

# Economic issues in the political thought of the Polish democratic opposition 1976-1981: the example of the concept of Mirosław Dzielski and the Workers' Defense Committee

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## Abstract

The article made an analysis of the Polish democratic opposition in the second half of the seventies. The author has made the analysis of scientific activity Mirosław Dzielski of the editor-in-chief of the so-called “second circulation” “13”, and the president of the Krakow Economic Society. The aim of this article is to confront the concepts concerning economic issues raised by the activists of the Workers’ Defence Committee with the concepts of Mirosław Dzielski.

**Key words:** liberalism, government, society, political realism, communist party.

## Introduction

The Polish democratic opposition in the second half of the seventies was social democratic in terms of the proclaimed systemic and economic slogans (Bartyzel, J., 2005).

However, this does not mean, that they did not break out of this standard thinking, as evidenced by the figure of the editor-in-chief of the so-called “second circulation” “13”, the president of the Krakow Economic Society – Mirosław Dzielski (Żyszkiewicz, W.; Misiek, J., 1991). His political concepts concerning regaining sovereignty by the nation, as well as his economic ideas, did not fit

into the current opposition paradigm (Syryjczyk, T.; Łagowski, B.), which resulted in marginalization and absence from the broad public discourse (Rekiel, A., 2000; Woźniakowski, H., 2000). What determined the uniqueness of M. Dzielski was the attempt to combine economic liberalism and Christianity, to conclude a “historical compromise” of society with the communist authorities, and promote organic and positivist “grassroots work” instead of demanding revolutionary political changes (Łagowski, B.; Syryjczyk, T.).

## Material and methods

The aim of this article is to confront the concepts concerning economic issues raised by the activists of the Workers’ Defence Committee

[(WDC), the source basis in this case was the “Biuletyn Informacyjny WDC”] with the concepts of Mirosław Dzielski.

## Results and discussion

For the editor of “13”, the starting point was the conviction that in the 1980s there was a political and economic crisis (Romański A., 1981; Dzielski, M., 1987; Chyliński, Z.). Dzielski M. expected that disregarding this situation could lead to the outbreak of a revolution: “You must

[the quoted text is in the form of a pamphlet letter addressed to the film lieutenant Borewicz, which was supposed to symbolize a part of the apparatus of the communist government willing to compromise with the opposition – ed. A. M.] to start acting and act wisely. Otherwise, there will be

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a catastrophe (Romański, A.). The crisis is building up and there will be an outbreak one day. Then you will have to reach for a weapon to master it". Consequently, he envisioned two possibilities for the evolution of the communist system. One of them was the "albanization" of the country, ie the maintenance of power by the most zealous communist ideologues, which in effect was to mean mass terror and a deepening economic crisis (Dzielski, M., 1984). The second solution – to which he was inclined – was to be "regression of the system", which would result in the retaining of power by members of the PZPR, while expanding the area of economic freedom (Dzielski, M., 1984). Such a situation would mean that the state authorities would build a "new NEP" (Duch nadchodzącego czasu, 2001). The latter option would, according to M. Dzielski, result in a "historical compromise" between the government and society, which was reduced to the following formula: "stay in power, keep the authoritarian system, but give up communism" (Duch nadchodzącego czasu, 2001).

According to the editor of "13", political realism required the opposition to support party cynics (Duch nadchodzącego czasu, 2001; Romański, A.) who were by nature willing to make concessions. In his opinion, the political situation and common sense required proper consideration of the forces and support of one group forming the PZPR – less threatening the civilization aspirations of the nation. As he wrote: "You have to support cynics not for their tasks, but for political reasons. It is impossible to defeat both the ideology and the armed nation of the "Spartians", which currently rules Poland. This would only be possible if the "Helots" had sufficient armed forces to drive its internal and external conquerors out of the country. We don't have such strength" (Duch nadchodzącego czasu, 2001; Romański, A.).

According to M. Dzielski, the fact that the democratic opposition did not take into account political realism and the interests of the people in power resulted in the opposition of the communist party towards the proposed plans to change the political system. As he noted, his proposal took into account the existing political reality and was addressed to people currently at the helm of the authorities (Romański, A.).

According to him, the interest of the rulers of the Polish People's Republic (PPR) was to prevent democratization (Romański, A.). The introduction of democracy, demanded by the main core of the anti-communist opposition, was dangerous for the representatives of the authorities due to the possibility of removing them from direct influence on political reality and the revolutionary potential, which could even take the form of the physical extermination of the existing party elite (Romański, A.). Therefore, the communists, according to the editor of "13", were right to resist the projects of democratization of the system.

The only situation in which the above-mentioned postulates could be implemented was that the current state apparatus would retain power, while allowing economic changes to be introduced, which would benefit the authorities equally with the society. Dzielski M. predicted that the communists could take advantage of the profits from the compromise made with the society in the form of direct participation in the general re-privatization of the existing state property: "re-privatization should be made in such a way that all power participants are materially and directly interested in it. The actions of steel mills, factories and mines are a stimulus that exerts a strong influence on the imagination, which may persuade those who oppose small reforms to implement great reforms (Dzielski, M.). Moreover, he assumed that economic changes while maintaining political influence by the current apparatus of power implied the necessity of an authoritarian, anti-democratic government that would break with the communist ideology and would be guided solely by pragmatic goals. As Dzielski pointed out, democracy in Poland was in fact a phenomenon absent from its history. Moreover, a factor in favor of introducing an authoritarian regime was the fact that such a government provided better protection for a "rational economy with a social order that protects the country from disturbances" (Dzielski, M.) than a demoliberal system. Authoritarianism also guaranteed the implementation of the common good and awakened respect for authority among citizens (Dzielski, M.).

According to M. Dzielski, the authoritarian government also guaranteed the freedom of

citizens better than a democratic government, which is only interested in “who rules” and “not in how it governs”. Therefore, in a democratic system there are restrictions on civil liberties, because if the power is exercised by the people: “nothing has to limit it. If, however, there is no barrier to the will of the people, a situation may arise in which the majority will bully a minority as a result of the most legally held parliamentary elections in the world (Odrodzenie ducha)”.

According to M. Dzielski, the duty of the undemocratic government would be to restore the following freedoms: religious, production, sale, travel (Romański, A., 1981), which were to be supplemented by the introduction of local government and legal protection of citizens (Dzielski, M., p. 116). Changes consisting in the introduction of a free market economy would mean the return of Polish society to the group of civilized nations which base their existence on free trade and production. Therefore, it was not the method of electing the authorities that seemed much more important to him, but their attitude towards free enterprise (Dzielski, M., p. 8). In presenting his proposals, M. Dzielski referred to historical examples confirming the accuracy of his judgments – including the rule of General Franco in Spain (Więcej, 2006; Doktryna El, 1999; Bachoud, A., 2000; Bartyzel, J., 2006) and General Pinochet in Chile (Na temat Augusta Pinocheta, 2007; Klewiec, W., 2001; Gratulował mi Pinochet, 1996), which exemplified the possibility of an authoritarian government implementing free-market reforms (Dzielski, M., 1983). A model example of a solution that could take place in Poland was the economic and political evolution of China in the early 1980s. The state led by the other communists retained its anti-democratic character. The introduced free-market reforms turned out to be beneficial both for the government apparatus and for society, causing its general enrichment. Importantly – according to M. Dzielski – these changes were not revolutionary (Podróż do Chin, 1985).

According to the editor of “13”, social constructivism posed a threat to the idea of a compromise with the communist authorities, whose representatives were to be the revolutionary democratic opposition, demanding

political changes instead of economic ones (Dzielski, M., 1984, p. 5–9). In his opinion, the structure of the Polish opposition to date was dominated by constructivist thinking taking the shape of “revolutionary anti-communism” (Dzielski, M., 1984, p. 59). The above form of opposition, demanding the extension of political freedoms, sought to break up state structures in order to replace the existing bureaucracy. According to M. Dzielski, this type of anti-communism ignored the issues of civilization and the problem of economic liberalization (Dzielski, M., 1984, p. 9). There was also a constructive pride in it, assuming that “by his own efforts he would make quick changes for the better in the entire social cosmos. [...] Meanwhile, really significant changes require time. Rapid, revolutionary changes are usually apparent changes” (Dzielski, M., 1984). In view of the above, M. Dzielski argued that the democratic opposition, despite its verbal struggle against socialism, which is one of the manifestations of constructivist thinking, itself represented the same attitude. As he wrote: “Nowadays, when attacks on socialism have become frequent and fashionable, socialists use various types of mimicry to hide their views from society and from themselves. They claim that they are not socialists, that they are fighting against socialism” – and at the same time he proposed the following method, with which he wanted to check whether an individual displays constructivist thinking or not: “If someone does not trust an individual and thinks that collective or the state, if someone is interested in other people instead of thinking about their own income, if they do not understand that the same man who was petty and evil in captivity can be good and generous in freedom, such someone is a socialist or has been seduced to the golden-mouthed socialist demagogues” (Ubezpieczenia po góralsku, 1983). He pointed out that the group of constructive anti-communists consists of Lech Wałęsa, the Young Poland Movement (Zaremba, P., 2000; Sikorski, T., 2007; Cecuda, D., 1989; Mażewski, L., 1999; Deklaracja ideowa, 1994; Między tradycją, 2008) and liberal groups, including the “13” he edited (Dzielski, M., 1983).

According to M. Dzielski, the constructive opposition was responsible for “building a limited

society, first of all within the legal limits, but – if necessary – also [...] illegal” (Dzielski, M., 1983, p. 9). Therefore, it should not engage in sterile discussions on the responsibility of state authorities for the economic crisis in Poland (Romański, A., 1981), but engage in organic “grassroots work”, as he emphasized: “the organization of existence always goes from below, not from above. Nobody can organize existence from above. Only non-existence can be organized from above (Romański, A., 1981). As he predicted, constructive opposition should move from the hard confrontation with the communist authorities proposed by the revolutionary constructivists to the ‘soft’ confrontation” (Romański, A., 1981).

According to M. Dzielski, private economic activity was an extremely important form of activity that should be used by the whole society (Romański, A., 1981, p. 65). However, private economic initiative in Poland encountered resistance, not only from the state-bureaucratic apparatus (Romański, A., 1981, p. 85), but also from the society itself, which underestimated and even despised private entrepreneurship: “In Poland, wealth derived from granting, privileges, inherited is tolerated. However, wealth that comes from one’s own free labor and trade is considered distasteful, if not bad, especially when it is fully justified from a market standpoint” (Romański, A., 1981, p. 3).

The goal of M. Dzielski was to change the social perception of free enterprise. Therefore, in the pages of his edited “13” he conducted a series of interviews with entrepreneurs, whom he called “heroes of civilization progress”, who struggled with legal and bureaucratic obstacles in their daily activities (Jak urządzić się PRL?, 1985, № 10, p. 1–3; №5, p. 7–9 1986, №6, p. 1–5; №7, p. 1–5; №8, p. 1–5; Rozmowa z Alfą, 1985). The development of the concept of creating a positive atmosphere around free enterprise was the idea of establishing an association aimed at supporting the activities of entrepreneurs, as well as giving economic activity a moral character, basing it on a metaphysical basis and conducting self-education activity in the form of courses, publications, research work based on comparative approaches economic systems, promoting the principle of conciliarity

with the communist authorities (Czy będzie, 1985; Dzielski, M., p. 66). These considerations took a specific form in the form of the Krakow Industrial Society, founded only in 1987 (Żyszkiewicz, W.) (although the first references to the need to establish this institution appear in the publications of M. Dzielski in the early 1980s). At the same time, he spoke with approval about illegal economic activity conducted in the People’s Republic of Poland. He believed that it was a natural defense reflex of citizens, directed against a bureaucratic state emerging not only in the countries under Soviet influence, but also in European democratic states that interfere with market mechanisms (Dzielski, M., p. 85–87).

The WDC community, similarly to M. Dzielski, also noticed the economic crisis spreading across society. Attempts were made to combine it with the processes taking place in Europe, consisting in the phenomenon of stagflation, i.e. a simultaneous decline in economic growth and an increase in inflation. The reason for this state of affairs was seen in the lack of adequate raw materials (mainly fuels), which would not be able to satisfy the growing demand, causing a sharp increase in prices (Socjalistyczna stagflacja?, 1979).

The sources of the Polish economic collapse in the second half of the seventies and early eighties were seen in the Gierek period. According to the anonymous author, whose article was published in the “WDC Information Bulletin”, in the 1960s Poland was developing slowly, even too slowly for its needs, but in return there was a balance between supply and demand and the balance of payments. On the other hand, with the advent of Edward Gierek’s rule, there was an increased consumption, which could not be met by an economy without appropriate technology. The only positive aspect of the seventies was the desire to modernize, and its dark sides were the negative trade balance and the economic imbalance (Trochę historii, 1979).

Investments from the times of E. Gierek were especially criticized, which instead of contributing to the elimination of social differences, led to their deepening: they only undermine the effects already achieved (eg in the field of population income), but also become an independent source

of waste, corruption and stratification, not to mention the obstacles created by improving the management system” (Brus, W., 1978).

The seventies were treated as a lost decade. On its threshold, it gave hope for reforms, but instead of genuine rebuilding of the economy, the actions of E. Gierek’s team resulted in the uprising:

- huge foreign debt,
- an increase in the level of consumption which in the long run cannot be satisfied,
- absurd price arrangement,
- centralized and autocratic management method,
- new workplaces which, due to the lack of foreign currency, could not use their full potential (Karol, 1978).

In addition, this period led to:

- increasing public distrust of the authorities,
- consolidation of the unfavorable structure of agriculture, resulting in an imbalance between socialized and specialized farms,
- defective planning system (Czwartki, 1979).

The year 1974 was treated by the parishioners as a kind of turning point in the Gierek decade, eloquently demonstrating the government's departure from reforming the economy. At that time, there was a break with the concept of the Great Economic Organizations (WOG), which are associations of enterprises, which fell to undertake short-term economic plans to replace central long-term plans (Kuczyński, W., 1979). In this way, the government was to limit itself to making only macroeconomic decisions. The departure from this experiment, which lasted only three years, was severely assessed by the economist and journalist Waldemar Kuczyński, who wrote in 1979: “Abandoning the reform closed the way to a certain chance and opened a certain temptation. Undoubtedly, a chance has been lost for more serious progress in the efficiency of all economic links, mainly the central level. This is where decisions are made at lower levels. The opportunity for a permanent and real introduction of economic calculation, treatment of inputs and outputs to all economic institutions from government to production plants has been lost. In the current system, cost does not count when making many central and other decisions. It only begins to count when, in the course of

implementation, the sum of the planned projects explodes the balance sheets, grows beyond the possibilities of the economy, when primary decisions have to be repealed, causing great losses for the society (Kuczyński, W., 1979, p.37).

Common to both M. Dzielski and the WDC milieu was a critical assessment of the ad hoc attempts to improve the state of the economy used by the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, as well as the cyclical economic problems that were a direct result of the omissions of the authorities. This was also the case with the so-called “meat crisis”, which arose with the events of December 1970, when there was public outcry against price increases caused by an attempt to curb demand. The problem of food shortages in retail was seen as part of a larger problem that resulted from the misuse of investment credits and the government's populist policies attempting to introduce collectivism in agriculture in the 1950s (Świńskie widmo, 1979).

In the free-market spirit, January Kostrzewski appeared in the “WDC Information Bulletin” against the government's rationing measures regarding lease prices of clothing boutiques. Well, as he predicted, such action contributed to:

- increased demand for fabrics due to lower prices, which had a negative impact on the quality of the products offered due to limited production possibilities,
- purchase of fabrics in retail trade, which contributed to the development of the black market,
- drop in the quality of customer service,
- increased corruption at the interface between trade and state controls (Kostrzewski, J., 1980).

The structure of Polish exports has also become the object of criticism from WDC activists. First of all, the lack of partnership in economic relations between Poland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was criticized. The problem was exemplified by the participation of the Polish company Energopol in the construction of the Soviet pipeline from Nowopołck to Możejki. This case caused a certain echo in the press organ of WDC. One of the authors treated the investment as unfavorable for Poland due to the enormous financial burdens constituting the equivalent of a loan granted to Poland by the government of the

Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) (Budujemy drugi, 1979). This position was not shared by the second author. Although he also considered the participation of a Polish company in the construction of the Soviet transmission network as costly and unprofitable in the short term, in the long term, given the rising oil prices in the world and the lack of it in Poland, he assessed this investment as purposeful and profitable. An additional circumstance in favor of a positive assessment was the fact that a more favorable solution for Poland was granting loans to the Russians for oil extraction and transport in exchange for its supplies at preferential prices than the political concessions to the USSR, which Bulgaria was forced to do (Karol, 1979).

In addition to the example mentioned above, the entire export structure was criticized, which was in a state of collapse due to:

- low demand for Polish goods,
- low economic efficiency,
- poor quality of goods,
- lack of timeliness on the part of Polish enterprises,
- bad use of foreign loans,
- lack of service and spare parts (Kostrzewski, J., 1979).

Due to these circumstances, the economy was unable to fully use its potential or bring in the missing currencies, and the entire value of exports was allocated to paying off foreign debt, and not to satisfying the internal market (Widmo bankructwa, 1980).

The journalists of the WDC Information Bulletin, like M. Dzielski, pointed to the mismanagement of the authorities. For example, they criticized the construction plan for loans granted by the West German government of iron ore mines in the Suwałki region. Due to the lack of railway infrastructure, large investment expenditures and a long payback period, they considered such a decision a sign of mismanagement probably caused by political pressure (W prasie o gospodarce, 1980).

What differed the WDC journalists from M. Dzielski the most was the issue of remedial measures. While the editor-in-chief of "13" was skeptical about the democratization of the system, the press body of the WDC contained

demands to gain the entire society for economic changes, and thus democratize the system (Brus, W.). As economist and academic lecturer Tadeusz Kowalik said during one of the meetings of the Polish Economic Society: "The crisis we are experiencing is no less related to culture, political institutions and the economy. In particular, I believe that the dependence of the fate of economic reform on politics is by no means limited to the fact that [...] the implementation of the reform will be determined by non-economic factors. The dependence is deeper and consists in the fact that no economic reform can be effective in the long run if it is not accompanied by an equally deep reform of political institutions" (Wystąpienie Tadeusza, 1980).

The second way out of the economic crisis, apart from the reconstruction of the political system, was, according to authors publishing in the "WDC Information Bulletin", the necessity to carry out a thorough economic reform. They were aware of the ineffectiveness of establishing workplaces operating on different principles than the rest of the enterprises. These plants developed much better than the others, but the use of their achievements did not translate into the entire economy (Karol, 1980). A comprehensive reconstruction of the economy would liberate the energy dormant in Poles, inhibited by the communist system: Reforms consisting in a profound reconstruction of the central planning system and profound changes in the principles of operation of enterprises would probably release deep reserves hidden under the crust of today's waste, apathy and social frustration, would lead to by increasing the use of existing and potential resources to overcome a series of material barriers that we perceive as these impossibilities (Karol, 1980).

The implementation of the above-presented beliefs was the postulate to implement Hungarian reforms in Poland, i.e. to decentralize the enterprise management process and to make the zloty exchange rate more realistic in relation to world currencies (Karol, 1980).

The publications published in the "WDC Information Bulletin" do not allow for an unequivocal determination of the position of the journal's editorial staff on the introduction of free-

market solutions in place of statism, as postulated by M. Dzielski. There was a tone of acceptance for capitalism, for example in the article by Jan Kostrzewski, who criticized the government's rationing of agency fees for boutiques, clearly supporting the abolition of state-owned enterprises producing textiles in favor of small and

medium-sized factories and the development of completely private clothing boutiques (Kostrzewski, J.; Karol, 1980). There are also elements that prove the acceptance of the planned economy and the solutions announced by John Maynard Keynes (Wystąpienie Tadeusza; Karol, 1980; Brus, W., Karol, 1978).

## Conclusions

As can be seen, both the WDC community and the Christian liberal M. Dzielski came to common beliefs primarily in the recognition of the state of the economy of the People's Republic of Poland, which was in a huge collapse caused by the lack of thorough reforms, the waste of funds by the state apparatus and persisting in the chains of absurd economic solutions. On the other hand, the contentious

issues were present in the case of the proposed remedies. While in the case of the editor of "13" we are dealing with the side of liberal economic solutions, in the case of WDC the proposed remedies were not as coherent as they cover both free-market and statist threads. However, the WDC first of all demanded democratic political changes, which was not so important for M. Dzielski.

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