

Barbara Labuda Podcast

Aneta:

Oni uważali że jestem... że jestem wspaniałą osobą, tylko mam odjazd, mam takie jedno odchylenie, takie zboczenie, ten feminizm, i często mi z tego powodu dokuczali, nawet nie złośliwie, ale dokuczali, co świadczyło że jeśli w tak otwartym środowisku, które występuje przeciwko represyjności władz, ale także w przyzwoleniu na represyjność, która jednak była w części społeczeństwa, była tak silna reakcja od kpiny, po szyderstwo, a nawet takie... krytykę, czasem zjadliwą, tych moich postaw czy poglądów

I had a lot of disputes, they thought I was... that I'm a great person, but I'm crazy, I have this one deviation, this perversion, this feminism, and they often teased me about it, not even maliciously, but they teased me, which showed that if in such an open environment, which is against the repressiveness of the authorities, but also in consenting to the repression, which, however, was representative for the society, there was such a strong reaction ranging from mockery, to mockery, and even such... criticism, sometimes scathing of my attitudes and views.

Natalia:

Barbara Labuda was born on 19 April 1949 near Wrocław in Poland, into a family belonging to the intelligentsia. While still at school, she was a well organized leader active in discussion clubs and groups. She started studies at the University of Poznań, majoring in Romance philology. It was important to her that studying modern languages in the communist reality, where opportunities to travel to western Europe were limited, opened the way out of the country. Her first trip to Paris took place in spring of 1968, when she left Poland immediately after the events of March 1968 when a wave of student protests passed through the country. In



the capital of France, she found herself again in the vortex of youth rebellion. Her experiences of May 1968 at the Sorbonne University greatly influenced the development of her left-wing political views. She became acquainted with the circles of French workers and French feminists. During her time in France, Barbara encountered a debate on the introduction of a liberal abortion law. Women, doctors, and those involved in abortion were threatened with imprisonment in France. In contrast, Poland had a liberal law that allowed the procedure upon a pregnant woman's request. That left a strong impression on Barbara.

On her return to Poland, she established direct contact with leading opposition activists – Karol Modzelewski and Adam Michnik. She also got involved in social activity under The Workers' Defence Committee, which was founded in 1976. The establishment of the Committee was a response to a wave of repressions directed against workers and was grouping Polish intellectuals critical of the authorities of the Polish People's Republic. Barbara was responsible for collecting and transmitting information about cases of human rights violations. She also distributed underground publications and managed organisational issues.

She created discussion meetings focused on the situation in Poland, the economy, social problems, human rights, and literature, which took the form of the Flying University.

Aneta:

I conducted classes for workers. I was teaching them about the trade union movement in the West, what the workers' movement is, what its traditions are, what rights are, what freedom is, what censorship is. We simply taught people how to live in a free country. In addition, I was writing a doctoral thesis. I worked on it almost exclusively at night until five or six in the morning, and at nine I had classes at the University. To this day I can't explain how I dealt with it all. And, together with my husband, I took care of our wonderful, beloved son, who woke up before me in the morning and was making tea for me.



Natalia:

In addition to being well organized, Barbara was also strict, not only with herself, but with other trade unionists in following the organization's rules. An issue to which she was particularly attentive was the problem of alcohol and thus incoordination during dangerous work in underground conspiracy.

Aneta:

One of my liaisons was a great woman, a researcher. One day she was moving parts of a radio station. It was dangerous because when the police caught someone like that, they were acting without remorse. She was terribly concerned about her task and I quickly realized that something was wrong with her. It turned out that she was sedated. I tried to convey to my co-worker the idea that if she was doing such a big thing, she didn't need any sedatives, because only those should take relanium who choose a different path than we had. We also banned from work those who were caught drinking alcohol.

Natalia:

From 1980, Barbara Labuda was an activist of Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity", which was a broad anti-authoritarian social movement that was using methods of civil resistance to advance the causes of worker's rights and social change. Labuda also established the first in Poland Trade Union University (Wszechnica Związkowa), which popularised knowledge about the union movement, the censorship system, the free market, and workers' freedom.

Aneta:

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In addition to organizing underground work, I also had international contacts, which increased the possibility of arrest. One of the few things I haven't learned was printing. It was a very dangerous profession and very damaging to health. I remember that we had to obtain milk for our printers. It detoxified the body destroyed by the fumes of paint. It was also a big problem because it was difficult to get milk at that time

Natalia:

On the night of December 12 to 13, 1981, officials from the Office of Security (UB) arrived at the Labuda's residence and arrested Barbara's husband, Aleksander, who was the deputy of the Solidarity's Wrocław region. After contacting a lawyer, Barbara informed Gdańsk of the arrest. By noon, telephone lines were cut, and Barbara left her son, Mateusz, in the care of their neighbors. Then she went on a journey around Wrocław and found that the arrests of union members were widespread. The Wrocław headquarters of Solidarity underwent a search, and in the morning, news about a general strike at the Cuprum factory emerged. After that Barbara participated in the strike at the Municipal Bus Station No. VII in Wrocław and later at the Pafawag State Railway Carriage Factory, where the Wrocław strike committee had its headquarters until it was pacified by the Milicia. From that moment, she had to live in hiding.

Barbara Labuda was certain that her arrest was imminent. It took place in October 1982, just before a meeting of the Transient National Committee "Solidarność".

Aneta:

Podwale arrest was terribly dirty; it's still a Gestapo detention center, a gloomy, terrible building. A cell for two people and ten women in it, a bucket for pissing, a bowl, you have to ask for water to clean yourself. Dust, a blanket so dirty you're afraid to touch it, not a single chance to wash it. I had no clothes, they took me in a dress and sandals, and then the winter came, the cell was terribly cold; other prisoners gave me some of their clothes. I couldn't get parcels with food because the prosecutor refused to give me permission for it, I was complaining about the right to take a bath, and I didn't hear



anything from my family. My only contact with the world was through my friends from the men's floor; they sent messages, sometimes a piece of soap, something to eat, they took care of us.

Natalia:

Later on she was relocated to another prison due to the Pope's visit in 1983 when John Paul II appealed to the authorities to release all women. Barbara was released under a government-issued amnesty.

After her release, Labuda returned to Solidarność and continued to work in the opposition. In 1983–1987 she was an author of articles published in the underground journals *Tygodnik Mazowsze* and *Ogniwo*.

Starting with the political breakthrough of 1989, Barbara Labuda was elected MP three times, including for the first time in the elections of 4 June 1989. At that time, she received a record support in the region of 84%. Then, she focused on abolishment (abolition) of censorship as a crucial issue for her. She participated in the debate on a need to restrict the liberal abortion law in force in Poland, which was associated with the Communist system and she was critical of the proposed changes as well as she protested unsuccessfully against new law issued in 1993. She presented draft changes to the abortion law in Parliament six times. At the same time, she supported women's rights movements and unions aimed at combating discrimination against women. She established the Parliamentary Group of Women, consisting of female politicians with different world views. The group's motto was: "Women for women". Her open feminist attitude was frequently a target of mockery. As she recalled:

Aneta:

I had a lot of disputes, they thought I was... I will give you an anecdote because it shows the horizon of their minds and mine... that I'm a great person, but I'm crazy, I have this one deviation, this perversion, this feminism, and they often teased me



about it, not even maliciously, but they teased me, which showed that if in such an open environment, which is against the repressiveness of the authorities, but also in consenting to the repression, which, however, was representative for the society, there was such a strong reaction ranging from mockery, to mockery, and even such... criticism, sometimes scathing of my attitudes and views. I don't know if you can see how strongly my biography, my behavior, is influenced by my attachment to freedom and equality aspirations...

My first step as a deputy was an idea to abolish censorship in Poland, and it was practically a legislative, historical initiative, because it was actually an institution of censorship, because there was regular censorship in Poland, so I suggested it and I was interested in it, an abortion suddenly came into my field of vision, and since I obviously had my own feminist, libertarian and equality views, it seemed obvious to me that this I will express my opinion on this matter and defend my point of view and defend this freedom act, this liberal act.

Natalia:

In 1996, she became a secretary of state in the Office of the President of the Republic of Poland during Aleksander Kwaśniewski's term. She worked on solving social problems such as drug addiction, social pathologies and unemployment. In 2005–2010, she lived in Luxembourg, holding the position of the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland.

Barbara Labuda dedicated her entire life to fighting for freedom and equality. She has never compromised her ideals, and continues to pursue them. She supports legalizing abortion as well as combating social pathologies. Barbara Labuda advocates the separation of church and state and points to the need to liberalize society. In the debate over same-sex unions and consent to the adoption of children by such couples, she sides with representatives of LGBT+ community and their right to form families.

