

## Zbigniew Romaszewski (1940-2014)

### A Life in Human Rights

#### Eric Chenoweth

I first came to know about Zbigniew Romaszewski while working for the Committee in Support of Solidarity, based in New York. The Committee was established by Polish opposition veterans Irena Lasota, Jakub Karpinski and several others who were in the United States, either as exiles or by circumstance, on December 13, 1981. In the early morning hours of that day General Wojciech Jaruzelski imposed a martial law regime on Poland. In fact, Jaruzelski invoked the constitution's provision for *stan wojenny*, a state of war, a provision intended to rebuff external invasion. At the time, however, the provision was employed to destroy the threat to communist rule posed by Solidarność (or Solidarity), which had arisen in August 1980 to unite Polish society in an independent trade union and social movement. Not having any clear constitutional justification, Jaruzelski effectively declared war on the Polish people, unleashing tanks, soldiers, truncheon-wielding riot police, water cannons, and all other weapons in the police state's arsenal to destroy Solidarity. Unlike Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, where the Soviet Union had to invade to brutally quell rebellions, in Poland Jaruzelski acted as a Soviet satrap, using Poland's own military and police forces to reimpose firm communist rule.

The Committee in Support of Solidarity was created the next day and I, a young American-born trade union activist and lone non-Pole, became the director. One key part of the Committee's mission was to chronicle the vast human rights violations being perpetrated by the government of Poland: tens of thousands rounded up in internment camps, tanks rolling over resisting workers (we documented more than 100 killed), soldiers occupying factories, police closing universities, students taken to

prison, protestors mowed down by water cannon and beaten by riot police. A long black night had fallen on Poland after sixteen months of unheard-of freedom in a communist country, freedom brought about by a unique movement allying workers, students, intellectuals, farmers, and artists. It was a movement born from years of human rights work by, among others, Zbigniew Romaszewski and his wife and partner, Zofia.

---

**In August 1980 in Poland, millions of workers joined together in the largest and most consequential national strike in the annals of international trade unionism.**

---

The Committee's other job was to shine light not just on the regime's repression but also on Solidarity's organized resistance to martial law. The Romaszewskis were among hundreds of activists and leaders who had escaped arrest and were busy putting into place the plans the Solidarity movement had made for such a circumstance. Workers and others were actively resisting martial law through strikes, demonstrations, wearing outward manifestations of support for Solidarity such as pins—an act subject to three years' imprisonment, recreating underground union structures at all levels, distributing clandestine publications, and organizing other acts of opposition to the regime. Zbigniew Romaszewski was an initial member of the Regional Coordinating Commission of the Mazowsze (greater Warsaw) region, one of the temporary underground structures of Solidarity organized according to its territorial structure.

Zbigniew and Zofia Romaszewski were also behind one of the more daring acts of early opposition to martial law, Radio Solidarność, a series of renegade broadcasts that used temporary transmitters set up on rooftops to override the main state broadcasts with fifteen to thirty-minute programs that included announcements by national and regional Solidarity leaders in hiding, information about worker resistance and the fate of those arrested and detained in internment camps, and other

independent news in a period when state propaganda was trying to convince the Polish nation that it had been utterly defeated and that it was hopeless to resist. Radio Solidarność, broadcast in every major region of Poland, offered tangible proof of the lie that martial law had destroyed the workers' movement. Indeed, the broadcasts helped to organize important national protests (such as lighting candles in windows at a specified time on the thirteenth of each month, Italian strikes and work slowdowns, and other actions that helped reinforce for Poles the social bonds they had recreated through years of political opposition had survived. The Committee in Support of Solidarity's busy documenters, translators, and editors who published reports of all the dramatic events taking place in Poland discovered that even more than demonstrations and clandestine union structures, Radio Solidarność was one of the more important proofs for American politicians and opinion leaders that the union movement was not destroyed.

Aside from the technical challenge of acquiring transmitter equipment and recording the programs, the broadcasts required semiguerrilla tactics, with close calculations for the activists who set up the transmitters on rooftops in order to escape the immediate police dragnet deployed to find and disarm them. Unfortunately, the police grew increasingly adept not only in catching the activists who set up the transmitters but also in closing in on the organizers. Zofia Romaszewski and several activists were arrested in early July 1982, and Zbigniew Romaszewski later that month. They were charged with "continuing union activities after December 13, 1981, and disseminating false information through the broadcast of Radio Solidarność about the political situation in Poland that could incite unrest and riot." At the conclusion of their famous trial held in February 1983, Zofia received a sentence of three years' imprisonment and Zbigniew a term of four and a half years, while eight other defendants received sentences of one to three years. Despite this setback, Radio Solidarność continued to broadcast, although with less frequency, and an even-more audacious TV Solidarność was launched. The Committee in Support of Solidarity reported all

of the trial proceedings. What struck me most at the time were the statements of the two main defendants and their colleagues. They all displayed an easy defiance and assurance. They were not backing down in the face of impending imprisonment. In his speech, Zbigniew Romaszewski told the court of the moral bankruptcy of communism, asserted that the judges lacked legitimacy, and promised further resistance by a society "that had taken a step forward in August 1980 and [was] not stepping back." The Radio Solidarność trial added to the Romaszewskis' growing legend.

---

**Today, we view everything as inevitable: Solidarity, 1989, the fall of the Soviet Union. In August 1980, nothing was inevitable. Each worker acted without knowing what the consequences would be.**

---

After a life engaged in struggles for human and worker rights, including twenty-two years as the longest-serving elected senator in Polish history, Zbigniew Romaszewski died unexpectedly of a stroke in February 2014 at the age of seventy-four. His life spanned the twin totalitarian occupations of Poland of the twentieth century and Poland's reemergence as an independent, democratic country after 1989. He and his wife Zofia, who survives him, did much to make that happen and their efforts are worth recounting as a major contribution to anticommunist opposition and democratic activism.

Both were born in 1940 and survived the Nazi occupation: Zbigniew in a concentration camp where his father was killed; Zofia in hiding as her parents, one Jewish, participated in the Home Army resistance. They grew up during the dark postwar Stalinist era in which Polish communists, backed by their Soviet overlords, entrenched totalitarian rule in the newly created Polish People's Republic. At the time, communism appeared unchangeable and, as recounted by Czesław Miłosz in *The Captive Mind*, most intellectuals succumbed to its dictates. Zbigniew and Zofia never did. They both grew up with a deep understanding of

human rights and of the heritage of Polish freedom, learned in the privacy of their homes from families who had lived in independent Poland between the world wars and who had survived the terrible conflagration of World War II.

In the mid-1960s they both chose to study physics at Warsaw University—science was one way to escape and transcend political ideology. There they fell in love and formed a lifelong partnership to advance human rights and freedom—a love story and partnership that mirrors those of Andrei Sakharov and Yelena Bonner in the Soviet Union, and Vaclav and Olga Havel in Czechoslovakia.

By the summer of 1976 they had already been active for several years in Poland's opposition movement, taking part in the 1968 student protests, signing letters and the petition to change the constitution of the Polish People's Republic, forming opposition study circles and publishing samizdat. It was in 1976, however, that they began to make a distinctive mark by organizing support for workers brutally repressed for spontaneous strikes in Radom and Ursus. The Romaszewskis traveled forty-three times to Radom that summer to get legal assistance for arrested workers, monitor the court proceedings of those charged, and raise material aid for the repressed workers and their families. Zofia described the thinking behind their actions in an interview for the Bush Center's "Freedom Collection:"

These were mostly people who never had any run-ins with the courts, with any criminal past, they knew nothing about these things, and they were completely helpless in the face of the machinery of coercion in Poland. So, they did not know such things, as what is a defense attorney, where you get one, how do you apply for a food parcel, for mail [privileges of prisoners to send and receive mail], for a jailhouse visit—they were entirely helpless in this whole context. . . .

You know, any movement can become organized and be effective when it has some form of protection. What I mean is, when people are able to organize in such a way, where there is a component of empathetic solidarity, protection, and where people know that it is one for all and all for one—

that you yourself would go to prison for another—that is very important.

The June strikes and repressive aftermath sparked the creation of a unique group, the Workers Defense Committee or KOR, that would help end the pattern of failed worker rebellions in communist Poland and other communist bloc countries by helping to bring together intellectuals and workers in united opposition to communist rule. Initially composed of thirteen veteran opposition intellectuals, KOR openly set out to overcome the regime's (up to then successful) ruling strategy of atomizing society and keeping different groups not only apart but at odds. It was this strategy that had set workers against students and intellectuals during the 1968 student protests and that had kept intellectuals and students from joining workers in the 1970 strikes on the Baltic coast that were brutally suppressed by police. KOR, which grew to thirty-three members including the Romaszewskis, became a key instrument for building the future Solidarity movement.

---

**During the heady events of 1989 to 1991, what was clear was that the fall of communism was the result of millions of people rising up to determine their fates.**

---

Some in KOR were elder statesmen of Polish opposition whose role was to craft and endorse proclamations, denounce the government for violating the Helsinki Accords, or develop manifestos and resistance strategy. Others organized underground publishing houses that aimed at putting out banned literary and scholarly books. Others, like the Romaszewskis and Jacek Kuron, joined by his wife, Danuta, to name a few, undertook the organizing and active defense of workers who were fed up with government-imposed price increases and wage controls, the tyranny of enterprise directors, and the social and workplace manipulation engineered by communist-controlled trade unions.

The experiences in Radom led the Romaszewskis to create the Intervention Bureau

of KOR, a not legal but more formal means for defending citizens' rights. In taking on this large task, the Romaszewskis and others built a broad network of helpers who educated workers in international labor rights, documented human rights violations, found lawyers to defend workers arrested or fired from their jobs, traveled around the country to monitor judicial proceedings and bring assistance to families of imprisoned workers, advised families on how to ensure that prison authorities honored the rules for family visits, and generally made sure that workers knew they were not alone in their struggle against the communist Leviathan. Based on the Intervention Bureau's documentation, Zbigniew and Zofia launched the Polish Helsinki Commission, which produced a famous comprehensive report to the 1980 Madrid Review Conference of the Helsinki Final Act.

The work of the Romaszewskis, KOR, and other colleagues was history in the making. Their efforts helped convince more and more people that they were not alone and that they possibly had power by joining together. This sense was made even more palpable by John Paul II, the first Polish Pope, who during his inaugural trip to Poland in 1979 told the millions of people who gathered to hear him "to live in truth" and "not to fear." The true impact was seen soon thereafter, in August 1980 when millions of workers joined together in the largest and most consequential national strike in the annals of international trade unionism. As the nationwide strikes grew in strength and gained international support, the Polish authorities were forced to sign the Gdańsk Accords, whose first provision recognized the right of workers to create and join independent trade unions of their own choosing—a fundamental admission that the communist government did not represent the working class.

Suddenly, all of Polish society had achieved a fundamental understanding of social solidarity and willingly took on the power of the communist state. Today we view everything as inevitable: Solidarity, 1989, the fall of the Soviet Union. In August 1980 nothing was inevitable. Each worker acted without knowing what the consequences would be. From previous

experience, they knew the possible risks: prison, dismissal from work, police harassment, retribution against family members, or, worse, targeted violence or "liquidation." Polish workers stood up to demand basic rights and freedoms knowing the real possibility of the ultimate retribution: a Soviet invasion. They did so because they had taken what Romaszewski called "that major first step towards freedom"—the belief that it "was one for all, and all for one."

---

**In the end, Polish society used the 1989 elections to register an overwhelming referendum against communism, electing Solidarity candidates by 90 percent of votes in all but one of the contested elections and refusing to vote for most communist party candidates.**

---

During the first period of Solidarity's legal or aboveground existence (August 1980 to December 1981), most of the intellectuals in KOR were key advisors helping to devise strategy. Zbigniew Romaszewski had earned enough of the workers' trust to be elected to the union's National Commission and its acting body, the presidium. The Romaszewskis also organized Solidarity's "Intervention and Lawfulness Commission," a way of institutionalizing their human rights protection mechanism within the trade union. The sixteen-month period of Solidarity's first legal existence was often called "the carnival." The term reflected the Poles' joyfulness about their newfound ability to express themselves and organize in a relatively free atmosphere. In fact, however, this period was fraught with constant tension. The communist hierarchy, still fully in control of the state, tried at all points to protect as much of its power as possible and constantly tested Solidarity's and Polish society's mettle through police attacks, harassment, dismissals, targeted enterprise closures, engineered food shortages, and military and police maneuvers.

The Romaszewskis documented everything and organized a defense system for all acts of repression—legal help, a public spotlight,



financial aid, material assistance—all while building a network that could survive a major crackdown. Behind all of the Romaszewskis' efforts was an understanding that opposing dictatorship was not an abstract idea: everything taking place in Poland involved real people, whose lives were often harmed by the risks they took to speak up and act on their beliefs. Every day they encountered the true impact that the communist system, in all of its repressive and bureaucratic apparatus, had on ordinary people. They made sure that Solidarity lived up to its name as a moral creed and never forgot those who took risks and suffered the consequences.

---

**The transitions in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have turned out to be much less than what human rights activists and leaders hoped for. The revolutionary chorus of “one for all, all for one” changed to a cackle of political ambitions and self-interest, not the least of which were the functionaries from the old regime protecting themselves and their associates.**

---

Internally, within the leadership of the union, indeed within all of Polish society, there was a constant debate over how far to go and what would provoke the authorities beyond a breaking point that would result in a crackdown or Soviet invasion. The historical evidence shows that the regime began preparing a crackdown even as it signed the Gdańsk Accords in August 1980 and that General Jaruzelski carefully directed the plans as they evolved. The Soviet leadership was regularly informed of these plans, and Soviet threats to invade were meant to prod Jaruzelski to take action earlier. In the end, the crackdown engineered by Jaruzelski was thorough and complete, but ultimately, as Romaszewski predicted, it failed to break Solidarity and the Polish people's resistance. Most Poles had indeed taken “the first major step toward freedom.” As the Romaszewskis proved after martial law, with enough preparation to resist a crackdown, Polish society would not take a step back.

The authorities released Zofia and Zbigniew Romaszewski early, about a year apart in 1984 and 1985, as part of “amnesties”—an annual ritual in which the authorities would release some political prisoners in order to get relief from sanctions imposed by the United States and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe. The Romaszewskis were in no way broken; indeed, they remained resolute. But like other released political prisoners, they found themselves in an odd situation. They were no longer in prison, but they could not go back into hiding or reenter clandestine Solidarity structures—this would be too dangerous for their still-underground colleagues. They now had to figure out how to continue organizing resistance for Solidarity.

Upon their release, the Romaszewskis did what came naturally. They recreated the Intervention and Lawfulness Commission in 1985 so as to organize protection and material assistance for repressed Solidarity members and their families. The structure was neither legal nor underground, and its activities were both public and clandestine. Despite the informal nature of the structure, the Romaszewskis retained their initial authority to act from Solidarity's legal existence. This authority was reinforced by statements by Solidarity's underground structures and the union's chairman, Lech Wałęsa, who was also outside prison. Despite the formal lifting of martial law and the supposed general nature of the amnesties, the scale was now even greater, involving thousands of repressed workers who were still frequently detained, sentenced by administration to large fines, sentenced to imprisonment by penal courts, constantly under police surveillance, dismissed from work and unemployable, their children harassed and prevented from studying at university, and otherwise repressed by the regime.

Surprisingly, the Polish authorities allowed Zofia to travel to the United States as part of the effort to show “liberalization” in exchange for sanctions relief. It was then that the Committee in Support of Solidarity's president, Irena Lasota, herself a prison veteran from the 1968 student protests, met Zofia for the first time. The two women were of a similar age and had similar orientations: they were people of both action and compassion, with common strategies

for opposing communism through peaceful means and with similar understandings of the necessity for helping people who suffered the consequences of standing up for human rights. Lasota and the Committee had raised money for underground Solidarity and directed some of this money to support the Romaszewskis' network, first in the broadcasting of Radio Solidarność but also for human rights documentation and social assistance.

What was needed now, Zofia argued, was social protection on a vast scale. Tens of thousands of workers had been dismissed from their jobs for union activities. Hundreds were still in prison. They and their families needed assistance, which the underground Solidarity structures had difficulty organizing. Without such assistance there was a danger that the extended period of repression by the communist state would again break the social bonds of solidarity that had been so important to the union's existence. The Romaszewskis argued that the recreated Intervention Bureau could act more effectively while operating semiopenly since they and their network of human rights workers were now able to travel within Poland with relative ease, no longer fearing being caught and, given the delicate diplomatic dance of the Polish authorities with Western governments, unlikely to be arrested again. The Committee raised a substantial amount of money in the next several years for this purpose. Other organizations, like Joan Baez's Aurora Foundation, also provided grants totaling more than \$100,000 over three years. Irena Lasota organized channels for the delivery of this assistance and the Romaszewskis developed means for receiving and distributing the assistance with none of it being seized.

Rebuilding these networks of social solidarity helped bolster worker resistance. When workers in Nowa Huta, Silesia, and the Baltic Coast again organized well-targeted strikes in summer 1988, demanding the legal reinstatement of Solidarity, the Polish authorities, fearing that the strikes would again spread nationwide, agreed to new negotiations that resulted in the Roundtable Accords six months later. Not only did the government agree to Solidarity's legal reinstatement, it agreed to semifree elections in

June 1989. From the evidence, it appears that the Polish authorities believed they could neuter Solidarity by forcing the movement in a subordinate position in parliament. In the end, Polish society used the elections to register an overwhelming referendum against communism, electing Solidarity candidates by 90 percent votes in all but one of the contested elections and refusing to vote for most communist party candidates, denying many a quorum to be elected (required by the regime's own electoral law) and thereby denying the regime legitimacy to rule. Ultimately, as satellite parties defected, the communist government was too weakened to survive. The first noncommunist government was formed in September 1989. The "springtime of nations" revolt by Eastern European countries soon followed.

---

**Before 1989, nearly everyone thought that getting rid of communism and bringing democracy to Eastern Europe was impossible. Afterwards, the same "experts" who had thought such a change impossible declared it "inevitable": communism fell because the system failed.**

---

In the June elections Zbigniew Romaszewski ran as a candidate in a working-class district of Warsaw for a seat in the Senate, a newly created upper chamber of parliament that initially had limited powers with 100 contested seats. With his wife running the campaign, Romaszewski won one of the largest percentages of any Solidarity candidate. In the years that followed, he won re-election six times, serving a total of twenty-two years, the longest-serving member of parliament after June 1989.

During the spring of 1988 the Romaszewskis launched another, perhaps even more significant initiative. They had long built networks not just in Poland but throughout Eastern Europe, understanding the struggle in Poland to be part of a broader struggle against Soviet-imposed communist regimes throughout the region. Although there were still constant acts of harassment and arrests of activists in their network, by this time they had been acting for

several years without arrest or serious retribution. They believed it was now possible to be even more bold: to hold an international conference involving human rights activists from throughout the communist bloc countries as well as others, with the aim of fostering a regionwide human rights movement. They invited hundreds of people from throughout the Soviet bloc, Western Europe, and the United States to come to Nowa Huta, a communist-created city built around a steelworks outside Kraków, to discuss how to bring about fundamental change with respect to human rights in the region. While there had been cross-border meetings of KOR and Charter 77 of Czechoslovakia, among others, this was the first time that anyone had attempted to organize an open forum for human rights activists from communist countries.

The Romaszewskis got approval from local Catholic Church officials to hold the conference in a newly built church in Nowa Huta created at the behest of and dedicated to John Paul II, who had been bishop and cardinal of the Kraków diocese and had long sought to build a church in what the communists originally conceived as a centerpiece to the atheist regime. (The director Andrzej Wajda depicts the creation and socialist culture of Nowa Huta in the film “Man of Marble.”) The Romaszewskis believed that the Polish authorities would not directly intervene to prevent the conference from being held in this church building, called Mistrzejewice; despite the presence of battalions of black-coated secret policemen outside, they were correct. In the end, several hundred activists walked right past the battalions to attend the conference. They represented the by-now significant democratic opposition movements in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic states; human rights activists from Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria; and an array of representatives from other repressed nations and ethnic groups within the Soviet Union. The general secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, John Vandervecken, and a representative of the AFL-CIO, teacher and union leader Albert Shanker, attended along with human rights activists from Western Europe and the United States. As the conference

got under way, the first strikes in Silesia began. Vandervecken left immediately after his speech to join the miners. It is hard to know the direct impact the first International Human Rights Conference in Nowa Huta had in spurring events in Eastern Europe, nor the direct impact of the second conference the Romaszewskis organized in Leningrad in 1990 in spurring the downfall of the Soviet Union. Certainly many of the participants went on to become parliamentarians, civil society leaders, and even prime ministers and presidents of newly free countries. What we do know, however, is that this may have been the first time that many human rights and democracy activists, all with a similar purpose, had had an opportunity to meet, talk, craft strategy, and declare for their countries a common future dedicated to the respect of human and worker rights.

---

**The outmigration of more than 5 percent of the total population—nearly a quarter of Poles aged eighteen to forty—is a unique phenomenon in a developed democratic country and likely to create enormous burdens on future governments.**

---

Before 1989 nearly everyone thought that getting rid of communism and bringing democracy to Eastern Europe was impossible. Afterward the same “experts” who had thought such a change impossible declared it “inevitable”: communism fell because the system failed. During the heady events of 1989 to 1991, however, what was clear was that the fall of communism was the result of millions of people rising up to determine their fates. They chose to bring about an end to communist dictatorship and to craft a democratic future, oriented to Europe and the West, for their countries. Those who organized internal opposition to communist regimes knew that any change, any transformation, depended on individuals standing up to and resisting the state’s power and challenging communist ideology. Without anyone to challenge the system, it could have continued much longer. There were many heroes who stood up and resisted. Some are well known internationally,

like Andrei Sakharov and Vaclav Havel; others, like Zbigniew and Zofia Romaszewski, are known in their own countries and even regionally, but not more widely. Then there are those who are wholly unknown but, as the Romaszewskis could attest, whose actions were the basis of the remarkable change and transformation that took place. These were the ordinary workers and members of society who finally decided to stand up and be counted, to create a new nation based on social solidarity, joining in the chorus “one for all and all for one.”

While many Eastern European countries are now in the EU and NATO, and tied to the West, nevertheless the transitions in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have turned out to be much less than what human rights activists and leaders had hoped for. The revolutionary chorus of “one for all, all for one” changed to a cackle of political ambitions and self-interest, especially regarding the functionaries from the old regime protecting themselves and their associates. In the former Soviet Union, most countries simply switched from communist dictatorship to authoritarian rule by KGB veterans—Putinism and its variations, rule protected by a new oligarchic elite of former communists that controlled most of the economic assets. In Eastern European countries there was more development of basic democratic institutions, but in fact a great deal of political life has been stunted and warped by the continuing influence of former communist elites in public and economic life.

Twenty-five years after World War II most Western European countries were well developed democracies with stable politics and economies. Twenty-five years after 1989, Eastern European countries are facing different degrees of political turmoil and economic distress. No country, not even the most successful Baltic States, has stable political parties that reflect basic historical and social interests in the manner of the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, or even post-Nazi West Germany in 1970, twenty-five years after the cataclysmic World War II. Today, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland and Romania all face serious economic and

social crises, with political establishments unable to present satisfactory solutions to the electorate. In Poland, which supposedly has the strongest economy of all post-Soviet bloc countries, 2 million mostly young people have left their homeland in the last ten years, most never to return. The outmigration of more than 5 percent of the total population—nearly a quarter of Poles aged eighteen to forty—is a unique phenomenon in a developed democratic country and likely to create enormous burdens on future governments.

Many revolutionaries from 1989–91 were either incapable of confronting the new challenges of democratic politics or, worse, were seduced by power and money and simply forsook their principles and the people they once led. There were a few, however, who never stopped trying to fulfill the hopes of 1989. As a senator, Zbigniew Romaszewski was among those few. He set about trying to institutionalize human rights into legislation, called for accountability for the human rights violations of the communist regime, and challenged the new economic orthodoxy of free markets, which seemed to benefit mostly old communist officials. Many Solidarity leaders cashed in on the new free market in Poland and some became antiunion zealots, but Romaszewski stayed true to his roots, defending workers against forced closings, massive unemployment, and lack of social services. He sponsored legislation to support Solidarity activists who had permanently lost jobs and ended up in dire poverty as a result of their courage under communism.

Romaszewski also stayed true to his internationalism and his belief in the universal struggle for human rights and dignity. He remained a champion for freedom throughout the former Soviet bloc and worldwide. In 1998 he and Zofia organized a third International Human Rights Conference, this time hosted in the Polish Sejm, or parliament, building to highlight the unfinished business of human rights implementation in postcommunist and still-communist countries including the People’s Republics of China and Korea and the last unchanged Soviet satellite country, Cuba. Among many other actions, he led international efforts to defend helpless Chechens from



Russian invasion, including organizing a special Senate investigative commission on Chechnya that took him to the war-torn region; advocated for Crimean Tatars who were fighting Russian chauvinism in their homeland in Ukraine after returning from Soviet exile after forty-five years; carried out human rights investigations of crimes in former Yugoslavia; stood up to the new authoritarian regimes in the Caucasus and Central Asia; joined with his human rights brethren in Russia against the rise of Putinism and Putin's reassertion of Russian domination of the former Soviet empire; sponsored and supported the creation of Belsat to offer Belarusians independent news under the dictatorship of Aleksander Lukashenka; and traveled with Zofia to Cuba in 2006 to share with dissidents the experience of Solidarity. In retirement from the Senate, he and Zofia undertook new human rights campaigns, among them helping the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe, the successor organization to the Committee in Support of Solidarity, to monitor elections in Georgia in 2012 that led to the first peaceful and democratic transfer of power in that country. A month before his death, he traveled to Ukraine to register his personal support for the civic Euromaidan movement.

I first came to know the Romaszewskis by editing accounts of Radio Solidarność and informing the American public of their daring resistance to martial law. After their arrest, I reported on Zbigniew Romaszewski's calm and certain declaration of future victory in court—even as he, Zofia, and his colleagues faced several years' imprisonment. Despite not sharing a common language—I never learned Polish well enough to converse—I came to know both Zosia and Zbyszek closely after their release from prison. After Zofia's trip to the United States I raised funds from trade unions, human rights groups, individuals, and the NED to support their campaigns of social solidarity and lawfulness. I also assisted their organization of the Nowa Huta and Leningrad International Human Rights Conferences and several of their post-1989 efforts, including the third conference in Warsaw to keep the spirit of Solidarity and human and worker rights alive in the region. Throughout, I knew I was in the presence of true

makers of history. The Romaszewskis' contributions to the struggle for Poland's and Eastern Europe's freedom are immense, but what struck me most about both of them was how their sympathy for and commitment to others mirrored their personal devotion to and love for each other. It is rare to know individuals whose private and public actions are a consistent reflection of principled values and human morals. The Romaszewskis were such individuals.

In 2014 Zofia Romaszewska lost her partner of more than forty-five years; their daughter Agnieszka, who continued in her parents' footsteps and currently directs Belsat, has lost a devoted father and teacher. Poland has lost a great hero. I, along with many others in dozens of countries, have lost a true friend, someone whose values and commitment helped guide us for thirty years. Zbigniew Romaszewski never viewed any issue as complicated and was never tied up by any ideology. He always stood on the right side, the side of human rights and freedom, wherever and whenever it was needed. I hope his legacy continues to guide me and others as well.

*Editor's Note:* In 2014, Zofia Romaszewska was awarded the Lech Kaczyński Medal for her lifetime work on behalf of human rights.



## **Between clichés and erasure Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe as an “empty syntagm” in contemporary public discourse**

**Dariusz Skórczewski**

### **ABSTRACT**

Drawing on the ancient rhetoric tradition, this paper employs the notions of “figure of thought” and “figure of speech” to address the issue of the ambivalent “soft” status of Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe in various contemporary public discourses in the Western world, such as discourses