

Institute of National Remembrance

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Press release: "Where was the opposition born? June 1976 to August 1980"

The exhibition preview and Cross of Freedom and Solidarity award ceremony are to take place at noon on 25 June 2021 in Ursus, Warsaw.

TU RODZIŁA SIĘ OPZYCJA

THE OPPOSITION WAS BORN HERE

WYSTAWA PLENEROWA

25 czerwca 2021 r. o godz. 12.00.

Parafia św. Józefa Oblubieńca Najświętszej Marii Panny
ul. Generała Kazimierza Sosnkowskiego 34, Warszawa-Ursus

1976 POCZĄTKIEM
NASZEJ SYŁY!



INSTITUT
PAMIĘCI
NARODOWEJ

The event

At 12 o'clock tomorrow, in the square by the church of St. Joseph betrothed to the Holy Virgin Mary at 34 General Kazimierz Sosnkowski Street in Warsaw, distinguished members of anti-communist opposition from the years 1956–1989 will receive state decorations. On behalf of President Andrzej Duda, Crosses of Freedom and Solidarity will be presented by President of the Institute of National Remembrance Jarosław Szarek. Following the ceremony, the venue will see the opening of an open-air exhibition "The Opposition Was Born Here. June 1976 to August 1980", prepared by the IPN on the 45th anniversary of workers' protests in June 1976 in Radom, Ursus and Płock; its panels show "the emergence of the opposition", both in urban centers and the countryside throughout Poland. On 2 July and 13 August, the IPN branches will launch the exhibit in their respective locations, and make it available to the public until it closes officially on 31 August 2021 in Radom.

Due to the pandemic restrictions, admission to the award ceremony is by invitation only. All media representatives interested in participation, please send your requests for accreditation to media@ipn.gov.pl.

Historical background

When in June 1976 the communist authorities announced the increase

in the prices of basic foodstuffs, the impoverished society responded with strikes in 97 manufacturing plants; in Radom, Ursus and Płock workers took to the streets, and the crew of the Ursus factory dismantled the rails on site and pushed an engine into the missing section to make sure no one could fix the track. Law enforcement reacted too: hundreds of protesters got beaten up, arrested or convicted, and over 1,500 laid off. A few days later, Jan Brożyna, just a passer-by, died as a result of beating by the Citizens' Militia, and in mid-August another victim, Catholic priest Roman Kotlarz succumbed to the injuries inflicted by the security services officers. The most violent clashes between the citizens and Citizens' Militia and its Motorized Reserves took place in Radom, where the demonstrators set on fire the local PZPR [Polish United Workers' Party] building. In June 1976, estimated 80,000 people protested one way or another against the authorities, most of them in Ursus and Radom (21,000 and 14,000 respectively).

The repressions suffered by the demonstrators and their families triggered spontaneous aid efforts in the form of financial, medical and legal assistance. Immediate help to the injured workers provided by the Romuald Traugutt 1st Warsaw Scout Troop led to the emergence of the Workers' Defence Committee, the first openly dissident organization in the People's Republic of Poland.

It was followed by other democratic opposition bodies, for instance the Movement for Defence of Human and Civic Rights, Free Trade Unions, Students' Solidarity Committees, Confederation for Independent

Poland, or the Young Poland Movement. Similar organizations popped up locally, like Cracow's Christian Community of Working People, Katyn Institute, Independence Action or Cracow Citizens' Initiative, and self-study institutions appeared – such as the Flying University or the Training Courses Society. What's more, underground publishing was born, putting an end to the communist information monopoly.

This open opposition was not a mass movement, but without it, masses would not have risen in August 1980, and the „Solidarity” Trade Union would not have gained so much precious experience.

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