

Xth National Congress of Delegates of NSZZ "Solidarność" Jastżebie Zdrój, 24-24.IX.1998

Address of Lech Wałęsa to the Delegates of the Congress

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My attitude towards the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarnosc" is almost paternal. I created it, I assisted its birth, I was its first president: legally, in the underground and legally again. I feel that my child has gone the wrong way, but one who has children has also problems with children. Let me, Ladies and Gentlemen, give to you a paternal reprimand.

I think there is something going wrong in the Union. And it is going wrong in the special and difficult time, the time of transformation. We are building the capitalism. The unemployment rate is high, many companies go under, whole branches have to be transformed, companies change owners and types of ownership - there is a necessity of a strong, wise trade union. The scope and kind of social services, such as health care or social insurance, is changing. Many workers' interests are in danger and not secured. The Union does not fulfil its role here. Because the role of the trade unions, their first function and duty is to care about the interests of the working people. This is valid both in socialism and capitalism, but especially in breaking points.

I have recently visited Railway Rolling Stock Repair Company in Nowy Sacz and I noticed something that confirms my other observations - the people are afraid. They are afraid of dismissals, they are afraid that they will be left out of the gate. They are afraid that nobody will defend them, that the Union is not working the same way as in the company. I told them that they pay dues to make the union activists be afraid. I told them that it is a shame that in a free country after almost ten years of democratic rule the people are so scared.

It seems to me that the Union is too deeply involved in the politics. The Union has paid a huge "tribute of blood" sending its best activists to the politics. It has been going on since 1989 continuously in several waves. This process must be stopped. One day it may turn out that the only organisation representing the workers interests is OPZZ. I hope this diagnosis is false. This would be the end of the Union, and no father would watch the death of his child untouched.

At the birth time of "Solidarnosc" we included into constitution several "safety-locks" to prevent the Union from degeneration, to make it fulfil its role properly.

I participated in the elaboration of the constitution and I remember well both the safety-locks and the intentions that we were guided by when putting them in this most important document of the Union.

Firstly there was the rule of the term of office. The Union functions may be held only for two terms. This is to counteract the alienation of the activists, counteract the creation of specific union oligarchy, the separation of the Union from the working masses, from the workers' interests which are supposed to be represented. We were asked then: "What guarantees do you have that "Solidarnosc" will not become another CRZZ?". The guarantee - we replied - was the statutory clause that after two terms an activist had to

return to the workplace not to forget the worker's sweat and to find the worker's interest. This used to convince the doubtful ones.

Another safety-lock was that it was forbidden to cumulate political and union chairs. The trade unions may not be, as it was said then, "the transmission belt from the party to the masses". This is a Bolshevik practice completely distorting the idea of trade unionism.

The combining of the politics with trade union tasks is good neither for the unions nor the politics.

The Union activists should not take the governing powers especially at the moment when the state is the biggest employer. The mixture of governing power and audit body corrupts everyone. The Union may keep the Government under the protective umbrella, but the handle should not be held in the ministerial cabinets.

The third postulate we have voted for since the August 1980 was to get rid of the politics from companies, schools and offices. The politics have their own rights, but also have their own place. This is the Parliament or party offices. This place is not the trade union institutions.

I have heard that you want to abandon these rules today. I warn you, Colleagues, it is not only a mistake, not only a crime - it is a suicide. The Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarnosc" served as a trampoline to the power for many groups, including - I admit - myself. There was no other possibility then - but now it exists. After so many jumps the trampoline starts falling apart. One more jump and it breaks down. You have to return to the rules and to the roots.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you probably know the First National Congress of Christian Democratic Party of the Third Republic of Poland, the party I am constructing, took place last week. I am building it, among other reasons, in order to let the Union live the union life, to show that there is still room for political parties. Because the marriage of trade union is also harmful for the parties. Out of thirty political subjects existing within AWS - only ZChN and SKL managed to keep their identity. And even they are helpless without the trade union logic.

I am not going to take over anybody's electorate by this political initiative. There is no need for this. In a country where 50% of the people do not attend the elections - this means they have nobody to vote for. We have to try to give them a chance. We want to represent some of this 50%. We want to run in the elections in three years, help us God. After these elections, in the Parliament, this party will politically support the apolitical Union. This party, just like the Union, is my child - and there should be harmony between the children. One of the first decisions adopted by the Congress of Christian Democratic Party of the Third Republic of Poland was issuing a letter with greetings and wishes of good debates to the National Congress of Delegates of NSZZ "Solidarnosc". I deeply believe that the Congress will take reasonable decisions - who other can decide on the Union affairs than its most important body. Ladies and Gentlemen - everything is in your hands.

I wish you fruitful debates.