New Technology Division

Andrzej Gwiazda

Andrzej Gwiazda – born on 14 April 1935 in Pińczów. Between 1940 and 1946, he and his family were in exile in Kazakhstan, and he has lived in Gdańsk since 1948. Graduate of the Gdańsk University of Technology, Faculty of Electronics (1966). Between 1966 and 1973, he was an assistant at the Institute of Cybernetics at the Gdańsk University of Technology, and between 1973 and 1981 he worked as an engineer at “Elmor”.

He participated in the anti-communist protests in March 1968 and December 1970, from November 1976 he cooperated with the Workers’ Defence Committee (KOR). One of the founders of the Coastal Free Trade Unions and one of the three signatories of the Declaration (29 April 1978), member of the editorial board of the Robotnik Wybrzeża magazine. Repeatedly imprisoned and repressed for his anti-communist activities.

In August 1980, member of the Presidium of the Inter-enterprise Strike Committee in the Gdańsk Shipyard, co-author of the list of 21 demands, from September 1980, vice-chairman of the Inter-enterprise Founding Committee of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”, then vice-chairman of the National Coordinating Commission, delegate to the regional and national conventions, defeated by Lech Wałęsa in the election for the chairman of “Solidarity”.

He was interned after the declaration of martial law of 13 December 1981, then arrested, released in July 1984, re-arrested in December 1984, and released in May 1985. In 1988, he spent several months abroad.He demanded the restoration of Solidarity’s statutory structures. He opposed the Round Table compromise. From 1991 to 1999, he again (until his retirement) worked at “Elmor”.Awarded the Order of the White Eagle in 2006 and the Cross of Freedom and Solidarity in 2018.



Formation of the Coastal Free Trade Unions

The first independent trade union in the Polish People’s Republic was founded in Katowice in February 1978. It was headed by Kazimierz Świtoń, an electrician cooperating with the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civic Rights. A group of independence activists in Gdańsk embraced the idea of forming an independent trade union under Convention No. 87 of the International Labour Organisation, ratified by the Polish People’s Republic, granting workers and employers the right to form their own trade union organisations without permission. On 29 April 1978, the Founding Committee of the Coastal Free Trade Unions was formed in Gdańsk and published a Declaration, signed by three people, including Andrzej Gwiazda and Krzysztof Wyszkowski.

The emergence of an independent trade union organisation in the Polish People’s Republic was a remarkable event. The society, previously enslaved by the communists, revolted from time to time, expressing its discontent and spontaneously demanding “bread and freedom”, as in June 1956 in Poznań, in March 1968 in Gdańsk and Warsaw, in December 1970 in Gdańsk, Gdynia and Szczecin, in June 1976 in Radom and Ursus. The circumstances changed in the second half of the 1970s. First, structures independent of the communists emerged, aspiring to act as spokespeople for the interests of society.

Second, independent civic and trade union organisations were operating under the legislation in force, invoking international provisions ratified by the Polish People’s Republic.The activists of the Free Trade Unions faced numerous repressions from the communist authorities: arrests, dismissals, and blackmail. Despite this, they published the

independent magazine Robotnik Wybrzeża, organised union training, and demanded that the memory of the victims of December 1970 be honoured. In 1979, after Andrzej Gwiazda was detained, the employees of “Elmor” spoke out in his defence. Similar protests were held at the beginning of 1980 at the Gdańsk Shipyard and “Elektromontaż”.

In August 1980, Gdańsk became the scene of a general strike, as a result of which, under an agreement with the authorities, the workers massively and vigorously joined to form the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”.

“Solidarity” was not just a trade union. It was a great movement of national rebirth, a phenomenon that inspired common admiration around the world. The reason for Solidarity’s popularity beyond Poland’s borders was its authenticity and unique formula: a trade union movement, a social movement, a national movement, a movement that acted without violence and at the same time demanded the observance not only of workers’ rights but also of civil rights, respect for human dignity, religious freedom and truth in public life.

The digital twins project presents the profiles of two prominent figures who played a major role in the period preceding the founding of Solidarity and during its height of popularity between 1980 and 1989.

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