers' traditions, including support for the dictatorship of the proletariat", said one of these micro-milieus in 1996.

"The absence of links of the representative of the trade union bureaucracy with workers' traditions and the dictatorship of the proletariat is not the fruit of chance. This is not then by chance that we have loosened our links with "Sierpien 80", when its dignitaries have moved into a luxurious office with big mirrors". This is an example of the total incomprehension both of how the consciousness of the workers' vanguard is formed and of what the trade union bureaucracy really is and how it develops.

Concerning these mirrors, they can be seen in the union office in Katowice [15] and to take this as proof of the claimed bureaucratization, some years after the birth of a combative organization and immediately after it led a big strike would be an event without precedent in the history of the workers' movement.

A great confusion in workers' consciousness was inevitable, making it difficult for them to identify their own interests, not only historic but even immediate. Under this or that aspect even a workers' organization inside of which working class consciousness is best expressed, cannot avoid this confusion.

This is particularly true in regions like Upper Silesia and in branches like the mines, where this consciousness is formed under the weight of structures and processes of reproduction of dependent capitalism which are establishing themselves in our country.

In the framework of the European and world capitalist system they reinsert Poland in its old position as a dependent country. But where "national exploitation completes and strengthens class exploitation" (Trotsky), the dependent development of capitalism profoundly deforms the conditions of the production of the national society and renders impossible to the proletariat any normalization of the strategic basis of the class struggle. Nationalism is here an inseparable component of class-consciousness.

The question is what is the class form of this nationalism, for it can also have its proletarian form, that is whether or not it obscures and deforms class-consciousness.

Some Marxists know that the great trade unionist, fighter for Irish independence, socialist and revolutionary, James Connolly, was right when, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, he argued against the mechanistic and economist currents then dominant within Marxism that among oppressed nations and in dependent countries the proletarian type of nationalism and international workers' socialism are not contradictory but complementary [16]. The elaboration of such a form of nationalism, in accord with the interests of the working class, is just as difficult for the workers' movement as arriving at political independence. So long as this is not realized, the "ready to wear" ideologies - petty bourgeois and reactionary bourgeois forms of nationalism -inevitably obscure class-consciousness.

## Confusions, errors, misunderstandings

In January 2000 Sierpien 80 took part alongside "Samoobrona" [17], the Front Polski [18] and general Tadeusz Wilecki [19] in the forum aimed at the creation of a national-popular Bloc for the elections.

This Bloc was ephemeral - the fruit of confusion if only from the fact that Wilecki had been a declared partisan of general Pinochet whereas the leaders of Sierpien 80 had no doubt that, as Podrzycki wrote, Pinochet was "a brown

general, acting in the interest of foreign capital, at the initiative of the right, whereas “president Salvador Allende was overthrown by the military junta of Augusto Pinochet because he had opposed the “interests of the free market” of the US copper mega-holding, ITT”.

In 2001, Sierpien 80 entered an electoral coalition of “political, social, economic and professional organizations representing national and pro-independence milieus” under the name of the Social Alternative-Movement, formed by KPN-Ojczyzna [20] and a group of activists originating from the Christian National Union. Inside this coalition were diverse organizations of the radical right and nationalist far right, including the National Renaissance of Poland/Alliance of New Forces [21], and the secretary of Le Pen's Front National, Bruno Gollnisch, was invited to Poland by the Alternative's parliamentary group.

At the end of the 1990s numerous anti-neoliberal economic analyses appeared in Kurier Zwiaskowy, along with proposals of economic alternatives and other materials issued by the Schiller Institute. This Institute belongs to the political current led by Lyndon LaRouche. In 1973 LaRouche transformed his US organization from a left grouping to a far right organization which practiced physical terror against Communists and Trotskyists and their assemblies, meetings and bookshops.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/lyndonlarouche.jpg>]

Lyndon LaRouche

Later LaRouche launched the idea of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), or “star wars”, thus politically arming the “Reagan revolution”, and mobilized support for it in Europe and Japan. René Monzat, a French analyst of La Rouche's organization, writes that it “has then served with success as an international lobby for the most gigantic project of the US military-industrial complex.”

The links with this complex and with the representatives of its interests - “the conservative and traditionalist elements of the army and the military training apparatus\* (the quotation comes from the LaRouche press) - explain why LaRouche's supporters identify with the interests of industrial capital while violently criticizing finance capital in apparently radical critiques of neoliberal globalization.

It is clear that the leaders of Sierpien 80 did not know who lay behind this Schiller Institute. In any case, LaRouche's material has definitively disappeared from the columns of “Kurier Zwiaskowy” since spring 2001.

“In the light of these facts can the passage of the Polish Party of Labour to left positions be considered credible?” This question was posed to me recently by activists in an association.

Yes, it is credible, for this episode constituted an anomaly in the history of Sierpien 80. “Any suggestion that Daniel was on the right is an absolute misunderstanding. Daniel was an ardent patriot, considering it necessary to devote all his strength to Poland, but that had nothing in common with the right. He always realized social goals, of the left. All his union activity witnesses to it. From the beginning he considered that the union cannot hold rightwing positions, for it would be a form of negation of his own ideas” says Zietek in “Nowy Robotnik”.

To the extent that its activity in defence of the workers' interests Sierpien 80 brought together political experiences, reactionary ideological incursions and political connections were repelled.

They were repelled by the level of class-consciousness that this organization embodied. It is not by chance that this went hand in hand with the creation of the Polish Party of Labour, based on Sierpien 80. The basis on which Podrzycki, Zietek and the other militants of Sierpien 80 took the decision to build the party was consciousness of the antagonistic contradiction between labour and capital.

Podrzycki put it thus in "Trybuna": "It might appear to you very Marxist, but it is about class struggle. The employers and employees are in two opposed, irreconcilable positions. On the one hand there are the interests of workers, including the right to decent pay for conscientious and honest work. On the other side - the interests of the boss whose goal is to maximize profit".

The Polish Party of Labour states clearly that it is founded on the principle of the unity of the interests of the working class and the workers' movement on the international scale.

In the "Letter to Friends in Europe", adopted at the congress in late October 2005, it states: "We know in Poland that capitalism is exploitation, the crushing of the rights of workers, unemployment, poverty and exclusion. The demands of workers in Poland and Western Europe are the same. It is your struggle and it's ours. We reject all attempts to oppose workers to each other in Europe. We know that we can only succeed if we are united.

"We believe profoundly that a common front of the European left can effectively oppose the aggression of big capital and new forms of exploitation. The organized attack against the social gains and legal protection of labour constitute in reality an attack against democracy. The Polish Party of Labour, conscious of the gravity of the situation, declares itself ready to cooperate with all authentic forces of the left in Europe which are ready to defend the exploited and the excluded".

## A trade union party

The creation of a party founded on the unions is one of the classic ways of building a workers' party known in the history of the international workers' movement. Recall here the attitude of Trotsky during discussions with US comrades in 1938, when there were initiatives inside the US union movement favouring the creation of a party of labour based on the unions.

Trotsky said the revolutionary left should support such initiatives and that "Any revolutionary organization occupying a negative or neutrally expectant position in relation to this progressive movement will doom itself to isolation and sectarian degeneration". If possible, it should take part in the creation and construction of a party founded on the unions, while proposing to it a precise programme.

Trotsky says "(we must work...) not to engage in abstract formulas but to develop a concrete program of action and demands in the sense that the transitional program issues from the conditions of capitalist society today, but immediately leads over the limits of capitalism."

He said on this subject: "Are we in favor of the creation of a reformist labor party? No. Are we in favor of a policy which can give to the trade unions the possibility to put its weight upon the balance of the forces? Yes. It can become a reformist party - it depends upon the development. Here comes in the question of program. I mentioned yesterday and I will underline it today - we must have a program of transitional demands, the most complete of them is a workers' and farmers' government.

"We are for a party, for an independent party of the toiling masses who will take power in the state. We must concretize it - we are for the creation of factory committees, for workers' control of industry through the factory committees". [\[22\]](#) Remember that in Poland such committees were called workplace councils just after the war, workers' councils in 1956 and councils of workers in 1981.

## Death on the road to a workers' party

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Since 1992 I have said - in the columns of the socialist newspaper "Dalej!" [23] which I then wrote for - that the construction of an independent party of workers and toilers, based on the unions, would be useful and necessary in Poland.

In spring 1999, during the political restructuring of the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD - transformed into a party), limited but significant forces inside the trade union federation OPZZ argued in the "Nowy Tygodnik Popularny" . [24] that the political representation of the unions grouped inside this federation should not be confided to the SLD; it was necessary to found a trade union party.

In relation to this discussion I wrote then: "Firstly, we are in favour of the total independence of the unions from all parties - which does not rule out individual membership for trade unionist of various parties or the conclusion of collective alliances by the unions with the parties, or the formation by the unions of a party which belongs to them.

"Secondly, we consider that the possession by the unions of their own party - that is a party which constitutes the political tool of trade union action - constitutes a significant factor in the preservation of the independence of the trade union movement and that only the existence of such a party can resolve the question of the political representation of the trade union movement. Thirdly, in the interests not only of this movement, but those of the whole of the labouring class and the entire workers' movement, we are in favour of the construction of such a party."

I also indicated that the trade union party "should not be oriented only - nor even essentially - towards participation in elections and parliamentary activity, but should develop everyday political activity everywhere where those whose interests it represents work, live and struggle" and that if this was possible, "within such a party our own party - which we try to build on the basis of the programme of the Fourth International - would act as one of its currents".

The Polish working class urgently needs to rebuild the political forms of the workers' movement. On the basis of the balance sheet of setbacks of 20 years of my own attempts - and those of others - seeking to build a revolutionary party in Poland, I wrote in summer 2002 on the website *Czerwony Salon* (Red Salon), that today the greatest tragedy of this class is the absence of a workers' party. Without such a party the country cannot have its own political representation and the workers' movement does not have the possibility of guaranteeing its own independence.

It must be remedied quickly, for the class struggle will not wait, and the more it develops and the more this tragic absence persists, "the more this struggle, left to its own spontaneity, will disperse or be consumed in a sterile fashion or again will be led into an impasse by political forces which are hostile from the class point of view". I wrote also that the workers' party should be open to all those who "aspire to the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of socialism without taking account what they think of whether this is done by the road of revolution or that of reform", in other words, that it should not immediately be "strategically defined".

In the class struggle, which should not be confused with literary proclamations, the separation between the revolutionary and reformist currents crystallizes in the course of struggle, on the basis of experiences accumulated by the workers' party, differentiations and debates between tendencies appearing inside it.

Those who make strategic definition the condition of the construction of a workers' party, proclaiming in an ultimatum manner that its founding act should be marked by its demarcation from the reformists, that it must be a declared revolutionary party marching towards the dictatorship of the proletariat and so on, adopt a purely ideological approach. That only allows parties to be built on paper.

After nearly a quarter of a century of such attempts which have yielded nothing, it is time to reflect and to place the horse before the cart, which the militants of "Sierpien 80" have precisely done, instead of placing the cart before the

horse, which has been done up until now.

In recent years the Polish working class has lost nearly all its social gains. It urgently needs means of political struggle in defence of all that which still remains and to recover what has been lost. Without doubt more than for all the other reasons, it is as founder of the first workers' party that Daniel Podrzycki will enter the history of the Polish workers' movement.

This party is still at an embryonic stage. Its only base is a minority trade union confederation. Its foundation is only a first step - but nobody has been capable of taking such a step until now. Independently of the future fate of this party, the die has been cast. If it survives the death of Daniel Podrzycki and develops - and it has a chance of so doing - it will naturally become the main factor of recomposition and development of the forces of the anti-capitalist left on a workers' basis, that is on the sole terrain where that is possible, inside the workers' movement.

Daniel Podrzycki is no more. The struggle continues.

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[1] "Sierpień 80" ("August 80") is a trade union confederation founded in 1992 by the regional commission of Upper Silesia (Region of Katowice) of the trade union "Solidarność 80" ("Solidarity 80"). "Solidarność 80" was in turn created in 1989 by militants originally in "Solidarność" who opposed the round table agreement between the clandestine leadership of this union and the state bureaucracy, which led to the acceptance of neoliberal policies and capitalist restoration by the opposition.

[2] Nowy Robotnik ("New Worker") is a radical, pluralist left monthly which has been published for the past six years.

[3] Huta Katowice, the second biggest Polish steel complex, was built starting from 1973. It was privatized in October 2003 to the benefit of the Indo-British holding LNM, (it has since become Mittal Steel), which acquired it for a hundredth of its value, according to Daniel Podrzycki (see "Prywatyzacji nie" ("No to privatization!"), "Kurier Związkowy" number 216, March 9, 2005.

[4] Marian Jurczyk, a "Solidarność" leader from the Szczecin naval shipyard and a member of the national leadership in 1980-1981, opposed the round table negotiations in 1989 and was the main leader of the "Solidarność 80" trade union. In 1997 he was elected senator, in 1998 mayor of the city of Szczecin.

[5] The town and region of Szczecin was the other point of strong implantation for Solidarność 80.

[6] Jan Olszewski, lawyer, active in the Polish opposition since 1956, formed a right wing government in December 1991.

[7] FSM produced small popular cars under license from FIAT. In May 1992 the company was taken over by FIAT in the framework of a joint venture and divided into three companies: FIAT AUTO POLAND, MAGNETI MARELLI POLAND and TEKSID POLAND.

[8] The Christian National Union (ZChN) was a clerical and reactionary party, founded in 1989. A good part of its members have joined the current governmental party Law and Justice, PiS.

[9] President of the Republic from 1990 to 1995, Lech Wałęsa, historic leader of Solidarność, tried and partially succeeded in transforming the unions into clientele for his political projects. As a candidate to the presidency in 2000, he won only 1.01% of votes cast.

[10] "Kurier Związkowy" ("Trade Union Mail") is the organ of "Sierpień 80". In principle weekly (with periods of irregularity), it is distributed free by the union structures and available on the web: [www.wzz.org.pl](http://www.wzz.org.pl)

## Death on the road to a workers' party

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[11] Leszek Miller, secretary of the Central Committee of PZPR in 1988 and member of its Political Bureau in 1989, was one of the founders of the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SDRP), which took the place of the PZPR in 1990 and a minister in 1993-1997. He was president of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD, new name taken by the SDRP which had previously constituted an electoral alliance with other political and trade union organizations) in 1999-2004, and Prime Minister from October 2001 to May 2004.

He pursued a neoliberal policy, developed privatization (in particular steel), negotiated Poland's entry into the EU and its involvement in the US war in Iraq. He was dismissed by his own party in 2004 when his popularity in the polls had sunk to 5% (in 2001 the SLD won 41% of votes cast, in 2005 finally 11.31% of votes cast while 60% of those registered abstained).

[12] Barbórka is the name of a traditional miners feast, marked by a day off and a bonus payment.

[13] "Solidarnosc Electoral Action" (AWS), a front of right wing parties set up in 1996 around the "Solidarnosc" union, under the leadership of Marian Krzaklewski. In government from 1997 to 2001. Did not elect any deputies in 2001. The majority of its politicians are now in the current governmental party, PiS.

[14] First SDRP then SLD (see note 12)

[15] A big apartment on the third level of an old building at the centre of Katowice, the office of the national leadership of WZZ "Sierpien 80" opens on a hall one side of which is lined with cupboards equipped with mirrored doors. The newly installed trades unionist did not judge it prudent to invest in new doors.

[16] For a more theoretical approach to this question see Z. Kowalewski, "Le trotskisme et le nationalisme révolutionnaire: introduction au cas cubain", "Cahiers Léon Trotsky" number 77, 2002, pp. 10-17.

[17] Samoobrona (Self-Defence) was originally (1991) a trade union and a peasant party set up by middle peasants who had become over indebted because of the monetarization of the economy. In 1993 this party (a trade union cannot contest elections) stood at the elections, winning only 2.78% of votes cast. It won parliamentary representation for the first time in 2001, winning 10.2% of the vote and becoming the third parliamentary party, with a populist programme. In September 2005 Samoobrona repeated its electoral success with 11.41%. Its founder and leader, Andrzej Lepper, has just announced his support for neoliberalism and his deputies have supported the government, which it aspires to join before the end of the current legislature.

[18] Front Polski ("Polish Front") was a small, ephemeral nationalist organization.

[19] General Tadeusz Wilecki, chief of staff of the Polish Army from 1992 to 1997, was in 2000 candidate for the presidency of the National Party (SN), winning 0.16% of votes cast. He identifies with the very reactionary nationalist party of R. Dmowski. In 1999 he said: "General Augusto Pinochet has taken the examination and has succeeded. The state is a supreme value and one cannot do everything with white gloves."

[20] The KPN-Ojczyzna (KPN-Homeland) is a split from the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), a nationalist opposition party founded in 1979, whose leaders were harshly repressed. In 1997 on the lists of the AWS, KPN-Ojczyzna elected 8 deputies and a senator.

In 2000 this party split up, its most right wing (and best known) leaders setting up the KPN-Oboz Patriotyczny (KPN-Patriotic Camp), with a minority pursuing activity under the old name for a time.

[21] National Renaissance of Poland/Alliance of New Forces is a far right nationalist organization founded in October 1981.

[22] L. Trotsky, "The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution", Pathfinder Press, New York 1977, pp. 107, 83, 82-83.

[23] "Dalej!" ("Further!") was an irregular publication of the radical left.

[24] Nowy Tygodnik Popularny ("New Popular Weekly") is a trade union publication linked to the OPZZ union federation.