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Demanding freedom or longing for modernity? Solidarity upheaval in 1980 Poland as a turning point for "communist modernity"

Zygmunt Bauman noted that in communism "audacious dream of modernity was pushed to its radical limits". Social engineering, large-scale technologies, transformation of natural environment appeared to be the hallmarks of many systems striving for modernity, Stalinism, however, remained the most radical in its aspirations. If Bauman's observation is valid, the modernity agenda might have been the basis of the social contract between the people living in communism and the communist authorities.

Advanced globalization would be a key factor contributing to the numerous crises and social conflicts of late communism. Economic integration forced the communist regimes to make concessions - the creation of the Solidarity Union or perestroika would not have been possible in the 1960s, as opposed to the 1980s, when the communist states could not longer disregard global capitalism. The late communist states, believing in the capacity of "communist modernity" to powerfully transform, switched to the market capitalism, gradually introducing some liberal economic reforms. Last but not least, the shipyard alone, from where the protest originated, is an interesting case study, since the shipyard workers' jobs and the maritime industry have been part of global economy from the beginning.

Such international context appears to be missing from the existing approaches to the Polish strike of 1980. How was it possible that the protest of only a few activists, mainly members of intelligentsia, transformed into the mass protest? The paper objective is to present preliminary results of inquiry based on a wide empirical material - sociological sources containing varied accounts of the 1980 strike participants (stored in the Manuscript Division of the Ossolineum Library in Wrocław). How was modernity in late communism understood - like in Stalinism, as a radical project for the future or, rather, as a return to the past solutions?