

# Experiences of the ZSP-IWA



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**The Union of Syndicalists** was founded at the end of March 2007 with the purpose of bringing a new type of unionism to life in Poland. The Founding Congress in Gliwice discussed the principles of organizing in a horizontal manner which could be developed in the framework of an anarcho-syndicalist organization. The operating principles of the federation were discussed at length; a prior attempt to form such an organization in Poland failed to do so and shortly was hijacked by individuals who created a more vertical structure. The Founding Congress also discussed potential areas of activity for the new organization, especially in light of the reality facing much of the working class in Poland: a high rate of precarious employment, unionization concentrated in traditional centers and widespread compromises, bureaucratic corruption and other problems in the largest, representative unions that often gave unionism a bad image. It would not be long before ZSP became recognizable as something different than the mainstream, with the ability to organize in situations where the other unions could not.

In the nearly 15 years since the union was founded, it has had notable victories in many areas, usually the result of direct action methods. Many of its actions and campaigns became unique examples of struggle in Poland, such as organizing agency workers who were in different workplaces, helping immigrant workers, dealing with problems of workers abroad in a multi-national campaign or even organizing successful strike actions outside of the extremely restrictive Trade Unions Act, which is intended to limit the rights of workers to take such action. Some of the actions of ZSP became a reference as to what is possible for workers who dare to take action outside of the legalistic confines of the mainstream unions.

ZSP became a member of the International Workers' Association at the XXIV Congress in 2009 and has hosted the 2011 Plenary and the XXVI Congress in 2016. It was elected as the IWA Secretariat at the XXV Congress (2013) and fulfilled this function during the period of 2014-the beginning of 2020.

## The First Five Years of ZSP



*May Day 2007 in Warsaw. The first public action of ZSP.*

During the first year of ZSP's existence, it was largely active in supporting other workplace struggles, but also started to see areas where it could operate. One comrade from the Opel factory in Gliwice was working there and a strike was held by the mainstream unions. It should be noted that the factory used a lot of workers from temporary agencies such as Adecco and these workers were typically not unionized as they were legally employed by the agencies. The mainstream unions, which operate by the laws invented by the capitalists, did not include the agency workers as they were not considered workers of the factory and did not fit into the schemes invented by the state to protect capitalists. During this strike, we defended our member but also put exposed how the laws worked to divide the workforce and called for the agency workers to unite and start taking action. The collective agreement ended with part of the temporary workforce made permanent. This experience gave us ideas about the possibilities of organizing amongst such workers, which was new territory in our region.

Our first real experience of getting really involved in organizing an active struggle came only in May 2008. It was an interesting experience for us and was the first in several actions we were involved with that dealt with exploited immigrant workers. From speaking to a Ukrainian bus driver, one of our members learned that there were various problems for the drivers at PKS Grodzisk Mazowiecki, a bus company which had won various public tenders and whose buses were servicing some of Warsaw's public bus routes. We heard that some workers were thinking about not going to work because of money that was not paid or unfairly deducted from their salaries.

People from Warsaw ZSP quickly made their way to the miserable barracks where they were housed. What we found out was appalling. The work time regulations in effect at that time limited the working time of drivers to 9 hours a day (with breaks) and a minimum of two days off per week. However, many of the drivers were forced to work 10, 12 or even up to 17 hours per day without overtime pay. The average driver from Ukraine worked 60-75 hours a week – sometimes more. Then there were the deductions made from the salaries. We sat down with the workers and helped them produce careful documentation of this. Deductions sometimes reached up to almost 50% of their wages for going over „gas limits“. The company had set strict limits (which they often didn't tell the drivers about and which were not written) about how much gas could be used during a typical route. Thus, if a bus driver was caught in traffic or put on the air conditioning or heat, they'd go over the limit and money would be docked from their salaries. These deductions were not in accordance to the law on making deductions, which we could easily document.

The company had also taken possession of the workers' passports, so they felt trapped. This was beginning to sound similar to the human trafficking that some immigrant workers fall victim to.

A group of the workers decided to go on wildcat strike and we agreed that we could help them to draw up demands and document the abuses. We contacted

the press, the bus company, the transit board and the city of Warsaw about this situation and the workers' action. Two days later, the head of PKS GM appeared at the barracks carrying envelopes filled with cash for the workers. They received their passports and were told that they were being given a 10-day „vacation” to „rest” back in Ukraine.

On the one hand, our actions brought some results. On the other hand, the 10-day „vacation” really had been a technique to get rid of the workers who dared to take action. Those people who got money and this „vacation” simply did not come back to be cheated again.

We learned a lot about how we can make demands on the bosses with this action, but also learned something that we would see a lot in later years: how cheated workers or ones with bad working conditions often simply want out. In such situations, we wondered if we could build more stable structures in such workplaces that use temporary workers or have high turnover.

The denunciations we made against PKS GM later had some consequences for the company. It was fined the equivalent of 15,000 USD and the Department of Health and Sanitation decided that the barracks were unfit for living and sent the case to the Public Prosecutor. Of course the Prosecutor did not follow up and the fine amounted to a mere slap on the wrist. That is how the authorities treat those who abuse workers and such actions do little to dissuade those companies. This too taught us something. With these experiences, we felt we could make a difference on the union scene, especially by dealing with workers which the mainstream typically ignored.

Members of ZSP also looked at their workplaces and noticed that, at that time in Poland, unions mostly existed in the public sector, factories or traditionally unionized industries. Unions in private companies and corporations were very unusual then. One member formed a union in a corporation in Warsaw and quickly many workers joined it. In order to bust the union, that person was fired under false pretenses. We responded with an international solidarity campaign and fight to get the comrade reinstated.

# PROTEST

**DOŚĆ ŁAMANIA PRAW  
PRACOWNICZYCH!**

**ZWIĄZEK W FIRMIE  
LIONBRIDGE ZOSTAJE!**



Unlike in many countries, reinstatement is a rare outcome in Poland. Legal battles for reinstatement often take years and by that time, people have moved on to other jobs. This situation ended in a settlement, which was more than what was expected.

The situation also taught us a lot. A lot of people joined the union but then essentially were frightened by this repression, which made us question the sense of building up a union so quickly in such an atmosphere. We

find that often in Poland, unions organize hierarchically and workers want to have a leader who will take the responsibility for us. We've seen many disgraceful situations in different workplaces where repressed unionists were not even given solidarity by their own workmates or unions. We wanted to make sure that we did not go that way and that those who joined with us understood the principles of sticking together and solidarity.

In 2009 we undertook action to support a repressed unionist from a mainstream union – Solidarity. We have seen how some workers who sincerely want to take action start branches of Solidarity in the belief that, as a member of Poland's most numerous union, they would be offered the most support. Unfortunately, we have encountered plenty of people who have been left out in the cold by the union, simply because they confronted the bosses which that union has pacts with. We organized solidarity actions against Nestle, who repressed a unionist working in Alima-Gerber and comrades in Switzerland visited their corporate headquarters, making a great impression.

Some of the leadership of this union, especially those involved with the church and sometimes fascist organizations, have been on a special mission to sabotage the work of ZSP. They have been involved in not only slander campaigns but in various legal denunciations against the union, accusing us of



everything from ludicrous accusations of having been Soviet agents during the war to trying to violently overthrow the state. On a couple of occasions, members of Solidarity have called on fascist goons to attack us.

In 2009 we acted against a temporary agency called Groenflex which sends workers to Holland. One friend was injured at work and was not insured by the agency and was sent home only to receive a large hospital bill. This was a typical example of the kind of conflict we wanted to take on. Legalists would only tell the worker that they need to sue Groenflex – in a Dutch court and this type of action is usually very difficult for any worker to undertake. Our idea was to expose what happened and occupy the Groenflex office, warning other workers not to use this agency. We also asked comrades in Holland to join in this action. This is what we did and not only did the worker receive his money but also Groenflex workers started to get health insurance.



*Occupation of the Groenflex office in Opole, March 2009.*

We were able to prove that direct action can bring results and can be a lot swifter than the means of the legalists.

One comrade who participated in the occupation later decided that such an action would be could for the work conflict with his hospital. The public authorities in charge of the hospital did not want to negotiate with the workers,

so it was decided that we would join in an occupation of the Starosta public office in Bielsko Biala. The workers were fighting against cuts in the number of beds and employees and also for a raise. We said that we would not leave the office until he came and discussed with a representative of the workers, which he eventually did. Although nothing was resolved during this action, it raised a lot of awareness of the situation of the workers and showed us that we can force authorities to meet if we insist.

The last action that we were involved in that year was also quite well known and set us apart from the other unions in this region. Our comrade was employed and suddenly dismissed from an „alternative“ bookshop in Wroclaw called Falanster. This bookshop was set up by a well-known „alterglobalist“ and was promoting Fair Trade, however, the working conditions were anything but fair. What we quickly found out is how many „leftists“ and „anarchists“ would quickly come to the defense of „alternative“ business. Even people who claimed to be „anarcho-syndicalists“ over the next few years would disgracefully support alternative business owners against workers' campaigns initiated by ZSP.

The situation in Falanster became well-known and controversial throughout Poland, with members of ZSP pointing out that there exist a lot of small businesses capitalizing on some „alternative“ image which in fact have abysmal, sometimes totally informal working conditions. The notoreity spread, eventually forcing the owners to go into negotiation with ZSP and the workers of the bookshop and adopt some codes of employment.

The next year (2010) we began another well-known campaign at a franchise of vegetarian restaurants called Greenway. There weren't too many vegetarian restaurants at the time and the appearance of this franchise was welcomed by many vegetarians who saw it as promoting vegetarianism. A number of people we knew decided to work there, however, among the many notorious things Greenway did was to illegally hire people on „unpaid trial periods“, sometimes lasting many days. This usually turned out as a way for the restaurant simply



to get free labor for a few days and it turned out that they were using this quite often. We called for compensation for the cheated workers and a boycott of Greenway, organizing both pickets and occupations in several cities in Poland. In addition, in Wroclaw, comrades from Food Not Bombs set up in front of Greenway, offering free vegan meals to boycotting customers.



*Going to occupy Greenway. Wroclaw, March 2010.*

Again, some people supported the bosses, including some self-fashioned anarcho-syndicalists. We found this totally unacceptable, however, we were able to get some new people interesting in precarious working conditions in supposedly alternative workplaces. Some vegans invited ZSP to speak about the importance of working conditions and supported the boycott. In the end, the franchise, which was sprouting up like mushrooms at that point, saw many of its restaurants either withdraw from the franchise or shut down. Only a few exist today in Poland.

While the franchise tried not to admit to the abuses and ignore the scandal and although we did not achieve all the results we wanted, it showed us that we could also impact those businesses that refuse to improve their working

conditions. An informal slogan in ZSP was (more or less), „respect the workers' rights or close down”.

There were also some more actions involving immigrant workers in Warsaw. One involved the working conditions on the National Stadium, where one worker was killed, several workers cheated by subcontractors who didn't pay and dozens of Ukrainians housed in unheated barracks. We exposed the problems of safety and payments and the Ukrainians got better housing conditions.



*Informational picket at building site, Oct. 2009.*

Another group of workers were a group of Chinese workers who had been working on JW Construction projects. JW is a large developer but they used subcontractor companies that brought people to work from China. These people were then completely cheated and all the companies involved blamed each other for the situation. The workers were stranded and we helped them with food and other support and to publicize their situation and demands for help. Eventually they were at least given plane tickets home, some people received money but we do not know if promises to pay them when back in China were kept for every worker.



*Picket at a JW Construction site in Warsaw, in defense of immigrant workers, 2010.*

In the same year, a very similar situation happened with a second group of workers who were employed at a different construction company called Turret. Each had paid middlemen in China the equivalent of about 10,000 USD to come to work in Poland. We also tried to help in this case and protested at the company's office however some of the workers found new employment (without papers) and disappeared. We tried to expose these problems both to let people here know about the exploitation going on at some high-end developments and try to get word out to other workers.



*Action at OTTO's head office in Holland, 2011.*

In 2011, we encountered another work agency sending people to Holland: OTTO Workforce. Comrades in Holland contacted us about Polish people who were being cheated. We quickly made this into another international campaign with comrades from Vrije Bond in Holland and Priama Akcia in Slovakia, where OTTO also functioned and there were workers with similar issues.

The campaign against OTTO lasted a number of years and we still receive calls about it today. Basically, workers were cheated on salaries, were not provided with all the working hours promised or were made to live in overpriced, substandard housing, controlled by OTTO, where they were subject to various „fines” taken out of their salaries. The campaign documented numerous abuses and organized lots of actions in different countries: actions at OTTO headquarters in Holland, Poland, Slovakia, at numerous local offices, at the workplaces and even at an event sponsored by the agency. The campaign also brought a lot of mainstream media attention, with big features in newspapers and on TV.

Some changes had to be made in OTTO because of the long-term pressure. Also, dozens of workers who had been cheated received their money or other rectification of their situation. Practices had to be changed, for example in one factory in Wroclaw because of our campaign.



*Action at OTTO offices in Wroclaw, 2011.*

However, OTTO relies on have a high turnover in its workforce. This made it difficult to have constant contacts with the same group of workers. In the end, OTTO decided it did not want to see us picket them anymore and told us that if there are problems, just call them and they'll straighten it out. At least at the time, workers were able to get their problems resolved almost immediately. However, as we have seen, although this means less work for ZSP, it also means the de-escalation of the campaign and makes workers dependent on ZSP as intermediaries, not as a tool for self-organizing. Although we are always happy that workers are not cheated, we think it is very important that workers are actively campaigning to build a sense of mutual struggle and solidarity in the union.

2012 saw the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ZSP. Prior to that, at the beginning of the year, we started pickets and protests at Roche corporation. Roche had been using a lot of B2B contracts instead of employing people to avoid paying benefits. Many of the people on these contracts were in fact not businesses but hired by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties who leased their services to Roche. Unlike temporary employment agencies, which are subject to some legal regulation, these were not. This type of fake employment in fact exists in many companies in the private sector. It leaves workers in some type of legal limbo and often they are literally employed by nobody, even though the places they work act as their bosses.





*Picket at Roche in Warsaw, January 2012.*

Our comrade from ZSP asked to get a permanent contract and was fired. This became a good opportunity for us to talk about this phenomenon in Poland and the need to crack down on both false B2B relationships and these unofficial agencies. Unfortunately we did not have success with it as the legal system is written to encourage this exploitation. We intend to still renew the debate about the realities of this type of employment and to one day inspire change.



*Picket at Roche headquarters in Switzerland, together with Swiss FAU.*

## **ZSP, 2012- 2016**

At the beginning of 2012, ZSP participated in a number of actions (together with various local residents and activists) against the planned closure of public schools and other budget cuts which affected different workers in education – ranging from teachers, speech pathologists to even cafeteria workers. In the Praga district of Warsaw, one such protest, which then took over the local council, resulted in keeping the school open.

After numerous actions, on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the union (March 31, 2012), ZSP held a large demonstration against Social Cuts and Anti-Social Policies. (This day also coincided with IWA International Action Days (March 29-31) held by IWA Sections.) Hundreds of people turned out to this protest.



*The Day of Social Rage Protest. Warsaw, March 2012.*

In terms of IWA actions, ZSP was particularly active in this year with organizing series of solidarity actions with sister unions around the world. Of particular note were many pickets held against Adecco and ABB which the CNT-AIT was in conflict with. We were eager to take on the work agencies like Adecco, so numerous pickets took place at Adecco all over the country. On the occasion of a picket at Roche headquarters in Switzerland, we also visited ABB and Adecco there.



*Blockade of Adecco office in Opole, 2012.*



Another notable campaign we took part in was to support Dominos pizza workers in Australia, called by the ASF-IWA. Many dozens of Dominos were picketed around the world and workers were eventually able to win their demands to rescind a pay cut (and they were paid back those wages.)

The year continued with actions at Roche, solidarity actions and action involving local communities affected by budget cuts and rising costs around Poland. At the end of September, we organized a social alternative demonstration to a huge clerical-syndicalist manifestation in Warsaw, organized by the religious right and Solidarity union. At the end of the year, comrades in Wroclaw organized a protest at the Agency of the Development of Industry related to the death of a worker at LG Electronics in the nearby Special Economic Zone. They demanded that the Agency start taking responsibility for working conditions in the SEZ which it was responsible for.



*LG kills. Protest in Wroclaw, November 2012.*

The next year started with the Education Workers' Union making some denunciations at language schools where people were hired on fake authors' contracts to avoid certain responsibilities. They also pointed out the very bad situation of contracted workers who had no contributions paid into social security or retirement funds. Although this was a quite small action, it happened at a time when there was a lot of pressure on the government to think of solutions to the growing hole in the social security systems, where millions of workers on trash contracts had paid no contributions in years. ZSP started a campaign against the use of trash contracts which is a constant campaign that it plans to renew shortly. There were some results of these

denunciations: a large control was made at the authorities, forcing many schools to change their contracts. Eventually, the law required social security contributions to be paid on mandate contracts. The government declared it would end trash contracts – but it lied. It still remains an issue that we campaign against. ZSP in Wroclaw started a campaign about paid sick days in particular as people on trash contract were not entitled to them. Again, the government changed the law, but the change is completely insufficient. Workers on trash contracts can now choose to have more money deducted from their salaries to pay for this insurance – but it is totally optional and comes out of the workers' salary.



*ZSP marching in Warsaw against budget cuts and in defense of education workers, 2013.*

The whole of 2013 we made campaigns related to global problems in the workplace and also to the government changing the mandatory accounting periods, effectively allowing employers to circumvent the 8 hour work day and use people more intensively during certain periods, essentially laying them off in slower seasons.

We also held some actions at temporary work agencies such as Full Job or Impuls. Impuls was particularly bad as they hired cleaners, portiers, etc. in many different places, including in several public institutions such as local municipal offices, theaters, museums, etc, on illegal conditions, with sub-minimum wages. (At some time there was no legal minimum wage for contracted workers but this too was changed, thanks to campaigns of ZSP and also even some mainstream unions.) In addition, many workers were owed wages and could not get paid. We even met someone who fell into debt and was going to be evicted because of this. We were able to organize people who

worked in different workplaces and had not met before, but had the same problem with the agency. Several pickets and an occupation of the agency took place, resulting in thousands of zloties being immediately paid out. However, we were not satisfied with this.



*Blockade of Impuls office in Warsaw. December 2013.*

We pointed out that public tenders often had one main criteria: low price. With the prices that some public institutions were paying Impuls, they had to know that the company was getting less than a minimum wage, so the workers were getting considerably less. We started a campaign called „Enough Exploitation on Public Money” to raise awareness of this problem and force public entities to care about working conditions. Ideally, they would contract such workers directly, on work contracts with all benefits. If an outside company had to be used for temporary work, then they should make sure that the company has at least legal working conditions.

Shortly afterwards, a new bill was adapted which was another half-assed measure. The bill gave local governments the right to use other criteria, such as working conditions, as a main criteria for selecting companies in public tenders. They have the right to do this, but not obligation to check the working standards in the contractors. The government made some propaganda on these „social clauses” but put no obligation on public entities to use them.

At the beginning of 2014, ZSP started one of several campaigns it has held at Polish supermarket chains. Dino supermarkets had been involved in union busting and was guilty of various violations of workers' rights, ranging from unpaid overtime to various health and safety violations. A campaign was originally started by a member of Solidarity union from the Bydgoszcz area who was then repressed and betrayed by the union which ordered her to shut up. She reaffiliated to us and we began the campaign that the mainstream union was afraid to begin.



*Picket at Dino in the town of Dopiewo, 2014.*

Three unionists faced situations like not having their contracts renewed – a popular way of firing people that is legally not considered a dismissal. We demanded reinstatement, compensation and also started documenting the unpaid overtime and health and safety violations. The union started to make protests all over Poland, even in some very small towns. In those places, Dino is often the only supermarket and thus the protests gained widespread attention. As denunciations started to flow about violations of workers' rights, the authorities actually started to inspect Dino and they faced numerous fines. At the same time, they were spying and searching for members of the union or cooperating workers, to make scapegoats out of them. In this situation, more people joined in with the protests.

Eventually Dino had to make a lot of changes and was forced to start making overtime payments. Workers who were able to evidence their working time were able to claim wages owed to them.

2014 saw a number of interesting protests and developments. In Bielsko-Biala, where ZSP helped co-found a union and we have some members at a local hospital, the conflict had been going on for quite some time. Workers had accused the director of many violations, including breaking the law on trade unions, diverting funds and falsifying documents. He was accused of not complying with the Labor Code and not putting money into the workers' social fund (which comes out of their salaries). Courts and the Labour Inspectorate sided with the workers, who presented proof of all their allegations and the Director was forced to step down.

Perhaps most notably, in 2014 a union was formed in Belchatow Hospital. (Again, many of these workers had been unionized in a mainstream union before, but were left high and dry when their jobs were outsourced.) When the public tender for cleaning, food services and some maintenance at the hospital was won by a new company, the workers from the old service providers, who had work contracts, were, according to the law, supposed to be transferred to the new service provider. However, the new service provider just decided to take a fraction of the workers and make them do all the work that was provided by more people before. The workers who were not transferred knew that this was illegal and just started going to work, to be on call. Eventually this turned into an occupation of the hospital.



*Protest at Belchatow hospital, 2014.*



When the workers unionized in ZSP, we encouraged the continuation of direct action and looked for ways that they could win demands. This included various protests, an occupation of the Wojewodship office in Lodz (responsible for the hospital) and protests at the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor and the Parliament in Warsaw. As a result of these actions, it became the first time that such workers were able to force the service provider to honor their work contract. The women got their jobs back.



*Protesting at the Voivodship office in Lodz, June 2014.*

If this were not good enough, it turned out that the other workers were inspired by actions. Numerous violations of working conditions were occurring with the new company, ranging from forcing lots of overtime, to various health and safety issues. Also, a few people had been unfairly dismissed or hired on lower wages. The workers had been reinstated in July but, by November, they were already leading a strike.

The Belchatow strike was very unusual for Poland as it occurred outside the mainstream unions and the trade union laws which regulate how strikes need to be held. This requires endless rounds of „negotiation” and „mediation” and very specific circumstances. Here, the workers just decided to go on strike. Mainstream unionists argue that there should be „representative unions” in the workplace and that employers should not have to deal with any minority unions. They often try to exclude such unions from the workplace or the right to negotiate. They try to convince workers that they should join such



„representative unions” because only they have the right to negotiate with workers. As we can see, any union can force the bosses to sit down and talk to them, if they take decisive action. On November 3, 2014, a strike was held with more than 100 workers joining. The workers were able to win their demands after some hours, on the same day. Dismissed workers were reinstated, various problems solved. The hospital was put in a difficult situation since, without cleaners to disinfect everything, they would have to start evacuation that same day. The Director demanded that the boss of the service provider solve the issues immediately.

Until this day this remains a unique example of workers' action in Poland.



*Strike in Belchatow, November 2014.*

More interesting developments followed shortly or took place prior to the strike. Before the strike, we won unpaid wages at the Double Tree by Hilton hotel for food service workers hired through an agency. The Hotel contacted us within minutes of arriving to scout the hotel and talking to the workers to avoid any actions taking place. On the one hand, that was easy – on the other hand, the workers did not have to picket and in a way, that's a shame.

We became involved with cases of mobbing and discrimination at Citibank. (Eventually the workers won court cases and compensation.) One case involved a man who was discriminated against after taking paternity leave. Some pickets were held at Citibank and ZSP held a number of workshops dealing with mobbing, informing workers about what they can do in such situations.



*Protest at Citibank's office in Warsaw. October 2014.*

After the victory in Belchatow, we were contacted by workers at the newly opened Amazon Fulfillment Center in Poznan. We had heard of some different problems and even work stoppages happening there and in another center. Workers formed the first union at Amazon (although mainstream unions quickly attacked us and claimed to workers that we were „illegal” to derail their attempts). As it turned out, some workers were hired by agencies such as Adecco and Manpower and experienced various problems, including not being paid for some „idle time”. We started a series of actions at these agencies which quickly resulted in some payments made from Adecco. Manpower, which had initially made immediate payments later proved to be more contentious of some demands. The result being that Manpower lost its contract with Amazon for some time. (They were later used again.)



*Protest of Amazon workers at Manpower in Poznan. January 2015.*

Actions continued around these agencies for a few months into 2015. As the holiday rush was over, many temporary workers' contracts ended or they decided to look elsewhere for jobs. The first few months after the initial wave of protests, workers from ZSP made some criticisms of working norms and demanded higher wages. Later on in the upcoming years, some limited activities continued in Amazon around issues such as entitlement to sick pay being denied because the employer did not submit the proper forms. However, soon independent organizing was pushed out by the presence of mainstream unions with professionalized worker representatives and salters.



*Protest at Adecco in Poznan. January 2015.*

In May 2015, the workers in the hospital in Bielsko-Biala decided to strike for some hours and organized a protest together with another nurses' union from a nearby hospital. The strike took place on International Nurses Day, however some of the workers who took part were from other professions. Among the demands were pay rises, including demands that prioritized the lower-paid workers. The protest went to the same starosta office that we had occupied several years earlier.

Later that year, ZSP became involved in solidarity with nurses in Wyszkw. Part of an independent union, 7 nurses who were talking about organizing a strike were fired. The hospital put up notices trying to scare workers by saying it would be illegal. We heard about this situation and visited, saying that they





*Protest of health care workers in Bielsko-Biala. May 2015.*

cannot let such things happen, that they need to show solidarity by taking action and that we would definitely support them as well. They decided to strike, although the hospital was claiming it was „illegal” all the time, but actually the nurses got a lot of support from the local community and even other unions, including the main nurses union. They eventually won their strike which we considered to be a good example of a „minority” independent union taking action outside the main union bureaucracy.

A few months later, ZSP participated in a large demonstration of nurses in Warsaw.

In Warsaw, as we were continuing campaigns against the exploitation of outsourced workers at public institutions, we were contacted by more workers with these problems. We had already called out the local municipal office in Wola for having security guards working through Impuls who were owed several months salary – a fact that they acted ignorant of. Then we were approached by workers who had been renovating municipal flats and left without any salary. (As many of us were also active in tenant organizing, we

already had other issues with the office responsible for municipal housing.) The situation was tricky as the men – who lived in a local homeless shelter where we were helping some people – were hired with no contracts by a shady contractor, which had won this public tender.



*Workers occupy the Municipal Office in Wola. Warsaw, October 2015.*

We of course occupied the municipal office, demanding that they take responsibility for their subcontractors, stop using them, hire people directly or, if it is a short-term project, make sure that their are legal working conditions at the companies they contract. (This still hasn't happened, but this was a very good example of the type of exploitation we were talking about.)

It actually took some time, but eventually we were able to get the money for the workers, but the process was nasty. This was one of the very few times that we saw workers who had no contract actually get money they were cheated out of. The legal system works very much in favor of wage theft, offering a wide variety of options for crooks of all sizes to cheat workers out of money.



*Finally paid.*

Several situations with OTTO Workforce appeared again in 2015 and there was a picket at the national headquarters in Wrocław. One worker in Holland was able to show that his salary was lower than the collective agreement and demanded that his salary be raised. After meeting with OTTO, not only was it raised, but it was raised slightly higher than the agreement rate. He was also paid the difference in the rate for his past work.

At the beginning of 2016, members of ZSP at the Post Office started organizing, creating a Facebook page and organizing meetings with other workers around Poland. They drew up a list of demands to the Post Office which included raising the basic salary, hiring more staff (as many mail carriers were overworked and given too many deliveries), reorganization of the regions to more evenly distribute the work, closing pay gaps and making more realistic norms to get bonuses. Although ZSP had appeared to support a general postal strike almost a decade earlier and had made an alternative platforms for postal workers to communicate, things had died down and workers had gone for some years without much show of discontent. The new Facebook page became immensely popular and drew in lots of workers who wanted to meet and do something.

The ZSP in Wrocław started a conflict at a vegetarian restaurant called „Zle Mięso”. Our comrade there saw that some workers had no contracts, no social security payments or benefits. Some workers who had contracts had two different ones so that the boss would have some paper to show in case of problems. This was yet another establishment owned by a pseudo-leftist, but by this time, leftists and self-styled anarchists had already stopped publically going against our campaigns against such exploitation. (Something had changed.) ZSP called for negotiations with the boss in April and announced it would start actions if the situation did not improve. In May the first actions started and continued until November.

The owner was particularly stubborn about the issue. Eventually, the authorities investigated the situation, confirmed all the complaints of the ZSP



and put the case for prosecution. The owner announced that because of ZSP, he was forced to shut down the business at the end of the year. Although this was not exactly a victory for the workers, it showed that people do not have to accept exploitation of other working people in such establishments. It also showed yet another time what the consequences of screwing the workers could be.



*Picket at Zle Mieso. Wrocław, November 2016.*

That year ZSP also prepared to host the XXVI Congress of the IWA in December 2016 in Warsaw. The X Congress of ZSP met after May Day in Krakow and was accompanied by some public events. The Congress adopted a statement on ZSP's positions on certain critical happenings within the IWA. Since the time we joined, we noted attempts of a few Sections to disenfranchise the others, which we opposed. We were initially seen by these organizations as a potential supporter of a split faction, however, our resolutions were against attempts to disenfranchise some Sections or to forment this split. At the XXV Congress, delegates were informed of attempts by certain individuals to lobby for splitting from the IWA and very soon we had to deal with concrete actions being carried out. In Spain, unions which had exposed wrong-doing in the CNT had been expelled and the expulsion process was happening at an alarming rate. The CNT (which is now part of CIT or ICL) of Spain even was calling for a new founding Congress of the IWA, without the discussion or decision of such and was planning on boycotting the Warsaw Congress. With such a situation facing us in December, we had to have a serious discussion about what to do, months ahead of the Congress, so that we

could make proposals. This drama sucked a bit of our energy, however, we kept active throughout the year.

We won several wage theft cases against various small employers. Then the workers of another supermarket chain, MarcPol, started organizing. MarcPol had started moving assets around in one of those schemes that are unfortunately all too typical, having several legal entities involved. MarcPol entity went bankrupt, but MarcPol as a supermarket was still run by several other entities controlled by the same people. When firms do that, often they try to cheat workers saying that the firm is bankrupt and thus cannot pay them – even if they are still doing business under a different name.



*Workers blockade MarcPol supermarket. Warsaw, August 2016.*

Workers asked why – if MarcPol was „bankrupt” and couldn't pay people – there was a MarcPol supermarket operating right in the center of Warsaw. If MarcPol is bankrupt, it should be closed. So in July, that's what we did. The workers blocked the entrances of MarcPol to draw attention to the situation. We wrote some articles exposing how this bankruptcy was a ruse and the owner of MarcPol was opening other investments.

Eventually, workers got paid but, unfortunately, this money came from a public fund, not from the thieving employer. Although we appreciate that such a fund exists (and we helped both MarPol workers and workers from a firm called Atlantic access those funds that year), this shifts the responsibility of payment and allows companies to get away with wage theft.

The workers from Citibank won their discrimination and mobbing cases, which is very difficult in Poland. The healthcare workers from Bielsko Biala also received a raise, although less than they demanded. More and more postal workers started to express interest in meeting and organizing with us. These victories in November, together with the announced closing of Zle Mieso lifted our mood in the weeks prior to the XXVI Congress.

The Congress was difficult. Our largest Section, CNT, had decided not to take any decisions at their Congress and not to send a delegation, however, pro-IWA unions – both from within the CNT and already outside the official structure – had decided to attend as observers. This infuriated the leaders of said union who then decided to send a delegate (without any mandates of the rank and file membership). The particular person was known inside the CNT as running numerous „inquisitions” against the membership, trying to weed out pro-IWA elements and expose those unions who still maintained cooperation with the expelled unions. The visit to the IWA Congress also had this characteristic – to check who from the CNT had dared to show up and to quickly start a denunciation campaign against those individuals and their unions. The ZSP had seen this coming and had submitted proposals about how to deal with such situations months in advance. Although this was a hard process, this drama was luckily the last of its kind at the IWA international congresses and plenaries as a few unions formed another international organization, the CNT-AIT reorganized itself in Spain and we could get back to business without the internal power struggles that we had been suffering for some years. In the end, we think it ended it a positive way, although some issues remain unresolved from that time.

## **ZSP, 2017 to Present (February 2022)**

After the IWA Congress, a number of international issues became pressing and, as Secretariat of the IWA, we were faced with some difficult things to handle. This was a little distracting but we tried to carry on activities as much as possible. This period turned out to be quite fruitful for us.

At the beginning of the year, we continued the efforts to bring together Postal Workers from outside the main unions to call for protest and, eventually strike action.

In February, another group of workers from Bydgoszcz decided to take action against a supermarket chain - this time, Polomarket. The campaign against Polomarket lasted many months and included many dozens of pickets throughout Poland. The workers had numerous claims: the violation of rights of workers with disabilities, forced overtime, improper evidence of working hours, lack of breaks and health and safety violations. Workers claimed that their signatures had been forged on some timesheets.

In addition, one woman was fired and they claimed it was an unfair dismissal.



*Picket at a Polomarket in Unisław. March 2017.*



The market acted with repressive measures, threatening workers who talked to us, filming all the protestors and even getting their lawyers to force Facebook to take down announcements of the protests. This only made people angrier, although it did have the effect of scaring some workers.

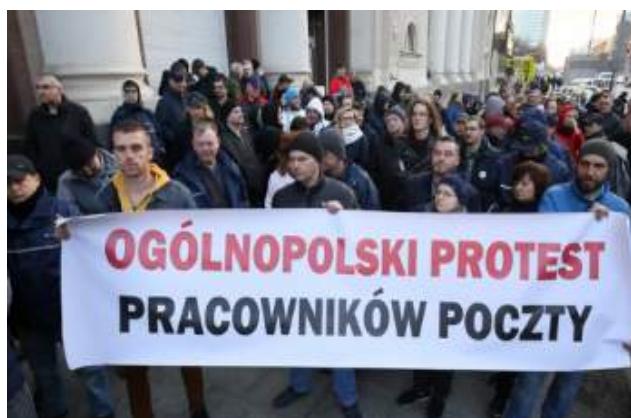
In March workers decided to go to the headquarters of Polomarket, walk in, demand a meeting with the boss and not leave until they get. One of the workers was the woman who had been unfairly dismissed. As a result of this action, she received compensation and was quite satisfied. However, despite the fact that upon entry, the bosses willingly met with members of the union, months later, as the campaign progressed, the bosses suddenly decided to invent some crazy stories about the incident, leading to criminal charges being filed against the people involved. These were of course dismissed in court but it shows the type of repressive measures the bosses try to take when workers organize against their exploitation.



*At the PoloMarket headquarters in Giebnia. March 2017.*

In a separate case, one of our members was accused of „slander” by the chain for talking about the working conditions.

In the meanwhile, the network of Postal Workers organized a national meeting in Wroclaw and called for a series of decentralized actions and then a main national protest in Warsaw. This was clearly the largest decentralized actions of workers outside the mainstream unions since the economic transformation. On March 16, 2017 a few thousand postal workers from 22 cities around Poland took part in these actions, each repeating the posulates adopted by the 1<sup>st</sup> national meeting. A day later, a comrade from Silesia who actively organized a protest was fired. The official reason was for what he wrote on the Facebook page. Our comrade from nearby Warsaw was also fired, for different pretexts but we know that the main reason had been for distributing leaflets at work. In response, we called for another national meeting in Warsaw and, although it was organized with less than one week's notice, workers from around the country attended. They spoke about the response to the actions and organizing in solidarity with the repressed workers. A day or two later, one week after the protests, the Post Office started its repression in full swing, ordering workers not to protest, making threats, sending spies, etc. This did not stop us from calling for the national protest in April.



*First protest of postal workers in Warsaw. March 2017.*

At beginning of April, ZSP had its Congress and also its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, holding a public meeting to speak about some of the actions it had won. Workers from the Dino and Polomarket campaigns spoke about their struggles and the current situation. Also, post office workers, including one who was fired, told about the unfolding conflict and invited people to support the upcoming protest.





*Postal workers march on Warsaw. April 2017.*

The next week, the national protest of Postal Workers took place in Warsaw. This was both the largest single protest of postal workers ever in Poland, as well as the largest independent workers' demonstration within recent memory with about 4000 postal workers from all over the country, despite the repression. We printed stickers which many people wore on their jackets stating „You can't fire us all” and the workers demanded the reinstatement of the two repressed colleagues.



*Postal workers' protest. One of the repressed comrades is speaking.*

Following this, another national meeting was held in Lodz. At this meeting some workers spoke of the need to have a legal structure nationwide and we spoke about the need to adopt libertarian statutes, in line with the practices of ZSP. While this was accepted at the meeting, as time went by, all sorts of problems arose around the issue. There were registration problems due political instructions from above and also, different workers started to make other proposals on how this should function. We heard ideas about having paid functionaries, trying to become a 'representative union' etc. As sometimes happens, some people who had different ambitions for this network (to become elected leaders or representatives perhaps), started to put a spanner in the works. The repression also started to escalate and many workers became demotivated. In the end, only one group in Wroclaw registered a local structure, but the national legalized structure did not happen. There is still debate on whether or not this was a good thing. Our comrade who was one of the main organizers in Wroclaw then was also fired. We organized a number of solidarity actions and even a few pickets were held in other countries. Quite unusually for Poland, he eventually gained his reinstatement. The Post Office also tried to bring a few criminal cases against another comrade, who isn't a Post Office employee but was just helping in the organizing efforts. Hundreds of pages of „evidence“ was sent portraying the comrade as somebody who is capable of overthrowing the state. These cases were also thrown out. Another comrade in Warsaw was later fired, despite having worked there for decades and even having been „the Postman of the Year“. Legal cases related to the Post Office have dragged on for years and some are still not resolved.

For sometime after there were solidarity actions but eventually things got a bit quiet. Some small improvements were made for the workers and it seems like many got tired of the struggle, or perhaps afraid of the repressions. We lost 6 of the most active organizers in the Post Office in this repression. We received lots of solidarity from around the world, with pickets in 12 countries and faxes and emails sent from some others. However, the situation locally was not the same some months after the protests. Only after more than a year did any significant signs of protest appear again at the Post Office.



After the action at Polomarket's headquarters, where one case of unfair dismissal was compensated, the chain decided rather to take a more repressive approach towards ZSP, which continued to picket Polomarket, sometimes on a weekly basis or in more than one location per day. As they refused to talk, the union presented cases in court and in September 2017, the first positive results started to come. Workers who had claimed that their signatures were forged on timesheets were upheld by the Public Prosecutors office and a judge ordered the company to pay them overtime.

By January 2018, the campaign had been going on almost a year. One case was won by direct action, 5 in court without another dozen cases scheduled. The company, on the other hand, had pursued a number of allegations of „criminal acts” by 8 members of the union and in March, they came to court and where eventually dismissed. Still, all of this repression required a lot of resources. We had to spend some time preparing various defenses for the different cases that the bosses were bringing against us.

However, more and more workers were winning cases in court and contacting us because of the campaign.

Although the situations with Polomarket and the Post Office took a lot of our organizing time, there were some other, shorter-term actions which took place and, luckily, ended in quick victories. Workers who were cheated at a small group of shoe shops in Warsaw held some pickets and received payments. Later, they went to court to demand more compensation for unpaid benefits (vacation time, etc.) and also won.



*Picket at Schaffa Shoes in Warsaw. December 2018.*

Cleaners at a refugee center near Warsaw also organized. As the boss refused to talk to them at the workplace and there is no physical office for that „agency”, a picket was organized in front of her home (which officially was the company address). We left the demands on her gate and the next day she already was ready to settle.



*Picket in Komorow. Dec. 2018*

We learned that this company had some other public contracts and their cleaners at the train station had no contracts, we contacted the City Council about this situation and this time they took appropriate action.

As we went into 2019, workers in Bydgoszcz who were cheated by Hostel24 wanted to organize. A number of pickets and small occupation in the hostel lobby were held. There was also a picket in front of the owner's house. Unfortunately, it turned out that the owner was a serial con artist who owed a lot of people money and kept bankrupting companies to avoid paying debts. Despite the fact that many workers had received payment orders from courts, only one worker was ever able to see any money from this struggle. However, all of the actions, etc. meant that the hostel had to shut down and the owner, who then tried to sell this property, had numerous complications. The workers were not satisfied with the results but at least they were satisfied that the man could not keep doing business there after his exploits were exposed.



*Picket at Hostel24 in Bydgoszcz. November 2019.*

Then, sometime near the last week of January, Postal Workers started to organize again, releasing updated postulates. Then, preceding the COVID 19 pandemic by a year, the workers also released interesting „information”. They mentioned that it was flu season and that extremely overworked postal carriers and other workers were massively „coming down with postal pigeon flu”. The reported this to the press and that in at least 20 cities, postal workers have come down with this flu and had to go to the doctor and take off sick. They warned other workers that this flu could easily spread, especially among workers whose system was „worn down”. In fact, this was understood to be a call to massively call in sick, which started happening around the country. There were even reports of one post office where nobody came to work. (Of course we have no other information about the origins of this mysterious flu.)

In Wroclaw, another „ethical” shop came under fire when it was shown that „I love Bio” had hired somebody with no contract and who was later owed money. From December 2018-February 2019, ZSP organized 4 pickets with slogans such as „Pay or Shut Down”. This turned out to be a fateful slogan. After a picket or two, one of the two local shops in fact shut down. Then the worker received payment of half the sum owed. Then the other shop shut down. Again, not the optimal outcome that we hoped to achieve but at least we knew that they would not cheat any more workers and ZSP maintained its reputation as the union that can put thieving bosses out of business.



*Picket at I Love Bio in Wroclaw.*

In Warsaw, a few situations involved a large influx of workers from India. We spoke to one corporation about the discrimination felt by the Indian workers there and, as we understand, they took some action. However their situation was very easy compared to the workers from Uber Eats.

It came to our attention that large numbers of workers were working in Uber Eats through „agents“ who signed B2B contracts with them. These „agents“ then gave the work to people who often did not even have any type of signed contract with them. Like the shady work relations in Roche in form, these situations were much worse as most of the workers knew nothing about Polish law and even a large group of them were students or others, without the legal right to work. In this situation, when they were cheated, they were almost certain that they could approach nobody in Poland for help due to their status. Of course this is not true. We were on these „agents“ very quickly and they were very afraid of the trouble they could have. Payments were made immediately. However, we were very angry about Uber Eats business model and encouraged the workers to organize themselves.

Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic hit, there was a lockdown and restaurants had to close up and only make deliveries. All of a sudden, food deliveries shot up in demand and there was a surge in work. With the workers trying to earn as much as they could in this situation and the middlemen desperate to keep workers and find even more, the wage theft went down and workers pursued the cash. Food delivers around the world have been organizing but here they haven't really followed up.

The time leading up to the pandemic in 2020 was a bit quiet for the union compared to the previous years but, unlike the saying „the quiet before the storm“, the second half of 2019 was more like „the quiet before the even quieter“. Coronavirus hit and Poland went into lockdown. Although this massively effected the working class, with tens of thousands losing their jobs, there was little echo of labour unrest throughout the country. It was as if the working class went into shock and did not recover. Although some groups of



workers contacted us about their sudden dismissals, few wanted to do anything about it. In addition, the government had „outlawed” public gatherings, essentially declaring protests illegal. (We did not believe this was legal but there were threats of enormous fines for breaking the lockdown.) Workers were losing their jobs en masse, but it seemed nobody was motivated to do anything about it. It seemed like people lived in fear and simply went into survival mode, trying to find anyway to put bread on the table.



We started to publish various articles about different aspects of the situation regarding the working class. We noted that although many categories of workers were sent home – either laid off or expected to telework at home – scores of workers which the society undervalues were forced to continue working, often at risk to their health and without adequate protection. We talked about health care workers as several of our comrades had to work with COVID patients, about supermarket cashiers, bus drivers

and cleaners, especially hospital cleaners, a category of worker which often joined and fought in ZSP. These latter were always especially exploited in their workplaces – being outsourced, being ignored by others in the medical professions, forced to work overtime at low pay. We kept pointing out that these workers, who get so little money and respect were extremely important and now maybe people would wake up and see this. We also started to offer concrete mutual aid to some workers who were not supplied with masks, for example with our hospital workers sending very good professional masks to friendly workers in another hospital.

However, we became furious when the government announced its plans for financial aid during the COVID crisis that focused on helping businesses stay afloat over offering concrete help to all the affected workers. As the first version of the plan was announced, we immediately took to very vocal criticism of how large groups of workers were actually excluded from receiving any relief. Many people picked up on our criticisms and eventually, parts of the plan were changed. ZSP drew up a list of postulates related both to the plan and to the situation of workers in the light of the pandemic. A few of the postulates actually were later realized by the government.

One of the particular problems we found is how the continued discrimination of trash contracts meant that large numbers of workers were left in a much worse situation during the pandemic. We had to remind the world of the pathologies created by this system, one of which is that scores of workers have no paid sick leave and are also pressured into working while ill and we began hearing of cases of people being forced to work or lose their jobs while they had Coronavirus. Workers on short-term trash contracts lost their jobs with no compensation but the government did not count them as „workers“. We started to write articles about the legal gaps in protection of workers which drew a lot of attention during the first period of the pandemic and we invited people to join in a movement to support our social demands. As the government's plan was called the „Anti-Crisis Shield“, we demanded a „Social Shield“ that would actually protect workers, tenants and in general, the mass of people affected, instead of being geared towards aid for business.

(As an interesting note, after actions at Schaffa shoes, two of its three locations had shut down. Schaffa then was one of the local businesses claimed to be „devasted“ by COVID which received subsidies to „maintain employment“ but it basically shut down and went to selling completely online.)

ZSP activists in Warsaw decided to test the constitutionality of the protest ban and were ready to fight for this right. The first occasion we saw in April of 2020, shortly after the lockdown was imposed. During this time when there

was a lot of other things going on in people's minds and protests were „banned“, there were moves to restrict the already extremely limited access to abortion and even ban sex education, the „promotion of LGBTQ ideology“, etc. etc. We tested the waters by joining in with women and LGBTQ activists to make a „protest line“. In other words, pretending to stand in a line in front of a supermarket (which had long lines because of lockdown limits“, but actually forming a protest. Others went by on bicycles or cars with protest signs. Later, it was decided to repeat this type of action in front of the Parliament. Although a few members of the union were singled out by police as probable „organizers“ and threatened with huge fines, we refused to take them and demanded to have a court case, to challenge the protest ban. The first comrade who received a court decision proved that the police actually did not have a legal basis to do this as the „ban“ was not passed in any legal way. We published this decision, which later emboldened other people who wanted to challenge this ban.

Having done this, we felt that we would like to organize May Day and, a month later, a protest to demand a Social Shield at the Parliament. The May Day was quite modest, all things considered, but we visited and showed solidarity with tram drivers and workers who were at a hospital dealing with COVID.

A protest was held at the Parliament at the end of May 2020. This protest was larger, but not as strong as it should have been as many people were still too frightened to go to protest with police threatening them. . We managed to stay for about two hours without police intervention and this caused some waves. On June 19, the Act was amended and took into account one of our postulates related to workers on trash contracts. However, there were still a lot of problems with the Act and 4 days later, a second protest on the topic of the Anti-Crisis shield was held at the Presidential Palace.

In October that year, ZSP took part in the IWA's international week of actions against unpaid wages. There were informational actions in Lodz and Warsaw.



*Informational action in Łódź. October 2020.*

In Warsaw, a campaign started at Tumiraj pre-school and educational center which was another business that pretended to go bankrupt but was actually just functioning with the same people in charge under a different legal entity. Three workers were left with pay and a pregnant woman found out she hadn't been properly insured by the employer and could not receive .... Tumiraj turned out to be an especially difficult case as the boss seemed to have contacts in the police that turned to persecuting the protesting workers in ways we had never encountered before. Despite various pickets, at the school and the bosses' residence, the boss felt very confident that he could get away with wage theft and other violations. The union is still fighting this and successfully defended the workers against outrageous fines and so on.



*Protest at Tumiraj in Warsaw. October 2020.*



There was more success with a bookseller in Warsaw which also engaged in wage theft as the worker received money on her account during the picket.



*Protest at bookseller. Warsaw, December 2020.*

On March of 2021, a worker who we hadn't seen in a while, who had previously been involved with a few other cases, including Impuls and taking successful action against wage theft at her workplace informed us that there were problems getting paid at Zabka. Zabka is one of the biggest convenience store chains in the world, with over 6000 shops throughout the country and we had been aware that in some of the shops people had no contracts and we had heard of workers being cheated.



*Action at Zabka in Warsaw. January 2022.*

The union went to the owner with calculations of what was owed and demanded payment. Within minutes, the money was paid. We began receiving calls and mails from Zabka workers around Poland with similar issues. Unfortunately, the majority did not seem too willing to get actively involved in their own cases, a very strange but real phenomenon that is all too common. Nonetheless, ZSP held successful actions at two other Zabkas, in Lodz and in Warsaw. All the actions at Zabka ended in the workers getting their money.

Another action against wage theft was successfully organized at the OFERTO store in Klodzko by our nearest group in Wroclaw.

In September, cleaners from the hospital in Jaworzno decided to protest. One of the main problems was that they did not all receive the bonus payment they were entitled to for working through the COVID period. Also, there were many shady things about the outsourcing company that was servicing the company, the notorious Impel. Although they were working for Impel, many had contracts signed with different companies which had no connection at all to the hospital and were just used so the workers could not claim anything from Impel which actually managed the staff.



*Cleaners protest at hospital in Jaworzno. October 2021.*

The cleaners protested at the town hall and the hospital against this type of employment and demanded that their COVID bonuses were paid. After this most, but not all, workers received this money, but the most active organizer of the protest was singled out. The situation at the hospital is still not resolved.

Two weeks before this protest, ZSP had participated in a national protest of medical workers in Warsaw.

### **Other Actions and Activities**

Throughout the years, ZSP has been involved in numerous activities not directly related to workplace struggle, but often related to the overall class struggle and battles against repression.

Examples of this would be various May Day demonstrations, held several years in Wroclaw or in Warsaw or demonstrations related to important issues. In 2008, the union, together with other comrades in a coalition organized very large protests against the opening of an American anti-missile base in Poland and many of the unions have organized and taken part in actions against NATO and various military actions occurring around the world. It also organized numerous actions against the repression of union and political activists in places like Columbia, China, Serbia, Belarus, Spain and Brazil, just to name a few.



*May Day in Wroclaw. 2013.*



In 2021, when border guards took violent actions against immigrants, ZSP organized a protest at the Parliament. Many members took part in some sort of support of the migrants, which is a topic we've supported for many years, including organizing protests and conferences against the EU border agency Frontex, which is headquartered in Warsaw.



*Solidarity with immigrants. Warsaw 2021.*

Campaigns were held around Poland for free public transportation in Wrocław and against fare increases in Warsaw. ZSP has often reacted to price increases and budget cuts that directly impact large parts of the working class.



*Neighborhood action in Warsaw, against local government. 2012*



ZSP has also participated in many actions in defence of women's rights and the rights of LGBTQ people and, in fact, when European activists came to Poland hoping to find unionists who would take up this topic, ZSP was the only union which officially took part. The union has always had a large participation of women, who often organized major campaigns and of people with disabilities who were especially active in a couple of the supermarket campaigns and cleaners' campaigns.



*Anti-repression protest in Wrocław.*

ZSP took active part in the protests of caretakers of people with disabilities.

ZSP has also organized a number of longer conferences, ranging from historical conferences about the wartime ZSP, to conferences on particular issues such as union rights, anarchosyndicalism, women in unions, discrimination or migrant rights. It has often held public meetings and has developed some internal training sessions and open workshops.



*Public discussion in Warsaw.*

However, the other area where the union no doubt has had the most activity is in tenant organizing, with members active in organizations in Warsaw, Wrocław and Łódź and occasionally in other places like Silesia. In Warsaw alone, hundreds of families have already been saved from eviction thanks to the tenant activists and the organization promotes the idea of the community taking over public housing from the hands of the corrupt bureaucrats.



*Protest in Warsaw. 2010.*

## **Conclusion**

No doubt there have been lots of omissions here; not all conflicts and certainly not all activities have been mentioned. As ZSP approaches its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary (March 31, 2022), we can look back and assess both the positive and negative, our successes and mistakes and we can look forward to the realization of new campaigns and the revival of some old ones.

Faced with the reality that we are completely different from all other unions, we always keep in mind that we do not want to go the route of becoming just another union led by professionalized activists but insist on promoting activity and engagement of workers who want to take action in a different way, outside of this model. We hope one day that this way of thinking will catch on and we will see a new wave of workers' self-organization, based on horizontal structures and the ethics which drove us to create this union in the first place.