

europa  
solidarity  
centre  
permanent  
exhibition  

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catalogue



edited by  
Basil Kerski and Konrad Knoch

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solidarity  
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Gdańsk 2019

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## Preface

Basil Kerski, Konrad Knoch

The permanent exhibition took nearly six years to compose. 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 entities 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.’ The key task of the ECS is to ‘maintain a permanent exhibition devoted to Solidarity.’ The exhibition—a modern multimedia presentation devoted to Solidarity’s revolution and the collapse of the Soviet bloc—is one of Poland’s biggest narrative exhibitions on the recent history of Poland and Europe. It explains the phenomenon and originality of the Solidarity movement and does it in a way that makes the subject both interesting and understandable to a variety of audiences: witnesses and participants of the depicted events, foreign guests, people from the younger generations, and even children. The basic historical narrative tells the story of a dynamic process and of its numerous dimensions: political, social and cultural. This foundation allows us to present the history of a universal idea that found a new expression in Solidarity. Visitors will learn how the revolution developed 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.

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 uniquely Polish invention. It is with great joy 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.





## The Sacking of Anna Walentynowicz

The direct cause of the strike at the Lenin Shipyard was the disciplinary sacking of overhead crane operator Anna Walentynowicz, who had worked at the factory since 1950. The official reason for her dismissal was 'gross violation of the worker's duties'. The management's decision was motivated by Walentynowicz's activities in the Free Trade Unions of the Coast (WZZ). The news of her dismissal reached her fellow workers through a leaflet distributed by WZZ activists on the morning of 14 August 1980.

- Anna Walentynowicz during the strike in the Lenin Shipyard, August 1980  
Photo: Stanisław Składanowski | European Solidarity Centre
- The overhead crane that was operated by Anna Walentynowicz, the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard, 1960s  
Photo: Andrzej Trzeciak | European Solidarity Centre







## 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 by, among other workers, Anna Walentynowicz. In 2010, the 'machine's' maintenance book (containing her entries) was found in the 'operator's' cab.

• Photo: Renata Dąbrowska | European Solidarity Centre





## Electric Trolley — Lech Wałęsa's Strike Tribune

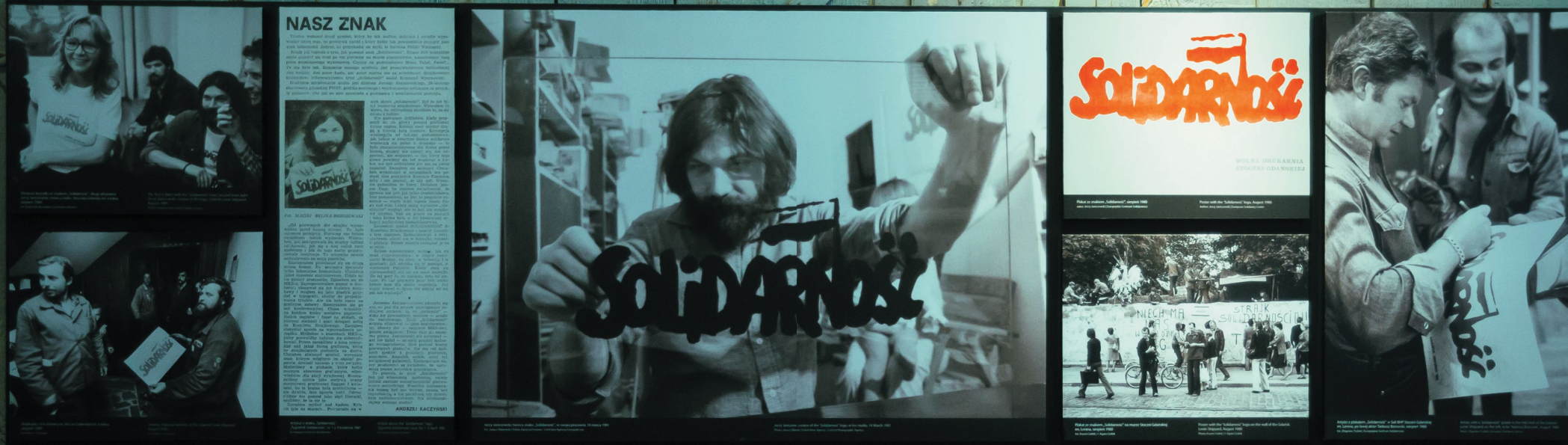
• Lech Wałęsa making a speech to shipyard workers, August 1980  
Photo: Jean-Louis Atlan | FotoChannels

• Cab of the electric trolley, STAL-258, type WA-2  
Photo: Renata Dąbrowska | European Solidarity Centre

The vehicle was a common part of the shipyard landscape. There were more than a 100 battery-powered trolleys on the huge shipyard grounds. Among the people responsible for their maintenance and for charging the batteries was Lech Wałęsa. The carts were a popular means of transport during the strike. They were used to move people, food, leaflets, and copies of the strike bulletin printed on the premises. There was also the non-standard application of the trolley as a moving podium. Lech Wałęsa, Anna Walentynowicz and Andrzej Gwiazda all made speeches from it, and so did Andrzej Kołodziej in the Shipyard of the Paris Commune in Gdynia.

Trolley number E-117, displayed in the exhibition, comes from the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard and is the oldest one that could be found on the factory grounds. It was produced in 1960 and is an example of the typical shipyard ingenuity: the open platform of the original vehicle, STAL-258 WA-2, was fitted with a closed cab that protected the driver from rain.





## The Logo of Solidarność

The spirit of everyday life during the strike inspired a Gdańsk-based artist Jerzy Janiszewski to create the 'Solidarność' logo. 'I started by thinking of a slogan—there were so many of them painted on the walls...', recalls Janiszewski. The word *Solidarność* cropped up in them again and again. It was also the title of the strike bulletin. I chose that word because it caught most accurately what was going on among people. I don't exactly remember when the idea for the graphic form of the lettering came to me. (...) The concept derived from this similarity: how people in a dense crowd each support one another. This was characteristic of the crowd in front of the gate—they stood without squeezing or pushing, just giving support (...)'

The shape and composition of the letters, as well as the use of the red-and-white flag motif, expressed the concept of unity and mutual support. Thanks to its simple and legible form, the logo quickly became popular with striking workers, and very shortly became a globally recognisable symbol of the independent social movement bringing together many millions of people.

• Photo: Renata Dąbrowska | European Solidarity Centre



## REAKCJA ŚWIATA WORLD'S REACTION



### The World and the Strikes

Thanks to the presence of Western European journalists in the Lenin Shipyard during the strike, the world found out about the situation in Poland. The covers of major magazines in Germany, France and Great Britain were dominated for weeks by the August protests. The most widely reported event was the agreement between the government and the Inter-Factory Strike Committee. The fact was relayed as an important step toward political change in Central and Eastern Europe. Lech Wałęsa became the icon of the protest.

• Photo: Renata Dąbrowska | European Solidarity Centre



Founders of the European Solidarity Centre:

**Ministerstwo  
Kultury  
i Dziedzictwa  
Narodowego.**



Graphic and Typographic Design: Filip Piasecki / tatastudio

Cover Design: Filip Piasecki / tatastudio

Cover Photograph: Renata Dąbrowska

Content Editing: Konrad Knoch, Ewa Konarowska

Editing Collaboration: Arkadiusz Bilecki, Magdalena Charkin-Jaszczka, Jacek Kołtan, Agnieszka Szuta, Piotr Szwocha

Catalogue Notes: Piotr Abryszeński, Adam Cherek, Damian Chrul, Basil Kerski,

Konrad Knoch, Krzysztof Korda, Karolina Lejczak, Michał Lewandowski, Marta Netza, Michał Przeperski,

Przemysław Ruchlewski, Magdalena Starega, Andrzej Trzeciak, Katarzyna Żelazek

Chronology: Mirosław Chojecki, Jacek Kołtan, Jakub Kufel, Przemysław Ruchlewski

English Language Editor: Agnieszka Mitraszewska

Translation: Marta Aleksandrowicz-Wojtyna, Piotr Kaliński, Michael Sanderson, Miłosz Wojtyna

Publishing Coordination: Konrad Knoch

Typesetting and Page Makeup: Filip Piasecki / tatastudio

Printing and Cover: Grafix Centrum Poligrafii

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Second Edition, revised and corrected

Publisher


Europejskie Centrum Solidarności


pl. Solidarności 1, 80-863 Gdańsk

tel.: 58 772 40 00, fax: 58 772 42 92

e-mail: [ecs@ecs.gda.pl](mailto:ecs@ecs.gda.pl)

[ecs.gda.pl](http://ecs.gda.pl)

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ISBN 978-83-62853-97-7

