

Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/10791,Deputy-President-of-the-IPN-Prof-Karol-Polejowski-at-the-official-opening-of-the.html>

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Deputy President of the IPN, Prof. Karol Polejowski at the official opening of the Institute's "Not only Siwec" exhibition in Prague and Bratislava

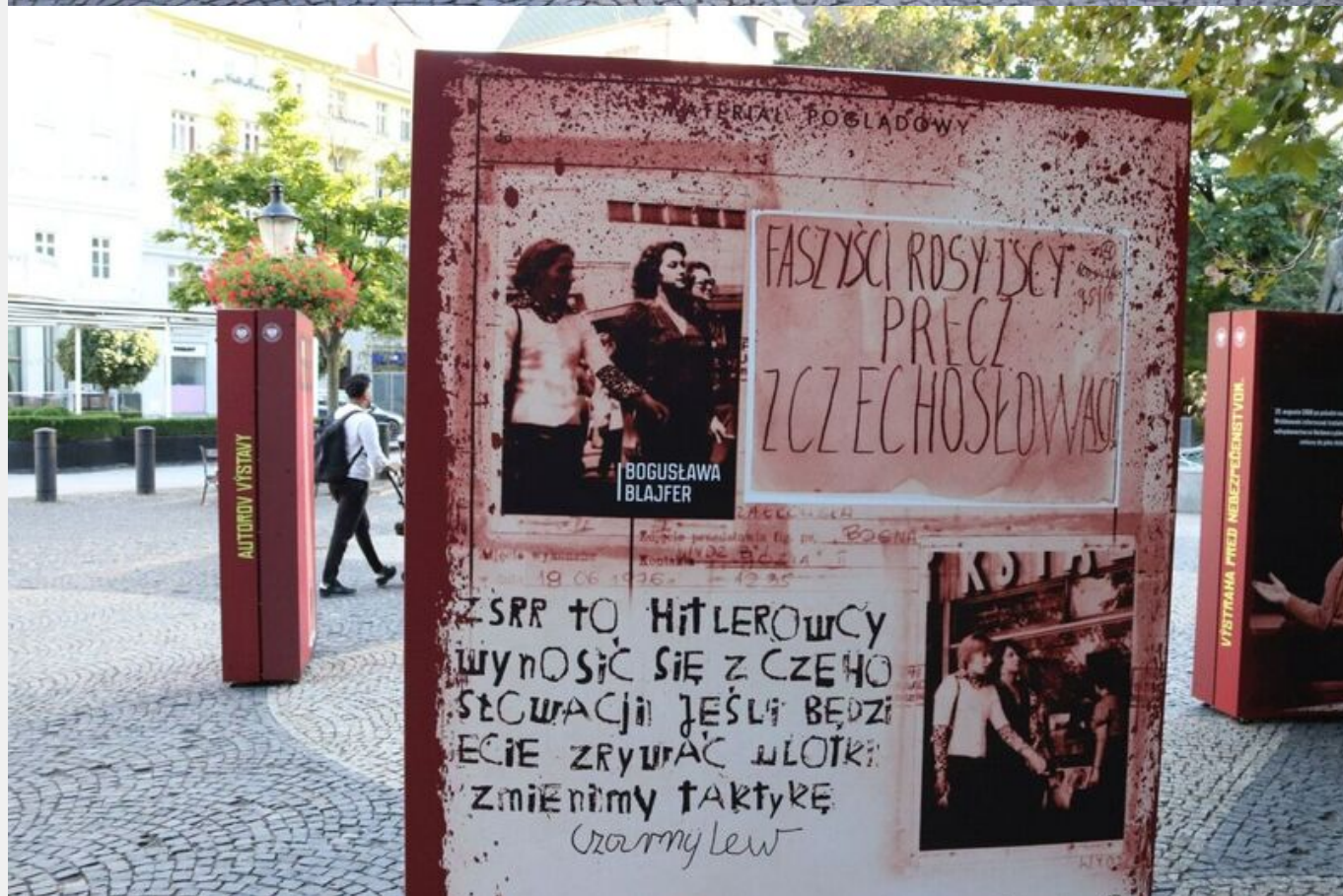














8 September 1968, accountant and Home Army veteran Ryszard

Siwiec immolated himself in Warsaw, protesting against the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. He did it during a harvest celebration in the 10th-Anniversary stadium, opposite the box for communist leaders and in full view of thousands of people. Having suffered burns to 80% of his body, Siwiec died four days later.

When the folk groups began dancing, he poured a flammable substance over himself and set it on fire. While burning alive, he screamed "I protest!" and pushed away people who tried to put out the flames. After all his clothes had burned down, he was still shouting to witnesses around him; an officer of the secret service remembered that he screamed "Long live Free Poland!" "It's a cry of a free, dying man!"

The protest was recorded by a cameraman of the Polish Film Chronicle, a few pictures were taken by photojournalist Leszek Łożyński, but the best recording was done by officers of the "B" Office of the Ministry of Interior (almost 90 seconds of the footage was preserved). Of the few dozen self-immolation acts in the history of the Soviet Bloc, only Ryszard Siwiec's is so well documented, and the records make a unique and moving historical source.

The IPN's exhibition titled "Not Only Siwiec" showcases Polish protests against the invasion of Warsaw Pact forces, including the People's Army of Poland, into Czechoslovakia in August 1968, as well as acts of solidarity with the Czechs and Slovaks, both within Czechoslovakia itself and outside of it.

The IPN Deputy President, Prof. Karol Polejowski, visited Prague and participated in the opening of the exhibition.

"As the title points out, not only Siwec protested. Unfortunately - for various reasons - the exhibition cannot present the figures of everyone who, in the gloomy times of the communist dictatorship, had the courage to protest or, what was equally dangerous, support the Czechs and Slovaks or even show their sympathy towards them. Similarly, it is impossible to portray all the forms these protests took on. Their scale was also quite surprising," said Mr. Polejowski.

Footage from the IPN Archive portraying the act of self-immolation:

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