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Kim Christiaens/Idesbald Goddeeris

Solidarność and Latin America in the 1980s

Encounters, Conflicts and Failures

Solidarność was one of the key players in the Second Cold War. The Polish trade union was founded in September 1980 after the Polish communist authorities – pressurized by economic problems and social unrest – agreed with strikers' demands to accept free trade unions independent of the Communist Party and of enterprises. Over the next months, Solidarność grew into a mass movement, eventually counting more than ten million members, about one third of Poland's working population. It united both left-wing and Catholic intellectuals, both workers and worshippers in their common fight against the communist regime. In December 1981, Prime Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law in order to suppress the opposition. He imprisoned thousands of activists, banned Solidarność, and gradually returned to a ›normalization policy‹. However, he never succeeded in controlling society. After a new wave of strikes in 1988, he agreed on holding Round Table talks with the opposition. In June 1989, months before the Berlin Wall fell down, Poland had its first partly free election, in which Solidarność scored a massive victory.¹

Solidarność, obviously, did not act alone. It was supported by many allies outside Poland. Over the past decade, especially, a series of works appeared on the attitudes of Western governments and social movements towards the Polish Crisis.² Most of them focused on the most visible countries, such as France, Italy, and Germany, often claiming a share in Solidarność's success.³ The United States have also been examined extensively, although a recent monograph concludes that Ronald Reagan's Poland policy was a great failure.⁴ Another dominant research line is the straddling attitude of the Western Left towards Solidarność.⁵ Social democratic parties and trade unions, or peace movements, indeed searched how to combine détente and even collaboration with the communist regimes on the one hand, and support of a clerical trade union that allied with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

1 *David Ost*, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics. Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968*, Philadelphia 2010; *Jack M. Bloom*, *Seeing Through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution. Solidarity and the Struggle Against Communism in Poland*, Leiden 2013.

2 *Helene Sjursen*, *The United States, Western Europe and the Polish Crisis. International Relations in the Second Cold War*, Basingstoke/New York 2003; *Idesbald Goddeeris* (ed.), *Solidarity with Solidarity. Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982*, Lanham 2010; *Patryk Pleskot*, *Kłopotliwa panna »S«*. Postawy polityczne Zachodu wobec »Solidarności« na tle stosunków z PRL (1980–1989), Warsaw 2013; *Paweł Jaworski/Lukasz Kamiński* (eds.), *Świat wobec Solidarności 1980–1989*, Warsaw 2013.

3 *Natalie Bégin*, *Kontakte zwischen Gewerkschaften in Ost und West. Die Auswirkungen von Solidarność in Deutschland und Frankreich. Ein Vergleich*, in: *AfS* 45, 2005, pp. 293–324, here: pp. 300 and 303.

4 *Gregory F. Dember*, *Empowering Revolution. America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War*, Chapel Hill 2014.

5 *Christie Miedema*, *Dilemma's, dialoog en misverstanden tussen Nederlandse en West-Duitse linkse organisaties en de Poolse oppositie in de jaren tachtig*, Amsterdam 2015; *Idesbald Goddeeris/Małgorzata Świder*, *Peace or Solidarity? Poland, the Euromissile Crisis, and the 1980s Peace Movement*, in: *Leopoldo Nuti/Frédéric Bozo/Marie-Pierre Rey* et al. (eds.), *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War*, Washington, D.C./Stanford 2015, pp. 291–308.

However, by limiting itself to the Atlantic world and focusing on the juxtaposition between Cold War hawks à la Reagan and advocates of coexistence and rapprochement, historians to date have not painted the entire picture. *Solidarność* also reached other continents. Especially its connection with Latin America attracts attention. In the autumn of 1980, *Solidarność* sent its first official foreign delegation to Venezuela and Peru, and in 1983 it even established a permanent representation in Caracas. In November 1989, Lech Wałęsa himself passed through Caracas during a triumph tour after *Solidarność*'s success in the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Delivering speeches about workers' rights in the East and in the Global South, calling for a transformation of both communism and capitalism, and referring to the financial and social crisis that had struck Latin America and Eastern Europe, he emphasized the two regions' common agenda and alluded to a ›third way‹ that surpassed the boundaries of the Cold War.⁶ This, along with the quest for new models of trade unionism, socialism, and democracy, indeed seems to be the major motivation behind these contacts. In 1986, Bohdan Cywiński and an anonymous *Solidarność* militant from Poland professed in an interview with Jan Kułakowski and the Beninese trade unionist Dominique Aguessy their deep sympathy with trade unionists from the ›Third World‹, juxtaposing their openness and holistic vision on trade unionism to the dullness and bureaucracy of their Western counterparts.⁷ It is therefore tempting to see such contacts, and *Solidarność*'s interest in them, as part of a broader fascination with the ›Third World‹ among Eastern European dissents, which historians are only beginning to uncover.⁸

Strikingly, *Solidarność*'s connection with Latin America has never been subject to research. This lacuna has paved the way for another, more dominant academic view on the Polish trade union's global scope, namely that it had, similarly to other dissident movements in Eastern Europe, little interest in the Global South, and was above all focused on a »return to Europe«, or, as boldly averred by Noam Chomsky, »absorbed by itself«.⁹ This article will confront these conflicting views, i. e. of *Solidarność* identifying with Latin America or neglecting the then ›Third World‹. Based on a wide variety of sources, ranging from archives of international organizations and Polish intelligence, over brochures and periodicals to interviews, it will reconstruct the contacts, analyze the agency of international, South American, and Polish trade unionists and look for successes and flops.

Over three chapters, we will argue that *Solidarność*'s contact with Latin America did not lead up to much and eventually had little relevance – contrary to Wałęsa's claims – and explain why this happened – giving a more nuanced account than Chomsky's. First, we discuss the genesis and the first contacts, demonstrating that they were particularly set up by the »Central Latinoamericano de Trabajadores« (CLAT) and the »World Confederation of Labour« (WCL). In a second chapter, we elaborate on the intensifying contacts during the first year after the proclamation of martial law and the deteriorating relation from 1983 onwards. An extensive third chapter discusses the reasons for the failure: the economic and political instability in Venezuela leading the CLAT to flirt with the more left-wing parties, Poland's and Latin America's conflicting views on the Cold War and the United

6 *José Ignacio Urquijo*, *El movimiento obrero de Venezuela*, Lima 2004, p. 52.

7 *Solidarność i Trzeci Świat*, in: *Widnokrąg* 1, 1986, pp. 25–36.

8 *James Mark/Péter Apor/Radina Vučetić et al.*, »We Are with You, Vietnam«: Transnational Solidarities in Socialist Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, 2015, pp. 439–464.

9 *Padraic Kenney*, *A Carnival of Revolution. Central Europe 1989*, Princeton/Oxford 2002, p. 70; *Filip Outrata*, *In the Same Boat. Chomsky, Dissent, and the Universality of Human Rights*, in: *V4/Revue*, 2.7.2014, URL: <<http://visegradrevue.eu/?p=2821>> [2.8.2016]; *Zuzana Piusi/Vít Janeček*, Interview with Noam Chomsky, 5.6.2014, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6Vcct_g_z4> [2.8.2016].

States, Solidarność's increasing contacts with Latin American and international social democrats, and, though less important, societal and cultural differences. In the conclusions, we elaborate our argument that at the end of the day Solidarność was an instrument in foreign groups with their own interests, particularly the CLAT and the WCL, which hoped to use Solidarność in strengthening a ›third way‹ of trade unionism – next to communism and social democracy – but eventually failed to do so.

I. FIRST CONTACTS DURING SOLIDARNOŚĆ'S LEGAL EXISTENCE

Quickly after its foundation in September 1980, Solidarność started to reach out to supportive organizations abroad – notably trade unions – in search for recognition and assistance for its struggle for human and trade union rights in Poland. As early as November 1980, shortly after its official recognition by the Polish authorities and thus before Wałęsa's first foreign visit to Rome in January 1981, Solidarność sent out a first official delegation abroad. Strikingly, the destination was not located in nearby Western Europe, but on the other side of the Atlantic, in Latin America. The delegation consisted of two persons: Józef Przybylski and Zygmunt Zawalski. Przybylski was a welder at the steel factory Budimor near Gdańsk who had joined the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee in mid-August 1980, co-signed the Gdańsk Agreements on 31st August and then became a board member of the Inter-Enterprise Founding Committee Solidarność.¹⁰ Zawalski was an electrical engineer at the Gdańsk Shipyard, the cradle of the Solidarność movement.¹¹ As representatives of Solidarność, they were invited by the CLAT, a regional confederation that united Christian trade unions in Latin America and was affiliated to the WCL.¹² First, they stayed nine days in Lima, where they featured as prominent guests during the 18th Council of the CLAT and discussed their struggle in Poland with Latin American trade unionists. Celebrating the establishment of an independent Polish trade union as an inspiring example for change in Latin America, CLAT member organizations professed solidarity with the Polish trade union and the launching of national support committees.¹³ Afterwards, the two representatives went for seven days to Venezuela, whose capital Caracas hosted the headquarters of the CLAT. Upon their arrival at the airport of Maiquetía, the Polish guests were welcomed by hundreds of trade unionists and members of the local Polish community.¹⁴ Highly mediatized meetings took place with the leadership of the CLAT, the Venezuelan trade union »Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela« (CTV), the Christian democratic president Luis Herrera Campíns and the archbishop of Caracas. The Polish delegation also visited the University of Latin American Workers in San Antonio de los Altos (Caracas), and received 6,000 USD from the Polish diaspora in Venezuela for the Monument to the fallen Shipyard Workers 1970, which would be inaugurated a couple of weeks

10 Rafał Kalukin, Zapluty karzeł z puszki. Rozmowa z Józefem Przybylskim, *Wyborcza.pl*, 19.9.2009, URL: <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,127290,7046513,Zapluty_karzel_z_puszki.html> [7.11.2016]; Letter from Jan Kułakowski to J.E. Humblet, 2.5.1984, KADOC – Documentatie- en Onderzoekscentrum voor Religie, Cultuur en Samenleving, Leuven (KADOC), WCL, 327.

11 Flor Bleux to W. Canini, 16.10.1984, *ibid.*

12 Kim Christiaens, The ICFTU and the WCL: The International Coordination of Solidarity, in: *Goddeeris*, *Solidarity with Solidarity*, pp. 101–127; *Gerhard Wahlers*, CLAT. Geschichte einer lateinamerikanischen Gewerkschaftsinternationale, Bonn 1990.

13 Posiciones y actuaciones de la CLAT en América Latina, s.d., KADOC, WCL, 326.

14 About the Polish diaspora in Venezuela, see: *Feliks Żubr*, Venezuela, in: *Tomasz Piesakowski* (ed.), *Akcja niepodległościowa na terenie międzynarodowym 1945–1990*, London 1999, pp. 703–710. The article does not mention anything about CLAT or the Solidarność Venezuela Association of Stanisław Panasewicz and only highlights the author's role.

later, on 16th December 1980.¹⁵ Also during their transit visits to Spain and Belgium on their way to and from South America, they received ample attention from media and dignitaries at airports, offices and meeting rooms.¹⁶

The visit of the delegation to Latin America was the beginning of a liaison between Solidarność and the CLAT: CLAT members returned the visits over the following months. A CLAT delegation met with Pope John Paul II and participated in a separate meeting with Lech Wałęsa during the »International Labour Organization« (ILO) Conference in Geneva in June 1981.¹⁷ Plans to visit Wałęsa in Poland were however thwarted by the Polish authorities' refusal to allow the delegation entry to the country.¹⁸ Similarly, Wałęsa was unable to answer invitations to visit Latin America to mark his message of Polish workers' solidarity with worldwide struggles for social progress proclaimed in Geneva.¹⁹ Yet, the Venezuelan trade union leader Rafael León represented the CLAT at Solidarność's first national congress in September and October 1981.²⁰ The same year, the leadership of the CLAT launched a campaign among its affiliates to support the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Wałęsa, an initiative of the Argentine human rights activist and 1980 Nobel Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel.²¹

This liaison is remarkable not only in terms of the geographical distance, but also because the CLAT had previously devoted little attention to dissident movements in Eastern Europe. Even if anti-communism was a hallmark of the CLAT since its foundation in the 1950s, the confederation's ambition to develop an own identity for Latin American trade unionism inspired by Christianity and exceeding the bipolarity between East and West had above all resulted in staunch criticism of U.S. economic and political interference in the region. Notably under the leadership of its charismatic leader Emilio Máspero, the CLAT had developed from the 1960s an ideology that embraced an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist language of liberation and solidarity in an attempt to profile its relatively small member unions in the opposition against right-wing dictatorships that ruled most of the continent. It regularly denounced the »negative anti-communism« of social democratic and liberal trade unions affiliated to the CLAT's competitor, the »Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers« (»Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores«, ORIT). The ORIT grouped non-confessional trade unions from South and North America, including the »American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations« (AFL-CIO), and was therefore touted by the CLAT as a pawn of the »capitalist« U.S. and a reason for the bipolar stalemate in many countries.²² From the late 1970s, ad-

15 Informativo CLAT. Vocero del movimiento de los trabajadores comprometidos con la liberación de los pueblos de América Latina 6, no. 53, December 1980–January 1981, p. 12; *Kalukin*, *Zapluty karzeł z puszki*.

16 *Idesbald Goddeeris*, Interview with Józef Przybylski, Brussels, 24.2.2015. They were hosted by ACV/CSC in Belgium and by the USO in Spain – two trade union federations that were, just as CLAT, affiliated to the WCL. See *Christiaens*, *The ICFTU and the WCL*, p. 108; *Idesbald Goddeeris*, *Belgium: The Christian Emphasis*, in: *id.*, *Solidarity with Solidarity*, pp. 243–267, here: p. 245; *José Faraldo*, *Spain: The Common Experience of Transition and a Military Coup*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 51–74.

17 Informativo CLAT, July 1981, p. 17.

18 *Emilio Máspero*, *De strijd van de vrije vakbeweging in Polen en Latijns-Amerika*, Utrecht 1982, p. 2.

19 Letter from Emilio Máspero to Lech Wałęsa, 5.3.1981, KADOC, WCL, 323; Informativo CLAT, July 1981, p. 17.

20 Rafael León to Jerzy Milewski, 26.4.1983, KADOC, WCL, 327.

21 Informativo CLAT, July 1981.

22 *Magaly Rodríguez García*, *The ICFTU and the Defence of Labour Liberalism in Europe and Latin America (1949–1969)*, Bern 2010, pp. 147f.

ditionally, the CLAT re-discovered its Christian identity and strongly identified with the Polish Pope John Paul II. This also became a means of profiling Christian trade unionists vis-à-vis Marxist opposition movements and governments, for instance in Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua, which it saw as pawns of Soviet communism. *Solidarność*, celebrated by the CLAT as an authentic representation of the unity between the Polish workers and their nation, served then as an example for a Latin American identity – »let Latin America be Latin America« –, a position that tilted to criticism of both U.S. and Soviet interference in the region.²³

Whereas the CLAT's enthusiasm for *Solidarność* was not different from that of many other organizations that started to join the support of the Polish trade union to empower their own agenda²⁴, the interest of *Solidarność* in establishing connections with the Latin American confederation was less obvious. After all, the CLAT was only a relatively small confederation. With an estimated membership ranging between 1 and 2 million affiliates and representing about 5 to 10% of Latin America's unionized workers, it paled in size by comparison with its much larger regional competitor of social democratic/liberal stock, the ORIT, and did not even come up to the level of that of *Solidarność*, which was to represent on its own 10 million affiliated workers.²⁵ Its functioning largely dependent on funding from Western European Christian democratic party and trade union foundations, the CLAT did not dispose of the financial power to contribute significantly to material support for *Solidarność* and to equate the impressive budgets of its allies in the West. The early alignment with the CLAT is even more striking when considering *Solidarność*'s disinterest in and lack of contact with other partners in the ›Third World‹ during the first year of its existence. This became clear at its first national congress in 1981, where ›Third World‹ issues remained virtually out of the scope beyond some occasional references to the murder of the Egyptian president Anwar as-Sadat and the struggle against Augusto Pinochet.²⁶ The above-mentioned CLAT representative Rafael León was one of the few non-European participants at the congress.²⁷ Meetings with other trade unionists from ›Third World‹ countries were always coincidental and organized by others. The iconic encounter of the two future presidents Wałęsa and Luís Inácio »Lula« da Silva – from 2003 to 2010 president of Brazil but in the 1970s and 1980s a left-wing trade union leader – in Rome in January 1981, for instance, was set up by Luigi Cal, the responsible of the international department of the Italian Christian democratic trade union »Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori« and only part of a broader tour of representatives of the Brazilian trade union movements across Western Europe.²⁸

One of the main factors accounting for this exceptional cooperation was the intermediary role played by the CLAT's and *Solidarność*'s common ally in Western Europe, more particularly by the WCL, the third – and smallest – international trade union confederation, next to the communist »World Federation of Trade Unions« and the social democratic and

23 Informativo CLAT, September 1980, pp. 17f.

24 *Idesbald Goddeeris*, Introduction: Solidarity, Ideology, Instrumentality, and Other Issues, in: *id.*, *Solidarity with Solidarity*, pp. 1–18.

25 *Rodríguez García*, The ICFTU and the Defence of Labour Liberalism in Europe and Latin America, pp. 147f. The number of CLAT members is contested due to contradicting sources and manipulated numbers. Some sources suggest it had 9 million members in the 1980s: *Tijd & Taak*, 2.4.1983, p. 7.

26 *Grzegorz Majchrzak*/*Jan Mariusz Owsński* (eds.), I Krajowy Zjazd Delegatów NSZZ »Solidarność«. Stenogramy, vol. 1: I tura, p. 95 and vol. 2: II tura, part II, p. 819.

27 Rafael León León to Jerzy Milewski, 26.4.1983, KADOC, WCL, 327.

28 *Idesbald Goddeeris*, Interview with Tadeusz Konopka, Warsaw, 2.2.2015. More about this meeting on URL: <<http://www.terra.com.br/istoegente/170/celebridade/>> [30.10.2016]; Informativo CLAT, March 1981, p. 15.

anti-communist »International Confederation of Free Trade Unions« (ICFTU). The WCL indeed put much effort to marry its Latin American confederation CLAT with *Solidarność* and financed the Latin American endeavours of the Polish trade union.²⁹ Several reasons can explain this. First, there was the competition with the ICFTU: just as the commitment of the CLAT (which belonged to the WCL) was triggered by its rivalry with the ORIT (affiliated with the ICFTU), their two respective international trade union confederations stimulated each other to side with *Solidarność*. Second, the WCL was headed at the time by Jan Kułakowski, who was born in Poland, had moved to Belgium after the Second World War and had since the 1950s made a career in international labour organizations. Third, and most importantly, the WCL was facing an identity crisis. In spite of having abandoned, in 1968, its old name »International Federation of Christian Trade Unions«, it kept struggling with questions about deconfessionalization and trade union unity and in 1979 it was left by its French and Dutch members. This not only explains why the WCL strongly focused on the CLAT, but also why it set new hope in *Solidarność*, which it saw as a unique projection screen for a new kind of trade union movement that went beyond the traditional models of the West and East.³⁰

Also for *Solidarność*, contact with Latin American trade unionists was more than a »learning experience«, as averred by public declarations of its representatives.³¹ Even if it was true that *Solidarność* searched for information and expertise on trade union organization, its Latin American endeavours also served strategic interests. Notably, it helped *Solidarność* to connect itself to the multiple networks through which money and support from Western European Christian democratic trade unions and party foundations had been flowing to Latin America since many decades and to help legitimize the entry of *Solidarność* in the international solidarity funds of the WCL and its affiliates.

II. FROM EXPANSION TO DECLINE DURING MARTIAL LAW

After the declaration of martial law in December 1981 and the escalation of repression under General Jaruzelski, Latin America remained the most important region in the Global South with which *Solidarność* developed ties. Partly, this was due to Latin America's sympathetic reaction on the events in Poland. In many countries, Polish diaspora communities set up committees to support the opposition in Poland. In Caracas, for instance, a *Solidarność* Venezuela Association was founded by Polish immigrants under the leadership of Stanisław Panasewicz.³² Such committees often collaborated with local activists. The anti-communism of many Polish exiles that had been forced to leave abroad since the establishment of state socialism in their native country indeed dovetailed with the potential of domestic instrumentalization that the Polish crisis offered in a continent where the Cold War loomed largely over local societies and debates. Strong feelings of anti-communism

29 Christiaens, The ICFTU and the WCL.

30 Patrick Pasture, Jan Kułakowski, from Exile to International Trade Union Leader and Diplomat, in: Michel Dumoulin/Idesbald Goddeeris (eds.), *Intégration ou représentation? Les exiles polonais en Belgique et la construction européenne*, Louvain-la-Neuve 2005, pp. 99–120. See also the published series of conversations with Kułakowski: *Spotkania na Bagateli. Polska Europa Świat. Z Janem Kułakowskim rozmawia Leszek Jesień*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 98–101 (about the WCL and Latin America) and p. 154 (about Máspero); Idesbald Goddeeris, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych »Solidarność«. Biuro Koordynacyjne NSZZ »Solidarność«, 1982–1989, in: *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 2006, no. 2, pp. 315–347, and 2007, no. 1, pp. 309–334; pp. 343f.

31 Informativo CLAT, December 1980–January 1981, pp. 12f.

32 José Mercedes González to Jan Kułakowski, 16.2.1982, KADOC, WCL, 323.

prompted a varied group of Latin American actors, ranging from conservative politicians to Christian trade union movements, to popularize the Polish crisis. In Peru, the presence of a group of Polish sportsmen that had participated in a two-year canoe expedition »Canoandes '79« from Mexico to Chile and were caught by the news of the coup, paved the way for a group of intellectuals and trade unionists to form a Committee for the Defence of Solidarność.³³ Under the presidency of the writer Mario Vargas Llosa, this committee found ammunition in the Polish crisis to critique »real existing socialism« and Soviet influence over Peru, which had just left behind twelve years of left-wing dictatorship that had nurtured cooperation with the Soviet bloc and fiercely confronted trade union opposition.³⁴

However, it were not only Polish migrants and local activists that accounted for the enduring contact with Latin America. The WCL, the CLAT, and Solidarność also continued to actively fuel the collaboration. Quickly after the proclamation of martial law, Kułakowski sent a new mission of Solidarność members to Latin America. Again, Przybylski was part of it. This was rather a coincidence. A couple of months after his return to Poland from his trip to Latin America, he had withdrawn from opposition activities in order to spend more time with his daughter he was nurturing alone after his divorce. He did not participate in any trade union election in mid-1981 and went to Belgium in September 1981 to work for three months after having been invited by a Polish immigrant he got to know during his visit nine months earlier. Przybylski was about to return to Poland when martial law was proclaimed and eventually decided to stay in Belgium.³⁵ Given his legitimacy as a signatory of the Gdańsk Agreement and his experience as a delegate in the previous mission, it was quite obvious that he left again for Latin America. Kułakowski wanted him to be joined by Bohdan Cywiński, the editor-in-chief of the Cracow Catholic monthly »Znak« in 1973–1977 and the deputy editor-in-chief of Solidarność's major periodical »Tygodnik Solidarność« in 1981. Cywiński had left for Italy in October 1981 to work on a book³⁶, was struck by martial law, wanted to continue writing and therefore proposed Tadeusz Konopka as a substitute.³⁷ Konopka was a sociologist who had collaborated with »Spotkania«, an independent journal of young Catholics in Cracow.³⁸ In August 1980, he joined the editorial board of the Cracow Catholic weekly »Tygodnik Powszechny« and became part of the Regional Board of Solidarność in Cracow. In November 1981, he travelled to Denmark, and when the news about martial law was issued, he found himself in West-Germany. Being familiar with Catholic and trade union circles – inter alia with Cywiński and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, one of Kułakowski's closest friends in Poland –, he was quickly accepted as the second delegation member.³⁹

From 24th January to 24th February 1982, Przybylski and Konopka visited eight countries: Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Columbia, Ecuador, and the

33 *Hanna Aritos*, *Solidarność z Solidarnością*, in: *Karta. Kwartalnik historyczny* 77, 2013, pp. 130–133.

34 *Kim Christiaens*, E-mail interview with Luis Pásara, 12.7.2014.

35 *Kalukin*, *Zapluty karzeł z puszki*, p. 5, and *Goddeeris*, Interview Przybylski. The person who invited Przybylski to Belgium in September 1981 was Mich Kuczkiewicz.

36 *Jan Skórzyński/Paweł Sowinski/Małgorzata Strasz* (eds.), *Opozycja w PRL. Słownik biograficzny 1956–1989*, vol. 3, Warszawa 2006, pp. 63–65.

37 The early contacts between Kułakowski, Cywiński and Konopka, who were together received in audience by Pope John Paul II in January 1982, are also accounted in *Spotkania na Bagateli*, pp. 140f.

38 *Jan Skórzyński/Paweł Sowinski/Małgorzata Strasz* (eds.), *Opozycja w PRL. Słownik biograficzny 1956–1989*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2000, p. 186.

39 *Goddeeris*, Interview Konopka.

Dominican Republic.⁴⁰ Again, this happened on the invitation of the CLAT, that hoped to buttress its claims to be the legitimate voice of *Solidarność* in Latin America and to undermine the activities of competing groups.⁴¹ All of the time, Przybylski and Konopka were accompanied by a CLAT militant and a Christian democratic Member of Parliament from Venezuela (and a translator). Their major goals were lobbying for political support, providing information, bearing witness to the 15 months of *Solidarność*'s legal assistance, and contradicting the propaganda that the Polish opposition was defeated. A stay in a particular country usually consisted of a number of ceremonial visits to politicians (e.g. the Salvadorian Christian democratic junta leader and later president José Napoleón Duarte), meetings with bishops, trade union activists, workers and Polish immigrants, performances at press conferences and TV programs, and festive meals. Just as in 1980, they were struck by the exuberant and »authentic« solidarity they were hosted with. They also triggered new actions, such as demonstrations, work stoppages, public declarations of support, etc. They refused financial support though, considering it inappropriate to receive material aid from countries that were in big need themselves. Only in Venezuela, the most affluent country they visited, they did not object a collection, and only in Costa Rica they accepted food aid in the form of coffee.⁴²

By contrast with the visit at the end of 1980, this second delegation was not an official representation of *Solidarność*. Przybylski and Konopka visited the countries as *Solidarność* members who temporarily found themselves abroad. In these first months after the proclamation of martial law, there was indeed no official leading of *Solidarność*. Militants, who were staying abroad when Jaruzelski issued martial law, met in December 1981 in Zurich and in January 1982 in Brussels and decided that each country should have one coordinating office. In February 1982, delegates to the first (and only) national congress of the NSZZ *Solidarność* (September–October 1981) established a Group of Delegates to the National Convention of the ISTU »Solidarity« Currently Abroad. However, after some leaders of the Polish underground had created the »Temporary Coordinating Commission« (»Tymczasowa Komisja Koordynacyjna«) on 22nd April 1982, they ordered their compatriots abroad to make a single representation in the West. In a letter that was smuggled out of Poland and sent to several exiles and trade union confederations, Bogdan Lis commissioned Jerzy Milewski to lead this centre. Milewski had worked as an engineer at the Polish Academy of Sciences, where he had initiated a strike in August 1980 and built a bridge between this intellectual milieu and the shipyard workers. His *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad (»Biuro Koordynacyjne NSZZ *Solidarność* za Granicą«) was founded in Oslo in July 1982.⁴³

This Coordinating Office had its headquarters in Brussels, where the ICFTU and the WCL also had their seats, and expanded the Latin American connection that had been

40 Konopka wrote an extensive report about this journey: »Uwagi po podróży członków *Solidarności* do krajów Ameryki Łacińskiej« (Rome, 19.3.1981, 16 pages), unpublished manuscript copied by the author for Idesbald Goddeeris. This enables us to refute details from other sources. The Polish Foreign Ministry learned from a note from Managua that a certain Barański was travelling with Konopka and Przybylski (MSZ, Z31/85, W2, Szyfrogram, Managua, 21.2.1982), but this is not confirmed by any other source. The WCL was informed that the delegation would also travel to Peru, but this visit has not taken place (Mission *Solidarność* in Poland, Enrique Marius to Jan Kułakowski, 6.1.1982, KADOC, WCL, 323).

41 Enrique Marius to Jan Kułakowski, 15.1.1982, *ibid.*

42 *Tadeusz Konopka*, *Uwagi po podróży członków Solidarności do krajów Ameryki Łacińskiej*, p. 16.

43 *Idesbald Goddeeris*, *Lobbying Allies? The NSZZ *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad, 1982–1989*, in: *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, 2011, pp. 83–125; *Goddeeris*, *Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych »Solidarności« (2006 & 2007)*.

established in the previous months. The CLAT remained its most active ally in the region. It continued to set up national support committees, resumed its support of awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Lech Wałęsa⁴⁴, launched a campaign for the release of Solidarność's vice-president Mirosław Krupiński⁴⁵, lobbied with the Venezuelan government for visas for Polish dissidents aiming to leave the country⁴⁶, and started efforts to give 300 Polish refugees in Austria political asylum in Venezuela.⁴⁷

In September 1982, a new Solidarność delegation set off for a third journey to Latin America. It was much larger than the previous ones and consisted of the Coordinating Office members Jerzy Milewski and Krystyna Ruchniewicz (its financial head), WCL general secretary Jan Kułakowski, the previous delegation members Tadeusz Konopka and Józef Przybylski, the intellectuals Bohdan Cywiński (who had apologized for the trip in January 1981) and Krzysztof Pomian, and the Polish chief editor of the »L'Osservatore Romano« Adam Boniecki.⁴⁸ First, they attended the international conference on »Poland-Latin America« organized by the CLAT in San Antonio de los Altos (Caracas). It was an event that was steeped in a spirit of anti-communist Catholicism and was attended by bishops from Brazil and the U.S., as well as opposition trade unionists from Cuba and Nicaragua.⁴⁹ The CLAT celebrated the struggle of Solidarność as akin to its own struggle against totalitarian regimes of the right and the left in Latin America, drawing analogies between the role of the church and workers in fuelling opposition in Poland and Latin America. Afterwards, the Polish guests travelled to various Latin American countries. Przybylski headed for Colombia, Milewski for Mexico, and Konopka, Kułakowski and Ruchniewicz hoped to get to Brazil and Argentina (where the trade union »Confederación General del Trabajo de la República Argentina« was clashing with the government) but eventually did not receive an invitation and returned to Europe.⁵⁰

This visit of September 1982 was not the last common event of that year.⁵¹ In October and November, the CLAT participated in an international campaign against the de-legalization of Solidarność by calling upon its affiliates to demonstrate in front of Soviet embassies (such as happened in Buenos Aires and Caracas)⁵², boycott trade and communication with Poland and the USSR and dispersing thousands of Solidarność posters in Caracas and other Latin American capitals.⁵³ And in December 1982, Krystyna Ruchniewicz attended as a prominent guest the CLAT Congress in Bogotá. There, she presented the struggle of Solidarność before some thousands of attendants, including a representative of the Afghan resistance and the president of Colombia Belisario Betancur.⁵⁴ Again, the Catholic

44 CLAT-Nederland to Nobel Prize Committee, August 1982, International Institute of Social History (IISH), *Solidarność Nederland*, 49.

45 CLAT Newsletter, September 1982, IISH, *Solidarność Nederland*, 49.

46 Letter from Jorge Cuisana Valencia and Emilio Máspero, 19.5.1982, KADOC, WCL, 323.

47 Emilio Máspero to Jan Kułakowski, 22.1.1982, KADOC, WCL, 324.

48 *Bohdan Cywiński*, El Catolicismo es la sangre de Polonia, in: ABC (Madrid), 21.1.1981, p. 7.

49 CLAT. Boletín Prensa, Radio y Televisión, 1982; CLAT Newsletter, September 1982, IISH, *Solidarność Nederland*, 49.

50 Telegram from CLAT to Jan Kułakowski, 17.8.1982, KADOC, WCL, 324, announces a visit to Argentina and Brazil, but this was eventually cancelled (*Goddeeris*, Interview Konopka). About the troublesome relationship of the Christian democratic trade unionists and Argentina, see also *Spotkania na Bagateli*, pp. 98f.

51 Circular from Emilio Máspero to CLAT affiliates, 15.10.1982, KADOC, WCL, 326.

52 Letter from Miguel Gazzera to Jorge Cuisana, 4.11.1982, *ibid.*

53 Emilio Máspero to Solidarność Coordinating Office Abroad, 20.10.1982, *ibid.* More about this action in *Goddeeris*, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych »Solidarności« (2006), p. 345.

54 Conclusions. Coloquio Movimiento de los Trabajadores Polonia-América Latina, IISH, *Solidarność Nederland*, 49.

identity of *Solidarność* was key in its representation, as became clear in the launching of a campaign for material support by selling medals of the Virgin Mary and of John Paul II.⁵⁵

In the beginning of 1983, the Poles still seemed to be interested in alliances with Latin American trade unionists. At the initiative of the CLAT affiliated trade unionists of the pluralist Venezuelan trade union CTV, Kułakowski sent Zygmunt Zawalski to Caracas as a permanent *Solidarność* representative in Latin America. Zawalski, who had been part of the first delegation in late 1980, had continued his commitment for *Solidarność* after his return to Poland. On 13th December 1981, he was jailed in the internment camp of Strzebielinek, but because of health problems, he was moved to a regular prison in Gdańsk, from where he was released after three months. He resumed his job, but was not allowed to leave his office and – as he had done in the past – to control ships. Eventually, he was given the choice between a broken career and a passport without the right to return, and he opted for the latter.⁵⁶ With the intermediation of the CLAT and the Venezuelan embassy in Warsaw, he was able to dispose of the necessary visas to travel along with his wife and their 13 year old daughter to Venezuela, after a short stop-over in Belgium in March 1983.⁵⁷ They settled in Caracas with the support of the CLAT, which aimed to establish in its headquarters a Latin American branch of the *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad to strengthen the legitimacy and impact of its campaigns over Poland.⁵⁸ Yet, the collaboration became quickly fraught in conflict, as revealed by the letters Zawalski wrote from Venezuela to Milewski in Brussels from May 1983 onwards. Three of them fell into the hands of the Polish secret service. They give an extremely interesting insight in his work and his contact with his partners on the location.⁵⁹

Zawalski had to fuel the Latin American interest in *Solidarność* and to intensify further collaboration. He gave interviews, wrote articles in local journals and gave lectures in Spanish, inter alia at the seminar »Marxismo y neomarxismo: análisis crítico« or at the anti-Left Centro Pro Venezuela. He also set up some special actions, for instance joining international campaigns against Yalta (Renounce Yalta) and in favour of individuals (e.g. for Andrzej Słowik, who was on a hunger strike). For a demonstration on Labour Day, he prepared 300 t-shirts with printed logos. However, he was all but satisfied with the results. A mere handful of people (and only one CLAT militant) showed up on the 1st May event, of whom there were so many communists that he did not dare to take the floor. His interviews were published with many mistakes, his proclamations were ignored, and his articles had to focus on particular topics, such as Catholicism and the Pope. Zawalski also complained about the media coverage on Poland in general, which he found weak and superficial.

The *Solidarność* representative did not find support elsewhere and did not succeed in mobilizing the Polish diaspora, in spite of the fact that he had become vice-president of one of their associations. Polish immigrants avoided involvement in politics because they did not want to have problems with visas or with relatives in Poland. Some individuals were supportive, and a certain priest Urbański celebrated patriotic masses. Most others, however, were not. The local *Solidarność* committee chairman even received a scholarship

55 Flash, no. 196, 15.2.1983, p. 4; Circular, 15.10.1982, KADOC, WCL, 326; El Nacional, 4.11.1982.

56 *Idesbald Goddeeris*, Telephone interview with Ewa Zawalska, Genk, Belgium, 27.2.2015.

57 Ernesto Molano to Emilio Máspero, 1.3.1983, KADOC, WCL, 326. In Belgium, he was provided housing and allowance by the metallurgist confederation.

58 Telegram of Jan Kułakowski, 29.10.1982; Telex from Emilio Máspero to Jan Kułakowski, 16.12.1982, *ibid.*

59 Institute of National Remembrance, Warsaw (IPN), 514/21, vol. 2, letters by Zygmunt Zawalski to Jerzy Milewski, Caracas, 5.5.1983, San Antonio, 1.7.1983 and 12.8.1983.

for his daughter from the Polish embassy. But Zawalski did not only blame his compatriots in Venezuela. He was also extremely disappointed about the CLAT. His first letter, from early May 1983, started with the comment that »it would be wrong to even speculate that one could get the CLAT's sincere interest in the Polish case or in your [Coordinating] Office«. Máspero was »an old sly dog who does not get into our case and pats on the back«, and »the proof that they would like to take distance from our issue is the fact that the guy who was sonorously represented as the CLAT's specialist of Polish affairs, is strangely avoiding me«. ⁶⁰

III. REASONS FOR THE FAILED COLLABORATION

There are several reasons accounting for this lack of support. Zawalski referred to the economic and political instability in the country. Venezuela was hit by a severe crisis caused by the 1980s Oil Glut. While a dollar was worth 4,30 bolívar in February 1983, the rate declined to 10,25 in May and to 17 in August. The crisis affected the CLAT, which disposed of fewer means. ⁶¹ Zawalski had to work in difficult circumstances: he stayed with his family in the CLAT office without any allowance or insurance, once in a while did an occasional job – for instance translating something – but sometimes had to survive several days without food. The economic problems had an impact on politics and weakened the Christian democratic president Luis Herrera Campíns, whose interest in *Solidarność* had been rooted in efforts to profile his government as a democratic model for Latin America vis-à-vis right-wing and left-wing dictatorships and movements. ⁶² Yet, in view of the general elections of December 1983, the Christian democrats (both the party COPEI and the trade union »Confederación General de Trabajadores de Venezuela«, affiliated with the CLAT) focused their fight on the social democrats (»Acción Democrática«, which would win a majority in the parliament and deliver the new president Jaime Lusinchi) and therefore flirted with other, more left-wing parties (e.g. with the »Movimiento al Socialismo« of Teodoro Petkoff). ⁶³ Accordingly, they were more reluctant to explicitly side with *Solidarność*, although their interest revived on other occasions, when they could weld the Polish crisis to other Latin American struggles, such as was the case in Nicaragua.

International affairs also troubled the collaboration. Zawalski complained that his Latin American colleagues »are more concerned about the Falklands and about how to stop American imperialism than about our issues«. ⁶⁴ *Solidarność*'s and the CLAT's views on the Cold War indeed only matched on the surface. Konopka had still been open to the CLAT's criticism of the United States. He denounced American support of dictatorships, political interference and military interventions but simultaneously emphasized to the Latin Americans that *Solidarność* did not want to be put in a black-and-white scheme and considered itself first and foremost a trade union, fighting for social rights rather than political change. One and a half year later, Zawalski learned that »the standpoint presented

60 Ibid.

61 Telex from Jorge Cuisana (CLAT international department) to the *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad, 15.10.1982, WCL, 326.

62 *Máspero*, De strijd van de vrije vakbeweging in Polen en Latijns-Amerika, p. 5.

63 More general literature on Venezuelan politics and society: *Urquijo*, El movimiento obrero de Venezuela; *Steve Ellner*, Trade Union Autonomy and the Emergence of a New Labor Movement in Venezuela, in: *Steve Ellner/Miguel Tinker Salas* (eds.), Venezuela. Hugo Chávez and the Decline of an »Exceptional Democracy«, Lanham/Boulder etc. 2006, pp. 77–98; *Elizabeth Gackstetter Nichols/Kimberly J. Morse*, Venezuela, Santa Barbara 2010.

64 Zygmunt Zawalski to Jerzy Milewski, Caracas, 5.5.1983, IPN, 514/21, vol. 2.

by the last *Solidarność* delegation regarding the United States was unacceptable for them.⁶⁵ Even the CLAT's anti-communism could not bridge the gap and conversely ran counter to the strategic goals of *Solidarność*. The CLAT and its national members were indeed keen to connect solidarity with Poland to denunciations of Soviet military interventionism in the past (Hungary and Czechoslovakia) and in other regions (Afghanistan) but also to protest against Soviet support for political movements in Latin America, most notably in Cuba and Nicaragua.⁶⁶ Throughout the 1980s, the CLAT put much interest in connecting *Solidarność* to its struggle against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, where its Christian affiliate clashed with the Nicaraguan government. This instrumentalization, however, met opposition from the *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad. One of the major reasons was the support the Sandinistas received among its allies in the West, such as social-democrats and more left-wing groups who aimed to construct a »third way« by equating U.S. involvement in Central America with Soviet imperialism in Eastern Europe.⁶⁷ Connections with the anti-Sandinista opposition carried the risk of furthermore fuelling criticism that the Polish trade union was, just like the Contras in Nicaragua, a pawn of the CIA – a highly unwelcome association at a time when peace movements denounced American power over Western Europe through large-scale protest against the installation of missiles.

Another reason that jeopardized the relationship between *Solidarność* and the CLAT was the competition with other trade union confederations. In the first years, this triggered the CLAT to identify with *Solidarność*. It even aspired to monopolize the Latin American contacts with the Polish opposition, and its support committee insisted to refuse official recognition of the *Solidarność* Venezuela Association.⁶⁸ However, the CLAT could not prevent the *Solidarność* delegations from meeting with other confederations. Konopka and Przybylski thought that they should talk to everybody who wanted this. In most of the countries, they also met with representatives of the ORIT, and in Colombia and Ecuador they even had conversations with communist trade unionists.

After the foundation of the *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad in July 1982, *Solidarność*'s contacts with the ORIT intensified. This is not surprising. The Coordinating Office was *Solidarność*'s official representative outside of Poland and did not want to ally itself with one single trade union confederation. Its president, Jerzy Milewski, had far less in common with Kułakowski than the other Polish activists dealing with Latin America. He leaned more to social democracy than to Christian democracy and had been involved in the foundation of a rather left-wing political party, the PPP (Polish Labor Party), in 1981. In the first months after December 1981, Milewski had lived in the United States, where he became acquainted with the AFL-CIO.⁶⁹ Once moved to Brussels, however, he wanted to avoid identification with the American trade union confederation and to refute the accusation that he was a Cold War hawk or a puppet of the U.S. The ORIT was an excellent way to do so. It grouped many American trade unions: not only – as within the CLAT – the Latin American ones, but also the Canadian Labour Congress and the AFL-CIO (which was the major financier and always provided the ORIT treasurer). Initially, the ORIT seemed even a better option than the ICFTU. The AFL-CIO had left the ICFTU in

65 Zygunt Zawalski to Jerzy Milewski, San Antonio, 1.7.1983, IPN, 514/21, vol. 2.

66 Nicaragua. El syndrome de Polonia. Departamento de Información y Publicaciones (DIP), Boletín de Prensa. CLAT, 29.12.1981, KADOC, WCL, 326; Mitil Ferreira to Kułakowski, 2.1.1982, *ibid.*

67 Kim Christiaens, Globalizing Nicaragua? An Entangled History of Sandinista Solidarity Campaigns in Western Europe, in: Jan Hansen/Christian Helm/Frank Reichzerzer (eds.), Making Sense of the Americas. How Protest Related to America in the 1980s and Beyond, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2015, pp. 155–177.

68 José Mercedes González to Kułakowski, 16.2.1982, KADOC, WCL, 323.

69 Goddeeris, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych »Solidarności« (2006), p. 317.

1969 and only rejoined it in 1982, but it had always remained affiliated with the ORIT.⁷⁰ It is also as a part of efforts to reach out to the left that the *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad cooperated with the Chilean labour opposition against Pinochet, which was supported by the ICFTU and the ORIT. In Brussels, the *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad allied itself with the Chile Labour Committee, which represented the democratic labour opposition inside Chile and cooperated with the ICFTU and its Belgian socialist member, the »Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond/Fédération générale du travail de Belgique«. For Milewski, solidarity with the resistance against the right-wing and anti-communist dictatorship of Pinochet was crucial to make clear that *Solidarność* was anything but a matter of the right or a clerical reactionary movement, and even less a »CIA plot«, as averred by Eastern European state propaganda as well as its left-wing critics in the West.⁷¹ In his opinion, connecting to Chile was strategically important to demonstrate that *Solidarność* was part of an anti-totalitarian struggle in countries »where there didn't exist a left and right«.⁷²

Milewski's opinion obviously collided with the CLAT, which was the ORIT's direct competitor and was highly critical of the AFL-CIO's and the ICFTU's policy in Latin America. It did not take much time before the divergence of views came to a clash. In the summer of 1982, just weeks after the *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad had been established, the CLAT announced that it was preparing the earlier mentioned conference on »Poland-Latin America« in San Antonio de los Altos (Caracas). According to the Italian priest and *Solidarność* supporter Francisco Ricci, the conference marked an approaching merger between the banned trade union *Solidarność* and the CLAT. Ricci's declaration was published in Italian media⁷³ but fiercely rebuffed by the Poles, who refused to function as co-organizers of the conference and only wanted to be involved as guests.⁷⁴ Eventually, Milewski did attend the conference, along with other Poles, but then travelled to the headquarters of the ORIT in Mexico.⁷⁵ There, he could convince the AFL-CIO to pay a ticket for Anna Nitosaławska, a Polish Canadian international labour development expert living in Mexico, to Brussels in order to assist him in developing the Coordinating Office. Nitosaławska would stay in Brussels for more than two years, initially as a volunteer and after a couple of months on a small stipendium from the Canadian trade union CLC, a member of the ORIT and the ICFTU. Especially her French, English and Spanish proficiency, her acquaintance with Western trade unions, and her Canadian passport – allowing for much travelling without visa complications – were invaluable for her foreign trips with Milewski, her editing of newsletters, etc.⁷⁶

70 *Stephen Burwood*, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), in: *Eric Arnesen* (ed.), *Encyclopedia of U. S. Labor and Working-class History*, London 2007, p. 673; *Robert Anthony Waters/Geert Van Goethem*, *American Labor's Global Ambassadors. The International History of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War*, New York 2013; *Idesbald Goddeeris*, Interview with Joanna Pilarska, Warsaw, 12.5.2015.

71 *Free Labour World*, 1983, no. 391/392, pp. 6–9.

72 Interview with Jerzy Milewski, RWE, 6.2.1985, IPN, BU 01820/49, vol. 4, pp. 111ff.

73 Jerzy Milewski and Bohdan Cywiński to Jan Kułakowski, 13.9.1982, KADOC, WCL, 323.

74 Jan Kułakowski to Emilio Máspero, 1.3.1982; Jerzy Milewski and Bohdan Cywiński to Jan Kułakowski, 13.9.1982, *ibid.*

75 Jan Kułakowski to José Mercedes González, 6.8.1982; Telegram from CLAT to Jan Kułakowski, 17.8.1982, KADOC, WCL, 326.

76 *Idesbald Goddeeris*, Skype interview with Anna Nitosaławska, Leuven/Ottawa, 4.6.2015. Anna Nitosaławska was born in Great Yarmouth (United Kingdom) in 1950. Her father was a former soldier of General Maczek's division, her mother the daughter of the Polish diplomat Tadeusz Romer. Four months after her birth, they moved to Canada and settled in Montréal. In the 1970s, Anna Nitosaławska stayed for a few times in Mexico for research on development and politics. In the late 1970s, she settled there, working as a correspondent for Canadian radio and doing all kinds of other jobs, inter alia translation work for the ORIT.

Nitosławska also took care of the contact with the ORIT. Every six months, she and Milewski consulted with its general secretary Luis Anderson when the latter was in Brussels for meetings with the ICFTU. After her return to Latin America at the end of 1985, where she first worked at a trade union committee in Panama and in 1987 again settled in Mexico, she sometimes represented *Solidarność* at ORIT, for instance at a meeting in Jamaica. Yet, one should not overestimate the relationship with the ORIT. Nitosławska emphasizes herself that the collaboration lacked a structural character, did not include financial aid and basically consisted of sending reports and bulletins. Her colleague Joanna Pilarska, who joined the Coordinating Office in March 1983 and would remain Milewski's right hand until the collapse of communism, admits that there was more contact with the CLAT than with the ORIT.⁷⁷ At the same time, both former activists underline the ORIT's relevance. Pilarska thought that the relationship with the ORIT was more sincere, and Nitosławska concluded that the CLAT issued a lot of declarations, but the ORIT had a much greater political weight, grouping the largest Latin American trade unions and having a seat in the Governing Body of the ILO. Yet, she also admits that the Coordinating Office collaborated much more intensively with the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO. Interestingly, its contact persons there – Ela Wasiutyńska (Connecticut) at AFL-CIO and Janek Kuczkiewicz and Anna Oulatar (Brussels) at ICFTU – were of Polish origin, just as with the WCL (Jan Kułakowski) and the Belgian Christian trade union »Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond/Confédération des syndicats chrétiens« (ACV/CSC, Tadek Oruba).

The CLAT made its own analysis of the ORIT's stance towards Poland. In a report for Kułakowski, it stated that the AFL-CIO was the single one trade union within the ORIT that supported *Solidarność* and that social democrats in Latin America primarily focused on Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Grenada.⁷⁸ This was quite correct, and Zawalski must have had the same impression. During his stay in Caracas in 1983, he twice reported to Milewski that he tried to contact Mexico, which presumably stands for the ORIT, but that he did not receive any bulletins or letters.

A last reason for the failed relation between the CLAT – after the political and economic instability, the diverging views on international affairs and the U.S., and the competition with other trade unions – are the societal and cultural gaps. Some Polish sources stated that Latin Americans lived in different worlds. Konopka extensively reported about the differences between Poland and Latin America. He was struck by the economic contrast, the unemployment and the social injustice. However, »my greatest shock were the great ties of the majority of trade unions with political parties [...]. Also striking is the low percentage of workers affiliated with trade unions [...], especially state workers who already have a certain professional position and whose living standard is higher than average.«⁷⁹ Konopka even became aware of

»many cultural differences that obstruct a repeated and complete understanding of Latinos with people brought up in the European culture. I am thinking of the difference of meanings, attitudes and temperaments. One can also often observe a feeling of uncertainty, which results from the lack of rootedness in one's own culture and native traditions«.⁸⁰

He therefore concluded that »it is completely impossible to directly pass experiences. [...] It is, however, vital that the persons who will go to Latin America will be introduced – as far as this is possible – in the social and political problems of these countries, at least more

77 Goddeeris, Interview Pilarska. About Pilarska, see her passport file at IPN, BU 797/68421.

78 Diferentes puntos de vista en América Latina sobre *Solidarność*, 7.2.1983, KADOC, WCL, 326.

79 Konopka, Uwagi po podróży członków *Solidarności* do krajów Ameryki Łacińskiej, p. 7.

80 Ibid., p. 12.

than had been the case with my person.«⁸¹ His advice was turned a deaf ear to. Zawalski had lived in Poland before moving to Caracas and was all but prepared. More than thirty years later, his widow explained the failure also by referring to cultural differences: »As it happens in the Southern part, everything was mañana«.⁸²

However, the Poles themselves were not entirely innocent either. On the one hand, they traditionally did not put this international collaboration high on the agenda. The stay of Zawalski was poorly prepared: he was recognized as a *Solidarność* representative, but was not given any power of attorney.⁸³ On the other hand, there was also internal tension within the Polish delegations themselves. In an interview published in 2009, Przybylski dwells at great length on his conflicts with Zawalski during the journey at the end of 1980. He represents Zawalski as a communist whose speeches were so badly received that he did not get the floor, as a Pharisee who did not teach his daughter religious »stupidities«, but then read the Bible in a Holy Mass in the presence of the Venezuelan President Campíns, as a thief who after his return asked the Venezuelans for financial support for *Solidarność* but kept the 4,000 USD he received for himself, and even as a secret agent of the Polish security services.⁸⁴

Of course, these internal conflicts do not solely account for the unsuccessful collaboration. Maybe the other way round, such gossips resulted from failure and frustration. Przybylski and Zawalski indeed did not build a successful political career after their Latin American adventures. Zawalski returned after an eight months' stay in Venezuela, settled in the East Belgian town Genk, became a warehouseman in the metalworks »Decometa« and died in 2008.⁸⁵ Przybylski had already been living in Belgium since 1981, unsuccessfully tried to return to Poland in 1983, eventually found a job as a blue-collar worker in a cannery in Mechelen (where he hid books and ink in tins for Poland), retired due to health problems at the age of 47 and still lives in Brussels anno 2015.⁸⁶ Konopka, in contrast, became one of the key figures of *Solidarność* in Rome⁸⁷, and Cywiński continued to be a major advisor of the *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad.⁸⁸

Over the following years, Cywiński also developed into *Solidarność*'s main voice in Latin America. With the financial support of 25,000 DM provided by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the CLAT translated his book »The Polish Experience« into Spanish and diffused some thousands of copies among its members in 1985 to publicize the Polish struggle.⁸⁹ The CLAT also invited him to visit its members in Caracas, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Brazil.⁹⁰ However, Cywiński did not always accept the invitation and only later returned twice to Latin America. In 1987, he joined Jan Kułakowski to Argentina for a meeting with local trade union representatives. And at the end of 1989 he travelled as a representative of *Solidarność* to Venezuela, Colombia, Chile and Paraguay. This was a victory tour – *Solidarność* had won the Parliamentary elections earlier that year and the Berlin Wall had just fallen. It was also an attempt to internationalize the Polish trade union in

81 Ibid., pp. 14f.

82 *Goddeeris*, Interview Zawalska.

83 Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse einer Aussprache mit Lech Walesa, 28.3.1983, KADOC, WCL, 326.

84 *Kalukin*, *Zapluty karzeł z puszki*, p. 5. Zawalski does not have a file at the IPN though (checked in the catalogue on 12th May 2015).

85 *Goddeeris*, Interview Zawalska.

86 *Kalukin*, *Zapluty karzeł z puszki*, p. 5, and *Goddeeris*, Interview Przybylski.

87 *Krystyna Asipowicz/Tadeusz Konopka*, *Włochy*, in: *Tomasz Piesakowski* (ed.), *Akcja niepodległościowa na terenie międzynarodowym 1945–1990*, London 1999, pp. 516–521.

88 *Skórzyński/Sowinski/Strasz*, *Opozycja w PRL*, vol. 3, pp. 63–65.

89 Jan Kułakowski to Emilio Máspero, 10.12.1984, KADOC, WCL, 327.

90 Emilio Máspero to Jan Kułakowski, 29.5.1985, *ibid.*

the new geopolitical context. Cywiński especially remembers how he helped a Polish priest working among foresters and how he addressed strikers at the construction of a dam near the Paraguay border with Brazil. A couple of days later, the police crushed the strike and some workers died. Cywiński could not return to the place – he had already booked his ticket back home – and decided to launch a campaign in Europe. However, the Romanian Revolution had just erupted and he did not succeed in mobilizing people for a workers' protest in the Global South.⁹¹

Yet, this failing solidarity and widening gap did not prevent the Poles from universalizing their cause and from pretending to have collaborated intensively throughout the entire decade. Next to Cywiński, also Lech Wałęsa visited Caracas in November 1989. They met with different unionists and dignitaries, including the Venezuelan president Carlos Andrés Pérez, but first and foremost attended the 22nd WCL Congress.⁹² There, the Argentinian Carlos Custer was elected the first South American WCL general secretary (and the successor of Jan Kułakowski). There remained a Polish connection though, since Krzysztof Dowgiałło – a *Solidarność* activist from Gdańsk who had been elected for the Polish Parliament in June 1989 – became the new WCL vice-president. In 1993, Wałęsa – then President of the Polish Republic – and Dowgiałło hosted Custer in Poland.⁹³ By then, the troubles of the mid-1980s must have been long forgotten. Amnesia allowed to cherish a great connection between Poland, Latin America, and the WCL. One even did not notice that Poland lacked a Christian democratic party⁹⁴ or that the contacts of the early 1980s had not led to an enduring collaboration.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Whilst *Solidarność*'s international contacts have mainly been studied with a focus on the West, this article has revealed a variety of contacts between *Solidarność* and Latin American trade unionists. *Solidarność*'s Latin America policy started very promising and very quickly after its foundation. The first official *Solidarność* delegation abroad, in November 1980, headed for Peru and Venezuela. In the course of 1981, Latin American trade unionists met with John Paul II in the Vatican and Lech Wałęsa in Geneva. In January and February 1982, just a month after the proclamation of martial law, two *Solidarność* members travelled to eight Latin American countries. In September of that year, a large delegation, consisting of at least nine Polish key activists, attended a conference in Caracas and then dispersed to other Latin American countries. And from March 1983, a permanent *Solidarność* representative stayed for eight months in Venezuela in order to intensify further collaboration.

Yet, these connections should be put in perspective. Contacts with Latin America mainly proceeded through a handful of leading exiles and paled in intensity and scope with those with trade unionists in the West. Even if these contacts and their motives have often been glamourized in retrospect, they were not high on the agenda in the 1980s and were far from successful. The protagonists themselves did not have a clue about what they were

91 *Idesbald Goddeeris*, Telephone interview with Bohdan Cywiński, Przerośl, Poland, 10.3.2015.

92 *Urquijo*, *El movimiento obrero de Venezuela*, p. 52.

93 See *The Downfall of the WCL*, part 3, 17.8.2013, URL: <<http://internationalworkers.blogspot.be/2013/08/the-downfall-of-wcl-part-3.html>> [30.10.2016], a blog by the Dutch CLAT and WCL activist Petrus Nelissen.

94 *Tim Bale/Aleks Szczerbiak*, *Why is there no Christian Democracy in Poland – and Why Should We Care?*, in: *Party Politics* 14, 2008, pp. 479–500, and *Ann Grzymala-Busse*, *Why there is (almost) No Christian Democracy in Post-Communist Europe?*, in: *Party Politics* 19, 2013, pp. 319–342.

looking for in Latin America and what their Latin American policy consisted of. When Tadeusz Konopka returned from his visit to Latin America, he reported that »I have to admit that until now, I considered dealing with distant cases such as the problems of Latin America as a flight from reality. I do not remember that anybody has ever got the idea to organize an action in Poland to support the struggle they are fighting there, even if this is a right one«.⁹⁵

At the end of the day, *Solidarność*'s Latin America policy failed. Already in early 1982, Polish trade unionists noted that the Latin American partners – particularly the regional Christian democratic trade union confederation CLAT – were making use of the Polish case for their own purposes:

»The CLAT militants' interest in *Solidarność* has to be seen in the context of their fight in their own domain. *Solidarność* is in their eyes a curious example of societal unity around a single and independent trade union. They are interested in how one has to come to such a situation and which tactics *Solidarność* deployed in the struggle for democracy and self-governance. They would like to transfer these experiences to their own ground. The introduction of martial law in Poland is an argument for them in their struggle against the communists at home, in their own field of action.«⁹⁶

From 1983 onwards, however, *Solidarność*'s relevance diminished. Venezuela was suffering from an economic crisis which pushed the local Christian democrats from power. The CLAT as a whole proved to have different views on international politics, the U.S., and communism. The Polish crisis had lost momentum.

Also for the international trade union confederation to which the CLAT was affiliated, the WCL, *Solidarność* was instrumental. The WCL faced an identity crisis. It searched for new alternatives to communism and social democracy and therefore put great hope in the independent Polish trade union. Its general secretary Jan Kułakowski brought *Solidarność* and the CLAT together and financed the travels of Polish unionists to Latin America. Yet, he could not prevent them from collaborating with his social democratic rivals, the South and North American ORIT and the international ICFTU. In the entire story, *Solidarność* did not play a leading part. Its Latin American policy was mainly outlined by others and dependent on their strategies.

⁹⁵ *Konopka*, Uwagi po podróży członków *Solidarności* do krajów Ameryki Łacińskiej, p. 15.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

