



european
solidarity
centre
permanent
exhibition

catalogue

edited by

Basil Kerski, Konrad Knoch, Jacek Kołtan, Paweł Golak

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Gdańsk 2015

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Preface

Basil Kerski, Paweł Golak, Konrad Knoch

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the permanent exhibition of the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk. We had a reason to open it on the 25th anniversary of Polish independence and the 34th anniversary of the signing of the August Agreement in Gdańsk's Lenin Shipyard. 'The light reaches from Gdańsk to the rest of the world,' said Pope John Paul II, to whom the last exhibition room is devoted. The permanent exhibition took nearly six years to compile. By completing it we fulfilled the provisions of our statute, drafted by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, the mayor of Gdańsk, the marshall of the Pomorskie Voivodeship, the Solidarity Centre Foundation and Solidarity Trade Union—the institutions that established the ECS as a cultural institution. Our statute bestows upon us the task of 'commemorating, conserving and publicising the heritage and message of Solidarity and the anti-communist opposition in Poland and other countries.' ECS's key task is to 'maintain a permanent exhibition devoted to Solidarity.'

ECS's permanent exhibition—a modern, multimedia display devoted to Solidarity's revolution and the collapse of the Soviet bloc—is one of Poland's biggest narrative exhibitions taking up the recent history of Poland and Europe. It explains the phenomenon and originality of the Solidarity movement and does it in an interesting way comprehensible to a variety of audiences: witnesses and participants of the depicted events; foreign guests; people from the younger generations, and even children. The basic historic narrative tells the story by reconstructing the dynamic process in its numerous dimensions: political, social and cultural.

This foundation allows us to convey the history of a universal idea that found a new expression in Solidarity. Visitors will learn how the revolution proceeded in Poland, turning a society marginalised by the Yalta agreement into one of the protagonists of global history.

We also take a look at Solidarity as a myth. We want to keep the Solidarity experience well within the memory of Poles and Europeans, so that in the community of European democracies it is seen as an important part of Europe's founding myth. We aim to keep the ideals of Solidarity—democracy, open society, social solidarity, the culture of dialogue—alive and attractive. We would like Solidarity to be a source of inspiration and hope for those who are yet to discover the virtue of living in an open and democratic society. From the European perspective, ECS is one of the most important projects that incorporate Poland's fate into the collective European experience of history. Obviously, creating a narrative common to all is impossible, and we do not wish to insulate history against criticism. We give our visitors a chance to create their own story, at once avoiding relativism that would allow for unlimited discretion in interpreting key concepts and events. This does not mean a didacticism of passing judgements. On the contrary, we intend to present information in a way that will not only be understandable and

attractive to the contemporary viewer, but will also provide a wider context. We will not just say communism was bad—our visitors will have ample opportunity to find that out by themselves, thanks to the almost palpable presence of that evil. Our exhibition encourages questions that still need answers: about the place of solidarity in today's world, about the public sphere, political philosophy, community and civic society and, finally, about freedom.

ECS's entire effort is aimed at allowing our pride of Solidarity to translate into the faith in the potential of its heritage.

As we present our exhibition we feel pride that today's democracy in Poland is a result of a bloodless and peaceful revolution. Solidarity, with its focus on what unites people rather than on what divides them, was an inspiration for Europeans who dreamt of freedom. We are proud of the Round Table, which is viewed globally as a Polish patent. It is with great joy and pride that we meet people from all over the world—Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Egypt or Tunisia—who know our immediate history and acknowledge Solidarity's universal language. We are proud that Poles' coming to terms with their neighbours—especially the reconciliation achieved with the Germans, the Lithuanians and the Ukrainians—is perceived by the world as a model for overcoming difficult relations between nations. That heritage of the Polish culture of dialogue, presented in the permanent exhibition of ECS, gives hope that hatred can be defeated and that we can always find in ourselves respect and empathy for others.

Anna Walentynowicz's Overhead Crane

Conditions in the cramped and stuffy cabin of the machine were difficult. Anna Walentynowicz recalled: 'It was hard to endure those few hours on the overhead crane. The air was filled with toxic welding fumes, which nobody had thought to ventilate. They gave me a small fan, which would only mix the heavy tar-like air inside.' The overhead crane on display comes from the 27B hall of the Lenin Shipyard's W-2 division. It was operated among others by Anna Walentynowicz. In 2010 the machine's maintenance book containing her entries was found in the operator's cab.

- The overhead crane that was operated by Anna Walentynowicz, the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard, 1960s
Photo: Andrzej Trzeciak | European Solidarity Centre





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Bullet-Pierced Jacket

A bullet-pierced jacket of 20-year-old shipyard worker Ludwik Piernicki, killed on 17 December 1970 in Gdynia. In the pocket there was a Holy Mary medallion and a blood donor's card, carrying the motto: 'Donating blood is the highest act of humanitarianism, telling of great social solidarity.'

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