

PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMON: TOWARDS A POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF POLISH COOPERATIVISM

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Abstract: The aim of the article is twofold. First, it is to interpret the main philosophical ideas of the Polish cooperative movement from the first part of the twentieth century and how they were applied in practice, by using the conceptual vocabulary of post-structuralist and post-Operaist political philosophy; and, second, to further develop the notion of “institutions of the common” that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri introduced — during debates about alternatives to both capitalism and the state-form — with their formulation of “principles of the common”, which is to say, general principles for creating democratic and popular institutions around the ideas of inclusion and solidarity, an ethos of mutual help and democratic governance over production and exchange of material wealth.

Keywords: cooperativism, the common, altermodernity, Abramowski, Społem.

In cooperatives we get to know the practical wealth of the common, the common good of mutual help; by living within them, we experience for ourselves how disastrous for men is selfishness and what a lever of welfare and happiness the common can be.

Edward Abramowski, *Kooperatywa jako sprawa wyzwolenia ludu pracującego*
[The Case for Cooperatives as the Liberation of the Working People],
1912

1. Introduction: Cooperation as the political practice of the common

Modern democratic politics begins with the arrival of workers, the *demos* of modernity, on the stage of political life (Rancière 1989). In the Polish case, the fundamental political experience has been the plebs' building of a collective identity through a revolutionary split in the oppressive order of the Tsarist police state, as this latter became suspended between the feudal economy and industrial capitalism.

The Revolution of 1905 was just such a turning point, one that sped up Polish society's entry into political modernity on numerous levels. It was an act of rebellion by the working classes, who were claiming their political visibility. This rebellion also brought about intellectual and cognitive emancipation among labourers, an emancipation that could no longer be reversed, not even by the most repressive of means (Marzec 2016, 423–424).

The workers' revolution of 1905 was a central occurrence for the democratisation of Tsarist Russian society. This event saw the Tsarist state introduce a number of reforms constituting real gains for the workers' movement and enabled the further development of “plebeian public institutions” — above all those of a cooperative nature (Wojciechowski 1939, 238).

However, the exuberant development of the cooperative movement did not apply solely to workers' associations (Piechowicz 1963, 12). In fact, one could say that cooperative ideology *par excellence* derived from an awareness of the shortage of organisations with a strict social and ideological working-class profile, while it simultaneously invoked the same slogans as the labour movement, broadly understood: the economic emancipation of socially deprived groups together with their political emancipation was to be an intermediate point on the way to reaching this. When recalling the beginnings of the journal *Spolem!* [Together!],

published by the Cooperativists' Society [Towarzystwo Kooperatystów], which was the basis for the later establishment of the Union of Consumer Cooperatives in Poland [Związek Polskich Stowarzyszeń Spożywców], Stanisław Wojciechowski (1869–1953) — a socialist, fighter for independence, the journal's founder and later president of the Republic of Poland (1922–1926) — recognised three fundamental ideological premises as guiding his work at the time: 1. That the first step on the road to creating a democratic society is the school of self-government and mutual aid in everyday life, and is achieved by participating in the activities of cooperatives; 2. that cooperatives constitute the centre of the rebuilding of a society's economic structure by society itself; and 3. that cooperatives create a just society “here and now”, by replacing unfair capitalist relations through a “harmonising of all factors involved in the generation of wealth” (Wojciechowski 2017, 208–209). These premises, which stem directly from the ideological manifestos of Edward Abramowski (1868–1918), Polish cooperativism's chief ideologue, determined the specific character of the cooperative movement in Poland. With the help of economic methods (which included a system of mutual insurance, the self-management of consumer choices and the association-based management of the means of agricultural and industrial production), the construction of a free and modern popular entity that, as such, possessed political agency, became a sort of meta-principle of cooperation.

Beginning with the founding principles formulated by the Equitable Society of Rochdale Pioneers, the cooperative movement declared itself totally apolitical and religiously neutral, a political strategy that the Polish cooperative movement (Thugutt 1945) also adopted upon the establishment of the Cooperativists' Society in 1906.¹ This imperative, combined with the principles of cooperative democracy — that is, principles of open membership and of one person = one vote — determined a unique place for cooperation vis-à-vis other modern grass-roots institutions striving for emancipation. As the Society declared a desire to overthrow the old state-and-market model (by gradually displacing competition-based institutions), cooperativists were attacked from conservative positions (Bilewicz 2017, 83–84). At the same time, by keeping a distance from all parties and the labour movement itself, cooperativists also risked criticism and scission from within the cooperative movement itself. One of the key discussions within the movement, and that concerned what relations cooperatives should maintain with the political institutions of the labour movement, was actually focused not simply on rules and ideological declarations, but also on the economic practice of cooperative associations and their membership. The nub of this controversy concerned the issue of empowering cooperative institutions and

¹ The founding members of the Polish Cooperativists' Society were Edward Abramowski, Romuald Mielczarski and Stanisław Wojciechowski.

their independence with regard to the immanence of social relations (common management/residence/consumption, etc.).

In this article we endeavour to extract and examine the specific “political” philosophy of the Polish cooperative movement on the basis of the “ontological” assumptions of cooperativism (above all those made in the thinking of Edward Abramowski), as well as analyse the movement’s ideological practice, and notably the ideological dispute between the proponents of political neutrality, on the one hand, and “classists”, on the other. The political philosophy of cooperativism sought to oppose a metaphysics of ownership and attempted to institute a logic of the common, which is to say a logic of that which does not belong to anybody and that is common to all without eliminating any type of ethical or ethnic differences. Such a project implies the idea of a community that organises a constituent authority beyond the logic of sovereignty (Hardt and Negri 2017, 14) and therefore beyond every property-based politics, insofar as the concept of sovereignty is what ensures both the state’s propriety over territory and population, and personal sovereignty over private property (see Capra and Mattei 2013). Our aim is to show that the guiding idea of the Polish cooperative movement was to institutionalise the common (Hardt and Negri 2009, 173).

From the outset, the cooperative movement, including the Polish cooperative movement from the early twentieth century, presented an alternative to forms of socialisation based on market individualism and state collectivism. Originating, on the one hand, from the great narratives of utopian socialism and, on the other, being firmly rooted in everyday practices subsumed under an advancing capitalism and dominated by the bourgeois state, the cooperative movement in Poland was portrayed by its first ideologues as a kind of “communism of everyday life” (see Abramowski 1965a, 207; Piskala 2014). It was to be a “utopia in action”, aimed at instituting both the economic *and* the ethical grounds for a new communal life — a “cooperative commonwealth” (Abramowski 2012a). The productive innovation of the cooperativists’ movement — at least of its progressive elements — was the construction of a new kind of subjectivity formed “within” and “against” both capital and the state (Tronti 2006, 230). In our view, the concept best able to grasp the ethical and material aspect of cooperativity, as well as the political philosophy of its movement, is “the common”, a concept that Hardt and Negri have made, as is well known, the point of departure and arrival of their critique of the “republic of property” (Hardt and Negri 2009, 3–21). Indeed, to the idea of the “republic of property”, the Polish cooperativism opposed that of the “cooperative commonwealth”.

As we try to show, Polish cooperativism had a unique and complex social ontology and a distinct political philosophy, both of which could well form a relevant point of reference for a contemporary theory of grassroots institutions and an economics of emancipatory practices. However, the conceptual universe of cooperativism is an historical

relic. It thus requires an appropriate, contemporary theoretical framework if its ideas of autonomy, economic democracy and constituent power of the multitude are to be sufficiently explicated. To this end, we engage in an historical analysis of cooperativism together with one of the philosophical conceptuality of the institutions of the common, thus enabling a new perspective in philosophical investigations of popular emancipatory struggles.

2. Cooperativism as an Altermodern Counterpower

Cooperativism stems from the first utopian socialists' diagnosis of the social nature of inequalities. It is to these socialists that we also owe the idea of changing alienated and unjust social relations in the industrial world as if "from inside", that is from the womb of the old system.

This diagnosis, which we could also acknowledge as the fundamental distinguishing factor of a modern political stance, relates to the discovery made by the first, nineteenth-century socialists, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier:

Nature, through the study of the past history and present state of the world, had deeply impressed on my mind that man had ever been, was, and ever must be, the creature of the circumstances made to exist around him before and after his birth (Owen 1850, 8).

These words identify something that today we may today consider a platitude, yet it is the result of the birth of an emancipatory worldview that we should link to the social, scientific and technical revolutions of the turn of the nineteenth century. The discovery of "the social", and therefore also of the social origins of poverty, subtended the thesis about the adventitiousness and non-essentiality of social divisions (Armand and Maublanc 1949, 210). Utopian socialists thus expressed the spirit of modern politics, though without creating a coherent body of "theoretical practice" that would allow for the realisation of their ideals.

Marx's ambivalence to the first ideologues of socialism (Marx and Engels 2008, 81; Marx 1985, 11) correspond somewhat to what was subsequently to become a premise of left-wing criticism of cooperative doctrine. According to such criticism, under the cooperative slogans of "class reconciliation", "brotherhood" or "solidarism", cooperativism sought to build a utopia that failed to take in account the realities of class struggle (Hempel 1931). The upshot, it was alleged, was that cooperativism thereby reduced the activity of cooperation to a form of capitalist ownership, similar to what Marx called the "socialism of

capital” (Jossa 2005). For orthodox Marxism, the awakening of the proletariat’s political will was not to be governed solely by the logic of political awareness through economic practice, but required the generation of a political elite (a party) to assume a transcendent, leading role. For the first socialists, on the other hand, the advent of the kingdom of social (and thus cosmic) harmony was to be achieved by the hands of the same working people, using social machines specially constructed for this purpose — the phalansteries or rural communities of tomorrow, themselves a logical realisation of the mechanism of nature.

Edward Milewski (1876–1915), a pre-War Polish cooperativist, called this combination of science (theory) and practice “applied sociology”. He saw in it the fundamental principle of cooperation and claimed it could be adopted “everywhere by all nations” (Milewski 1930, 88). This experience, he emphasised, is not a purely theoretical digression, but is derived from the experience of the movement, of the self-learning institution (Milewski 1930, 89). Therefore, as the foundation of cooperative practice, knowledge constitutes a common good resulting from cooperation — from manufacturing or consumption based on horizontal relations: on workers’ self-governance, the structure of delegation, the logic of inclusion. This relationship between democracy, the economy and knowledge is expressed excellently in the words of Romuald Mielczarski (1871–1926), one of the pioneers of consumer cooperation and co-founders of the Cooperativists’s Society: “Cooperation is democracy organising itself, and there is no democracy without education and solidarity” (Mielczarski 1936, 220).

Cooperativism is a historically realised project to institutionalise a certain version of communism (Kuligowski 2016, 96) or else an “achievable utopia” (Gielżyński 1986, 56). As such, it results from an enlightened belief in the possibility of transforming the human world with the aid of tools belonging to reason, while simultaneously emphasising the immediate context — rational management with a democratic structure for managing the common. This is what makes cooperativism a modern phenomenon, together with all of the burdens of its extremely difficult heritage: particularisation within ethnic identities (Lorenz 2006); its transition over to the market and transformation into an entity of capital accumulation; its reproducing of class divisions, including the division between the intellectuals and the masses on the side of the “party of progress”, its over-codification by the state, and — as a consequence — the loss of what is, after all, its essential self-governance.²

However, any simple dialectic between “modern” and “anti-modern” will fail if we want to define the position of cooperativism in modernity. On the one hand, the

² In the case of Polish cooperativism, this process began in the 1930s together with the increasing confluence of cooperation and state following the Great Depression in 1929, and continued through the period of Nazi occupation up until its adoption by the socialist state forming after World War II. The Polish People’s Republic made cooperation *de facto* a sector of state activity, destroying its autonomy, its democratic structures and its political culture (Bilewicz 2017, 96–98).

cooperative movement, similar to the workers' movement, emerged during a phase of developed, industrial capitalism. This much is clearly visible in the case of Poland, where the cooperative movement began in the same period as the 1905 Revolution, which marked the beginning of the modern workers' movement in that part of the Russian Empire (Marzec 2016). But, on the other, the cooperative movement refused either to assume any particular political identity as emergent from modern struggles or to reject any of them in the name of the universal brotherhood of men: the identity of the cooperative subjectivity was determined by participation in the movement and adhering to the principles of the movement alone. But being neither "modern" nor "antimodern", in the sense of engaging in violent uprising against state oppression, the position of the cooperative movement could be best described as "altermodern".

"Altermodernity", as Hardt and Negri put it, "has a diagonal relationship with modernity. Similar to antimodernity, it marks a conflict with modernity's hierarchies as much as does with antimodernity, but orients the forces of resistance more clearly toward an autonomous terrain" (Hardt and Negri 2009, 102). More than a simple counterpower against modern forms of oppression and exploitation, altermodernity refers to the historical line of mass subjects who *institute* counterpower and thereby create spaces of freedom, resistance and an alternative production of subjectivities. This line of altermodernity cuts diagonally through the history of modernity and includes, among others, the resistance of the early Italian cities against the German emperor, the revolt of Haitian slaves, the English, American and French revolutions and also "Polish Solidarność, the Zapatistas of Chiapas, the Bolivian cocaleros, the movements of 2011 [...] and numerous other initiatives the follow the path of instituting counterpowers" (Hardt and Negri 2017, 256). The key to understanding the altermodern form of resistance is that it breaks with the dialectic of modern sovereignty and antimodern resistance "by presenting a direct relation to the common" (Hardt and Negri 2009, 67). This is why altermodern forms of struggles "are characterized by relations of autonomy, equality, and interdependence among vast multiplicities of singularities" (Hardt and Negri 2009, 111). In our view, the Polish cooperative movement was — in its philosophical reflection and its practical implementation — precisely such an altermodern attempt to establish "a direct relation to the common", that is a form of socialisation beyond state sovereignty and the logic of capitalist accumulation. The history of the cooperative movement is being analysed today as "a lost way of modernisation" (Bilewicz 2017, 151–159), but it should be also viewed, we claim, as a forgotten way of establishing altermodern institutions of counterpower.

3. Cooperatives as Institutions of the Common

The application of the conceptual vocabulary of “the common” presents a double advantage. On the one hand, it makes it possible to construct a theoretical link between historical forms of cooperative movements and contemporary forms of life, and to do so without comparing consumers’ or workers’ cooperatives from the first half of the twentieth century with similar present-day initiatives. On the other, it makes it possible to move beyond interpretations of the cooperative movement from the perspective of a Polanyian theory of capitalist development as the “self-defence of society”³ (Polanyi 1944) and towards a more radical political interpretation of this movement as working parallel to workers’ organisations, and aiming at instituting a post-capitalist society. We take our inspiration here somewhat from Rosa Luxemburg, who at the beginning of the 1905 Revolution demanded freedom for both “producer-consumer cooperatives and for workers’ trade unions” (Luxemburg 2009, 354), insofar as she considered them two pillars of anti-capitalist, democratic politics.

The very idea of the institution of the common refers to “common organizational structures, where the common is seen not as a natural resource but as a social product, and this common is an inexhaustible source of innovation and creativity” (Hardt and Negri 2009, 111–112). Viewed initially as forms of organisation and politics beyond the principle of property, institutions of the common can be seen as a different way of formulating the rule of a communal use of shared resources and practices of commoning (De Angelis 2017, 18–19; Midnight Notes 2009), from communal agriculture and worker-run factories to free software cooperatives (to name only a few examples). As Dardot and Laval put it: “It is only the practice of men that is able to make things common” (Dardot and Laval 2014, 49). The closest formulation of a politics based on the institutions of the common is probably Nick Dyer-Whitford’s proposal of “commonism” (2006, 2007), which assumes that the common is not only a kind of resource, but a principle of social and political organisation. The common denominator of all these approaches is not so much the nature of the common understood as a kind of object to be organised and managed — whether knowledge, affects, information, natural resources, space or urban forms of life — but the common as “a product of a social and institutional structure that demonstrates forms of governing and social co-operation that guarantee its production, reproduction and spread” (Vercellone et al. 2013, 4–5). Institutions of the common are not only economic, but primarily political institutions that function as “the incarnation, the production and the liberation of the multitude” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 303).

³ Aleksandra Bilewicz was the first to suggest a Polanyian interpretation of the Polish cooperative movement. See Bilewicz 2017, 15–20.

According to Gigi Roggero, the common is primarily a class concept (Roggero 2010, 363), one that characterises struggles and forms of antagonism between the private and public (Roggero 2010, 365). The common, in this sense, is the principle of collective practices and organisations directed against the commodity-form and the state-form; it is the “non-capitalistic outside” (Moll 2017), both as the source of value for extraction and as the site of possible resistance. This is also what distinguishes the institutions of the common from any social organisations of the commons, such as collaborative commons, P2P production, the collaborative economy, the sharing economy, and so on (see Papadimitropoulos 2018), as well as the politics centred on the common from perspectives adopted by such authors as Elinor Ostrom (1990), Yochai Benkler (2006) or Michel Bauwens and Vasilis Kostakis (2014). Institutions of the common are institutions of class antagonism — they institute class struggle against the expropriation of the common and the subsumption of social life under capital (Fumagalli 2015).

However, it remains an open question as to what concept of class emerges from antagonism rooted in the struggles over the common. On the one hand, as Roggero suggests, thus following the Operaist tradition, class is born only in struggles (Tronti 2008, 72) and class politics is always one-sided; it only ever assumes the interest of class engaged in the struggle (Roggero 2010, 363). But, on the other, the common is open for *all* to share; it is a potentially universal principle of democratic politics and an all-inclusive mode of governance. The concept of class rooted in the struggle over the common doesn't define any identity prior to the emergence of the struggle, or movement, but only the position of subjectivity as regards the political antagonism brought about by the struggle/movement. Direct access to the common enables every class, ethnic and national identity to be included in a common political horizon (Curcio 2010), but the organisation of the movement requires that existing differences be taken into consideration as a basis and a point of departure. This was precisely the main political problem of the Polish cooperative movement, which ultimately took on the form of internal struggle between “neutralists” and “classists”, with one side claiming that the cooperative movement should be open for all regardless of their political views and position relative to the division of labour and the other wanting to make of the cooperative movement an element of the political struggle of the Polish proletariat.

This is the problem we would like to pursue here in treating the cooperative movement as an institution of the common. But in doing so, we have to abstract from one of the main aspects of post-Operaist analysis: technical class composition, i.e. the analysis of the “capitalistic articulation and hierarchization of the workforce” (Roggero 2010, 363). Instead, we focus exclusively on the *political composition* of class, the practices and forms of organisation aimed at resisting both the power of capital and of the state. Such was also the standpoint adopted by philosophers in the Polish cooperative movement, especially

Abramowski, namely to pursue class politics as an institution of autonomy; or, to quote the title of one of Abramowski's most influential publications, to view the "cooperative as the case for the working people's liberation" (Abramowski 2012b).

This is also to say that struggles over the common are not only characteristic of the contemporary stage of capitalist development. According to Peter Linebaugh, struggles for autonomy from both the state-form and the commodity-form were fought throughout modernity in the name of customary rights, such as the right to travel and to establish neighbourly relations, the right for subsistence, reparation and rights against enclosures (Linebaugh 2008, 275; see also Moll 2015). All these struggles were fought in the name of establishing direct, shared access to natural and social wealth, and thereby join up with the altermodern historical line that promotes direct socialisation and a direct relation with the common. According to Hardt and Negri, three essential elements constitute altermodernity: first, the multitude as the subject of resistance against capitalist exploitation and state oppression; second, organisational practices of self-determination rooted in bottom-up, democratic processes; and, third, the constant transformation and mixing of political and social identities, or the movement as the site of production of subjectivities (Hardt and Negri 2009, 111–112). The idea of the common is therefore first of all a *political* idea. The common is a political form of life that organises both the production and the distribution of what can be shared in common and what doesn't belong to anyone:

The common [...] is not really a *tertium genus*, beyond private property and public property, if that were to mean it is simply a third form of property. The common stands in contrast to property in a more radical way, by eliminating the character of exclusion from the rights of both use and decision-making, instituting instead schema of open, shared use and democratic governance (Hardt and Negri 2017, 100).

This idea of the common as a form of democratic governance, but one not separated from questions of production, distribution and reproduction, was the guiding idea of the Polish cooperative movement right from the establishment of the Cooperativists' Society. It was also formulated in the earlier philosophical writings of Abramowski. In his seminal text from 1904 *Socjalizm a państwo. Przyczynek do krytyki współczesnego socjalizmu* [Socialism and the State: Towards a Critique of Contemporary Socialism], Abramowski left no doubt as to his views on the revolutionary and innovative character of cooperatives:

in the cooperative movement, some new forms and figures of association undoubtedly exist. Such associations are aimed at today's helpless, exploited masses, because the whole movement is not a social formation, which is withdrawn and finite, but is a process of permanent creation resulting in some new methods and bonfires of hitherto unforeseen revolution (Abramowski 2018b).

4. Edward Abramowski: need as a metaphysical concept

As a true child of his restless era, Abramowski, endowed with a real “sense of synthesis” (Krzeczkowski 1933, 74), combined the ostensibly incompatible elements of Marxism, anarchism, French sociology, clinical psychology (a field in which he conducted advanced research himself), and the thought of Nietzsche, Bergson and Kant. In doing so, he strove to create a kind of “system” capable of becoming a “theory of the practice” of scientific socialism tailored to his day (Abramowski 1965b, 83). As a social theoretician, he strived to reconcile two opposing social concepts that had dominated sociological debate for decades: the theory of the individual as a genetic factor of the social world, and the theory of what is social as a *sui generis* reality (Abramowski 1965b, 1980a).

Abramowski made combining the dimensions of individual and society within a single ontology the main stake of his own notion of the social. In practice, this endeavour amounted to establishing a project very similar to the one that Kant strove to accomplish: to consolidate a metaphysics of human cognition by combining the orders of the phenomenon and the noumenon (Borzym 1980, XXIX). In his opinion, the social domain and social practice were the point of departure for a philosophical reconstruction of the transcendental realm. He granted social factors an experiential realness, but tied this experience to the sphere of human consciousness (Abramowski 1965b, 97). And consciousness for him constituted a creative aspect of socialisation, an element of creation qua essence of every and any social formation, where such a formation is understood as an order determining human action (Abramowski 1980a, 193–194). Abramowski's study of philosophical and psychological research on human consciousness can be seen in his inquiry into the social aspects of the production of subjectivity.

With regard to the above, Abramowski's thought constitutes an interesting example of the relational conception of the subject that was so essential to the philosophy of life at the close of the nineteenth century (Borzym 1984, 80–96). For him, a social phenomenon constituted the effect of contact between that which experiences and that which is experienced, between a thing in itself and the subjectivity of the individual, the unbridled force of the difference of which life itself is, in its factuality, the realisation. The emphasis that he places on the mechanics itself of the relation between experiencing and

the experienced provides grounds for acknowledging this as one of the day's more important philosophical attempts at constructing subjectivity. Despite the quite classic philosophical instrumentarium, Abramowski's concept of subjectivity was not ultimately grounded in some kind of identity and "inbred ontology", according to which relations between subjective factors and the objective thing were reduced to a form of substantialisation, and as such amounted to a form of idealisation (both in the physical-biological and the legal-political senses). The category that ultimately allowed Abramowski to go beyond the dualism of apperceptive cognition, which in his *Zagadnienia socjalizmu* [Issues of Socialism] still seemed to be the mechanism behind both the socialisation of the self (Abramowski 1965b) and of intuitive cognition, is agnosia:⁴

states of creative inspiration or passive ecstasy that give works of art, the experiences of mystics and heroes, and ideals in development, meaning the heralding of the coming into being of a new species — the heralding of the *Übermensch* (Abramowski 1980c, 571).

The agnostic process, within the confines of which the self, through contact with forces of the outside, carries out a transformation of the deepest layers of the species' unconscious, was the theoretical challenge that Abramowski set for himself, beginning with his first sociological works of the 1890s (Abramowski 1980a, 1980b), as is to be found in his 1895 article *Co to jest sztuka?* [What is Art?]. In it, he argues that pure individualism is transformed into the new form of social deindividualization (Dziedzic 2010, 149), to *Experiential Metaphysics*. The agnostic process was about something along the lines of an "empirical-transcendental cognition", which — as action heading towards the material cementing of formal principles in the cognitive relations outlined above — would enable a realisation of the demand for a political epistemology, for a world-changing knowledge.

For Abramowski, man's most important attribute — and on this point he referred frequently to Marx (Abramowski 1965b, 66, 86) — is "creation", the practice of transforming nature (understood as a set of forces external to man). Abramowski's vitalistic conception of the subject assumes that the creator, in performing the act of transforming socio-material reality, connects with the deepest layer of life — the "idioplasm" (Abramowski 1980c, 580), a biologically conditioned programme enabling subsequent transformations and evolutions of

⁴ This bears essentially on the lectures he began on *Metafizyka doświadczalna* [Experiential Metaphysics] in 1917, and that he delivered during the final months of his life at the Psychology Institute of the University of Warsaw, which he headed.

the species. The subject, therefore, is understood as a set of outwardly directed actions, where the “idioplasm” constitutes a kind of “principle of transformations which itself is transformable”. This principle is transcendental in the pragmatic sense (constituting a coercive necessity), yet empirical in the temporal sense (it is historical, variable in time [Abramowski 1980c, 584–585]). The “idioplasm” presents a “potential model” (Abramowski 1980c, 580) for the further development of mankind in its pursuit of an ever broader connection of successive forces in the universe, and is therefore pushing man towards new forms of relations with forces that are external to him, towards new forms of socialisation of the universe.

One can see here perfectly well how Abramowski remains Fourier’s true heir: for him, reality is social in the primal sense, and that which is material is essentially social. Abramowski calls this overriding connection of all living beings “brotherhood”, a category of both sociological and metaphysical significance in his work. Brotherhood constitutes the *arche* of the universe: first, it signifies its fundamental socialisation; second — as the principle of transformation that is itself transformable — it is performative, creative, in character.

The ideal of brotherhood is an ideal of the type that cannot remain an external phenomenon, but by its very nature must transmute into acts, evoke changes in the outside world, pass from the subjective into the objective, achieve fulfilment (Abramowski 1980c, 582).

The Nietzschean figure of the *Übermensch*, which Abramowski frequently uses, constitutes for him both an approaching and a mightier version of mankind, as well as a model for a new form of life unable to be subordinated to any existing community. Hence the *Übermensch* populates the ranks of future members of a pan-human association, and only thanks to the system that it realises will it enable “true humanity” and “genuine individualism” to come about as an effect of the human soul’s immanent socialisation. This is also why Abramowski links the ideal of the *Übermensch* with slogans of the workers’ revolution, which he identifies precisely with finding new life opportunities. In *Issues of Socialism*, Abramowski writes:

Socialism [...] as a political party believes it essential to acquire new forms of life, although those forms are determined spontaneously; [...] socialism can set obligations, transform phenomena of collective consciousness into ethical categories (Abramowski 1965b, 71).

This is also why the transformation of man is governed by the logic of revolution, meaning the kind of resetting of values that no longer allows one to view the present in former categories.

By being the base of social phenomena and a bridge between inner life and socio-material life, it [class struggle — BB and MR] causes a double effect. On the one hand, it reconfigures the moral and intellectual nature of the individual by adapting his spiritual system and on the other it naturally aims to realise itself by creating popular gatherings. These gatherings later on transform themselves into new institutions and, due to this, they change an individual's conditions of life. So here the unbroken nexus of mutual interactions, individual, social, moral and collective configurations takes place. These nexuses form the situation in which society cannot be considered a stable and finite being, but instead a continuous process of becoming, one that connects, by imperceptible changes, basically conflicting types of collective human life and different types of popular morality (Abramowski 2018b).

True individualism, which is achieved solely through the community, is — in Abramowski's thought — simultaneously at risk of falsification from instances whose goal is to intercept the forces resulting from cooperation among free people. It is worth emphasising here that, in Abramowski's case (and likewise for Marx), criticism of the state explicitly indicates that political institutions are inseparably connected to the mechanism of capitalist exploitation, itself based on a process of accumulation. The state and market are, for Abramowski, two sides of the same phenomenon — the activity of governmental reason, of which the unrelenting logic involves the top-down interception of immanent social forces and managing the cooperation among these forces. If the logic of the market imposes a logic of individualization based on the commodity-form, the state serves to supervise the process of capital accumulation and to ensure a phantomic unity of the political body, as a result of the subsumption of processes of social work. Both the commodity-form and the state-form over-code social differences, reducing forms of life to one abstract model — the subject of rational economic choices and the juridical principle of property, a subject that, in practice, turns out to be but a sublimation of egoism (Lange 1990, 46).

All social institutions governing contemporary life, which we define with the general term capitalism, or to be more precise the “capitalist state”, are based on today's type of debased and sick person, because the political institutions are working together

here with economic and educational institutions, etc. As an internally adapted harmonious social whole (Abramowski 1980c, 597).

Capitalist institutions are, for Abramowski, corrupted forms of satisfying needs that turn subjectivities into the recipients of state “services” and customers realising illusory, market-imposed needs. And the category of “need”, in Abramowski’s deliberations from the 1890s onwards, constitutes the keystone of all metaphysics and sociology (which also encompasses economics). For him, it holds a specific realness linking that which is individual and particular to that which is social and objective (Abramowski 1980a, 180–181). Need is a constitutive moment of socialisation, and as such simultaneously the most important moment of individuation. The needs of the individual can only be satisfied by the collective, where the individual — as the one who is “in need” — is one who is incorporated into the collective and bestowed with the identity of a subject realising its needs. Need is therefore a category that is primal in relation to the subject, and in this sense signifies the symmetrical inverse of “property” — an abstract attribute that grants the subject static, ahistorical and extra-social existence, thereby entitling the order of accumulation of work by individualised beings harnessed into the management process. Need is social in character, and — like brotherhood — is practical and constitutes a dynamic category indicating a creative impulse for changing the world through action unable to be performed individually. In this sense, need is a medium of change (Abramowski 2018a, 100) — a political impulse.

The categories of brotherhood and need constitute destinations, and this leads Abramowski to a specific materialistic “theory of the common” based on the conceptual sequence of agnosia-brotherhood-need-*praxis*. As Anna Dziedzic has written:

Abramowski, who throughout his adult life was a supporter of the materialist conception of history and a person convinced that capitalism would be replaced by socialism, at the end of his life came to the conclusion that the advent of socialism is contained in cosmic calculations (Dziedzic 2010, 207).

Abramowski’s political thought anticipates the path before humankind as a “transformer” of forces, while at the same time for him all “cosmic changes” always mean social revolution. This revolution is both ethical, since it primarily means a “change in the subject’s perspective”, and political, since it constitutes a self-elimination of the inequalities that intensify in the class struggle and is a “path of free assembly, striving to realise society’s

economic transformation” (Abramowski 1965a, 269). The moral revolution is achieved via the common’s institutionalisation, that is, via cooperative organisations (Abramowski 1980c, 593–594).

5. Institutionalising the Common: Cooperativism and Class Struggle

Abramowski’s oeuvre is one of the most extensive and representative socio-political proposals for developing Polish socialism, a proposal that also overwhelmingly shaped the formation of the ideological paradigm of Polish cooperativism connected to the labour movement. The specific “pan-social” dimension of his subjective conception culminates in a bizarre vision of socialism, the sources of which the author of *Experimental Metaphysics* sought deep inside the self:

It has to be proved that within each of us is concealed a kind of profound essence that constitutes the bedrock of freedom and community, untouched by time. No matter how deeply it is buried beneath the slag of history, the task of the thinker is to dig it up, and the task of the socialist — to revive it (Mencwel 2009, 110–111).

Cooperativism grounds its vision of political revolution in “pure socialisation”, in the immanent essence of interpersonal relations. For Abramowski and the cooperativists who put his conceptions into practice, socialism is not a far-reaching ideal, but rather the everyday practice of directly reconstructing social reality, that is without the assistance of any transcendent instance whatsoever, whether state, market, or party... (Abramowski 2018a, 83–84).

Within the socialist movement, cooperativist doctrine is formed in the framework of the fractional struggles and discussions of the late nineteenth century, the main stake of which is the specific character of the revolutionary process and the role of the state in the proletariat’s achieving political subjectivity. Abramowski, who other cooperativists followed in this, unequivocally opposed basing emancipatory politics on the assumption of the necessity to hijack the bourgeois state and make it a vehicle for transformations leading to a communist society (Abramowski 1965c, 254). If the market and state constitute two sides of the same apparatus, then the politics of socialism that takes the real conditions of the capitalist formation into account, should simultaneously tend toward limiting market logic

— that is, through collective work and consumption supplanting intermediaries and owners in cooperative organisations [Abramowski 2012c, 17]) — as well as toward replacing state institutions by creating self-organising structures devoid of hierarchy and supreme decision-making instances. The cooperativists saw in stateless socialism the only direction in which the demands of socialism in general could be realised, and thereby also the achievement of the final stage of development for humankind. This final stage is the cooperative commonwealth, “where everybody is appointed to government; a commonwealth where there is no compulsion and where everything revolves around good will” (Abramowski 2012c, 19).

This point is where cooperativism is most connected with anarchism, as has been already commented upon (Blesznowski 2018, Borzym 1980, Duszyk 2008, Lange 1990). The political philosophy of cooperativism views the state as a harmful and therefore unnecessary element in the life of the collectivity, and not as a destination of any kind at all for socialist politics (Thugutt 1937, 184). As Oskar Lange has aptly pointed out when describing Abramowski’s vision of the state: “The theory that the future socialist community cannot manage without state organisation is wrong” (Lange 1990, 54). According to the cooperativists, the socialist revolution did not foresee a takeover of the state, or an abolition of its using means of terror. In their case, *action directe* meant grassroots work towards taking over successive areas of life from the alienated structures of capital and state, work that entails change in social subjective models.

The beginning of 1930s saw acrid discussion flare up within the Polish cooperative movement regarding the status of cooperatives in relation to the rest of the labour movement, the movement’s attitude to party politics, and, as a consequence, also the relations between socialism (and cooperativism) and the state. This dispute split cooperativist activists into two camps. On the one hand, there were those who, like Stanisław Wojciechowski, Romuald Mielczarski or Marian Rapacki (1884–1944), all of whom were founders of and activists in the largest union of consumer cooperatives “Spolem”, worked to uphold the cooperativist principles of (political and ideological) neutrality and (class) universality; on the other, there were those cooperativists and movement sympathisers who were closely tied to the politics of left-wing parties, the so-called classists, including the likes of Adam Próchnik (1892–1942) and Jan Hempel (1877–1937), both of whom were radical revolutionary activists connected to the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Polish Communist Party (KPP).⁵

⁵ The social substratum of the above-mentioned dispute was the temporary split in the Polish cooperative movement; alongside the neutral Union of Polish Consumer Associations, 1919 saw the formation of the Union of Workers Consumer Associations representing the radical wing of cooperativism. Only in 1925 did the two unions unite, forming the organisation referred to the “Spolem” Union of Consumer

A central issue in this discussion was that of the “classness” of cooperatives. Radical socialists and communists perceived the demand for the universality of consumers’ cooperatives as a total negation of socialist doctrine, the foundation of which was the concept of class struggle. If, as some claimed, cooperation constituted a tool for lifting people out of their state of economic backwardness, then it was addressed above all to the proletariat and peasant classes, and therefore to those with a vital interest in bringing down the capitalist system. “The victory of cooperativism can only happen upon the ruins of the capitalist system. [...] The neutrality of cooperativism equals its capitulation; it equals its relinquishment of expansion, its resignation from its own development” (Próchnik 2018, 278). And so, as Adam Próchnik emphasises, any idea of neutrality was above all considered a kind of compromise with capitalism, meaning the formation of institutions bearing the character of capital communities (companies). Jan Hempel has gone much further: by refusing to get involved in politics at a party level, cooperativists were defending the interests of the bourgeoisie and becoming “agents of fascism in cooperative territory” (Hempel 1931, 23). According to both activists, cooperation made sense only as support for the political institutions of the labour movement, and was therefore in itself merely about economic activity. Cooperation as such, it was deemed, implied having the tools for the spontaneous toppling of capitalism via economics, and thus constituted a “harmful utopia” that discouraged labourers from real revolutionary struggle aimed at seizing political power over the state and leading to classless relations (Próchnik 2018, 282–283). In the opinion of both activists, any universality was only possible *post factum* as a secondary development, after the initial particularity of the class struggle, while openness made sense when applied to the popular masses (Hempel 2017, 377). They thus understood the concept of class as the property of a concrete, pre-existing political subject fighting for political hegemony, and in effect cooperation, seen as a practice of class struggle, became the function of this subject, and not a practice of creating a class subject and transforming existing identities and differences.

In refuting accusations of a supposed absence of ideology (Hempel 2017) and a misleading conception of brotherhood (supposedly contradicting the doctrine of class struggle), the “neutralists” tended to cite the same socialist ideal that they were accused of not understanding. One should bear in mind that the majority of them also came from the labour and peasant movements, the difference being that they were connected to the moderate and independence-oriented circles of the Polish Socialist Party, the Polish Peasant Party “Wyzwolenie” [“Liberation”] (a left-wing fraction of the Polish peasant movement), and were frequently also — as was the case with Stanisław Wojciechowski — former party members.

Cooperatives. For more on the subject of “class-oriented” cooperation, see Bilewicz 2017, 101–110; Kędziorek 1969, 140–148; Piechowicz 1963.

In explicating the position of the neutralists, Marian Rapacki (later chairman of the “Spolem” union) wrote about the consumer cooperatives: “Nevertheless, the interests of the members of all these classes as consumers [entrepreneurs, workers, farmers, craftsmen, the bourgeoisie — BB and MR] are uniform and can be organized with the aid of one and the same organizational form — that is, consumer cooperatives” (Rapacki 2018, 271). Class struggle is understood here as an objective process in which the proletariat fights for its own abolition and thereby also that of class struggle itself. Therefore, as a means for ameliorating the lives of the working classes within existing social conditions, and as a tool for changing these conditions through the means available to consumers as such, the consumer cooperatives worked to disassemble the capitalist system from within the confines of this system. Universality within a cooperative organisation means that it does not shut its gates to new members, regardless of the social group they come from, although with the reservation that every member has the same say within its structures, that the rule of direct democracy is abided by: one person means one non-transferable vote in the institution’s decision-making process. A cooperative is therefore the direct multitude of the individual beings bound by its democratic system (Kurnatowski 2018, 124). Therefore “classness” here does not mean some kind of specific attribute or property, and its medium is rather the category of “need” that remains beyond any possibility whatsoever of aggregating individual wills in the overriding common will. As such, classness is understood here not as a constituted form of sovereignty, but as a constituent power — as emancipatory politics conducted in real time.

The cooperativists [...] never oppose the class struggle conducted by the proletariat through organizations created for this purpose; on the contrary, they frequently work together with those organizations on an appropriate plane. They only oppose use of the cooperative as a tool in direct class struggle, because it is counterproductive and harmful for the working class itself (Rapacki 2018, 275).

The figure of political activity according to the “neutralist” is the cooperator (the consumer, the manufacturer, the resident and the citizen, i.e. a social subject in various social relations as producer and consumer), and not so much some new kind of subject as the image of the process of popular democratisation. Romuald Mielczarski describes the figure of the consumer, “universal in his particularity”, as follows:

Cooperation organizes consumers. Who are consumers? Everyone. Consumers organize not one group or another, one trade or another, but people, because all people have needs and desire to satisfy them as best they can, with the least effort [...] the cooperative stands open to all. The principle of universality [the principle of

the common — BB and MR] is in its fundamental interest. Without the accession of the majority of humanity to cooperation, it is not possible to imagine cooperation's victory (Mielczarski 2018, 132).

Cooperativism grew largely from the plebeian and proletariat forms of the autonomous self-organisation of social and economic life. As such it opposed the abstract ideology of liberal democracy insofar as it is based on a particular “political arithmetic” governed by the “rule of greatness, the rule of the number, which commands one to assume the existence of equivalent individuals comprising society” (Abramowski 1965c, 287), as well as the mechanism of representation that serves the constitution of an abstract political body — the people, a class, the proletariat. As Andrzej Walicki has written: “In Abramowski's view, statehood (and the law inextricably connected to it) essentially involves the ‘realising of abstraction’” (Walicki 1983, 308). Cooperativism therefore annuls any transcendent and identity-related forms of political subjectivity, and relies solely on the idea of an associated multitude and the pragmatic criterion of class. Cooperativists only realise the needs that they would be unable to realise individually; economic activity is thus, in itself, political activity.

6. The Principles of the Common: Cooperativism as a Constituent Movement

Cooperation as “pure socialization” was by no means treated by cooperativists as an automatic process, but instead as a political project. As an ideologist of labour cooperatives, Jan Wolski (1888–1975) used to say: “There's no cooperation without an idea” (Wolski 1927). The altermodern strategy adopted by cooperativists was based on the grassroots organisation of both the economic and ethical aspects of social life — a strategy that was neither in complete alliance with nor in opposition to the labour and socialist conceptions of politically emancipating the working class. The conflict internal to the cooperative movement between the “neutralists” and the “classists” was, so to speak, inherent to the movement itself. The political idea of a transition to communism/stateless socialism by creating cooperatives as institutions of the common remained an autonomous political practice, albeit more in theory than in practice owing to the constant interference from the newly established Polish state. Nonetheless, this idea still presented an alternative to other forms of class struggle.

This is not to say that the cooperative movement succeeded in creating a truly altermodern form of political organisation, one that would cut diagonally through all forms of

existing social identities and differences. Consumer cooperatives were mostly organised along the lines of ethnic differences; the influence of the Catholic Church was significant; and the movement's political perspective was focused on the Polish state and Polish society. Still, it was the cooperative movement that was the laboratory of many progressive social, economic and political ideas in Poland, including a very notable example: the institutionalization of the League of Cooperating Women (Liga Kooperatystek) by Maria Orsetti in 1935 (Orsetti 2018).

The sheer scale of the Polish cooperative movement is impressive in terms of its organisational efficiency. In the 1930s, the biggest Union of Consumer Cooperatives in Poland (commonly known as "Społem") counted more than two thousand cooperatives and a few hundred-thousand members (Bilewicz 2017, 7). If we were to count their families and the members of other cooperatives active in Poland, we could be talking of somewhere close to three million people who were either active in the movement or at least taking advantage of its infrastructure (*Mały rocznik statystyczny* 1939, 116). This scale, combined with the accompanying ideological, theoretical and programmatic declarations, makes it legitimate to speak of the Polish cooperative movement as a *constituent movement* with a clear strategy of development and an expressly stated political goal of transforming society and the people.

The "expansionist" aspect of the strategy was present in the cooperativists' political philosophy and organisational planning from the very inception of the movement. Abramowski ever insisted that the cooperative movement strives to reach out to all humanity (Abramowski 2012c, 15). The principle of expanding and including new members was taken into account at the most basic financial and economic levels. On the one hand, the cooperatives strove to acquire new members and to increase consumption levels, which translated into more income for the cooperatives and higher dividends for each member (the dividend depended on the level of individual consumption and the total income of the cooperative); on the other, the management of the collective fund in every cooperative meant, among other things, dividing it between the dividends paid to members and the "fundusz gromadzki" (saving fund). The latter was used to finance different cultural and educational activities and, generally speaking, to expand the cooperativist form of life. The strategic aim was to move more resources to the saving fund as the cooperative grew larger and was able to perform more cultural and therefore "expansionist" tasks (Abramowski 2012c, 17).

This structure naturally reproduced a division between the managerial elite and the managed people. However, there were more than a few examples of successful transfers of experience, knowledge and skills between the educated and non-educated classes, with many representatives of the latter taking over managerial functions in cooperatives (Bilewicz 2017, 110–117). One of the most important tasks that the Union of Consumer Cooperatives

in Poland funded was educational activity. Economic activity was perceived by the cooperative movement as directly ethical (Rapacki 1922), in such a way that the economy was not reduced to ethics (the union of cooperatives had to be economically independent and make a “profit” that could be divided into different collectively managed funds), and nor was ethics reduced to economic efficiency.

The cooperativist movement’s political strategy here may be called “biopolitical”, that is if, by “biopolitics”, we understand the situation in which “the content of the constituent power tends to become life itself” (Hardt and Negri 2017, 36). Instead of establishing the autonomy of the political, cooperativists decided to manage — directly among themselves and autonomously in relation to the state — the spheres of production of the means of consumption and social reproduction. By focussing on the sphere of reproduction and distribution of the means of subsistence, and not on large-scale industry, the cooperativists’ strategy was first to create a new man by means of the democratic management of economic life and then to establish a new society — not the other way around. The theoretical foundation of this strategy was Abramowski’s philosophy of human (and cosmological) creativity. Indeed the main assumption of cooperativist social ontology is that the social organisation of cooperativism — free associations — is the form proper to sustaining and enhancing the creative character of the human species (Abramowski 2018a).

The philosophical ideas of Abramowski and the declarations (or even economic programmes, see Rapacki 2017) of the main organisational cadres of the Polish cooperative movement might be easily deemed naive, unrealistic and even utopian. This goes notably for the assumption, which Abramowski held throughout his life, that it is possible to eradicate egoism and create a new habitus, a new ethical attitude, simply by organising all social institutions around cooperatives (Abramowski 1980c, 2012d). This assumption should be taken more as an idea intended to guide the movement and give it intellectual strength than as a valid philosophical or economic analysis. This, however, does not change the fact that the ideas and practical experience of the cooperative movement were formed under the conditions of a developed capitalist mode of production (i.e. production subsumed under the value-form) and that under these conditions the movement managed to develop a long-lasting and effective system of the institutions of the common as well as significant political strength.

The “idea” that guided the Polish cooperative movement and made it into a constituent, expansive movement of instituting the common should not be reduced to a simple projection of some utopian society to be established at some point in the future. Rather, it was a complex political philosophy about constructing a movement that was able to transform society *within* and *against* existing social conditions, insofar as they were subsumed under the logic of the state-controlled accumulation of capital. In our view, the complex and

heterogenous political philosophy of the Polish cooperative movement can be reconstructed as a set of principles that aimed to guide the movement's organisation and transform the economic and ethical aspects of social life in a *constituent* manner. We call these principles "the principles of the common". In 1844, the cooperativists of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers formulated principles in accordance with which they thought every cooperative should operate. The "principles of the common" below present a similar set of principles, but grasped from the perspective of a movement that wishes to become constituent, that is, a constituent power working on the "biopolitical" level, which is to say the level of the common, of direct, "pure" socialisation.

In the last step of our analysis, we shall therefore reconstruct these principles using the formal characteristics of constituent power as described by Antonio Negri (2009). The characteristics in question are "of the new rationality that oppose the rationality of modernity" (Negri 2009, 329), i.e. formal characteristics of an altermodern rationality that goes beyond the characteristic oppositions of modernity. They describe the functioning of constituent power as a constituent movement, an "absolute procedure", not a constituted political, legal and social order. Similarly, the political philosophy of Polish cooperativism was designed for a constituent movement, a movement of and for social transformation. However, since the cooperativist movement was focused on a peaceful revolution and a transition to a communist society by means of economic and ethical change — by means of instituting a different mode of the production of subjectivity — the formal characteristics of its constituent praxis refer already to the "biopolitical" level, or the level of the "base", without assuming any form of the so-called "autonomy of the political".

1. The principle of autonomy. The first formal characteristic of constituent power is that it functions beyond the opposition "of creativity against limit and measure": "Constituent power is beyond measure or, rather, progressive measure, the reflection of the common on itself" (Negri 2009, 329). Abramowski recognised the limitless character of human creativity very early in his intellectual development. Within the cooperative movement this limitless power was to be realised in the principle of the autonomy of the movement: from both the state and the market. The end of the movement was itself — the development of each member in cooperation with others. Although there were limits and measures imposed on the movement — acting in accordance with the law, following tax regulations and adhering to the measure of economic calculations — the process of accumulation of different forms of capital was to be restricted to the movement itself and the accumulated capital was to be used by the movement alone.

2. The principle of economic democracy. The second characteristic of constituent power goes beyond the opposition of process and procedural rules. Constituent power does not

proceed according to *a priori* defined rules, but rather creates rules as it goes (Negri 2009, 330). This was certainly the experience of the cooperativist movement; however, in a limited sense, for the general rules of every cooperative's functioning were defined both by state law as well as by the movement itself. Still, the movement-defined rules were open to democratic debate and change from within the movement. The abstract rules to change the rules were designed according to the democratic principle "one member = one vote", even if they were applied to the sphere of economy and not to some autonomous political sphere. This was because the economy was treated as democratic and the needful individual as the basic "unit" of a cooperativist economy. The only abstract rules that constituted a kind of a transcendental framework for the creation of other rules within the cooperative movement were tied to the principle of economic democracy, which safeguarded everyone's equality regardless of his or her economic input and output, so that differences in levels of consumption, for instance, would not translate into the accumulation of power by any member outside of the democratic process.

3. The principle of inclusion. Constituent power functions beyond the opposition of equality and privilege that is characteristic of modern civil society and state sovereignty. As Negri writes:

If constituent power takes roots in the relation between *multitudo* and *potential*, if the rationality of this relation is the rationality described by the movement of creativity against the limit and measure, and continual procedure against institutional stasis, it is evident that there is no place for privilege here because it is contradictory with the constitutive movement of living labour (Negri 2009, 330–331).

In the case of the cooperative movement in Poland, the principle of radical inclusion was formulated as one of political and religious neutrality, which was constantly championed from within the movement itself. But as a matter of principle, the movement remained open — everyone could participate in it as formally equal by learning to apply the general organisational and ethical rules.

4. The principle of multitude. The fourth characteristic of constituent power is that it goes beyond the opposition of diversity and uniformity. In Negri's view, "The rationality that goes beyond modernity seizes in diversity and in the richness of equal and irreducible individualities the keystone of its every logic" (Negri 2009, 331). We've come across this logic in the pragmatic thinking of the Polish cooperativists' about class, which they understood as a political subject formed by and within the movement and not a pre-existing group simply arising from economic relations. According to this principle, the diversity of subjectivities

included in the movement (diversified by class, gender, national, ethnic etc. relations) is no obstacle to the unity of the movement, that is, so long as everyone follows the general principles of and the rules created by the movement. The cooperativist class subject is antagonistic towards state sovereignty and the subsumption of life under capital. However, this implies no identity other than that coming from cooperative practice alone. This principle, in our opinion, can rightly be called “the principle of multitude”, since it designates the cooperativist movement as a constituent subject (multitude) that creates the social world and itself through its own activity.

5. The principle of expansion and education (or the ethical principle). The final formal characteristic of constituent power is to go beyond the opposition of cooperation and command. Cooperation, on the one hand, “is innovation, richness, and thus the basis of the creative surplus that defines the expression of the *multitude*. [...] On the political terrain any definition of democracy that does not assume cooperation as the interpretative key and as concrete fabric of this relation is false” (Negri 2009, 332). On the other, however, cooperation proceeds not only according to the established rules. It imposes itself on the social world and transforms reality and, as such, cannot be reduced to a simple realisation of the existing rules. But to do this it must possess political power — *strength*. “Freedom, equality, and strength — these old formal elements become history, second nature, third, umpteenth — they are the dynamic and agile substance of constituent power” (Negri 2009, 332). The political power of the cooperative movement came from its economic power, the power of the economic democracy. The final principle is therefore the principle of expansion — the task of including more members and more spheres of life in the movement and of subsuming them under the principles of the common. New members could be included on the sole condition that they stuck to the movement’s organisational rules and principles. Cooperativists were also conscious of the fact that the process of *applying the rules* was just as important, if not more so, than the rules themselves. The rules were not to be set and applied by an authority transcendent in relation to the process of socialisation. Rather, the institutions managing and controlling the application of the rules were to be elected from the movement itself. Thus, the ethical dispositions of people engaged in the movement were of critical importance. For, only by developing ethical attitudes and skills aimed at a proper application of the rules was it possible to make any kind of cooperative function. The final principle, the principle of expansion of the institutionalization of the common, was therefore also a principle of education, that is, of developing a *general intellect* able to manage the common through a cooperative form of life.

7. Conclusions

The above-described principles of the common were reconstructed on the basis of the political ideas of the Polish cooperative movement (Abramowski's social ontology and a concept of class build on the concept of universality of the need) and the movement's praxis, which developed along with its organisation of economic life. These principles are those of cooperativism as a constituent movement, a movement based on the idea of the collective "sovereignty" of the very parties that are interested in a particular kind of activity that aims at satisfying existential needs (work, consumption, residence, services, knowledge, training, education etc.), and binds a particular activity of an occupational and consumer type to political subjectivity. It thereby constitutes a peculiar "community economy" (Gibson-Graham 2006) founded not on the "ownership" of the means of production, but on the usage — and therefore also production and reproduction — of the common. As a political idea, the common is the basis of organisational activity that builds a frame for the transformation of social subjectivities and their life conditions, as these subjectivities work from within but against the capitalist order of accumulation and the sovereign structure of state.

In our view, cooperativism constitutes a practical dimension of the doctrine of socialism, the main premise of which is the non-essentiality of supreme ethical, economic and political structures for an efficient organisation of human collectivity. Romuald Mielczarski, for example, writes: "Cooperation is an economically organised democracy. Work in cooperative is not the work on people or the work for people, but the work of the people itself" (Mielczarski 2010, 27). As already stated, cooperative associations were built on principles that can be recognised not only as the rules of transformation of the *ancien regime* and of capitalist exploitation, but much more as a rules of transformation of the cooperative movement itself — rules of empowerment of the multitude.

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TYTUŁ: Zasady dobra wspólnego. W stronę filozofii politycznej polskiego kooperatyizmu.

ABSTRAKT: Artykuł stawia przed sobą dwa cele. Po pierwsze, chodzi o interpretację głównych filozoficznych idei polskiego ruchu spółdzielczego z pierwszej połowy dwudziestego wieku i tego, jak były one realizowane w praktyce, za pomocą pojęć z zakresu poststrukturalistycznej i postoperaistycznej filozofii politycznej. Po drugie, celem artykułu jest rozwinięcie koncepcji „instytucji dobra wspólnego” – zaproponowanej przez Michaela Hardta i Antonio Negriego w ramach debat nad alternatywą dla kapitalizmu i formy państwa – przez sformułowanie „zasad dobra wspólnego”: najbardziej ogólnych zasad tworzenia demokratycznych, ludowych instytucji opartych na inkluzywności, solidarności, etosie wzajemnej pomocy i demokratycznym zarządzaniu produkcją oraz wymianą materialnego bogactwa.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: kooperatyizm, dobro wspólne, alternowoczesność, Abramowski, Społem.