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The Alternative Society Movement (RSA) against a Background of Other Youth Formations of Political Opposition in the Polish People's Republic (PRL) in the 1980s

Abstract: The paper raises the issue of the presence and uniqueness of RSA among political youth opposition in PRL in the 1980s. The very phenomenon of political oppositional activity among youth on such a large scale was undoubtedly unique to Poland when compared with other countries of the Eastern Bloc. In the period between 1980 and 1990, at least 400 organizations, movements, circles and groups were created. RSA's originality consisted in formulating a political program that encouraged the Polish society to emancipate both from communist enslavement and capitalist system fostered by the Solidarity political opposition. The uniqueness of this formation came also from its acting both as a political opposition movement as well as a youth subculture which enabled it to survive the break-up of the whole current of the political opposition in the Polish youth milieu that took place in 1990.

Keywords: neoanarchism, youth political opposition, systemic transformation of 1988-1990.

Introduction

The article raises the issue of the presence and uniqueness of RSA among political youth opposition in PRL in the 1980s. The very phenomenon of political oppositional activity among youth on such a large scale was undoubtedly unique to Poland when compared with other countries of the Eastern Bloc. In the period between 1980 and 1990, at least 400 organizations, movements, circles and groups were created, which attracted at least one hundred fifty thousand representatives of

the young generation, and some of them (e.g. the Independent Students' Union – NZS) were of a mass character. The Independent Students' Union – between 1980 and 1981 – gathered approx. 110,000 members, while in 1989 around 20,000. Others were less numerous, e.g. the Federation of Fighting Youth had 2,000-3,000 members. Most of them were cadre organisations, that is those with several dozens or several hundred members.¹

Youth political opposition was especially prominent in the second half of the decade, when “the second wave” appeared (after the first one dated on 1980-1981), which fed off the legend of “Solidarity” and – with dynamism typical of youth – they tried to change the reality they were faced with. Towards the end of the 1980s, it undoubtedly became a dominant current of the opposition, contributing to, among others, organising strikes in spring and summer in 1988, which facilitated the comeback of weakened and small structures of the Independent Self-governing Trade Union “Solidarity”. Ultimately though, young oppositionists had to either act at the bidding of their older colleagues from the moderate Solidarity opposition or end up on the margins of the big politics. One of such formations was a neo-anarchistic movement gathered in RSA/FA/MA, which had many features both similar and different from other formations of oppositional youth.²

The history of RSA not only deserves, but simply requires the presentation in the broadest possible context of the epoch. The reason for that is an unusually turbulent and complicated course of the last decade of PRL when the changes of social and political relations were so far-reaching and dramatic that it can be divided into at least three separate periods: 1. legal functioning of “Solidarity” (1980-1981); 2. the Martial Law in Poland (1981-1983); 3. the fall of the communist system (1984-1990). In each of these periods, youth played an impor-

- 1 Cf. M. Rymśa, *Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów w latach 1986-1989 jako ruch społeczny (próba opisu Zrzeszenia od jego reaktywowania do uzyskania rejestracji)*, Warszawa 1990 (Master's dissertation, the Institute of Social Prevention and Resocialisation at the University of Warsaw); *Federacja Młodzieży Walczącej 1984-1990*, ed. M. Wierzbicki, Warszawa 2015, 512 pp.
- 2 MA – the Intercity Anarchist Agreement [Międzymiastówka Anarchistyczna] – established in 1988 on the initiative of RSA; anarchist organisation with a loose organisational structure; FA – the Anarchist Federation – established on November 11, 1989 after the transformation of MA. See: M. Wierzbicki, *Młodzieżowa opozycja polityczna u schyłku PRL 1980-1990. Fakty, konteksty, interpretacje*, Lublin–Warszawa 2013. Some opinions and observations included in this paper come from this monograph.

tant role, often presenting different attitudes, behaviours and views. It also sought various ideas, which led some of its representatives to discovering and implementing new ideological inspirations. Neo-anarchism became one of them.³

1. Genesis and organisational development of the Alternative Society Movement

As for its genesis, similarly to the rest of youth political opposition, it stemmed from the “solidarity revolution” of 1980 and followed the example of a working class “Solidarity”. It was inspired and, to some extent, simply organized by adults, whose support it relied on and, in the first stages of its development – more or less – was subordinated to. With the passing of time, as a result of its own maturing and a gradual weakening of “mature” oppositional structures, it became autonomous, taking a stand which was independent in every sense of the word (similarly to other youth formations). This mechanism, which underlay the emergence of oppositional movements of the young generation, was also present in the former periods of the most contemporary history of Poland, e.g. in the Stalinist period (1948-1955) when at least 1000 conspiratorial organisations and groups were created across the country, aiming to overthrow communism, fight for Polish independence from the Soviet Union and returning sovereignty to the Polish state. Their members grew up in the shadow of great historical events such as World War II, the activity of the Polish Underground State, the struggle of the “mature” Polish Underground State in the post-war period.⁴

3 J.P. Waluszko, *Dlaczego odszedłem z Federacji Anarchistycznej*, in: *Studia z dziejów polskiego anarchizmu*, eds. E. Krasucki, M. Przyborowski, R. Skrycki, Szczecin 2011, pp. 280-282.

4 For more information on the conspiracy of the Polish Underground State see: T. Strzembosz, *Rzeczpospolita Podziemna. Społeczeństwo polskie a państwo podziemne 1939-1945*, Warszawa 2000. For more information on youth opposition during the Stalinist period see e.g.: J. Wołoszyn, *Chronić i kontrolować. UB wobec środowisk i organizacji konspiracyjnych młodzieży na Lubelszczyźnie (1944-1956)*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 394-513; M. Wierzbicki, *Młodzieżowe organizacje i środowiska konspiracyjne w Polsce 1944-1956. Rozważania wstępne*, in: *Polskie podziemie niepodległościowe na tle konspiracji antykomunistycznych w Europie środkowo-wschodniej w latach 1944-1956*, ed. S. Poleszak, Warszawa–Lublin 2008, pp. 266-269; J. Chańko, Z. Onufrzak, *Z dziejów konspiracji młodzieżowych w Łodzi 1948-1953*, Łódź 2005, pp. 11-320. Cf. *Dруга конспірація непадлегасціова. Тажне арганізацыя маладзёжы школнай Лубліна і Лубельскай зямлі ў гадах 1945-1956*, ed. J. Ziółek, Lub-

A few decades later, the establishment of the Independent Self-governing Trade Union “Solidarity” – its legal activity (1980-1981) and struggle with the authorities during the Martial Law in Poland (1981-1983) – acted similarly as a catalyst for building attitudes of oppositional youth. It was the time when the myth of “Solidarity” was created, which influenced particularly those who were maturing during the radical shifts but they were too young to participate in them personally. The creation of youth formations was being triggered then by the stimuli coming from the older generation and consisted in encouragement and advice, organisational, financial, personnel or legal support. This is the role which was played by the oppositional formations of the second half of the 1970s, e.g. the Student Committees of Solidarity, the Young Poland Movement, the Committee for Social Self-defence KOR or the Confederation of Independent Poland. They helped to create the structures of NZS and various committees for renewal of education, which united in Gdańsk on September 12-13, 1981 and established the School Students’ Federation [Federacja Młodzieży Szkolnej] – all-Poland formation gathering secondary school students. Importantly, the “solidarity revolution” created an atmosphere of unprecedented freedom and intellectual ferment, as a result of which the most active representatives of the young generation could follow various ideological directions.⁵

The period of martial law and a resulting change of activity to conspiratorial, followed by years of increasing apathy of the society and decreasing importance of the older part of political opposition,

lin 2001; P. Zwiernik, *Młodzieżowe organizacje niepodległościowe w Wielkopolsce*, in: *Konspiracja antykomunistyczna i podziemie zbrojne w Wielkopolsce w latach 1945-1956*, eds. A. Łuczak, A. Pietrowicz, Poznań 2007, pp. 33-45; G. Baziur, *Wierni Polsce niepodległej. Antykomunistyczna konspiracja młodzieżowa w województwie krakowskim w latach 1945-1956*, Kraków 2010; M. Wierzbicki, *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej i jego członkowie*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 345-353; S. Poleszak, R. Wnuk, *Zarys dziejów polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego*, in: *Atlas Polskiego Podziemia Niepodległościowego 1944-1956*, eds. R. Wnuk et al., Warszawa-Lublin 2007; K. Krajewski, *Konspiracyjne organizacje młodzieżowe na terenie województwa mazowieckiego w latach 1945-1956*, in: *„Jesteście naszą wielką szansą”. Młodzież na rozstajach komunizmu 1944-1989*, eds. P. Ceranka, S. Stępień, Warszawa 2009, pp. 157-202.

5 T. Sikorski, *Oblicze ideowe i działalność Ruchu Młodej Polski 1979-1989*, Warszawa-Szczecin 2011; T. Kozłowski, *Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów 1980-1989*, in: *NSZZ „Solidarność” 1980-1989*, vol. 7, *Wokół „Solidarności”*, eds. Ł. Kamiński, G. Waligóra, Warszawa 2010, pp. 237-298; T. Junes, *Student politics in communist Poland. Generations of consent and dissent*, London 2015; M. Wierzbicki, *Ostatni bunt*, pp. 23-26.

facilitated a gradual emancipation of young oppositionists from the tutelage of older colleagues. In the second half of the 1980s, the cooperation between youth formations and the structures of “mature” opposition was based on partnership. While in the years 1988-1990 – due to the significant enlivening of the young generation and their increasing interest in public affairs with simultaneous weakening of the older opposition – younger oppositionists and their formations became independent from moderate oppositional circles such as the NSZZ “Solidarity” trade union.⁶

Typically, youth opposition in the strict sense of the word – that is created by youth and only for youth – appeared only among university and school students. Other parts of this social group did not manage to establish their own autonomous organisations. Young blue-collar workers fulfilled their political ambitions and developed their visions within the structures of “Solidarity”, while the youth from the countryside generally kept off any political activity, distancing themselves considerably from the postulates of the then political opposition, its youngest part included. Oppositional activity was more an urban phenomenon typical mainly of large and medium-sized cities. Several social, political and cultural factors gave an incentive to its formation and activity. The most important were as follows: socio-economic crisis which plagued Poland and its citizens till the end of the 1970s, causing a drop in the standard of living; political crisis provoked by the anarchy of undemocratic political system of PRL and the style of rule adopted by the Polish United Workers’ Party; native liberation, patriotic traditions and other cultural models which were in stark contrast with the reality of “social realism”; counter-cultural youth movements from the West, consisting in the rebellion against the world of “adults” (that is those who were already settled down and mature) and promoting their own modes of conduct (e.g. radical freedom, individualism, focusing on one’s private life, love, friendship and hedonism).⁷

6 M. Łopiński, M. Moskit, M. Wilk, *Konspira. Rzecz o podziemnej „Solidarności”*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 183-185; P. Pleskot, R. Spalek, *Pokolenie 82-89. Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim we wspomnieniach (1982-1990)*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 312-325.

7 B. Wagner, *Strategia wychowawcza w PRL*, Warszawa 2009, p. 202-219; M. Wierzbicki, *Ostatni bunt*, pp. 238-240. Cf. K. Kosiński, *Oficjalne i prywatne życie młodzieży w PRL*, Warszawa 2006.

To some extent, RSA followed the same path. Its creators gained experience during the period of legal “Solidarity” by, for example, editing their own zine “Gilotyňa”. At the beginning of the martial law, they fought in the underground with the military regime of PRL, cooperating with the authorities of the underground “Solidarity” in the region of Gdańsk. As a matter of fact, they had their support, e.g. they received a duplicating machine and duplicating stencil matrix. However, the clashes between those oppositional circles were gradually becoming more serious. Excessive independence of the young, manifested for instance in organising – without informing the underground “Solidarity” – the demonstration on the occasion of six months of the Marshal Law (June 13, 1982), interrupted a previously smooth cooperation. Another situation which called their cooperation into question was the creation of the Alternative Society Movement in June 1983 by the aforementioned youth, which was a clear evidence of their organisational maturity and an attempt to become independent on the oppositional arena. To add insult to injury, they also published articles criticising the Catholic church, the underground “Solidarity” and national traditions in the RSA’s zine titled “Homek”, which first appeared in 1983. Its publishers were accused of political provocation and being controlled by the Polish secret police. As a result of this situation, towards the end of 1983, the paths of “Solidarity” and RSA practically diverged. It was the earliest case of a Polish youth oppositional formation which became independent from the circles of mature opposition. On the other hand, the participants set a few-year process of organisational-ideological crystallisation down to their young age and a lack of any reference point such as older anarchistic circles.⁸

One consequence of becoming independent was – contrary to the actions of the underground “Solidarity” – an attempt to consolidate various underground groups, circles and organisations. The result of those efforts was establishing (in 1984) the Agreement of Independent Groups “Freedom” which undertook the opposition’s activity on

8 J. Waluszko, *Ruch Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego*, in: *Ruch Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego 1983-1991. Wybór tekstów*, wybór i opracowanie D. Kaczmarek, Poznań 2009, pp. 5-7; W. Turek, *Ruch Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego*, in: *Encyklopedia „Solidarności”*, vol. 1, ed. M. Łątkowska, Warszawa 2010, p. 399; “Homek”. *Pismo Ruchu Alternatywnego*, Gdańsk, 5 November 1983, year 1, no. 5; *ibidem*, 2 December 1983, year 1, no. 7.

their own account. Participating formations (the Youth Resistance Movement of Gdańsk, the Polish Fighting Youth and – since 1985 – the Youth Publishing House “Kres”) criticised – to their mind – too conciliatory an attitude of the underground “Solidarity”. Despite an organisational crisis, in the second half of the 1980s, new RSA cells were created across the country in Szczecin, Chełmno, Warszawa, Białystok, Zakopane and Sochaczew. Towards the end of the 1980s, RSA (already existing within MA/FA) together with a large part of political and counter-cultural formations and youth circles loudly protested against the policy of the “Solidarity” trade union, which opted for the agreement with the communist authorities. That is why, they consistently fought against the Round Table agreement.⁹ Unlike other youth formations, which almost completely disappeared from public life in 1990,¹⁰ RSA (at the time known as the Anarchist Federation) survived this political turning point and continued its activity during the Third Polish Republic.¹¹

2. Organisational structure of RSA

RSA had a number of features which it shared with the rest of oppositional youth with respect to an organisational structure. Influenced by students’ revolutionary ideas of 1968 in the West and their counter-cultural overtones, it preferred the least formal and possibly the most loose organisational structure characterised by minimalizing the hierarchization of relations inside the organization and making it more network-like, that is with the predominance of partnership and, as it were, federation-like relations between equal circles. It seems to

9 The Round Table Talks ended in the agreement between the authorities and opposition, under which the “Solidarity” Trade Union and the Trade Union of Individual Farmers “Solidarity” were legalised again, the office of the president and the parliament’s upper house – Senate – were re-established. Also, a substantial decision was to announce partially free parliament elections, which finally took place on June 4, 1989. Cf. A. Dudek, *Reglamentowana rewolucja. Rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988-1990*, Kraków 2004, pp. 237-272; P. Codogni, *Okrągły Stół czyli polski Rubikon*, Warszawa 2009; J. Skórzyński, *Rewolucja Okrągłego Stołu*, Kraków 2009.

10 NZS was an exception, but only after undergoing a significant organisational crisis and completely changing its mode of operating from oppositional-political to environmental-social.

11 J. Waluszko, *Kręte ścieżki (naszej współpracy) NSZZ „Solidarność”*, in: *Ruch Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego*, p. 40-43; R. Antonów, *Pod czarnym sztandarem. Anarchizm w Polsce po 1980 roku*, Wrocław 2004, pp. 136-151.

be typical that such models and resulting “fondness for decentralising” dominated not only anarchic RSA and approaching anarchism “Peace and Freedom” Movement, but also much more conservative formations, e.g. the Federation of Fighting Youth and even the Students’ Organisation “Confederation of Independent Poland”. As for a kind of structure, small groups of friends – which were closest to the then young generation – were the most predominant. They consisted of a few, or at most a dozen or so, people who – thanks to the division into roles and functions – could resort to the minimum of internal structure. Also, they gave an opportunity to establish more or less intimate friendships, which often became quite emotional. Youth formations based their activity on combining those small social groups, which – even though there were not of considerable size and as a result they were short-lived – could fulfil tasks related to current political struggle. They were connected by the so-called hubs for information, ideas, people, money, authority flow. As such qualified charismatic people, publishing houses, Catholic chaplaincies, boards of organisations.¹²

As a consequence of these assumptions, the management of RSA avoided formalizing their activity and building a hierarchical organisational structure or central management. Its leaders tried to make their leadership informal. Therefore, they described themselves only as “guides”, basing their authority on personal attributes of character and active engagement. They did not set any formal memberships terms so that it could retain a loose structure of a social movement. That is why, no official RSA congresses were organised, except for the meeting of representatives from different centres in the flat of prof. Leszek Nowak in Poznań. The participants came from RSA circles in Gdańsk, Szczecin, Łódź and Poznań.¹³

The situation changed significantly during the political transformation of 1988-1989. After the establishment of the Intercity Anarchist Agreement (MA) (June 1988), its first national congress took place in Gdańsk (October 1988) and brought the division of this formation

12 J. Turowski, *Socjologia. Małe struktury społeczne*, Lublin 1993, pp. 111-112; M. Castells, *Społeczeństwo sieci*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 467-470.

13 J. Waluszko, *Ruch*, pp. 14-15.

into centres and appointing their representatives from among MA. In Gdańsk, it was J. Waluszko. What followed was a further development of an organisational structure. During the II Congress, the Fund's Council and information points were created. The task of the latter was to distribute materials promoting their policy, collect contributions, create event schedules. The name was also changed into the Intercity Anarchist Federation, which emphasised that it was supposed to be a federation of equal centres. During the III Congress in November 1989, apart from changing the name into the Anarchist Federation (FA), it was agreed to introduce more formalised procedures of taking decisions by simple majority for internal affairs. For "external" affairs of the federation, a right of veto was retained. Since now, all matters related to FA as a whole were discussed during national congresses, which were to take place twice a year.¹⁴

3. Ideas and program of RSA against a background of the rest of youth opposition

The conceptions related to ideology and policy significantly separated RSA from the rest of political youth opposition. This area was cemented only by anti-communism, which was some kind of semblance of ideology for them. The progressing erosion of the communist system revealed increasingly more profound ideological differences in the circles of youth. 1989 was the year when various ideological-political trends began to appear there, e.g. left-wing (RSA/FA/MA and what was left after the "Peace and Freedom" Movement¹⁵), supporting Piłsudski (the Students' Organisation KPN) or conservative-nationalist (FMW). It is characteristic that RSA was one of few youth political circles which had a vision of social order after the fall of communism. For this reason, it did not disappear already in 1990 – like many other youth formations – but continued to operate also in the Third Polish Republic.¹⁶

14 R. Antonów, *Pod czarnym sztandarem*, pp. 222-223, 225; J. Waluszko, *Ruch*, p. 22; M. Pęczak, *Mały słownik subkultur młodzieżowych*, Warszawa 1992, p. 82.

15 Cf. M. Litwińska, *WiP kontra PRL. Ruch Wolność i Pokój 1985-1989*, Kraków 2015.

16 M. Wierzbicki, *Ostatni bunt*, pp. 131-134, 248-249. J. Wąsowicz, SDB, *Niezależny ruch młodzieżowy w Gdańsku w latach 1981-1989*, Gdańsk 2012, p. 155.

As J. Waluszko states, between 1982 and 1985, the world view of RSA members built on ideas of neo-anarchism popularised by the supporters of students' 1968 rebellion in the West. The essence of this world view consisted in the resistance to traditional moral values, "middle-class" lifestyle, omnipotence of the state and authorities it promoted. Therefore, this part of Polish anarchists became the main promoter of ideas of sexual revolution of 1968. They were also against – this time as well as most formations of youth opposition – the communist authorities in Poland, rightly accusing them of poverty, social injustice and political oppressions. They presented their views in a few manifestos, published in consecutive periods during which the anarchist movement existed. The first one was the Manifesto of the Alternative Society Movement, which contained a harsh criticism of the communist state with totalitarian inclinations and of an anti-communist opposition also described as totalitarian. Both high and mass culture "created" by the state and the society – through all "hierarchies, divisions and values" – was a tool of oppression and control of individuals, exerting negative influence on them.¹⁷

The only solution – according to the authors of the manifesto – was to promote the idea of "an alternative society", which should offer an alternative lifestyle, social structures, cultural models, and its own social, economic and cultural institutions. An important part of this program was anti-communism and striving for the independence of Poland. Following manifestos elaborated on the basic ideas of the first RSA program, putting emphasis on building alternative – next to the communist and then democratic Polish state – social structures and institutions, created thanks to the self-organisation of the society. Their supporters endeavoured to lay emphasis on constructive program propositions. In 1989, they clearly refused to accept both communism and capitalism associated mainly with the policy of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government. The latter was perceived as a betrayal of "Solidarity" ideals, epitomized by the policy resolution of the I Congress of NSZZ "Solidarity" Delegates in 1981 titled "the Self-governing Polish Republic" ["Samorządna Rzeczpospolita"]. In the Third Polish

17 R. Antonów, *Pod czarnym sztandarem*, pp. 170-171; W. Jankowski, *Stan bezwładzy*, "Karta" 1991, no. 6; *Dokąd idziemy?*, "Homek". Pismo Ruchu Alternatywnego, year 1, Gdańsk, 24 December 1983.

Republic, they meant to fight with “pauperisation and exploitation” and the propaganda of official institutions of the state, as well as the Church, the Polish United Workers’ Party, “Solidarity”, and Western mass media.¹⁸

RSA was the only formation of youth political opposition which consistently continued its cooperation with counter-cultural circles. In April 1986, it participated in establishing an anarchist formation known as Totart in Gdańsk, which gathered visual artists, poets, musicians and performers. In summer 1989, on the initiative of RSA, another group called X Pawilon was created, which became a platform of integration for political and socio-cultural youth formations. Since 1985, during summer time, RSA organised anarchist youth gatherings known as “Hyde-Park”, which were attended by the representatives of different youth subcultures, fans of music for young people, supporters of political opposition. Implementing these initiatives, young anarchists tried to be closer to the world of politics and independent culture. In this sense, they created a group that was exceptional against a background of other formations of political opposition among the young. Undoubtedly, RSA contributed to the development of youth political opposition by instilling in it some ideas and slogans followed by the neo-anarchist movement. Some of the most important were pacifism (not excluding the right to self-defence) and, stemming from it, the refusal to perform military service, ecology, rejection of hierarchical subordination, happening-like style of demonstrations. To a varying degree, these ideas were adopted not only by the “Peace and Freedom” Movement – which RSA co-created – but also by NZS, FMW, the Movement of an Involved Society [Ruch Społeczeństwa Zaangażowanego], and even the Students’ Organization KPN or the Youth Organisation of Fighting Solidarity [Organizacja Młodzieżowa Solidarności Walczącej].¹⁹

18 R. Antonów, *Pod czarnym sztandarem*, pp. 217-218, 223-224; J. Waluszko, *Ruch*, pp. 25-26; *Miasto dla człowieka*, “Homek”. Special supplement to no. 44, March 1990, “Homek”. Pismo Ruchu Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego 1983-1990, eds. G. Berendt, K. Brzechczyn, Z. Stybel, J. Waluszko, Gdańsk 2013, pp. 196-197.

19 A. Smółka-Gnauck, *Między wolnością a pokojem. Zarys historii Ruchu „Wolność i Pokój”*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 52-54; J. Wąsowicz, SDB, *Niezależny ruch młodzieżowy*, pp. 459-481.

4. The activity of RSA and other formations of youth opposition

RSA shared most features with the rest of youth political opposition when it came to day-to-day operations. All of these formations used unusual methods which made them different from the “mature” opposition. One of them was – introduced by the Orange Alternative²⁰ – a political happening, which was a mark of the oppositional youth. Its popularity should be put down to an out of the ordinary form of political protest, which combined elements of political demonstration, fun and street performance. Some other popular forms of protest were: sit-ins²¹ and “ruszting”²², pickets, “kadrówka” and “bovver” [“zadyma”], that is demonstrations during which protesters faced Citizens’ Militia (MO) and Motorized Reserves of the Citizens’ Militia (ZOMO).²³

In the first period of its activity (1983-1985), RSA propagated its ideas through illegal press (“Homek”), printing and distributing leaflets, e.g. during official elections and ceremonies. One distinctive feature of this elite circle, which after all was not of considerable size, was a striving for inspiring or even organising other groups and circles of oppositional youth. One example of this tendency was – already mentioned – establishing of PGN “Freedom” in 1984 in Gdańsk. In the period in question, RSA also tried to organize anti-government demonstrations, which involved a creative plan as well as violence. In-

- 20 The Orange Alternative – a socio-cultural movement that was counter-cultural in nature, which organized political happenings mocking communist authorities between 1987 and 1989. It was created and led by Waldemar Fydrych “Major” from Wrocław. Cf. *Wszyscy proletariusze bądźcie piękni! Pomarańczowa Alternatywa w dokumentach aparatu represji PRL (1987-1989)*, eds. J. Dardzińska, K. Dolata, Wrocław 2011.
- 21 Sit-in – a form of protest that involves a group of protesters sitting in public areas, e.g. in the streets or squares in order to draw attention to the aim of a protest and to impede any police intervention. Popular among youth political opposition in PRL in the 80’s.
- 22 Ruszting – a form of protest that involves scattering leaflets, hanging banners or speaking from a scaffold or building roofs in the centres of big cities. Due to a difficult access to protesting oppositionists, they could continue a protest for many hours to the fury of the officers of the security apparatus and great joy of the audience.
- 23 Youth opposition joined their forces to protest in Gdańsk on June 11, 1987, during the third pilgrimage of John Paul II to Poland. See: Z. Gach, *Drugie podejście. Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów w Uniwersytecie Gdańskim 1985-1989 na tle swoich czasów*, Gdańsk 2009, pp. 97-121; J. Wąsowicz, SDB, *Niezależny ruch młodzieżowy*, pp. 409-416. *Operacja „Zorza II”. Służba Bezpieczeństwa i Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR wobec wizyty Jana Pawła II w Trójmieście (czerwiec 1987)*, eds. S. Cenckiewicz, M. Kruk, Warszawa–Gdańsk 2008. See also: A. Dudek, T. Marszałkowski, *Walki uliczne w PRL*, Kraków 1999.

terestingly, few of its members would appear among the protesters, but, due to their typical outfit (dark clothes, scarves on their faces or flags), they generated a lot of interest. A manifestation which became legendary among the Tri-city opposition took place on May 1, 1985. It led to blocking the official parade for 40 minutes and violent riots, during which two ZOMO officers were killed. Furthermore, on March 21, 1990, FA invited school students to participate in a demonstration in the Old Town Square in Warsaw on the occasion of the first day of Spring (so called Truant's Day). According to police sources, approx. 10,000 school students gathered and an initially peaceful meeting turned into violent riots, during which 6 MO officers were wounded. The riots were accompanied by fights between the representatives of various youth subcultures.²⁴

What was typical of both RSA and other formations of youth opposition was the cooperation of various currents and circles based on a generational community. Young oppositionists paid attention not so much to political or ideological issues, which introduced divisions between them, but to the need to fulfil particular postulates which were crucial from the perspective of the young generation. As a result, they acted together, e.g. to abolish obligatory military service, to reform military training schools at universities in Autumn 1988, to relegalize NZS in 1989, to deal with the most deadly threats to the natural environment, to create conditions in which the young could develop or to expose the negligence, mistakes or crimes of communist authorities.²⁵

RSA participated in these moves, often taking an inspiring or simply leading role. As such, they took part in establishing the Totart formation in 1986 and "X Pawilon" in July 1989, which consisted of – apart from anarchists – the members and sympathisers of other youth formations independent from the authorities. The efforts of "X Pawilon" led to the creation of – in Autumn the same year – the Square of Positive Exchange [Plac Wymiany Pozytywnej], where concerts, meetings and happenings took place for a few months. The anarchists from

24 The Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (hereinafter: AIPN), the Panel: Ministry of Internal Affairs (hereinafter: MSW), 0248/191, Information on illegal activity of school youth, Warszawa, November 1987, sheets: 45-47. J.P. Waluszko, *Ruch*, pp. 7-8; IPN, MSW, file no. 0248/191, Report no. 629 OKPP, Warszawa, 21 III 1990, sheets: 249-250.

25 M. Wierzbicki, *Ostatni bunt*, pp. 250-251.

MA/FA together with the representatives of other youth formations (NZZ, FMW, the Freedom and Peace Movement – WiP) participated in demonstrations and other protests against the Round Table talks and arrangements and, on the turn of 1989 and 1990, in occupying the buildings belonging to the Polish United Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Youth Union in, among others, Gdańsk, Kraków, Rzeszów, and Tarnów. They cooperated with NZZ and WiP in the fight for abolishing military training schools at universities, reforming higher education and re-registering NZZ. In Kraków, they cooperated with other oppositional formations so closely that they were described as a whole as “the Kraków Group”, which means that they were treated as one political entity. The biggest campaign organised by anarchists and other youth formations was a two-year fight to stop the building of a nuclear power plant in Żarnowiec led in Tri-city between 1988 and 1990. The fact that the protest lasted so long resulted in creating a real platform connecting various oppositional formations, circles and organisationally non-attached youth. The most important organisations were: WiP, RSA, FA, “Twe-Twa”, FMW, NZZ, the Movement of an Involved Society, the Independent School Students' Union, and the Youth Organisation KPN.²⁶

RSA was also involved in educational activity, e.g. within – existing from April to October 1988 – the Anarchist Chaplaincy, where discussions, meetings and exhibitions took place. An important role was played by the publishing activity of RSA, but perhaps even more crucial were attempts to broaden their cooperation with movements and para-political circles such as social movements (religious, scout, ecological) and alternative ones (e.g. the Orange Alternative, Totart formation, youth subcultures), which provided more opportunities for anarchists to impact other circles of the young generation. Hyde-Parks – a few-day oppositional and cultural gatherings organised by anarchists – proved to be an effective way of integrating youth. Thanks to such initiatives, youth political opposition became much broader not only in the political but also in the social sense and was permeated

26 See the memoirs of Tomasz Burka, a co-organizer of the campaign against the building of a nuclear power plant in Żarnowiec, written down and edited by Janusz Waluszka, <http://tezeusz.pl/cms/tz/index.plphp?od=6441>. See: J. Waluszko, *Protesty przeciwko budowie elektrowni jądrowej Żarnowiec w latach 1985-1990*, Gdańsk 2013.

with counter-cultural influences. This gave it a unique shape separate from the world of adults.²⁷

One characteristic feature of the collaboration between youth formations was frequent borrowing of slogans, ideas, and modes of operating, and also merging of structures, people and ideas. Oftentimes, the same person belonged to more than one oppositional organisation. Many anarchists became members of WiP or NZS and, on the other hand, FMW activists would join WiP or RSA. It created favourable conditions for the integration of a relatively small oppositional circles but sometimes it could result in organisational and merely human problems (animosities, mess).²⁸

Summary

To conclude, it must be stated that – for all common features – there were clear differences between individual formations of youth political opposition. It is not surprising then that RSA differed in many respects from other groups. Apart from anti-communism, which was shared by the younger generation of political opposition, RSA also promoted ideas not to be found in other Polish oppositional circles, that is an anarchist vision of reality, “alternativism”, criticism of communist and capitalist states, totalitarian rule and “totalitarian” opposition, “official” culture promoted by the then state, but also traditional, national culture nurtured by the majority of the Polish society with the support of the Catholic church. This kind of ideological profile – and policy resulting from it – put RSA in stark contrast with the rest of youth opposition,²⁹ which, generally speaking, was not against Polish traditions, authorities and the idea of a democratic state with capitalist economic foundations, but that same profile saved RSA from decomposing after the fall of the communist system.

27 J.P. Waluszko, *Ruch*, pp. 8-11.

28 M. Śliwa, *Ruch „Wolność i Pokój” 1985-1989*, Kraków 1992 (Master’s dissertation, the Jagiellonian University), p. 67; *Wspomnienia Klaudiusza Wesołka* (the Federation of Fighting Youth’s website); J.P. Waluszko, *Ruch*, p. 9.

29 These differences were alleviated by anti-communism and the awareness that there was a much greater enemy, namely communist authorities.

After 1989, anarchists from FA were involved in intense activity consisting in, among others, spectacular international, nation-wide and local protests. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s, they protested against introducing religion to schools, the anti-abortion resolution, another parliamentary elections, taxes, US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan or Russian intervention in Chechnya. They also brought action against huge corporations (e.g. McDonald's), NATO presence in Poland, political and economic summits (e.g. G-8 in Genoa), building a missile defence system on the territory of Poland. They were engaged in defending residents against eviction, themselves living in uninhabited buildings (so called squats) where they organised "communes" (that is communities of residents), cultural centres, libraries, club-rooms, etc.

During the Third Polish Republic – similarly to the period before 1989 – RSA's important tool for propagating its slogans was its press. The most important zines was "Mać Pariadka" (90 issues appeared between 1990 and 2005). Later, the Bulletin of Poznań's Anarchist Library took over its role and, in 2007, it was changed to "the Anarchist Review" (11 issues were published). Another important anarchist zine was "Inny świat", published in Mielec (33 issues were published until 2011). Sympathisers of anarchism could also be found among journalists working for left-wing magazines such as: "Krytyka Polityczna", "Lewą Nogą" or "Obywatel". It should not be surprising since the views of contemporary Polish anarchists are left-wing, if not systematized.³⁰

After 1989, the Polish anarchist movement divided into three main currents: liberation anarchism (libertarian, that is consisting in limiting the role of the state to minimum, not completely rejecting it), anarcho-syndicalism (focusing on protecting employees' interests against exploitation by the state and capital, hence fighting against privatisation of Polish economy regarded as an unfair division of national product), and pacifism (connected with rejecting obligatory military service and broadly understood militarism). Besides, at the beginning of the 21st century, some new trends appeared: cultural, feminist and ecological anarchism. As a result, participants and sympathizers of this movement can be found among the circles of these new social move-

30 A. Kamiński, *Polskie badania nad anarchizmem. Przegląd literatury*, in: *Studia z dziejów*, p. 342.

ments, that is feminist, pacifist, ecological and socialist movements. At the beginning of the 21st century, the estimated number was approx. 2,000 people at a national scale.³¹

Despite its relatively long tradition of social and political activity, after the year 2000, the anarchist movement suffered from an ideological crisis. Its symptoms could be visible in resisting external influences by the circles of anarchist activists and focusing on other forms and modes of operating while, at the same time, pushing primary objectives of this ideological formation into the background. This detrimental situation was further developed by the generational change, as a result of which older activists – oftentimes the creators of the movement – who lay more emphasis on the social dimension of its activity departed from it. Later, it was dominated by the younger generation, which defined an anarchist movement in counter-cultural rather than socio-political terms. Therefore, it gained many features of a youth subculture which was not interested in the reality outside their own circles and in particular they did not seem to care about any social effects of their activity.³²

Since its establishment, or rather rebirth, in 1983, having a clear and vivid ideology made the (neo-)anarchist movement in some sense “missionary”. The presence of counter-cultural values in RSA’s ideology, program and activity turned it into a trigger which enabled to promote these ideas in other circles and acquire them by their members, even though the ideas in question were frequently quite distant from politico-ideological sympathies of some formations of youth opposition (e.g. FMW, KPN, SW). RSA functioned then as a carrier of cultural rebellion of 1968, disseminating its ideas first among anarchistically inclined youth and then among its circles and formations. In this sense, there are considerable similarities between them and WiP movement, which also inspired youth oppositional circles. However, due to an ideological infiltration by RSA members and mutual influences, it is difficult to state which of these groups was more prominent. I believe that here opens a field to a more advanced research and investigation whose results, I hope, will soon be available.

31 R. Antonów, *Pod czarnym sztandarem*, pp. 374-379.

32 J. Waluszko, *Dlaczego odszedłem*, pp. 280-287; A. Kamiński, *Polskie badania*, pp. 341-344.

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