

Poland

Adam J. Jarosz interviewed **Henryk Wujec**.

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Jarosz: My name is Adam Jarosz, I'm an academic, a political scientist at the University of Zielona Góra. My areas of interest include local government, Polish-German relations, as well as the position of the president in the Polish political system. And Henryk Wujec...

Wujec: Is a pensioner, I'm a Polish pensioner and I call myself a free citizen of Poland.

Jarosz: In the past, Henryk Wujec was an active social activist, an activist of the democratic opposition in the People's Republic of Poland, and a member of Solidarity. He also participated in the Round Table talks, during the negotiations of 1989. Then he was a member of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, deputy minister in the Jerzy Buzek government [activist of the democratic opposition], and recently an adviser to President Bronisław Komorowski [president of Poland 2010 – 2015]. I warmly welcome you, thank you very much for agreeing to take part in our project.

Wujec: Our conversation will be archived?

Jarosz: Yes, exactly.

Wujec: My voice has been already archived by the SB [Security Service]. They recorded us in order to be able to identify who said what.

Jarosz: Well, here we meet in perhaps slightly more pleasant circumstances, but we will also archive your statement. OK, so let's start, because as I said, we want the project to show the history of the 20th century from the perspective of experiences of individuals from various European countries. That's why I would like to start by asking about your origin. Could you tell me where you came from and say a few words about your childhood?

Wujec: So: I was born in 1940, in December, probably on December 24th or 25th, in the countryside. It was a village called Podlesie, located south of Biłgoraj, in the parish of Puszcza Solska. An ordinary village in the Lublin area. As a child, I lived in the countryside. I was a peasant's child and did everything that a country child can do. But it was a time of war, so the beginning was dramatic, because when I was two and a half years old, I was taken by Germans together with my family to Majdanek [German concentration camp in Lublin] . Because Germans pacified our villages and my family (but not my mother and father, it was more complicated) went to Germany, and my grandmother saved me. She bribed a sister and thanks to that I left Majdanek. And then my dad took me back to the countryside and then I lived in the countryside, I went to school in the countryside and then to another one in Biłgoraj. That was the beginning.

Jarosz: So what do you identify with, what do you associate with the place where you grew up? We will come back to the topic of war later because I will definitely want to ask about it.

Wujec: That place? That rural place? This is my favourite place. I feel a strong identification with my place of birth, the place where I lived. We often go there. My brother and his family still live there and we spend all the holidays there, I'm friends with my brother's children, my brother's daughter lives with me and my wife because she has a place there but works in Warsaw. She is almost like a daughter to us. So this is a powerful place for some sort of identification for me.

Jarosz: You mentioned your grandmother. Is this memory of war also important to you? You said you have gruesome memories from that time.

Wujec: Some of those memories remain with me. I was born in 1940, I was two and a half years old when they took me to Majdanek, so I don't remember that time, but I remember the period afterwards when I was three and a half years old. I remember May, June 1944 – more or less that time. I have very few memories from that period. I also remember a German, German soldier who scared me a lot. They did some exercises and I thought he was chasing me, so I ran away, I screamed. It was panic. It turned out he wasn't chasing me, but I remember that.

I also remember the arrival of Soviet soldiers – it was in 1944 as well, but later, probably in July, around that time. I remember that these soldiers were in our yard, their behaviour. The war ended then, because when Soviet soldiers came, it was the end of the war. But these first signals, they remained in my memory. Personally, I think that Soviet soldiers liberated us, because thanks to them we stopped being afraid that the Germans would murder us. Because they did murder. Therefore, as a child, I responded to that visit with gratitude, although they killed (as well). They shot my beloved dog because he barked too much.

So these feelings were a little ambivalent, but I remember it well anyway. And then there was the normal life of a country child, minding cattle, helping with field work and going to school.

Jarosz: Did you talk with your parents or grandparents about the war? Did they talk about these different experiences?

Wujec: Yes, of course. It was a vivid issue all the time. Our village was relatively close to the forest, which is why it was pacified by the Germans when the Germans created these security zones. In place of the people they had displaced from there, they brought Germans from Bessarabia.

Jarosz: As a part of this Heim ins Reich¹ operation, right?

¹ Heim ins Reich – resettlement of the population of German origin from areas of the USSR, Romania and the Baltic States to the territories of the Third Reich, areas incorporated into Germany after the invasion of Poland and the General Government, carried out in 1939-1944.

Wujec: Yes, yes, they brought Germans from Transylvania and so on, but they did not implement the second part of their plan, which involved bringing Germans to our village, because they had to flee.

Jarosz: And did the topic of the Home Army [Polish underground army in the Second World War], of partisan Polish soldiers appear in these memories?

Wujec: Yes, it appeared, but not necessarily in the heroic-patriotic version which is taught in schools. I asked my dad about it when I went to school – because I was taught as well how great the partisans were, and how they fought. I was convinced that my father was a partisan. Why was I convinced? Because with my brother - I had a younger brother - we found various cartridges, hidden among some farm items, for example a special grain container. We found a whole packet of bullets downstairs. Dad didn't know that, we didn't brag about it, we used these cartridges to shoot on the fire. Nothing happened to us fortunately, but we did it quite carelessly. And I asked my dad: "Dad, but you were also a partisan, right?" (I was so proud). And dad says: "What? With these bandits? Come on!" So it was instantly such a shock that my father treated them as bandits who came at night, took what was at home. After all, dad couldn't take someone's ID card and check if he was a partisan, or a bandit. If someone had a gun, it was his only ID. The countryside was wary of partisans because they posed a threat. They were a diverse threat.

Admittedly, I don't judge it that way, because some of those who fought in those forests were heroic and sacrificed themselves. Some of them even defended those villages against Germans, against pacifications, and so on. There was a famous Battle of Osuchy in the Solska Forest in which partisans participated. We went there, we visited a cemetery, and so on. Sometimes it was different, but generally the countryside was wary and generally remembered the time of war with horror as it was under (constant) threat. What's interesting, German soldiers were perhaps remembered less negatively because they nevertheless used a certain *Ordnung*, that is, if they didn't get an order, they didn't murder.

But there were also (military) units that were used to pacify villages – they were paramilitary, mostly Ukrainian, or some other type of militia. And they were feared. These were the so-called "Black Heads". My mother used to say: The Black Heads were the worst, those who took part in these actions. They were probably very aggressive, I don't know, I can't assess it. So that period was terrible for these villagers, and so they were glad that they survived.

But then, paradoxically, in much later times, in the time of Gierek [1970s], Gierek [leader of communist Poland 1970 – 1980], as the first secretary [of the Polish United Workers' Party], arranged as a result of an agreement with German Chancellor, it was probably Schmidt.

Jarosz: Not Brandt?

Wujec: No, it wasn't Brandt. So Gierek arranged with him (Schmidt) that Germans would make pay outs to children who had been taken to a camp, the so-called "*Majdankowe*". That is, families who could prove that their relatives were kept in

concentration camps were given some sort of compensation. That was the *Majdankowe* – that's how it was commonly called in our village. A lot of people got it, and a very close relative of mine once said that "if there was a war now, I would sign up to Majdanek immediately, and why not? I would get *Majdankowe*."

So after the war, the perception of it changed. Over time, the memory ceased to be so traumatic, because it was a new generation and many people were jealous of those who had been sent to Majdanek, because thanks to that they could receive large allowances.

Jarosz: Could you tell me something more about your grandparents? Who were they?

Wujec: So, I come from a village, I see this village as a cultural formation. I treat it with respect. My grandfather was a real farmer, proud of his horses and cart. He ran a brickyard, as there was good clay nearby, good bricks came out of this clay, because first there must be a feedstock. So he was a respected farmer in the area and our farm was also so nice, there were hives there too. But grandfather... the countryside was plagued by drunkenness. It's a constant, I don't know if it's still like that, I don't want to make that judgement. But then, from my (early) childhood on it was something terrible, how many people got drunk and what terrible things happened afterwards. I witnessed it as a child, so I matured quite quickly.

And because of that lifestyle of my grandfather, my grandmother left him. She left him, she said: "So you stay here, and I don't want to be with you". For rural conditions, it was courageous. Grandma took her younger son and left her older son, my father, with grandfather. And she went away. She found a job somewhere near Lublin, so later she could save me (from the Majdanek), but that's a later consequence of that.

My dad stayed alone with grandfather on the farm, and grandfather squandered that farm to a large extent. I mean, it was already in a very poor condition, but when my father got it following my grandfather...

That's also important, because hardly anyone knows that before the war, we have a certain idealised image of the Second Polish Republic [1918 – 1939], there was banditry. Grandfather was murdered in 1938 by bandits who thought he had money with him. And dad, as a young boy, was left alone on the farm. So (...) my grandfather died early, but at the same time he was well remembered, he was remembered as the kind of farmer with a hat and so on. My father largely took over the cultural patterns of my grandfather. He also considered himself a terrific farmer, was proud of it and so on. I have always liked it, I liked that there is some sense of value in it.

They were peasant (in the area) already in earlier times, in the 1860s that village of course lived under serfdom². It wasn't very severe serfdom, as that village was subject to a Franciscan monastery in the Solska Forest, but nevertheless it was serfdom. And it wasn't until 1864 or 1865 that Tsar Alexander enfranchised peasants, in my village too. And in honour of the fact that they were enfranchised, my village, which previously

² Serfdom – obligatory forced and unpaid work in the form of feudal service, performed by peasants for the benefit of the landowner.

was commonly called Czostek – that’s what everyone used to say: “In Czostek”, and: “Where are you from?” – they asked me. “You are from Czostek.” – adopted the official name “Aleksandrowska Swoboda” (“Alexander’s Freedom”), to honour Tsar Alexander who freed us. This also is somewhat controversial because those were the times of the January Uprising³. The peasants were happy because they were given land while at the same time in a church, in a nearby monastery, a mile away, monks supported insurgents. So it’s all quite complicated but that sense of pride kept the whole village going.

That was my father's side, that was the place where I was born and lived. However, on my mother's side, my mother came from another village, also near Biłgoraj. That village was called Różnówka. My mother also came from a large family, a poor family, because her father, my grandfather, was murdered as well. Someone else murdered him, in another place, it was also a murder.

Jarosz: He was also killed by bandits?

Wujec: Yes, he was killed by bandits who wanted to rustle some horses, take something of that kind. They lived close to a forest, and my mother wasn’t able to finish primary school, although she was a good student, because her grandmother told her: “You must be on the farm, you must help.” And she sent her to work in France. As a teenage girl my mother went to France to work to earn a few pennies to support a large family.

Jarosz: It happened before the war?

Wujec: Yes, before the war. And when she came back from working there, from France, the family Areopagus decided that she had to get married, and they chose her a bachelor, that is, my dad. There were no choices there and she got married to my dad and then she lived in the countryside.

So there were two different (family) lines, but I am closer to this local line from the village of my father. There I also met my grandmother’ brother, his name was Wojda, Jan Wojda. He was the best farmer in the village – a neighbour who ran an exemplary farm, who even subscribed to newspapers. I used to visit as a child, because he told cool stories. He had beehives, he also had a radio, even in 1945 or 1946, but it wasn’t a radio with a winder, but a so-called crystal radio, a crystal which you could touch. It was the most primitive radio. When Marconi invented radio in Italy, it looked more or less like that – there were two poles with large wires, because it was a long-wave radio and the energy of the radio wave itself transmitted voice to headphones – it wasn’t powered by batteries. So he was a really enlightened farmer. And that's why my memories are focused mainly on that village.

Jarosz: Could you describe your childhood as happy and safe?

Wujec: It was absolutely miserable in terms of standard of living, because, for example, even as a small child – now it’s not like that, but then a child was treated as part of the

³ The January Uprising – an insurrection in Russia’s Kingdom of Poland aimed at the restoration of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. It began on 22 January 1863 and lasted until 1864.

family workforce. And from a very early age (the child) was expected to help with all the work they could handle. For example, from the age of three and a half I had to watch over the cows. And when I was four years old, I would dig potatoes. Then I helped with threshing and all the other rural work. So I was busy, I was a hard-working little boy, but I appreciate it very much, because it taught me physical endurance, gave me physical strength, so now I'm not afraid of anyone, I have strength. I don't have an aggressive character, I don't like to fight, but I can defend myself, if need be.

I believe there was a certain culture of rural life, an imposed ethic of life which required you to live in a community. You can't try to be self-sufficient, you can't live alone, because otherwise you can't cope. If you want to run a farm, you have to invite others to help with the threshing. And then you help others thresh. And then you help others do the same. The same with the harvest, the same with other work. A community is created and a feeling is created that cannot be valued monetarily, because it cannot be counted. You feel obliged to help those in need of help. It grows into your psyche, so then when you see someone who needs help, you must act.

Jarosz: Do you have any object which you keep as a souvenir from your childhood?

Wujec: Do I have a souvenir from my childhood? I don't have many photos, because photos were rarely taken then, although they existed before the war, so they weren't new at that time. I have pictures of my first, beloved house, which was miserable, because it was a cottage consisting only of a small room, a pigsty and a barn. Everything under one roof. Next to the cottage there was a beautiful tree – an elm. Now elms are rare in the countryside. On one of the photos there's me sitting in a pram which my dad made for me – that's my beloved childhood photo.

Jarosz: All right. Now I would like to move on to your schooling. How do you remember your schooldays? What is your most vivid memory of that period? What was the most important thing you learned at school?

Wujec: For the sake of my mother's glory... My mother herself couldn't go to school as a child, she suffered all her life, because she felt inferior to others who could write. She could, but quite poorly. She could also read, but also poorly. So, she sent me to school when I was five and a half years old. Thus, the current discussions about whether six-year-olds can be sent to school are somewhat abstract to me, because I was five and a half years old when I started going to school, and it didn't do me any harm. On the contrary, it helped, because it imposed an obligation to learn. There were no books in my house, nothing. There was no radio, no television, it was a village. Our light source was a kerosene lamp. So, it was important that my mother sent me to school because it forced me to learn.

My education was divided into two stages: for the first three years I used to learn in a neighbouring village. It was right after the war. There was no school. Lessons were held in a peasant's home. Farmers would move to the kitchen, and a living room, which was larger, and made available for the pupils, and that's where we learned. Often lessons for two or three classes were held simultaneously due to the lack of space. Nevertheless, it forced me to learn arithmetic and writing. I didn't learn to write well, I

still scribble, but I learned to read and I liked reading. I got to like that you can learn something from books. So I used to nag my mother to buy me a book. And finally my mother bought me a book in town.

Jarosz: So, what was your favourite book?

Wujec: At first there was no book. The first book was a children's book. I don't remember the title, but I think it was *A History of Flax*, a story about how flax was invented, how it became a useful material. It was described in such a way that children could understand it. There were also illustrations. I read this book and people in the village – like I said, it was a life in a community – would ask: “Hynieku, what are you doing? My name is “Henryk”, but they used the diminutive “Hynieku”. What are you reading in this book? What's in it?” Everyone was curious, they wanted me to tell them the content of the book because they couldn't read themselves. So, I would tell them what I read, and I liked that too.

Jarosz: And your favourite book was?

Wujec: My favourite book was that first one, and then I didn't have another book [for a long time]. For the first years I studied in Dereźnia, in that neighbouring village. Then my mother came to a conclusion – all the time trying to achieve her goal of providing her child with an education, so that he wouldn't be in a worse situation than other children, so that he wouldn't feel handicapped in relation to others – that after completing these three classes I should continue my education at a school in Biłgoraj. It was about three kilometres away from my house, I had to walk every day to primary school, to the city centre. Now Biłgoraj is a city, then it was a small town. So that was the next stage. There I really got a more serious education.

And I cannot say that I had a favourite book, but I actually remember one book. I went to church, along the way to school there was a church, first there was the parish church of Puszcza Solska, and then you had to go a mile to school. And there was a parish library in that church where I borrowed various books. One day I borrowed a book about astronomy, by an English author, and I liked it a lot, because it included pictures of nebulae, stars, asteroids, etc. And it was well described, how rich this world is, and suddenly I realised that looking at the sky I can see a lot more than before.

Anyway, it should be pointed out that nowadays a child who lives in a city can't see the stars because they are obscured by light – electric and other. As I said, there was no electricity in the countryside at the time. The countryside was dark, but the sky was bright, so the sky was starry, fantastic, especially in winter, so it was a pleasure to look at. And that deepened my knowledge of the sky even more, made me curious about what is really there. And these were the first traces of my interest in physics and astronomy which were expanded much later in high school in Biłgoraj. Thanks to that, I decided to study physics.

Jarosz: So you went to school in Biłgoraj, right? And did you still go to school every day on foot?

Wujec: First, I walked, but then my dad repaired his bicycle which he had owned since before the war. There were bikes in the countryside then, and it was a typical bike. I learned to ride it because it was a bicycle with a frame. As a child, I couldn't reach the pedals, so I learned to ride under the frame. I don't know if anyone can ride this way today because it's difficult. After a while my dad allowed me to ride this bike to school and this was great progress.

Jarosz: You were a good student?

Wujec: I was a very good student. Maybe not the best one, but it was a source of satisfaction for me that when I moved from this village school to Biłgoraj, other children would ask me: "Why did you move here?" And I answered: "Because the level of teaching here is higher, so my mother thought I should go to school here." And then they said: "Higher level? You are better at maths than we are."

Indeed, I had mathematical skills and teachers also saw this very quickly. They could tell when someone was good at something. And very often, when there was an inspection visit at school, they would call me up to the blackboard because they wanted to show off. I wasn't always able to answer correctly, but sometimes I did. Sometimes a teacher would also use me and call me – at that time I had, I don't know why, I don't have it now, curly hair – "You, Perm, solve this equation for me 'cause I don't want to do it. Solve it!". So I would solve the equation for him and gave him the solution so that he would have it ready before the start of the lesson, and so on.

The teachers liked me. Because in the countryside there was also, I do not know if it still exists, a duty of humility. Children were supposed to be humble, were supposed to obey their parents, when children went to someone's house they couldn't just enter. They were supposed to say: "Praised be Jesus Christ," "Amen forever," and only then go in. It was a whole ritual of proper behaviour. I showed this obligatory politeness at school too and the teachers liked it. Not always, because sometimes as a result of some idiotic children's jokes I got in trouble with these teachers. But that rarely happened, so the teachers liked me, so I had a good name.

Interestingly enough, the school in Biłgoraj had many students who came from nearby villages, so there weren't only city children. There was a clear distinction between city children and us, children from the countryside. We felt a little bit inferior because we were less well dressed and sometimes we would speak in dialect, which made others laugh and embarrass us, especially when a teacher called one of us to present in front of the class, and they used an unknown word. For example, I once said that "they couldn't catch me in the village, because I am *świtki*" [fast]." No one understood what *świtki* meant. The other time I said that I had to do *ino*, but *ino* was a word which didn't exist.

I remember a case like that, but I didn't feel very bad about it because I knew that I'm doing fine, that I am stronger than them, that I'm immune to everything. I felt this, this internal strength, so I didn't have too many complexes. I had hidden complexes due to the fact that girls weren't interested in me, etc. There was some anxiety in me, but I hid it very deeply. Since many of us were from the countryside, we competed with each

other. I had a friend from a neighbouring village, Jasiu Okoń was his name, who was a son of a blacksmith, so he belonged to a certain rural elite, because blacksmiths are very important in the countryside. And he was also very talented and he competed with me, he was ambitious, he wanted to be number one. And sometimes we competed with each other, but I didn't feel worse when I came second or third, although I took pride from being good.

Jarosz: And how was it that you started to study physics and why did you choose that particular university?

Wujec: At school, teachers have a great influence on their students. There are such teachers.

Jarosz: Did you have a teacher who played a special role in your life?

Wujec: I did. It was Adam Rottenberg, a physics teacher. A young teacher who cared, who wasn't the kind of teacher who just wants the work done any old how. He wanted to inspire us, to show us the richness of this physical world. And his physics classes consisted not only of having to learn by heart some formulae, but also of giving us a certain understanding of these physical phenomena. I really liked that thanks to that, my understanding of the world was expanding.

In addition, he had a lot of interesting books and invited us to his home to show us books I had never seen before. These were some philosophy books that I normally had no access to. I tried to read them, but it was too difficult for me. Anyway, I felt that this is something very interesting and that this is one of the things for me to consider when thinking about further education. So when I had to choose a field of study, I thought that I would study either philosophy, but I was afraid because I thought I lacked knowledge, or I would become an athlete, that is I would go to the Academy of Physical Education, because I tried to be a good athlete, I used to train running, or as a compromise between philosophy and sport I would choose physics, because that's physical education, that is, physics, science and philosophy. So I decided that this would be the most appropriate option and I chose physics.

But I didn't go to Warsaw right away because I was afraid I would not pass my exams. To be admitted to the Faculty of Physics, you had to pass exams in mathematics, physics and some other subject, I don't remember what else. Therefore, I submitted documents only to the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and I was admitted there. There I became a first-year student. It should be taken into account that I started school education a year and a half earlier than other children, which had both its advantages and disadvantages. The advantage was that I was more absorbent and devoured all available knowledge. The disadvantage, on the other hand, was that I was inexperienced and stood out a bit. At that time, a year and a half was a lot. I was shorter and the others disregarded me physically, so to say. That's how it was.

Jarosz: And how did you perceive other countries at that time? For example, was there any country that you admired?

Wujec: Probably not, I had no idea. I mean, I was taught in geography lessons that there are other countries, and I tried to have the best grades in all subjects. I also had to study capitals. I don't know if you had it at school too, but there was a children's game which went like this: you had to say, for example the name of the capital of Brazil, and show its location. Or: What is the name of the capital of Argentina? You had to answer quickly in front of a map – students would ask each other questions. That's how we learnt, but I can't say that I had a favourite country then.

I however participated in an anti-Soviet, anti-communist prank once. You know, children fool around sometimes. That prank almost ended tragically for me. It was a few days after the 5th of March 1953, the day when Comrade Stalin died. It wasn't announced immediately. One day it was announced in a form of a message distributed among schools. In those days, special ceremonies were held every day at school before lessons began. It was a compulsory element of communist civic-patriotic education.

That day, one of the students was reading out the news and we stood in the school corridor and listened to it. The mood was serious because it was announced that Comrade Stalin had died. I'm not sure if the teachers were crying, but it's possible that they did. The mood was serious, we sang some songs. We always sang a song during those ceremonies. It could be for example: "Forward, young people of the world, fraternal union joined us today, dangerous years will pass, hey, who's young, get up and fight!", or the Internationale: "Arise ye wretched of the Earth" etc. We probably used to sing hymns too, but not so often. And on that day we sang as well, after that sad ceremony had ended, but for us it wasn't so sad because we were children. I was in Year 7.

We went into our classroom and a friend of mine whom I liked very much, who I used to share a bench with, said: "Look at that wall, what's written there?" And written on it was: "Long live Comrade Stalin, the ensign of peace, the chief of humanity, the role model, the leader etc" – all these adjectives. My friend said: "It says 'long live', while he is dead. You should tear it off, so that it says: 'Comrade Stalin is dead'." And I said: "You're right". I was clever, so I climbed on a tiled stove and ripped off the letters "ch", thanks to which the inscription was changed to: "Comrade Stalin is dead" ["niech żyje Stalin" to "nie żyje Stalin"]. When our teacher came in and saw it, she turned pale, froze, speechless, because she was mature and knew what that could lead to. We, on the other hand, were just kids. She asked: "Who did this?" Silence. "Who did it?". She says: "All right, I'm going to fetch the headmaster." And she went to the headmaster, and we were terrified. Fortunately, nobody denounced me. When the headmaster arrived, he looked at the wall and said: "Oh, okay, please move the class to another room." He was smarter and knew that instead of digging into it and investigating, it would be better to brush it under the rug. Immediately. Nobody mentioned it anymore, the inscription disappeared and I survived. But if it turned out that I did it, I would probably have been thrown out of school.

Jarosz: It happened during the school day?

Wujec: It was the first lesson, 8 or 9 o'clock, right after that celebration. Year 7 of primary school. I wouldn't have been admitted to any high school. It would have been the end. I would have stayed in the countryside. So you can say that this was my first anti-state antics.

Jarosz: And when did you get your first job? Did you work during your studies? Or only after graduation?

Wujec: Since I was good at maths, parents of other students often asked me for help. First, I went to teach a boy who was quite nervous, I don't know why. I couldn't understand it, but I felt it. Still, I tried to teach him. Then I used to teach a friend of mine who had problems at school and in order to cope somehow develop a method of learning everything by heart. If he was told to solve a task he knew by heart, it was great, but when he got a task he didn't know, he would break down. He nevertheless passed his final exams, so I was pleased.

Another of my students was a friend of mine who also had problems at school. Some students faced difficulties at school because schools in the countryside offered a lower level of teaching and although country children were talented, it was hard for them. I met that friend recently. We hadn't seen each other for about 40 years, but we did meet recently. She reminded me that it was thanks to me that she graduated from high school. I didn't remember it myself. So, these were my first attempts. And I think I even helped for free, or for some candy or something else like that, but I don't remember it exactly anymore.

Jarosz: And your first serious job?

Wujec: When I lived in Warsaw, I gave tuition. After the first year of studying in Lublin, I moved to Warsaw and studied physics there. It was very hard. To survive, I gave tuition, but it was already paid tutoring. I dealt with it sometimes better, sometimes worse, but I tried. But my first serious job was the job at the Tewa semiconductor factory in Służewiec. I started working there after graduation, probably in 1968.

Jarosz: What was your position at that factory?

Wujec: First, I worked as some kind of an intern in the quality control department, then I became a controller, and then I got promoted. As a result of completing some additional studies, I became the head of the reliability research laboratory in the quality control department of the Tewa semiconductor factory.

Jarosz: Do you remember what you bought with your first salary?

Wujec: I don't remember what I bought with my first salary, but I remember one important thing: namely, that when I worked in that quality control department, I wrote a paper for a competition organised by a certain association, the Association of Polish Electrical Engineers and Electronics, something like that, and I got the first prize. For this I was awarded a colossal sum of money, as per the conditions of the time, about 20,000 or several thousand zlotys. It completely stunned me. One day a postman came to my house and said: "I have a postal order for you, please sign it here." I signed it and then he started to pay me out a lot of money. I said to him: "Can you tell me where

this money comes from?" "I don't know" – he replied. "Perhaps it's written somewhere in the letter" I looked at it closely and then noticed an inscription: "Association of Electricians". "Oh," – I said. "I forgot about it, it was a while ago. I got a prize." That award allowed me and my wife to go to Sweden in 1973 to holiday there. In those days, my wife used to work at a school and I used to work at the Tewa factory. We took a vacation and went to Sweden. It was our first serious foreign trip.

Jarosz: Did you go to Sweden as a tourist or to work?

Wujec: As tourists. In those days it was possible to travel, it was the Gierek era. If someone had dollars, he could go abroad, but it was necessary to apply for a passport as we weren't allowed to keep passports at home. If you had money, you could buy dollars. You had to submit an application to a tourist office and there some kind of a lottery took place. I was lucky to win this lottery and my wife too. She bought 100 dollars, and I bought the same amount. Thanks to that we could go to Sweden. And once you catch that thread, you can't let it go. In Sweden I worked illegally on a farm. I earned a lot of money there that I could spend on the next trip.

Jarosz: So that was your first trip?

Wujec: Yes, that was the first time. Right away, right away. I knew why I was going to Sweden.

Jarosz: Oh, ok in that sense.

Wujec: So it wasn't the money from the first payment, but it was the first serious money I got for work. I went to colleagues and boasted about it, because it was related to my work, the work I sent to the competition.

Jarosz: Was that job in Sweden the only time you worked abroad or were there other trips like that?

Wujec: No, in 1975 I went to Sweden again for the second time, for the money I earned then, and I earned money there again, but not only.

Me and my wife had this thing about us that we weren't afraid of anything. And so we went to the Arctic Circle in Sweden, to see what life is like there, in empty Swedish spaces. That place is called Sarek Park (a national park in Sweden). This was our great adventure and we wanted to continue it, but in 1975, they took my passport away for signing a letter of protest and didn't give it back to me again. I couldn't travel abroad until 1989.

Jarosz: And how has this work affected your life?

Wujec: It gave me a lot of experience. My wife had already worked at school before and it had been our primary source [of income]. (...) In 1967 my wife and I, so to speak, decided to live together and at the beginning I was still [in the process of] graduating. In a sense I was [financially] dependent on my wife until I started to work at Tewa. I owed it [the job] to my fellow physicists who already worked there. They took me in, otherwise I wouldn't have worked there. It wasn't so easy to find work, you had to have friends somewhere.

And that job was terrible at first because it was work in socialism. Work in socialism, in an industrial plant, was not some job where, like now, we come and have things to do, but it was basically just spending time. There was sometimes work to do, but in general I felt so hopeless that I would come here all my life, drink tea, talk to colleagues, and [do] nothing. My knowledge was for nothing, it is useless here, well, maybe I will slowly earn something, but there was a bit of a sense of hopelessness. This feeling also applied to that system which did not reward creativity. Or rather, sometimes it did, but you had to join the Polish United Workers' Party [communist party which governed the People's Republic of Poland], and I didn't want to join it for any treasures.

Jarosz: And if you could choose again, would you choose the same profession and the same studies?

Wujec: As for studies, certainly, yes – I would study physics. But I would be smarter and study more than then. These are obviously difficult studies. To make you understand, because it is important in my opinion: as I said, because I started a little earlier, and from the countryside, I was at a lower intellectual level than urban youth, even in Biłgoraj, because, as I said, there was no book. There was only the so-called “*kolkhoznik*”, that is, a loudspeaker that broadcast regular programmes from Biłgoraj to the entire *powiat* [county]. Speakers appeared in the cottages, and there were poles, wires, etc., but they were all focused on the first programme, so that was all. There was nothing else from morning to evening, because if a peasant had a speaker, he wouldn't turn it off anymore. It was on all the time, so it was some extra knowledge, and yes, he benefited from it a lot, because yes, there were, for example, sports broadcasts, the Eterek Theater⁴ of Jeremi Przybora [TV author], which was fantastic, I remember it from there, I liked it.

But the level (of access to information) was much lower. And when I came from this village to the primary school in Biłgoraj, then high school, I felt the barrier and distance, I felt that I had to overcome it, that I had to match this youth. And while I was good at maths, I did a little worse with other subjects, but thanks to some effort and perseverance I was able to succeed.

When I came to Lublin, this barrier appeared in front of me again. In Lublin I had a close friend whose name was Marek Tabin [member of opposition and Solidarity]. He was fantastically educated, knew literature and music. I envied him and studied a lot in that dorm. I didn't have many books there, but I tried. And when I went to Warsaw, this shock was even greater, but it was still a shock in the field of physics; shock that there are such talented people, that they can solve problems, that they know so many interesting things, and I can hardly get near them. That is why I studied a lot again, but not in the sense of “swotting”, because I hated learning by heart, but in the sense of understanding – I tried to understand. And gradually I did begin to understand, so this absorbing of physics was for me such an opening of the world, it allowed me to

⁴ Eterek Theatre – satirical radio broadcast aired on the Polish Radio from 1948 to 1956, created by Jeremi Przybora.

understand not only physics itself, but also everything else, because all our understanding is based on physics. So of course, I would choose physics again.

Jarosz: Well. We are about halfway through our conversation, and now [I would like to talk] a little bit about political and social issues. When you were a young man or even a child, did politics come up at home? Did you talk about politics and these issues “over the dinner table”?

Wujec: No, there were no discussions about politics. There were sometimes fearful statements, for example about my distant relative who was arrested. It was right after the war. He was in the Home Army. He was a young boy, he was kept somewhere [in custody], and then he was released, so nothing terrible happened, but nevertheless, then, there was [the thought] that one should be very careful about words so as not to be exposed. And that's why that antic with Stalin was dangerous, but fortunately no one reported me. But it appeared in the countryside at various times: “Don't talk about it,” “Don't say it,” so there was fear. However, where this fear came from, we knew very little as children. It was: “You can't,” “You'd better not,” “Don't talk about it,” etc.

In Biłgoraj I didn't belong to any (political) organisation. Yes, I dreamed of becoming a member of the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP) [youth mass organisation]. Why? Because there was a rumour among the students that if you don't belong to the ZMP, you won't be admitted to high school. And that's why I specially went to the ZMP county office to sign up, because I wanted to study. I didn't know yet. Moreover, my mother also thought that I should study. And they told me that I was good, but “You are too young, child” – because I was too young. “And you will come back later”. And it was lucky that it happened because I managed to get to high school without being a member of the ZMP.

Jarosz: So ultimately you didn't become a member.

Wujec: I didn't, so I didn't belong to any organisation. The first moment when something appeared in politics was in 1956.

Jarosz: That's exactly what I wanted to ask.

Wujec: In 1957 I finished high school in Biłgoraj, I was 16 years old. And how did it manifest itself? It manifested itself in such a way that, for example, I used to go both to a parish library and a city library to read newspapers. I read all possible newspapers to broaden my knowledge. There was a journal *Po prostu* [Plainly] which was the voice of that transition period. It published articles by, for example, Leszek Kołakowski. I realised that these are important articles. I tried to read them, but there were too many foreign words which I didn't understand. It fascinated me a lot, but I didn't understand it. I tried to read, I knew it was very important, but I didn't really understand what he wanted to say.

The last page, on the other hand, was humorous, it was a satire mainly on socialism, prescriptive socialism, that claptrap, and so on. That I could understand and I liked that the journal mocked what we experienced every day. So I began to draw some elements of political knowledge from that journal.

One day, the headmaster came to our class, his name was Dyrka and he taught civic education. He came with a student from Lublin and said that he had specially come to us and to Biłgoraj to encourage us to join the Youth Revolutionary Union, because the ZMP was ending, because it was compromised and therefore a new union was being formed – the Youth Revolutionary Association (ZRM). I didn't know it then, but I learnt in time that that union was formed in Warsaw on the initiative of Kuroń and Modzelewski [leaders of the democratic opposition], but later expanded to Lublin. And it was from Lublin where that student came to encourage us to join. I found it extremely interesting that someone comes, criticises, offers something new. I was even eager to join the new union, but that student only told us about it, he didn't register anyone. And then it was dropped. The authorities probably cancelled this organisation.

There was also the ZMS [Union of Socialist Youth], but I didn't join it because I didn't like it too much, it reminded me of the ZMP. Therefore, I didn't belong to any union. Anyway, the first signals that something important was happening in Poland were the events in Poznań. I was quite interested in it, but I didn't have any special intentions. I just wanted to have some information and knowledge. And then, when I studied in Lublin for the first year, I was mainly involved in physics. I also tried to attend philosophy lectures at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University and the Catholic University of Lublin⁵ to learn more, because I was generally hungry for knowledge. That was the most important thing. I don't remember having any contact with politics there.

Jarosz: And what or who influenced you in such a way that you became interested in politics? Or shaped your political views?

Wujec: Moving from Lublin to Warsaw was probably the decisive step for me. Because, as I said, after the first year of study thanks to Marek Tabin (I moved to Warsaw). He also wanted to study at a higher level, at a better university. Although the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University was good, it was known that in Warsaw there was Infeld⁶, and Infeld, it seems, cooperated with Einstein, that was the rumour. And so Marek persuaded me to move to Warsaw immediately after the first year. And we moved.

We lived in a dormitory on Anielewicza⁷ Street, Mordechaja Anielewicza 10a, close to the monument to the heroes of the ghetto. That dormitory was a melting pot. We didn't live in isolation, on the contrary, there were six of us, no, there were four of us, because there were six in Lublin. Four of us were in one room (...) and we had interactions, joint conversations. In the next room there were also four [other students], and in the next also four as well, so there was a lot of getting to know each other, discussions, and I had that desire, as I say all the time, I was hungry for knowledge. I wanted to understand as much as possible. And therefore, together with that friend Marek Tabin

⁵ The Catholic University in Lublin.

⁶ Professor Leopold Infeld – a Polish theoretical physicist who specialised in general relativity as well as in the field theory and electrodynamics theory.

⁷ Mordechaj Anielewicz – the leader of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

we founded a discussion club. We founded it in the second year of physics, we, the guys from the province.

Jarosz: What year was it?

Wujec: 1962 more or less, something like that, I'm not sure. We founded a discussion club in the dormitory with the consent of the director, under the aegis of the ZSP⁸, because we belonged to the ZSP. The ZSP wasn't political at that time, it was just a kind of student union. At least at this faculty level there was no ideology. Probably higher, at the university level, national level, there was ideology, but we didn't reach that high. And we joined in and started a discussion club.

Well, here politics began. Why? Because at the start we invited Marxists, philosophers whom we knew. During the inter-semester break, I went to Lublin voluntarily, for a philosophical week at the Catholic University in Lublin. I went to meet people there, to listen. We invited the most interesting (teaching) assistants to the dormitory. There was a guy named Raimko, he is still a philosopher. He agreed to come to our meeting and proposed a title: "A man in a crucible of alienation". A lot of students came. We were so green, we knew nothing, but it was already happening.

And then it occurred to me that for balance we should also invite a priest. That's how I met Father Dembowski who later became widely known in the circles of the Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej [Club of Catholic Intelligentsia]. I asked him to tell us about catholic philosophy. He agreed and so we started to advertise the meeting on posters. When the party found out that students had invited a priest to a dormitory, a scandal broke out. It was a shock for them because they were fighting the church. So they decided to prevent it. They called us for questioning to the SB headquarters, near the Mostowski Palace. I was a little scared, I didn't understand why the SB was involved.

They threatened me that if I continued doing what I was doing, I would go back to minding cows. That's what an investigating officer told me. This outraged me so much that all my life I felt resentment against the SB. Because he treated minding cows as something bad. And there's nothing bad about it, it's honest work. I felt contempt, I felt that he despised herding, and that I despised him. I felt contempt, felt that he despised those who must mind cows, and I despised him. That stayed with me. It was a lesson in politics.

In addition, that investigating officer boasted that he had informers who reported on our actions to him. That disgraced him in my eyes completely. Then we were called to the rector who banned the meeting. That taught me that our horizons were very limited. It was a collision. And then one of my friends who attended the club meetings said: "Look, there's a guy who heard about you" – because we've become famous. "He knows that you were interviewed and wants to meet you."

We agreed to meet this guy in a cafe, and that was Jacek Kuroń, who at that time was an assistant at the University of Warsaw. He did not know us, but he learned that some

⁸ ZSP – Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich, a communist student organisation founded in 1950, in 1973 transformed into the Socialist Union of Polish Students, reactivated under its former name in 1982.

young people founded a discussion club and that a scandal broke out around this club. So he took us (under his wings). At that time, Kuroń organised young people ready to participate in revolutionary activities. At that meeting, he immediately presented us the entire scenario, without further ado. He said that soon a revolution would break out in Poland, because workers were ready to rebel. He had some contacts at the FSO car factory, nurses rebel, young people rebel, so soon a revolution will break out for which one should prepare, there should be a programme. We were shocked because we didn't see any signs of revolution around us. Anyway, contact had been established.

Kuroń invited us to his home. He had books there. I borrowed Djilas' *The New Class* from him and some other books. *The New Class* was an analysis of the process of transforming a revolutionary idea into a bureaucratic class. It was written by a Yugoslav communist who was thrown out of the party by Tito [leader of communist Yugoslavia 1945 – 1980]. A good book. And I also liked Kuroń himself. I liked that this man wanted to achieve something and instead of just sitting and accepting everything, he thought, analysed, made plans. And although his revolutionary idea was crazy, it was an idea. Kuroń organised a political club at the University of Warsaw and invited me to come. I started going to the club's meetings and it became a school of public speaking for me, of public polemics, public discussion – I mentioned it when I talked about the Round Table talks⁹. The Auditorium Maximum is the largest auditorium at the University of Warsaw and that's where lectures took place. I sat there with no clue about what was going on and I noted everything because I wanted to remember everything.

I mention these notes intentionally because later, when I was interrogated by the SB, an *esbek* [term for an officer of the Służba Bezpieczeństwa – political police force] told me: "We sat next to each other." He also took notes. So that was this university, these were the first political contacts. It didn't happen immediately, because I didn't start this activity immediately, especially since Kuroń urged me to join the ZMS. And I said: "ZMS? But I go to church, to the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia". Joining the ZMS would be like signing a pact with the devil for me, so I said no.

Jarosz: And what was the ZMS?

Wujec: The Socialist Youth Union was the only such organisation then, because at that time only certain organisations were allowed: the ZMS, ZMW, ZHP [Polish Scouting Association] but they were all under party control.

Jarosz: And the ZMW is the Union of what?

Wujec: Of Rural Youth, yes. So they wanted me to join the ZMS. They said that we would take control of the ZMS and the ZMS would be ours. I told them: "Yes, but then they will arrest you all, throw you out, and I will be left in the ZMS alone." And he said: "So then you will quit." I didn't like it, so our contacts cooled down a bit. However, there still was something between us, various things. And when he wanted to have

⁹ The interview was recorded after a meeting of Ludwika and Henryk Wujec with young people during which they talked about the events backstage at the Round Table talks of 1989.

something done, he would look us up and say: "I want you to..." He knew that we were eager to work.

Jarosz: Under what circumstances did you later engage in opposition activities?

Wujec: Well, it was that first contact. Then Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski went to prison because of this letter to party members. I met also Michnik [editor in Chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*] there, who was younger, he still went to school and together with his friends he founded the Contradiction Hunter Club – that's what it was called. Professor Manturzewski [sociologist] was the patron of this club. You will find information about him in books, he was one of the most interesting sociologists of that period, and he supported them. They invited Schaff [communist activist and philosopher] to one of their meetings and had a heated discussion with him. On one occasion, they also invited young people from the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia, to which I belonged.

In the dorm, together with our friends, we created a kind of [circle], a small group who contacted the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia. So we went to one of those discussions and I met Michnik, Blumsztajn [journalist, opposition activist] and others there directly. I liked them very much because they were open and you could have great discussions with them, although I didn't agree with some of their ideas. I was a Christian, and I defended the faith, but not in a dogmatic sense, rather in the sense of ethical values conveyed by the Bible. I told them that these are important things and I'm not sure if I convinced them of anything, but Michnik, for example, later wrote the book *The Church, the Left: A dialogue*. So they were thinkers too, and they were repressed as well.

I was approaching the end of my studies and for various reasons I didn't write my Master's thesis on general relativity in due time (according to schedule). It was a very abstract thing. I thought that I didn't know enough about this theory, that I had to understand the whole depth of Einstein's theory and only then would I be able to start writing. So I delved into these studies until I lost my right to live in the dormitory. I was forced to organise things differently. It was a period of several years when I didn't study. I passed all my exams but I didn't have a diploma and I wanted to have it. To achieve this, however, I had to study the depth of physics. And I had no money, because my parents were too poor to support me, so I had to tutor. I tutored quite extensively to earn a living and at the same time it was a period where I shaped my life by myself. Finally, I could shape my life in such a way that I could think about life and experience. I was in my twenties then.

At some point I came to the conclusion that it was time to finish, so I decided to resume my studies. I went to professor Andrzej Trautman, he was a very good relativist, one of the best, a student of Infeld, who was a student of Einstein. He was good also in the ethical sense. I began to complete my studies. It was 1967, and I was still a student. And that's when my second start into politics happened.

Why? In 1967, Michnik and Szlajfer [economist and political scientist] were thrown out of university because of some interview, anyway, it was absolute nonsense. And we

signed a protest against the expulsion of our friends. I, a physics student, also signed it. And then, because they wanted to throw them out, we decided to organise a rally.

It was 8 March 1968. Straight from the Faculty of Physics I went with a group of students by trolleybus to Krakowskie Przedmieście to participate in that rally. I remembered Michnik as a very interesting man and besides I thought that students shouldn't be thrown out of studies for their views. So I took part in that rally and it became my second important experience, a very important one. Because I witnessed everything that happened afterwards, namely the beating of protesters. I wasn't hit myself, but I was shielding a friend of mine so that she wouldn't be hit. but anyway I was lucky. I saw how the ORMO reacted, and so on [the Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens' Militia].

But the worst thing was that after that experience, when students in fact didn't do anything wrong, they just organised a rally, an avalanche of lies and allegations appeared in the press the next day and the following days. The main theme was anti-Semitism. And that hit me so hard. I came from the countryside and I cannot say that there was a special sentiment for Jews there, but neither was there such anti-Semitism that peasants are now suspected of. They weren't anti-Semites from birth, it wasn't like that. Like I said, in my village Jews were remembered as people whom you did business with. It was said that Jews were very cunning, very wise, so if someone could deceive a Jew, he was smart. There was mutual rivalry, people were cheating on each other, but they were also doing business together: buying a horse, a tree, whatever. So there was some respect for the Jews, and there was some aversion based on religion as well, but there was nothing wrong with that. Anyway, that avalanche of lies was shocking to me, it was like an outpouring of trash. I thought then that this system must be ended because it's so deceitful and so full of inner meanness that it's impossible to live with it.

Added to this were personal circumstances. About September 1967, I met my current wife, whose maiden name is Ludwika Okręt, and she is of Jewish descent, but that came to light only later. Because then nobody talked about it. Someone came from the countryside, someone else from the city, the third lived somewhere by the forest. That was interesting, but it didn't play any role. And it was only this anti-Semitic campaign that forced us to define ourselves. And that element was significant, and then I felt morally obliged not to let them because they wanted to expel everyone abroad, that my fiancée would go abroad. We were together. Well, of course she didn't leave, and her mother didn't either, but her aunt did. Almost all of her family was killed in the Holocaust, almost everyone was killed. Only her younger brother survived – a close brother, but not her own, only a cousin, who later left for Sweden. And that aunt left for Sweden too. That was a real drama. I used to go to the Warszawa Gdańska railway station to say goodbye to those who were leaving, my friends etc. It all disturbed me. So that was a moment of a huge jump into politics, but politics in the sense of disagreement with what was happening.

Jarosz: If you could say a few words about your later activity as a “full-time” opposition activist?

Wujec: Alright. So that was 1968, and then I finished. I passed my exams and started working at that Tewa factory. In 1970, there were the events in Gdańsk. The shipyard workers are on strike. The authorities use the army to pacify the strike, they are shooting at people, they have tanks – because in Szczecin tanks were used. That was a shock for us working people, it demonstrated clearly that that system cannot be reformed. But then Gierek comes, a new man, and he doesn't say “comrades”, but “compatriots”, and asks: “Will you help me?” “We'll help,” the workers replied. A new face.

Suddenly there were some discussions on television, some openness. And in fact, I started to believe. I thought that maybe that man, not communism, but that man, maybe he'll do something, maybe he'll change that system, because he knew the West, he was a worker himself, he worked as a miner in Belgium before the war, he'd seen the world. He is on good terms with these western leaders, so maybe that will be OK. And it worked. During the first years of my work at Tewa, I hoped that maybe something would change. At that time, our colleagues, Michnik, Kuroń and others, came out of prison. We met them, after such prison trauma it's difficult but friendship remains.

And already in 1973, we began to realise that that hope was illusory, because the country was returning to the rails of a socialist, centrally controlled, ideological economy. That ideology said that the Polish United Workers' Party was the leading force, so it was decided to change the constitution to include a provision that all youth organisations should be united because we are one nation, one entirety, one organisation, one party etc. It was obvious that it was going in the same direction, that it would end again as tragically as in 1956 in Poznań, and in 1970 on the coast.

Those who had been already infected with the political bug before 1968, weren't indifferent. We already knew that this system is bad, that it needs to be changed somehow, but we did not know how. We created a kind of seminar, a regular seminar that brought together over 20 people. There were those who were imprisoned after March 1968, and those who, like me, associated themselves with the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia or with independent scouts such as the so-called “Black One” to which, among others, Antek Macierewicz, Piotrek Naimski, and Darek Kupiecki and Wojtek Onyszkiewicz [activists of the democratic opposition] belonged – that whole group.

We created a joint seminar where we discussed how the People's Republic of Poland came about, and what led to that, because first we wanted to understand and then think. And it was extremely important that we met, because thanks to that we got to know each other, we became friends, personal ties arose, a group of people was formed. We wanted to continue to study, but the course of events forced us to abandon our studies and to start something else.

First it was the year 1975 and the events surrounding the changes in the constitution. We signed a letter of protest and for that signature, they took away my passport. And in 1976, what we expected happened: protests of workers broke out again, this time in

Ursus and Radom. There protesters weren't shot at, but they were beaten and some were thrown in jail. And we, this diverse group of young people, participated in the trial of workers from Ursus in a court in Warsaw. It was in mid-July 1976. Apart from me and my wife there were also Michnik, Szlajfer, Kuroń and his wife Gajka, as well as Antek Macierewicz, Janek Lityński, Ludwik Dorn [activists of the democratic opposition], Ulka Doroszevska [advisor to president of Poland Andrzej Duda], Małgosia Łukaszewicz, and others. That was a diverse group of people, we liked each other, although we had different backgrounds. And that experience, participation in that trial, where we met workers' families, people different from us, because we were the young intelligentsia, I had a beard then.

Anyway, they were so crude, ill-dressed, tearful. They were terrified that the sentences would be high. For nothing, because there was nothing there, there were no charges. They just stopped a train. Can someone be sentenced to five years in prison for that? And we felt the need, such a drive, such a pressure, to approach them, to talk to them, and to tell that we would help, that there would be lawyers, because there were lawyers already, a whole group of lawyers who were ready to defend people for free. And it happened there, and then that spark jumped between these two groups. And in a sense, we did what we had considered before, but it hadn't been possible before. We knew that the reason for our defeats was that everyone protested separately – first students, then workers, and that the authorities divided us to deal with us separately. So we understood that this barrier between intelligentsia and workers had to be overcome.

And then there was a natural opportunity. Antek Macierewicz on the one hand, and on the other Jan Józef Lipski [activist of the democratic opposition] said that this initiative, which began there in that court corridor, must be continued among people in Ursus. Because from those families we learned that there were a lot of oppressed people there, that it wasn't just those five or seven people we saw at court, but many more, and we had to reach out to them. And then Antek Macierewicz became the main organiser of that support, he decided who went where. I also began to go. not immediately, because I had other things to do, we had a baby, we needed to go on holidays or something like that, but after two weeks I joined the action. It was the beginning of August. It was my baptism of fire in the sense that I not only wanted to do something, but I also began to do it. I went to Ursus with my friend almost every day. We reached all these families, we met them. Before, no one knew the course of events there. I wrote a report on the events and repression in Ursus.

Andrzej Wielowieyski [activist of the democratic opposition], secretary of the Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia, gave this report to Primate Wyszyński and in early September 1976 it was discussed at an episcopal conference. The episcopate passed a resolution condemning the repression, because the episcopate was humble, it did not condemn it loudly, but said that it was a mistake, that people needed, that they should be allowed to work, that they should be released from prison – they announced our demands. We later told families that the episcopate supported them. And thanks to that success many young people from the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia joined our

actions. They went to the families, we told them where to go. On the 23rd of September the official Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) [Komitet Obrony Robotników, opposition organisation] was established as some sort of a public representation of those who participated in the aid initiative. What's very important, the names of those who signed the declaration of the Workers' Defence Committee were publicly announced. Jerzy Andrzejewski [co-founder of Workers' Defence Committee] was first on the list. I don't remember his address, but I still remember Kuroń's address: Mickiewicza 27/64, phone number: 39-64-64. There were 15 such persons, and also Halina Mikołajska [actress and director, activist of the democratic opposition] was among them, Antek Macierewicz, Piotr Naimsk etc. It was that group that dared, and it was very important that it was public and that the declaration didn't state that we wanted to overthrow communism. No. I only stated that we would be helping until everyone was released from prison and could go back to work. This was the basis of this activity, and it launched the whole great process.

Jarosz: At what moment, in what circumstances did you get involved in the Solidarity movement? Was it a natural transition?

Wujec: It was a natural transition. Of course, it wasn't all nice and beautiful, but as a result the authorities. The authorities didn't execute us, it wasn't Stalinism, we weren't sent to Siberia, but there was that terrible harassment, it was something awful, scary. At some point in the 1970s, because those were the years 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, and so on, my home was searched almost every week. At six in the morning some guys would come, a whole group, and they would make a huge mess on the pretext that they were looking for something, but in reality it was just harassment. And then they took you for 48 hours to a "hole", first at the Mostowski Palace, which was relatively hygienic, and then to one of the "district holes". There was muck there, dirt, bed bugs, it was all terrible and you had to have a lot of strength to endure it to be able to continue your activity.

In this way, they managed to significantly weaken our movement which at first developed nicely, but then it turned out that not everyone could withstand the repression. We, nevertheless, continued. And our idea, the idea of those who started the initiative in Ursus, was that in all that there should also be a thought that would help to nurture the bonds between workers, that would serve as a link. And that was the journal *Robotnik* [workers journal] that we started publishing in 1977. The main idea didn't come from us, but from Moczulski and Świtoń [activists of the democratic opposition]. It was an idea to create founding committees of free trade unions. But we took over and propagated this idea. *Robotnik* was widely distributed in Poland. That was the main idea, and that was the key which dismantled communism in the world – first in Poland, then in the world.

How did it work? Poland signed the International Labour Organisation convention in 1956, and the State Council [supreme body of state power, collegial power of the state in the People's Republic of Poland] ratified it. The convention states that employees have the right to form a trade union based on a founding committee, and that they

mustn't be repressed. Nobody knew about this convention. Nobody knew this, but if there is a lot of traffic, there will always be a madman who will go, he will search until he finds. And he found it – that was Henio Bąk [activist of the democratic opposition], who issued the journal *Postępowanie* [Progress]. He found it, brought it, and showed it to us. And so we knew that we have the rights, that we have the international conventions ratified [by the state].

Shortly afterwards, probably in 1978, the Helsinki Agreements were signed, which contained the so-called “third basket”, which also mentioned that citizens have the right to form trade unions. All of that was fortified by an infinite number of regulations, conditions, etc., but we negated it and focused on the fact that we had the right to form trade unions. This was the legal basis, so a factory worker could say “we have the right.” He wasn't illegal, he was legal. He didn't agree with the party, but he was legal. It was the force that, of course, the SB fought against, harassed, they put people in jail, but it was them who broke the law – not us. We used what was. So that was the idea in which they were somehow defenceless, in a sense, especially when that idea was backed by the democratic western states, because it was peaceful, open. In Sweden, Olof Palme [prime minister of Sweden from 1969 to 1976 and from 1982 to 1986] said, and his special envoy came to us, to meet us, to meet the trade unions. It wasn't very strong, but it germinated slowly.

The strongest of these unions was founded in Gdańsk. Its founder was Borusewicz [former speaker of the Senate of Poland], but there were also Andrzej Gwiazda [one of the leaders of Solidarity], Anna Walentynowicz [activist of democratic opposition], and a certain Lech Wałęsa [president of Poland from 1990 to 1995]. That was in the 1970s. And so when the new wave of strikes came in the 1980s, it came inevitably, because there were economic difficulties because everything was centrally planned, and so they had to raise prices to meet demand, because they didn't supply people with food, so they raised prices. But the price increase caused resistance, strikes, and then those strikes followed a different path – not of this kind that people take to the streets, set fire to a party committee, and there is a shootout, because we taught them, in that *Robotnik*, how to organise a strike, how to found a strike committee, how to call the authorities for negotiations, how to start negotiations, how to fight for your demands.

And that was the path that the strike in the Gdańsk shipyard followed: first, a strike was announced, a strike committee was appointed, Wałęsa became its leader after he had jumped over the fence, etc. – all this legend, and then the demands. And Bogdan Borusewicz, our friend, who published *Robotnik* said that these demands were extensive, “but we sat with a whole group of young people, and we itemised them.” He says to me: “Guess what demand was on top?” I knew what was on top, because I read it – free trade unions. He says: “But you know it's no accident?” Because he was aware of everything. The first demand was: the right to form free trade unions. There were other demands, in total there were 21.

When that started to develop around this, they were ready to agree to any demands, such as allowing the live broadcast of Catholic masses on Polish radio. They signed it immediately. Salary increase – they signed it too. But that particular demand they didn't want to sign, because they knew that it would end badly for them if something free appeared, they knew that they would become hopeless. And we acted step by step, we travelled around the country, we campaigned, we published leaflets, and there was also Radio Free Europe.¹⁰ At the end of August 1980 the whole country stopped. I mean, almost the whole country stopped. Everywhere there was the threat of a strike, and they had the strike gun to their temples, so they signed it. And that's how the Solidarity movement came about. And we were in prison then – all of us.

Jarosz: Even at that point? Not after martial law? [state of emergency introduced on 13 December 1981]

Wujec: No. Right then, because they already knew that if they didn't lock us up, they couldn't stop the whole wave, but they locked us up too late. Too late, because the machine was already going.

Jarosz: "Us" means who?

Wujec: There were a dozen of us. We were kept in the prison at Rakowiecka Street [in Warsaw]: Kuroń, members of the Workers' Defence Committee and of the Movement for Defence of Human and Civic Rights – both. They took us, so to speak, equally. We were given a three-month detention, the decisions were signed by prosecutor Detka-Jackowska. Three months in custody. But in the end I was in custody for only four days, because on the 31st of August, no, it was the first of September. Prison officers came to our cells and said: "Leave!", "Leave!"

Jarosz: After the agreements?

Wujec: I knew nothing and they said: "Outside, outside, outside!" "You're free!" "But why?" We are staying there, no one knows why. I run to the kiosk, buy a newspaper, *Trybuna Ludu* [press organ of Communist Party] and there I read: "Agreements". I say: "Look!" Kuroń announces that he is going to Gdańsk. One of the strike demands was the release of [political] prisoners, which is why we were released. It didn't matter though, the important thing was that it was the moment when Solidarity was established, It was the moment of signing the Gdańsk agreements which included the right to create free trade unions. Theoretically, this only applied to the Gdańsk Shipyard, industrial plants in Gdańsk, because it was a joint strike committee, but who is so stupid to say that it is only Gdańsk. Agreements are universal, so the committees were quickly formed in various cities, and eventually everyone had to have a committee because it became a matter of honour. And this way the avalanche started. So Solidarity was a consequence of that struggle, but also of the fact that we developed a certain framework which assumed that we are establishing trade unions, not a party,

¹⁰ Radio Free Europe - a radio station founded in 1949 by the US government and operating in Munich, whose purpose was to provide reliable information and news to communist countries and Soviet republics. Currently, the radio continues its activity and broadcasts in countries with undemocratic regimes. Its headquarters is in Prague.

we aren't preparing an uprising, but we are exercising the rights we already have. And this is how Solidarity was created, with its authorities etc. And the philosophy of peaceful action was the key all the time. Wałęsa never threatened or said that he would go there. He spoke of gradual changes.

Jarosz: And then, when martial law was imposed, were you also interned?

Wujec: Yes, yes. On December 13th I was detained in Sopot, because in Gdańsk we had a sitting of the National Commission. I had been elected to the National Commission at the Solidarity congress in September, in September-October 1981. I am proud of that. There were thousands of delegates there, thousands of delegates elected by committees in their workplaces and regions. I was elected in Mazovia. I was an active Solidarity member and I was very keen on it, I devoted myself entirely to this organisation. It still happens that someone meets me on the street and says: "I know you from Solidarity." They remember. It was a period of enlightenment by the Holy Spirit. And I was proud that I was elected to the National Commission. That was a sitting of the National Commission.

And when martial law was imposed, they decided to lock everyone up. As I said, it was perfectly prepared. An *esbek* was sent for each of us, from the region he came from. For me they sent an *esbek* from Warsaw, which I obviously didn't know about. He arrested me together with his friend from Gdańsk. It was an ordeal, I mean, it was terrible. We thought it was over. no one knew what it would end with. It was a blow to us, a very strong blow, but we could comfort ourselves with the fact that outside people continued to fight, that is, they organised demonstrations, published newspapers, and the secret organisation "Fighting Solidarity" was active. The struggle for our release went on, so hope returned. This hope was strengthened on the one hand by the tough stance of the West, which introduced sanctions, and said that it would not give any aid if there were no democratic reforms, and on the other hand the position of the Pope was very important to us. It was extremely important to us.

The Pope came to us, to Poland, for the first time in 1979. And that experience of meeting a million of people on the streets of Warsaw, people who peacefully, smiling, greeted the Pope as he walked through the streets. He rode in an open "popemobile". I was in this crowd too, and he drove past me. I had a forage of the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia. It was such a formative experience and in a sense Solidarity came about as a result of this, because it was a collective experience. There was no militia, they hid somewhere in the backyards, and the church guard was on guard along the Pope's entire route.

That experience of being there, on Victory Square – that was its name then – when the Pope uttered the words "Let your Spirit descend."¹¹ I was there, on that square, and it was an important experience for me, just like for many others. The Pope gave us hope, and he visited Poland again in 1983, during martial law. That was somehow controversial, because he had to meet with General Jaruzelski [Minister of National

¹¹The famous words spoken by Pope John Paul II during his first pilgrimage to Poland, during a mass on the Victory Square on 2 June 1979.

Defence in 1968-1983, first secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR from 1981 to 1989, chairman of the State Council from 1985 to 1989, leader of communist Poland, instigator of martial law 1981-1983, president of Poland from 1989 to 1990] etc., but the Pope was a very wise man and he came away unscathed from that. And he gave us hope. But even more important was his visit in 1987 when hope was dying, when people were sick of that torment, that anguish, that harassment. Afterwards in 1986 I was in prison for the second time. I was released in 1984 for the first time, I came to terms, I found a job and in 1986 they put me in prison again. Not only me, others too. So it was an experience of constant fear, repression etc. Solidarity no longer had 10 million members. It shrank to about 50,000 active people.

And then the Pope came in 1987 and a million Solidarity members from the whole country attended a mass at Zaspka in Gdańsk. Those less active came as well, and there were church pilgrimages and others. Everyone was curious about what the Pope would tell us and it was a shocking experience, because he was standing on a nave of the ship, it was such a structure that was supposed to resemble the Ark of the Covenant, and he repeated the word “solidarity” many times. He meant it in an ethical sense, in an evangelical sense, but everyone left that place with the conviction that solidarity could save us, that this idea cannot be abandoned, and that some solution must be sought in the strength of solidarity. This gave us an additional impulse, which in my opinion played an important role in bringing about the Round Table talks.¹²

Jarosz: We are approaching the end of our conversation, so I would like to ask about the Round Table negotiations. How did it happen that you became a participant in these negotiations? You played an important role in those events, so how did this happen?

Wujec: When I was released from prison in 1984 I got a job. That’s also interesting, but I won’t say how it happened, but I considered myself a man of Solidarity, and I felt obliged to stay faithful to Solidarity and to realise this legacy in some way. And since I possess some rural traits, an ability at mimicry, to blend in with people, I was able to become an intermediary between the public representation of Solidarity, between activists who acted openly, like Wałęsa, and secret structures in factories and the underground, that is, the Temporary Coordination Commission, or the structures like INEME, KRKS, KK. These were the underground structures. I had the idea that I can act as such an intermediary, because there must be some communication. Otherwise it cannot work. So I dealt with it and thanks to that I had many contacts.

Of course, I was followed, I was arrested. But when in 1986, after my second imprisonment, I was released, the authorities announced that they would no longer lock people up, that it was the end. It was a signal for us that we no longer need to act in the underground, that we can act openly, like in the times of KOR. At first it was 60 people, then about 100 who volunteered to create Citizens’ Committee with Lech

¹² The Round Table talks – negotiations regarding changing the state system, conducted between the communist authorities and the democratic opposition from 6 February to 5 April 1989. The result was partly free elections on 4 June 1989, which turned out to be the beginning of the end of communism in Poland and the commencement of building a democratic system.

Wałęsa. The first impulse came from the Pope's visit in 1987, to put it in historical perspective. Then we started to call it the Citizens' Committee of Solidarity with Lech Wałęsa which sounded provocative. Of course, we couldn't meet in private apartments, so we met in churches. For example, in a church at Żytnia street in Warsaw, the church of Divine Mercy, the church of Baby Jesus in Żoliborz, Priest Jędrzejczyk, the church of Priest Jankowski in Gdańsk. We met in churches, because the SB wouldn't go there, our operating structure was almost public. There had to be someone who does the work, who notifies, who knows what the agenda is, and so on. I was that person – Wałęsa chose me as secretary of the Committee. In December 1988, at the meeting of the Citizens' Committee, which was taking place in the Divine Mercy church, this election was even formalised. So I had a lot of work.

We split into teams, there were probably 14 teams: an economic team, a team which dealt with associations, a team which was supposed to prepare a legal reform, and so on. Our goal was to carefully prepare for possible negotiations with the authorities, because it was known that the authorities were weakening, and we were constantly repeating that we need to talk, because there is no other way out, that we must find a way out of this crisis through negotiations. As I said, the authorities were reluctant, of course. They would like to incorporate us into their system as a new element, but without permission to re-legalise Solidarity. It went beyond their horizons.

Our side in turn remained firm, and Walesa, in turn, said that he would not enter into any negotiations unless there was a preliminary agreement that the result of all this would be the legalisation of Solidarity. And they broke. It wasn't that easy because they had, for example, the Central Committee [the governing body of the communist party of the People's Republic of Poland] plenum in December 1988, which was interrupted because there was no agreement. The second part did not take place until January. Jaruzelski with blackmail forced them to agree on this form of agreement, on the legality of Solidarity and for the participation of Solidarity in partly democratic elections. This was more or less the shape of the [agreement].

Of course, I thought it was a path to freedom because I knew the state of Solidarity. I saw it, because I had thousands of contacts, including with young people – because young people were also looking for people from Solidarity with whom they could communicate. The Federation of Fighting Youth was established. I had contacts with them in Warsaw, I even organised a special meeting for them in Mokotów, because I had contacts there, I knew where to hide etc. I have friends from this youth so far, such as Mariusz Kamiński [head of the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau]. He was my colleague for some time. He is currently the head of the investigation service. But I also knew others. And they, some of them were already thinking about military operations, they had some Molotov cocktails. I told them "No" – not only me, Bujak [activist of the opposition], and others refused too. We said that it would end in a tragedy, we argued that we did not have the strength of a quarter-million strong Soviet army that is still stationed here and certainly will not be passively watching. Therefore, we can only do it peacefully, of course, acting together. A more rebellious generation had already grown up. They, in the party, also saw it because they had their insights.

In 1987 and 1988 we organised strikes again to repeat the Gdańsk scenario of 1980: we start a wave of strikes and force them, like before, to agree on legalisation of Solidarity, we put the strike gun to their heads, and it's over. But they suppressed all strikes. People were no longer so strong, they were afraid. And so we lost all the strikes. There were two strikes and we lost both. So it was obvious that we wouldn't win that way, that we wouldn't push them out, so we had to sit down [for negotiation]. They, on the other hand, knew that they wouldn't. They would have to reimpose martial law. Again? It didn't make sense.

In addition, a new ally appeared in the east – Gorbachev. It is also very important that he saw his Soviet Union was collapsing, he saw he can't sustain it, that this system had to be reformed, because it was losing the economic race with the Western world, and therefore Gorbachev agreed to some kind of experiment on this side, in the field of democratisation, to change this system in a democratic and peaceful way. He allowed it, he did not intervene. In a similar situation, Brezhnev would certainly intervene and impose martial law, while Gorbachev said: "Go your own way, comrades." He was here in Warsaw, so at that moment he was our ally because he allowed for the possibility of reforms.

Finally, there were the Round Table talks which weren't planned in advance. We know that we have to make a deal, that we want to come out of it with legalisation of Solidarity, while they have to show the apparatus that Solidarity has stopped smashing the system, that it accepts it – something like that. Negotiations lasted two months, they weren't easy. As a result it was agreed to hold a partially free election to the Sejm. Solidarity could only apply for 35% of the seats, the rest was reserved for the communists, plus a fully free election to the Senate. It may seem that we obtained very little, and that we agreed to too much.

However, as it turned out later, the final key was elsewhere – not in this agreement, but in the elections. The election on 4 June 1989 was the moment when we said "Check". The people had to decide. And we didn't expect to win – neither did I. Like I said, I was generally a man of work, everyone treated me like that. And when we had to form an election committee. We formed it on the basis of the Citizens' Committee I was talking about. There I was a secretary, so I became secretary of the election committee as well. [Local] election committees were formed throughout the country, like mushrooms after rain. There were 49 provinces and in each province [there was our election committee]. And in addition to provincial committees, they were also committees in counties. In total, there were several hundred of the citizens' committees. They were made up of mainly of Solidarity people, who gathered spontaneously, but in fact it didn't matter where you came from, but whether you were ready to work and take part in an election campaign.

Although there were only two months, we ran a very intensive campaign. You saw this poster with such a big, emerging flag – it was designed by an artist who was our friend, we distributed it. Ultimately, that June 4th turned out to be a knockout for the authorities – a public, political and a liberating knockout. And that's what we're so proud of – that

in some sense we managed to drive the authorities into a dead end. They counted on victory, but they screwed up.

Jarosz: Finally, in the last part of our conversation, I would like to ask you a few questions about more general and current issues. The result of your actions turned out to be freedom, so what is freedom to you?

Wujec: At first it was very important in the sense that finally we could decide for ourselves what was going on in Poland. And so it was that the economic reforms that Balcerowicz [former deputy prime minister and minister of finance of Poland, president of the National Bank of Poland] initiated, were done by us, that is, not by us, but by the parliament, etc., but these are our reforms. It was important that the democratic reforms, for example the reform introducing local government, were done by us and that we change this world completely. And it may still be crude, but the opportunities created by these reforms, the fact that every town began to develop and if you travel around these towns and compare them with what there was before. There is no comparison at all.

But now freedom is much more difficult. This is the kind of freedom where we are dominated by the world of media and internet, which introduces lies, hate, trolls, bots. It's all free. But all this often falsifies news and truth about reality, which is why freedom has become very difficult. And this is a new task that the younger generation will have to face. We can help, but it is up to them to figure out what to do with this world to save freedom.

Jarosz: What do you think of political issues? Has anything agitated you in recent years?

Wujec: First of all, the events in Poland, this attack on the independent judiciary. This is something brutal, but I absolutely understand it, because I know poor Kaczyński [Jarosław Kaczyński, governing Poland in the years 2005-2007 and since 2015] from the underground, from the times of Solidarity, martial law. I worked with him. I pity him because now it's like this: a prosecutor wants to put someone in jail, to investigate something. Now there is this scandal around the Polish Financial Supervision Authority. To divert our attention from these events, he arrested some people who had previously worked there and announced that he would investigate. But a court released them.

Can Kaczyński not be mad at this court? It spoils his plans, so what he can do? The court must obey legitimate political advice, just like in the times of the People's Republic of Poland, the court must perform such a task. So the courts need to be pacified. But how? From above of course. First the Constitutional Court, then the Supreme Court and then the National Council of the Judiciary. And he gradually implements this plan. For me this is shocking because he is my colleague from Solidarity. He does it because he wants to gloat over his power. This is in my opinion his main motivation. He wants to have power and derive satisfaction from the fact that everything depends on him. This is extremely harmful to Poland.

Jarosz: So what does being a citizen mean to you? After all, the Solidarity movement and your activity had a very civic dimension. How would you describe it?

Wujec: It is difficult for me to answer this question because I am already a pensioner. But I feel personally, emotionally attached to non-governmental organisations and to those activists who, all the time, regardless of the regime and the government, are trying to do something sensible in their environment, on their territory. I have a lot of such friends. Many of these people were activists of Solidarity, but they did not go into politics or to local governments. Instead, they stayed at the places where they are now, and are still trying to build a civil society.

For example, Jakub Wygnański is such a model for me. Not far from here is his foundation, the Stocznia Research and Social Innovation Laboratory. This is the place where various discussions and meetings take place. Kuba is faithful to this message. He is ready to talk to anyone, even to Kaczyński, if that can help to broaden the scope of citizens' rights. It is important for me to try to support those who work in this field. I try to do this by working with Kuba Wygnański [social activist], and also with Piotr Frontczak [social activist], who founded the National Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations (OFOP). If we are invited somewhere by some local organisations or by the Committee for Defence of Democracy, we go there and we try to convince local activists that they shouldn't lose hope. That their work isn't fruitless, that although it is possible that for some period of time that authoritarianism, that Kaczyński is building, will dominate, the pursuit of freedom will eventually win, just like in the past. We began as a small group, martial law lasted seven years, but eventually we won.

Jarosz: And what is your attitude towards the European idea? Do you feel European?

Wujec: It is very positive. I feel European.

Jarosz: When do you feel European and when do you feel Polish?

Wujec: I feel Polish, and as part of Europe, because Poland was shaped by Europe – by Christianity, by Greeks, by Romans. This whole legacy of Judeo-Christian heritage, Greek philosophy, Roman law, shaped Poland. As the Pope said, we are a part of Europe – of Eastern Europe, but it is still Europe. As Poland, we are a part of Europe, we contribute to Europe. And we should be an equal partner, but now because of this aggressive policy we are losing this status. We are losing our capabilities and we are losing the opportunities to influence Europe, also in a positive way. That is why I support our pro-Europeans with all my heart and I believe that it is necessary to cooperate at all costs with luminous European circles, such as Macron or Merkel. I value Merkel and Macron very much and I would like the European project to develop.

Jarosz: And how has Poland's accession to the European Union affected your life?

Wujec: It hasn't affected me that much, because it was my fulfilment. But in a sense it did, because before joining the EU, I was deputy minister of agriculture and I dealt with pre-accession programmes so that agriculture could benefit from it. And I'm glad that it has benefited.

Jarosz: Speaking of European topics, I would like to ask you at the very end of our conversation, how do you view the future?

Wujec: Pessimistically, I view it pessimistically, because I have no idea how to restore in our country a positive way of functioning of freedom – such, that freedom would build, encourage cooperation in the European Union, reform the country, give more rights to citizens, and let local governments have greater competences. How to do it, I do not know. I mean: I don't lose hope, but it is a difficult problem for me, I don't know how. The second problem is ecology, because as a physicist I take seriously the warnings that the future of the Earth is threatened by global warming. These are facts. According to researchers, in a few decades we can bring our civilisation to an end – not in the sense that everyone will die out, because some groups will remain. But the mechanism of global warming will start, which we can no longer stop because it is so strong that we are helpless. We can now. Now is the time. There are congresses to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, emissions that cause the destruction of ozone layer, or methane. There are a number of such things and this is very important, but it's all too weak. Because politicians are only interested in what will happen tomorrow, but they do not care at all what will happen in 30 years. The world may end, but they don't care, because they won't be there anymore. This is something that I am very afraid of.

Jarosz: And what will the future of Europe be in, say, 20 or 50 years? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about it?

Wujec: I hope that the European project survives. What's more, I think that its survival is very important because, as I said when I mentioned this Christian, Greek and Roman heritage, it is an incredible value. Europe has built a certain way of functioning of the world. The far-reaching consequences of this are the UN and the European Union. It is important not to lose it, so as not to get in the way of, for example, China, where authoritarianism prevails. I hope that European ideas will have a positive impact, that it will be seen that there are more achievements in Europe, for example in the field of science – because this is where most of the scientific achievements came about – and that this should not be. And that even those will understand, those in China and elsewhere, that their system must be gradually modified to become more democratic.

Jarosz: The last two questions. First, when you look at your activities and everything you did, what do you consider your greatest achievement?

Wujec: The greatest achievement is the campaign for workers in Ursus and Radom and, as a consequence, the establishment of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR). That is, I was one of the participants in that initiative and of course I did not take a particularly active part in the creation of KOR. And then there was the creation of Solidarity.

Jarosz: Finally, I would like to ask what is your opinion about the younger generation? Do you have faith in them and do you have a message for them that you would like to voice at the end of this interview?

Wujec: For now, they are infatuated, enchanted by the possibilities created by the internet and it has mastered them to a large extent, it rules them. I mean, many of them

use it, because you can find a lot of things there, but in general it rules them, although not all of them. There is a large group of young people who refer to this, those who use these tools, but critically and want to have control over it. And my hope is that since the young have always been able to find a solution, these young people will also find a solution. I don't know yet how, but they will. For example, I am associated with the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia. There is a group of young people who publish the magazine *Kontakt* and they provocatively describe themselves as *katolewica* [combination of the words “catholic” and “left”]. They go against the tide because they declare that they are not only Catholics, but also the left. Because they probably see the curvature of this world, the capitalist curvature, they see that there is a pursuit of profit, pressure to get something, the rat race. They see that it is dehumanising and that one has to resist it, look for ways to be able to maintain a human attitude instead of being more greedy. So there are such people and it starts with such a small group, and then great events can grow out of it.

Jarosz: Do you think that they will move towards national identity or will they rather be European?

Wujec: No, no, they will combine both. Relying on national identity would end in World War III. It would be dramatic. It seems to me that the experience of two wars gives so much wisdom that people will step back. Please note that even when the two terrible blocs competed with each other – here was communism and there was capitalism, and the former had atomic weapons and surpluses, and the others had only nuclear weapons – they hesitated and eventually they didn't press the button. Therefore, it seems to me that there is some wisdom, because there is an awareness that this button may kill them, but then it can also kill me, so maybe it is not worth doing. So now it will be similar, that is, in such extreme cases, there will be a thought that we need to look for a solution that will not lead to destruction.

Jarosz: Would you like to leave a message for young people?

Wujec: I have no idea what the message should be. I don't know, I really don't know. I mean, I think that being independent is very important. You can try everything, learn, search, go against the tide, but you need to be independent and try to find your own source of internal strength, your own independence, because only then you can be sure that you are going the right way all your life. If you rely on someone, you will be helpless, because he will be the one to guide you. That is why it is very important to try to develop your own opinion, but based on not one, but many sources. And to look for the source that leads to the best way of life in this world.

Jarosz: All right, thank you very much.