

THE PATH TO SOCIALISM: THE PROGRAM FOR FOSTERING COOPERATIVES AND SOCIALIZING THE PUBLIC SYSTEM

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Abstract: The paper by Jan Wolski — a Polish theoretician and cooperative activist — constitutes the third section of the book *Spółdzielczy samorząd pracy* [*Cooperative Labour Self-Management*], which he wrote over the years of 1943-1956, but which was never published as a whole. The manuscript, from the author's family archives, includes the information that this piece was “written in 1943 for the Inter-union Cooperative Committee (functioning underground in Warsaw during II World War) and the Socialist Planning Commission”. Entitled *Cooperative Labour Self-Management*, this section of the planned book was published in the monthly magazine *Więź* [*Bond*], issue no. 2 of 1972, and in 2011 on the website Lewicowo.pl. It contains Wolski's deliberations regarding the functioning of cooperative labour self-management under the conditions of a social and economic transformation heading towards a classless society. Wolski believed a universal labour-based political system to be one of the essential conditions of socialism, supplanting the old organisational forms originating from the capitalist period. As such, universal labour self-management together with other forms of popular self-government, and particularly user self-government, constitutes a transmission belt between the populace's grassroots activity and top-down political organisation. Mindful of Edward Abramowski's teachings, Wolski considered that only having the state based on self-governing cooperative institutions consisted the true realisation of universal will, and thereby the realisation of socialist ideals.

Keywords: labour self-management, cooperativism, stateless socialism, economic democracy.

The socialist system will be the system of civilized cooperators.

Vladimir Lenin

Premises and assumptions

1. Since the second half of the past century, under the increasing pressure of objective and compelling needs dictated by the production capacities growing along with advancing scientific and technical knowledge, the imperative to transform the current socio-economic system has become clearer and more urgent.
2. In the economic sphere, the need for this transformation aims for the replacement of the goods economy system (private capitalism is its current, and as we believe, perhaps its final stage), based on the conflict of interests and stimulated by profit-seeking obtained in the conditions of disproportionate supply and demand ratio, with the system of a socialized planned economy, based on universal solidarity and stimulated by seeking the fullest and possibly the best satisfaction of the needs of human communities.
3. In the social sphere, the need for transformation aims for the replacement of an antagonistic class society with a solidarity-based classless society.
4. In the way of these necessary transformations, there are numerous obstacles which stem from the following sources:
 - a) the resistance of the social forces interested in maintaining the current system,
 - b) the traditional mindset, mentality and life attitude of the wide social masses interested in the discussed transformations but still entrenched in the reality of feelings, notions and relations inherent to the current system,
 - c) the unsuitability of the current frames of the public and legal system to the needs and requirements of the transformation process.
5. Unsuitable to the objective needs of today's era, the traditional frames of the public and legal system allow the above-mentioned obstacles of the first and second kind to continue.

Appropriate changes to the political system could create the conditions to remove, or at least to alleviate, the obstacles stemming from the first two sources, and even to ultimately accelerate these sources to dry up.

6. Both the experiences of the past decades and the theoretical analysis indicate that the traditional system of political democracy is not able to provide the essential conditions for

the implementation of the necessary changes to the socio-economic system. Hence, the need to modify the present public and legal system is becoming increasingly urgent.

7. The change of the current public and legal system should aim to gradually deepen and improve the current political democracy by introducing new, previously absent, factors of social activity interested in the discussed transformation, displaying a positive and vibrant resourcefulness in the social sphere. I mean here cooperative and labor movements for the working people.

8. Due to the dual role of an individual in the society (benefiting from the services of the society as a user and providing services to the society as a working person), there are two basic directions for cooperative resourcefulness: various kinds of users' cooperatives and the labor cooperative.

9. No connections have been established between the users' cooperative and the labor cooperative. Each of these currents exists separately with its own initiatives, creating its own separate enterprises. There has also been no connection whatsoever between the cooperative activity and the activity of the public.

10. The initiative of each of the aforementioned factors should be of interest to the remaining segments, especially that none of them is able to infallibly complete its tasks alone, without appropriately interacting with others. Hence, the isolated initiative of the public, if allowed to expand, inevitably suffers from overgrown bureaucracy. The isolated initiative of the user segment is inherently unable to appropriately solve the issues of professional work and professional management in its enterprises. The isolated initiative of the labor force, on the other hand, is inherently unable to embark on larger economic projects by itself and based solely on its own financial means, nor to appropriately ensure the public interests in its enterprises.

Therefore, the close and complementary interaction of all these factors within every single enterprise operating not for profit but to satisfy the needs of the community is in the particular interest of each one of them as well as in the common paramount public interest.

11. In the conditions of the current socio-economic system, the labor cooperative had limited application and was easily degenerated in the unfavorable climate of the goods economy. The private-capitalist system was more conducive to the thriving of the labor movement, which in this system was primarily of a combative nature.

Both these emancipation movements of laborers (the labor cooperative and the labor movement), uniting the same people of the same social nature, aimed at the common goal of the proletariat and essentially constituting two bearings of the same movement, should, and, in the conditions of the discussed planned economy, will enter into a close cooperation.

12. When re-organizing the current public and legal system according to the needs and conditions of the planned economy, two public self-governments should be introduced as its two new core members: the self-government of labor and users. The first should be based on the previous experiences and comply with the ideology of the labor movement and labor cooperative; the second should be based on the previous experiences and comply with the ideology of the users' cooperative in general, and the consumers' cooperative in particular.

13. Since the labor and user segments inherently express the entirety of the real common interests while their life tendencies veer towards the discussed socio-economic transformations, their appropriate organization, coordination and implementation in the public and legal system will transfer the issue of this transformation into competent and reliable hands.

14. Considering the public nature of the self-governments of labor and users, their appropriate organization should ensure that all individuals capable of activity in communal life as workers or users should be included, without creating (even temporarily) the category of „outcasts” (persons outside the law or with limited citizenship rights).

15. The social attitude of a human being who acts strictly as a worker or user inherently leans towards solidarity (and the implementation of the projected self-governments will enhance it). It will effectively influence the transformation of the mentality, psyche and life attitude of the nation's wide masses according to the spirit of the future classless society.

16. Referring to solidarity, we mean the essential solidarity, the proper kind, and in terms of its full realization, possible only in the conditions of a classless society and the socialized economy. It differs from the insincere and shallow bourgeois solidarity propagated by the defendants of the current system based on antagonisms.

17. Both forces of social activity (labor and users'), appropriately organized and installed in the public and legal system as its essential foundation, should be expanded at the state-level as two public self-governments equipped with a wide scope of competences.

18. The cooperative movements and the labor movement should not only be treated as the nucleus of the new forms of a socio-economic system but also as the new forms of the public and legal system. They will be incorporated in the aforementioned public self-governments as their starting components, most deliberate, creative and competent elements, which will give the self-governments the right shape from the beginning, and their activity — the right directions from the beginning.

19. Transitioning from the modest role of emancipation movements, operating in a foreign, and partly hostile environment, to the role of key components of the public and legal system and the socio-economic system, they will have to undergo certain transformations in terms of their current nature and organization, however, without changing

fundamentally or resigning from their previous objectives but being able to serve these objectives better.

20. From the very beginning, both self-governments should be provided with the necessary legal conditions to advance and expand their activity. This activity, while transitioning from the status quo, should gradually phase out (and have room to do so) and simultaneously replace the old forms and relations characteristic for the current society of class and antagonisms noticeable in the public, social and economic life. The new forms and solidarity-based relations will give the communal life a new character according to the requirements objectively necessitated by the new epoch and the postulates formulated at the beginning of our reflections.

21. The public self-government of labor and the public self-government of users — both stemming from the concept and experiences of free emancipation movements — should self-organize according to the ideology and experiences of these movements, based on four cardinal principles:

a) the voluntary nature of the recruitment, creation and dissolution of all the organizational units of the system,

b) ensuring the widest competences to each of the organizational levels of the system with the right for the final decision-making and handling of any issues within the interest range of a given cell,

c) a multi-level federalism with few bodies deliberating and jointly arriving at decisions in all organizational units,

d) the competences of the agents at all organizational levels should be strictly regulated and the agents should be directly responsible to their principals.

The public self-government of labor

22. The goal of the public self-government of labor should be providing the society and state with a competent, creative, positive and responsible labor force acting according to the public interests in the economic, social and public life, particularly, in the processes of planning, organizing, implementing and monitoring the tasks and activities performed by workers as well as protecting labor from exploitation, degradation and corruption.

23. The public self-government of labor should be a constituent of the public and legal system, guaranteed by the state constitution.

24. The public self-government of labor should include all employed persons, or persons qualified and eligible for employment in the area exceeding the unpaid satisfaction of personal needs or the needs of their closest family and householders.

25. The self-employed persons (small farmers, independent craftsmen, small traders, free-lancers, etc.) should be included in the public self-government of labor on equal terms with employed persons.

As potential employers and entrepreneurs, or, alternatively, owners of companies, resources and production facilities, they should not be entitled to any extra rights under the public self-government of labor nor should they be limited in any way on this behalf.

26. The public self-government of labor should be organized within professional and vocational self-governments, both complementing and collaborating with one another within the chambers of labor (district, provincial and central) as well as expanded at the state-level.

The professional self-government of labor

27. The professional self-government of labor should be expanded according to the ideological assumptions and on the organizational foundation of the free labor movement of the working people.

28. The competences of the professional self-government of labor should include:

- a) establishing the qualification criteria for all professional work categories,
- b) professional qualification and disqualification of individual workers,
- c) records and statistics of workers,
- d) labor legislation,
- e) participation in planning together with all social and public groups interested in any processes of organized labor aimed at satisfying the needs of the community;
- f) employment mediation (distribution),
- g) registration of employment contracts as well as regulations and statutes in the area of organization, employment and administration of labor (regulations of labor unions and any labor self-governments in enterprises, statutes of cooperative labor units, labor cooperatives, their unions, etc.)
- h) labor inspection,
- i) labor judiciary,
- j) establishing the principles of estimating the labor costs together with other interested parties,

k) planning, drafting programs and supervising vocational trainings in work places, at courses and universities,

l) representing professional competences and professional interests of organize labor against any other factors in fundamental matters at all levels of the socio-economic and political life.

29. The above-listed tasks of the professional self-government of labor which are already performed by labor trade unions or other labor organizations should be included in the professional self-government of labor under which the aforementioned current organizational units will be appropriately re-organized and expanded, or — should they not prove useful — liquidated.

30. Those of the aforelisted tasks of the professional self-government of labor which are currently included in the competences of the public and legal segments should be assumed by the professional self-government of labor while the aforementioned offices should be re-organized within the self-government, or — should they not prove useful — liquidated.

The vocational self-government of labor

31. The vocational self-government of labor should be expanded according to the ideological assumptions and organizational experiences of the labor cooperatives. In terms of its organization, it should be based on labor unions or other labor self-governments in work places, especially on labor cooperatives as the fullest realization of a self-government so far.

32. The competences of the vocational self-government of labor should include:

a) organization, administration and labor supervision in individual shop floors and work places,

b) representation of labor competences and interests before enterprises,

c) professional training and instruction at work places, special courses and universities of all degrees,

d) conducting collective research and studies in the scopes of individual professions and specializations.

33. Those of the aforelisted tasks of the vocational self-government of labor which are currently performed by non-employee-related elements (public, social or private), should be assumed by the vocational self-government of labor under which the aforementioned units will be appropriately re-organized, or — should they not prove useful — liquidated.

34. Those of the aforelisted tasks of the vocational self-government of labor which are factually performed by individual enterprise shop floors by various kinds of labor self-governments or labor cooperatives, should be incorporated into the general system of the vocational self-government of labor. The aforementioned units will be appropriately re-organized under this self-government, and if they prove redundant or unsuited for transformation, they will be liquidated.

The public self-government of users

35. The goal of the public self-government of users should be providing the user with the influence on all the processes related to the satisfaction of communal needs.

36. The public self-government of users should develop from the ideas and organizational experiences of the users' cooperative.

37. The public self-government of users should be an element of the public and legal system guaranteed by the state constitution.

38. The public self-government of users should express its activity and have the power in the following areas:

- a) initiatives and questioning,
- b) planning,
- c) estimates and budgeting,
- d) monitoring.

39. The public self-government of users should include all natural and legal persons interested as users in the functioning of the institutions satisfying their needs. It should find application in all establishments whose goal is to satisfy communal needs, even if these establishments happen to be private enterprises.

40. The public self-government of users should should develop especially in these areas:

- a) supply needs (food, clothing, etc.),
- b) housing needs
- c) healthcare needs
- d) the need to gain systematic knowledge and skills (teaching),
- e) cultural needs (the press, libraries, theater, museums, concerts, vacation, etc.)
- f) transportation needs,
- g) safety needs.

41. The public self-government of users should be introduced everywhere simultaneously and gradually expanded.

Instructions on the distribution of competences between both public self-governments

42. The interrelations between labor and users in the discussed system should be regulated at the level of common interests of both parties.

43. The public self-government of labor should collaborate with the public self-government of users at all levels and in all establishments of its application.

44. When distributing the tasks and competences between the two collaborating self-governments, the status quo should be considered and conditions should be fostered to encourage the implementation, advancement and consolidation of the following principles:

a) in terms of initiative, both self-governments have equal rights,

b) in terms of planning, the technical and preparatory activities fall within the tasks of the self-government of labor while the approval of plans requires the consensus of both self-governments,

c) budgets, calculating principles (particularly the principles of calculating the costs of labor) shall be developed by the self-government of labor while the pertinent decisions require the consensus of both self-governments,

d) the execution, its organization and supervision fall within the exclusive competences of the self-government of labor,

e) the monitoring activities are entrusted to the committee jointly established by both parties from professionally-competent persons. The tasks of joint monitoring do not include the supervision of internal labor relations and organization of professional work. These areas fall within the supervision of the self-government of labor's own bodies

f) in justified cases, the self-government of users can request that the self-government of labor remove an employee from a pertinent position if their duties involve direct contacts with the user component.

45. If a consensus cannot be reached by the collaborating self-governments, an *ad hoc* arbitration shall resolve the issue.

The process of transforming the system

46. Along the development of the discussed self-governments, phasing out and replacement of the current out-dated forms of the antagonistic system, the national economy shall aim towards the great (statewide) economic community of free and supportive citizens where all enterprises or work places striving to satisfy the communal needs shall be in the public ownership and shall be used and administered by the interested and competent social factors organized under these self-governments.

47. In connection with the activity of these self-governments, the current activity components, namely:

- a) the private initiative,
- b) the state initiative,
- c) the self-governments' initiative
- d) the initiative of various cooperatives of users,
- e) the initiative of various cooperatives of labor,

shall undergo gradual exterior transformations, change their current nature, modify, expand, restrict or even cease their participation and significance in the economic and social life.

48. The scope of the private initiative's activity shall be decidedly restricted, providing the economic facilities (which are a source of profit for their owners and not solely workshops of their personal work) are expropriated for universal application.

Following these expropriations, the remaining small private enterprises, by being incorporated into the general system of the planned economy within a network of two public self-governments, shall evolve in the direction discussed above.

49. The self-government of users shall have a thick network of units which will cover the entire nation's population activating it to strive for the appropriate satisfaction, in line with the wishes of the interested parties, of all kinds of material and cultural needs of the community.

50. The enterprises which in the current system comprise a separate ownership of various users' cooperatives or their unions will have to embark on a path to change their current organization.

By introducing in their area a collaboration between users and the self-government of labor, and as a result of connections to the overall planned economy, these establishments shall transform, if not immediately, then gradually, into public enterprises in terms of the title of their ownership, and they shall be conducted by the self-government of labor operating in consensus with and under the supervision of the self-government of users.

51. The self-government of labor shall also incorporate the institutions currently conducted solely by the public, aiming to include all the areas and any establishments of work performed for the satisfaction of communal needs, wider than the needs of a working individual, his closest family and householders.

52. The enterprises currently owned by the labor cooperatives shall follow in the same direction. As a result of the collaboration with the self-government of users and in close connection with the state's overall planned economy, in terms of the title of their ownership, they shall transform into public enterprises while the labor cooperatives shall transform into the cooperative self-governments of labor in the area of these enterprises.

The transformation of the state's character

53. By introducing the public self-governments of labor and users to the public and legal system while transforming or phasing out the out-dated and out-of-touch forms and units of the current public system, a major change to the current character of the state shall take place.

54. The state will cease to be something counter to the bottom-up self-governing work of free people, a factor above this work and separate from it, or in any event, having claims and manifesting tendencies to predominance.

The state will become an emanation and culmination of the self-governance growing out of the free bottom-up activity of the citizens at the highest levels of coordination, planning, disposition, execution and supervision.

55. The state will cease to be a goal in itself, departed from live people, above their real needs and wishes, violating their freedom and turning them into helpless victims of political games, willfulness and arbitrary experiments at the hand of authorities.

The state will become a union of free citizens, existing not to hinder and enslave but to expand the scope of their freedom, to ensure them benefits resulting from public solidarity and the planned socialized economy within the great community including the nation's entire population and maintaining a well-rounded solidarity-based connection with the whole world.

Jan Wolski (1888–1975) – was an activist, theoretician, and organizer of labor cooperatives. From 1909 he belonged to the Polish Socialist Party, and from 1915 he was engaged in secret educational activities for the workers' association "Wiedza" ["Knowledge"]. In November 1915 he was arrested by the German police and interned. In 1917 he entered the People's University, where he became acquainted with Edward Abramowski. Under Abramowski's influence he began to work actively in the cooperative movement. During the war in 1920 he served in the Legions, organizing a network of cooperative army canteens at the front. Later he was active in the Union of Labor Cooperative Associations. In 1928 he initiated the establishment of the Section for Labor Cooperativism in the Polish Society for Social Policy, and in 1937 he was one of the participants of the founding meeting of the Democratic Club in Warsaw. From 1945 to 1948 he was director of the Central Educational Center of Labor Cooperativism; from 1956 to 1959 he was a member of the Central Council of the Union of Labor Cooperativism and the Main Cooperative Council. Harassed by the communist authorities, from 1956 he was an opposition activist of the Krzywe Koło Club. To the end of his life he tirelessly proclaimed Abramowski's ideas of brotherhood.

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Jan Wolski (1888–1975) – działacz, teoretyk i organizator kooperacji pracy. Od 1909 roku należał do PPS, zaś od 1915 prowadził w Warszawie tajną działalność edukacyjną dla stowarzyszenia robotniczego „Wiedza”. W listopadzie 1915 został aresztowany przez policję niemiecką i internowany. W 1917 roku wstąpił do Uniwersytetu Ludowego, gdzie poznał Edwarda Abramowskiego. Pod jego wpływem rozpoczął aktywną działalność spółdzielczą. W czasie wojny 1920 roku służył w Legionach, organizując na froncie sieć spółdzielczych kantyn wojskowych. Później podjął działalność w Związku Robotniczych Stowarzyszeń Spożywczych. W 1928 roku zainicjował powstanie Sekcji Kooperacji Pracy w Polskim Towarzystwie Polityki Społecznej, zaś w 1937 był jednym z uczestników zebrania założycielskiego Klubu Demokratycznego w Warszawie. Od 1945 do 1948 był dyrektorem Centralnego Ośrodka Szkoleniowego Spółdzielczości Pracy, od 1956 do 1959 członkiem Rady Centralnego Związku Spółdzielczości Pracy i Naczelnej Rady Spółdzielczej. Od 1956, szykanowany przez władze PRL, był działaczem opozycyjnego Klubu Krzywego Koła. Do końca życia nieustraszenie głosił idee braterstwa Abramowskiego.

TYTUŁ: Droga do socjalizmu. Program upowszechniania spółdzielczości i uspołeczniania ustroju publicznego

ABSTRAKT: Prezentowany tekst Jana Wolskiego stanowi trzecią część książki „Spółdzielczy samorząd pracy”, którą polski teoretyk i działacz spółdzielczy pisał w latach 1943–1956, a której planowane opublikowanie w Wydawnictwach Centralnego Związku Spółdzielczego nigdy nie doszło do skutku. W maszynopisie pochodzącym z rodzinnego archiwum autora znajdujemy informację, że tekst ten został „[n]apisany w 1943 roku dla działającego konspiracyjnie w Warszawie Międzyzwiązkowego Komitetu Spółdzielczego oraz Socjalistycznej Komisji Planowania”. Pod tytułem „Spółdzielczy samorząd pracy” ta część planowanej książki została opublikowana w miesięczniku „Więź” nr 2 z 1972 roku oraz w portalu Lewicowo.pl w 2011 roku. Znajdziemy w niej rozważania Wolskiego dotyczące funkcjonowania spółdzielczego samorządu pracowniczego w warunkach transformacji społeczno-ekonomicznej, zmierzającej ku społeczeństwu bezklasowemu. Wolski uważa, że powszechny ustrój pracowniczy jest jednym z warunków koniecznych socjalizmu, wypierającym stare formy organizacyjne pochodzące z okresu kapitalistycznego. Tym samym powszechny samorząd pracy wraz z innymi formami samorządności ludowej, szczególnie zaś samorządem użytkowników, stanowi pas transmisyjny pomiędzy oddolną działalnością ludu i odgórną organizacją polityczną. Pomny nauk Edwarda Abramowskiego, Wolski uważał, że tylko państwo oparte na samorządnych instytucjach spółdzielczych stanowi prawdziwą realizację woli powszechnej, a tym samym realizację ideałów socjalistycznych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: samorząd pracy, kooperatyzm, socjalizm bezpieczeństwa, demokracja ekonomiczna.