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PHOTOS P. 2: YURI BELETSKI,
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FROM THE EDITORS

AN UNATTRACTIVE WORD

In the 1960s in the West, and in Poland starting in the 1970s, young people invoked the word “freedom” in a broad array of contexts. They scrawled the slogan “be free!” across the walls that marked great social divides (or across the walls of their own bedrooms, at least). They wanted freedom from family ties, from the communist-era captivity that they viewed as encompassing the government, the schools, the Church, family, and all organizations that involved wearing uniforms. The freedom to travel, freedom from racial and religious differences.

In the 1980s, the phrase “no freedom without Solidarity” voiced not just a demand that the opposition-minded trade union should be legally recognized, but also a metaphor for a certain kind of relations between people. Both those living here and those who supported the struggle for freedom from outside, in Europe and the United States. In the individual dimension, the fight for liberty meant striving to attain autonomy, seeking a space not dependent on anyone, taking responsibility for oneself and others.

When the walls came down, it seemed that we were leaving behind the idea of the government as a big regulator of everything. That the alluring idea of civil society, for instance, was swallowing us whole. That proved not to be the case. For many people, the idea of running around a military range with a rifle is not something odd, but rather a potentially interesting activity. A government that restricts access to information – perhaps there’s nothing wrong with that? “My body – my choice” is perhaps no longer an issue? And would it be so terrible not to be able to travel to neighboring countries just with one’s ID card? After all, we do still have passports. And if those passports will be kept and given out by the government? Then, we will simply have to ask for them. It appears that as long as there is freedom online, as long as there is latte in the café, many people will wonder what all the noise is about.

We live in a free world, but the ideas enshrined by the revolutions of the late 1960s have strangely crumbled. We no longer want to be multicultural, we are afraid of foreigners, we are prepared to consent to restrictions. Why is this the case? Why has freedom lost its attractiveness?



Celebrating the moment when the NSZZ Solidarity trade union gained official registry in court, Warsaw, 24 October 1980.



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