

# ŁÓDŹ '71

DECEMBER 1970

ON THE POLISH COAST

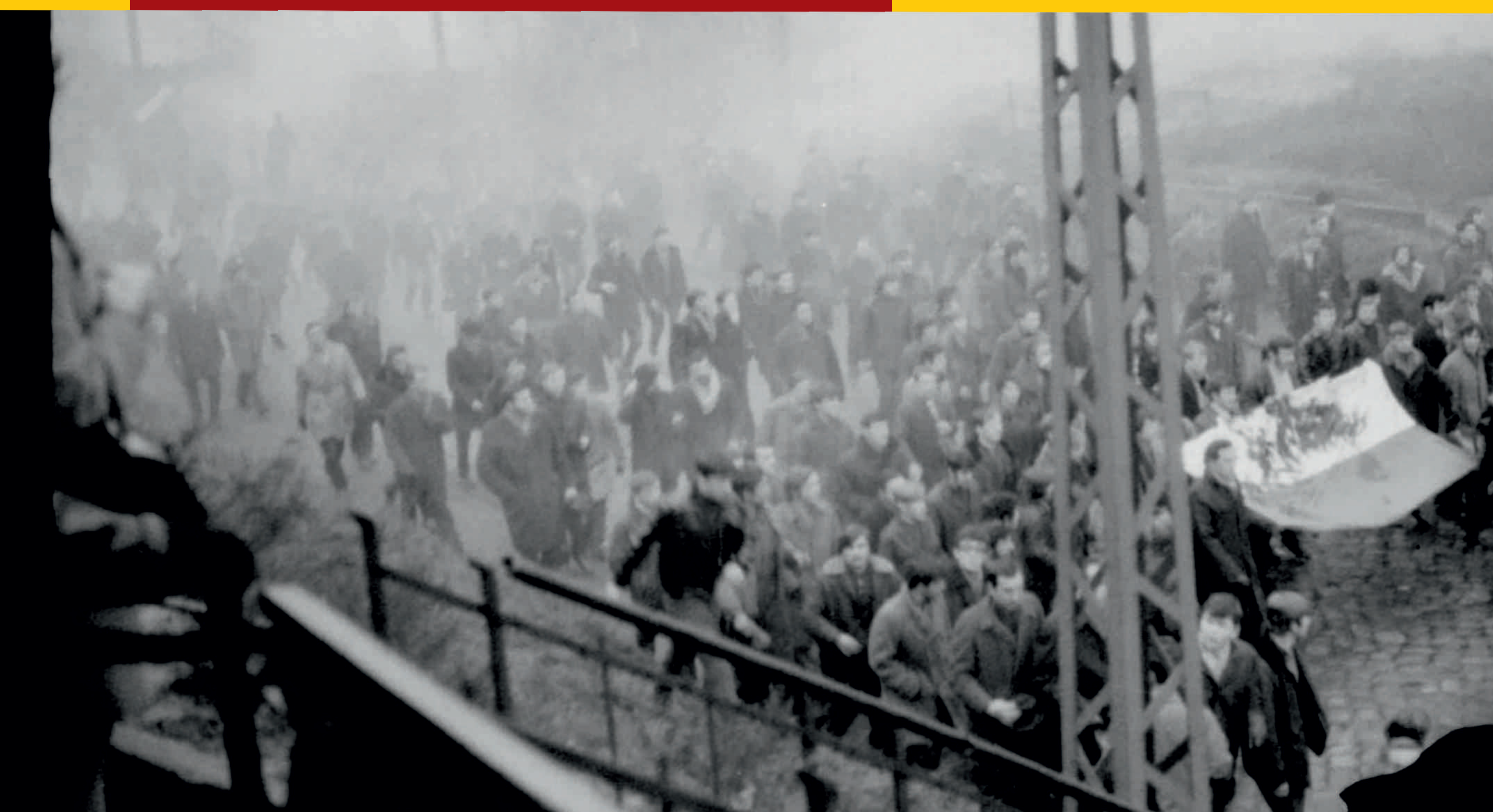
In December 1970, violent workers' protests against rising food prices broke out on the Coast. The regulations introduced before Christmas were an attempt to save the Polish economy, which was on the brink of crisis. On 14 December, the Gdańsk Shipyard went on strike. A general strike was announced the following day. It was joined by the Gdynia Shipyard, and later by workers from the Tri-City, Elbląg, Słupsk and Szczecin.

The confrontational policy of Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, towards the workers led to street protests, clashes with the Militia and arrests. In the evening of 15 December, desperate demonstrators set fire to the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in Gdańsk. When it seemed that there was a chance for the shipyard workers to return to work, in the morning of 17 December, military-backed Militia fired at people going to their first shift to the Komuna Paryska Shipyard in Gdynia. 10 people were killed and several hundred were injured. After the Gdynia massacre and repressions on the inhabitants of the Tri-City, the protests intensified in Szczecin.

The events on the Coast contributed to the changes in the Party authorities. Gomułka was replaced by a more reconciliatory Edward Gierek. However, despite the government's talks with workers in the Szczecin Shipyard and another wave of strikes in January 1971, the price increases were not withdrawn.



To pacify the workers' protests, the communists had used 27,000 soldiers, 9,000 militiamen, 550 tanks, 750 armored personnel carriers, 108 planes and helicopters, 150,000 units of chemical supplies. A total of 46 thousand bullets had been fired. (IPN's Archive in Gdańsk)



According to official data, the victims of the pacification on the Coast totalled: 45 people killed, 116 wounded, 2,989 arrested. (IPN's Archive in Gdańsk)



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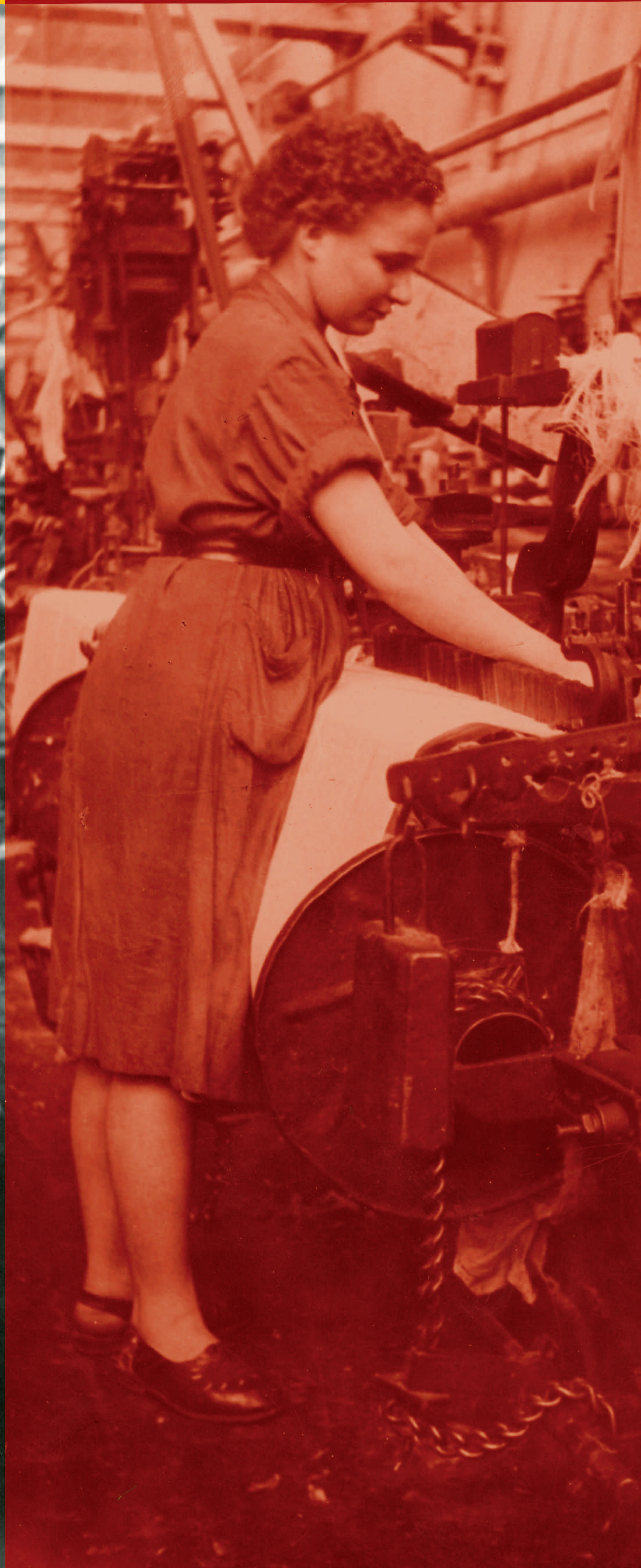
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Sources of documents and photographs: Institute of National Remembrance in Gdańsk, Institute of National Remembrance in Łódź, Museum of the Factory in Łódź and the album *Najdłuższe pół wieku*, edited by Krzysztof G. Latocha, Artur Ossowski, Paweł Spodenkiewicz, Magdalena Zapolska-Downar, Łódź 2013.

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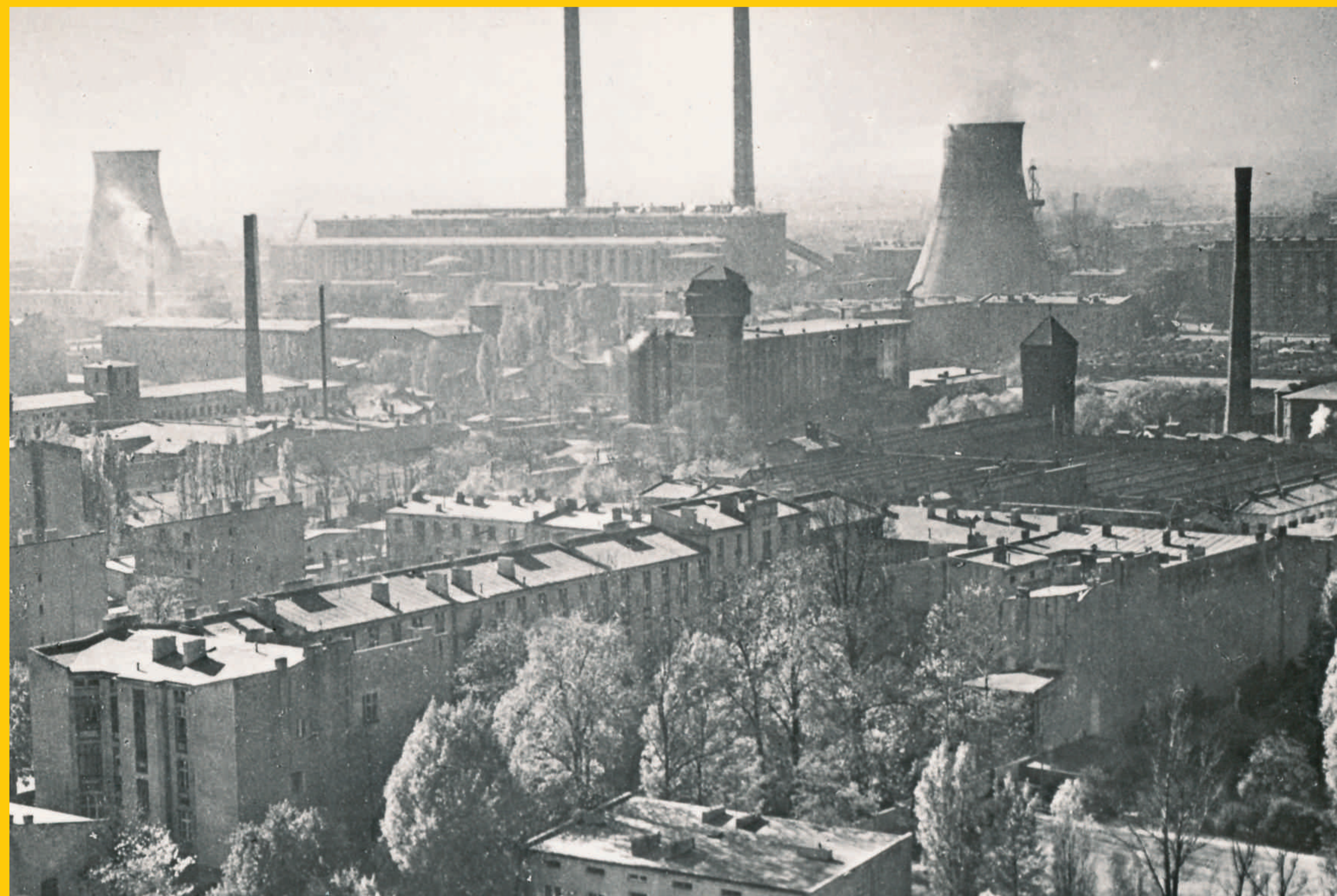
ŁÓDŹ – THE CITY OF WOMEN



In 1971, 755,000 people lived in Łódź, including 455,000 women, 89,000 of whom worked in the textile industry (which constituted about 3/4 of the total number of people employed in this branch of production), hence the name "Łódź – the city of women". Compared to other industrial centers, the living and working conditions in Łódź were difficult. Due to their poor condition, 40% of the plant facilities and machinery, dating back to the 19th century, should in fact have been either replaced or demolished.

The earnings of workers in Łódź reached approximately 80 % of the salaries in large Polish cities. Work in the so-called light industry posed a health risk and resulted in occupational diseases such as pneumoconiosis and hearing loss. Hard working and living conditions resulted in the highest infant mortality rate in Poland. Sheltered workshops for pregnant women began to appear in Łódź factories only at the end of the 1970s. The city, full of destroyed 19th century buildings, was polluted with smoke from factory chimneys.

During a single shift a weaver working by the loom covered a total distance of about 12 kilometers in cotton dust, humidity, high temperature and noise up to 110 decibels.  
(Archives of the Museum of the Factory in Łódź)



A panorama of Łódź with the characteristic chimneys of textile plants and No. 2 Heat and Power Plant (EG-2).  
(Source: *Najdłuższe pół wieku*, edited by Krzysztof G. Latocha, Artur Ossowski, Paweł Spodenkiewicz, Magdalena Zapolska-Downar, Łódź 2013)



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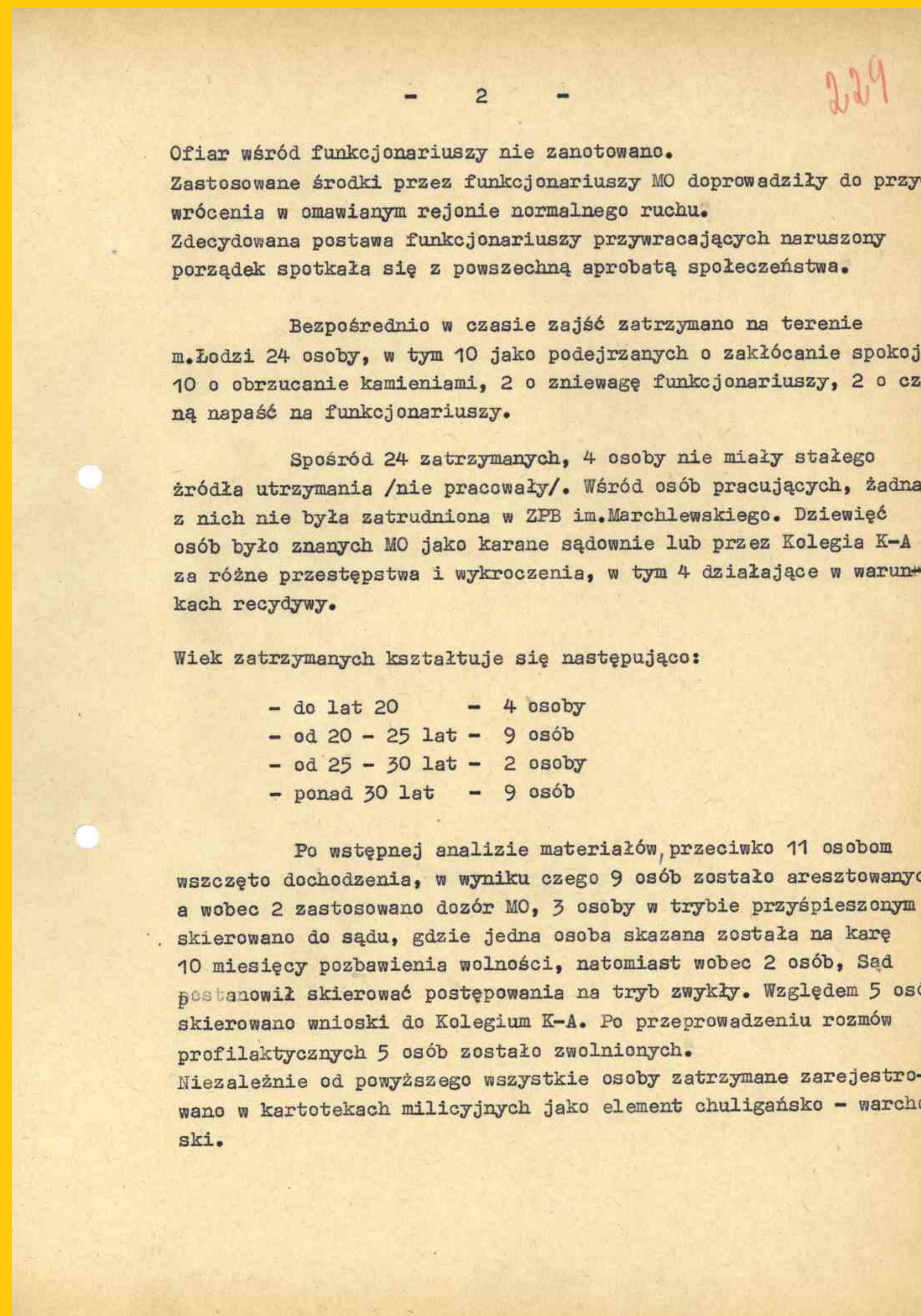
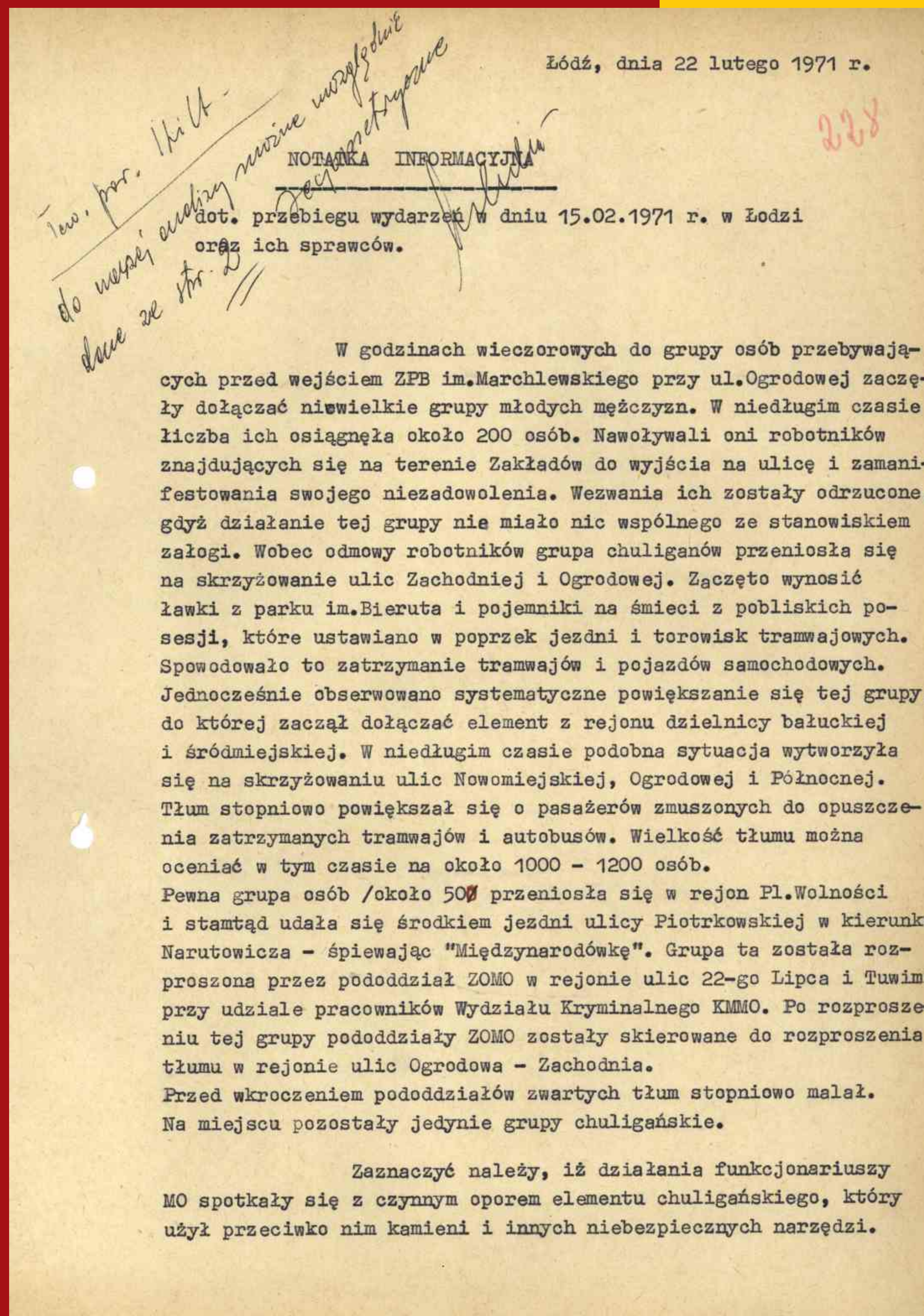
## STREET PROTESTS

On 15 February, after the end of talks with the government delegation, which made vague promises to improve the conditions, the strike spread to two more textile plants and 17 others. The strikers were afraid of attempts to break their resistance, for example by turning off the heating in the facilities, and threatened to go out into the streets.

That evening, a crowd of demonstrators gathered at the gate of the Marchlewski plant in Ogrodowa Street. In the following hours the crowd grew to about 1000 people. The protesters blocked the streets surrounding the factory and stopped trams and cars. The Citizen's Militia partially dispersed the demonstrators, who then went to the seat of the Łódź Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. Ultimately, the demonstration was stopped in the vicinity of Kościuszki and Zamenhofa Streets. The clashes between the demonstrators and the police ended after midnight. About 30 people were detained.

The information that the price increase would be withdrawn reached Łódź during street demonstrations, in practice putting an end to the protests and strikes. They finally died out on 17 February.

What the shipyard workers from the Tri-City and Szczecin did not manage to accomplish was achieved by the women of Łódź, employed in the textile industry.



The demonstrators were portrayed in police reports as hooligans, not as people fighting for the country's freedom. (IPN's Archive in Łódź)



Photos of people detained on 15-16 February in Łódź, taken by the Citizens' Militia. (IPN's Archive in Łódź)



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