

96 Solidarity Without Solidarity

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Paradoxically, one could say that the objective of solidarity is to lead to a situation in which solidarity will no longer be needed. Solidarity manifests itself as the mechanism of the functioning of communities, a mechanism which allows them to mend and heal what is sick. One can understand the history of communities as the intertwining of the following: dependability, the crisis of dependability, and the solidarity which will restore the original state of dependability.

For Poles solidarity is an important thing. This is an idea to which we eagerly refer. We tend to think, perhaps not without reason, that we have a special right to it. It was in our country that August '80 happened, it was our Pope who had predicted these events, it was the Polish philosopher Józef Tischner who described, analyzed and showed these events to the world in the form of his book *The Ethics of Solidarity*. We like to

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perceive ourselves as the creators of solidarity and its greatest experts. 97 We export this idea beyond our borders. Who, if not we, could tell the world about solidarity? We demand that others show solidarity (first of all toward us). Who else has a greater moral right to call for solidarity? Last but not least, it is we who can distinguish which events and processes that happen around us deserve to be called solidarity. Why is it then that, being the greatest experts in the field, we are so helpless with regard to the idea of solidarity? We christen as solidarity all impulses of goodwill and all acts that come “straight from the heart.” After the death of John Paul II – solidarity, after the catastrophe in Silesia – solidarity, tsunami – solidarity, coalminers – solidarity, physicians – solidarity. In our concern not to overlook various expressions of solidarity, we forget that a notion with too broad a meaning loses its ability to name reality. For if we lump together all impulses from the bottom of one’s heart, all sympathy, compassion and mercy, all help or feeling of unity, then we will lose the opportunity to understand what solidarity is in its essence.

Where does our helplessness come from? Can we speak about some kind of helplessness at all? First, difficulties appear when we want to grasp a concrete idea precisely. Is solidarity an event, a feature of a given community, or a value that some communities have? Or should we understand it as an idea that organizes group life, an ethical principle, or finally, a name for communities of a special kind or maybe a name for bonds and relationships that appear in these communities? These questions, seemingly academic, are of fundamental importance for reality itself. Through intellectual helplessness we could reach a much more serious helplessness: in our country the ideological seal of August ‘80 is less and less visible. To put it simply, we are not a society in solidarity. Since we all understand solidarity so well and desire it so much, why are we so far away from it? It would certainly be naïve to claim that our non-solidarity is a consequence solely of incomprehension or insufficient reflection on events from a quarter of a century ago. This would lead to a rather absurd conclusion that the sound consideration of historical experience is enough to develop mechanisms of evoking and maintaining the atmosphere of August ‘80. The matter is more serious though.

One could pose a legitimate question, whether there exists any sensible link between the spontaneity of a social movement and the calm persistence of a certain community. Is it possible to keep a community in the state of euphoric concern for others, or is it just natural that these emotions subside? Is solidarity without these emotions possible and is there a reasonable program of “solidarity for the time of peace” that essentially is not some kind of a social utopia? These are important questions that have already been posed. It is not my objective to answer them satisfactorily. However, I will attempt to point out certain difficulties, which give rise to a situation in which these questions remain without answer.

“We lack exhaustive descriptions of the ethical aspect of the most important social revolutions which mapped out the roads and dead-ends of modern Europe’s development,” wrote Józef Tischner in the text “Perspectives of the New Ethos of Work” known mainly from the collection *Poland Is the Motherland*. In this opening sentence one can see, on the one hand, certain coyness toward the reader, and on the other, a sincere confession. I say coyness, because writing these words Tischner was already the author of *The Ethics of Solidarity* – no less than an exhaustive description of the ethical aspects of solidarity. On the other hand, in this sentence a confession can be heard that *The Ethics of Solidarity* alone does not solve all the problems. This humility gives food for thought. In this context it is worth examining the descriptions made by Tischner, keeping in one’s mind the ambiguity of the sentence quoted above. Is there a sensible program of “solidarity for the time of peace” that is not in its essence some kind of a social utopia? *The Ethics of Solidarity* is often perceived as an exhaustive analysis of the phenomenon: a description of the years 1980 and 1981, deepened by philosophical analysis and at the same time laying intellectual foundations for a social project, the idea for a community and for Poland. A close reading of Tischner’s texts does not confirm such a broad framework of philosophical analysis. The articles that make up *The Ethics of Solidarity* are at times only of temporary relevance. In these texts Tischner himself admits that he carefully observes the events happening before his eyes and tries to understand them, naming certain processes and mechanisms. The history of this book confirms these intuitions.

Tischner does not build some cohesive theory while observing the events of August ‘80 from the perspective of the end of the year 1981. He had his homilies and articles from “Tygodnik Powszechny” published, generally, without alterations.¹ Probably not because the subsequent stages of the “Solidarity carnival” did not teach him anything, but because he treated his work as *sui generis* philosophical reports from the center of events, and not as an independent, complete, theory. That is why *The Ethics of Solidarity* is full of elements that form a self-contained whole with difficulty. Tischner indicates these difficulties already in the beginning of the analyses in the second chapter on community. He asks what the word “solidarity” means and answers that it is neither a concept, nor a complete ethical system. It is rather an idea that illuminates the current events. As opposed to concepts, it does not require any justification and does not lend itself to precise analysis. It is important that thanks to this idea we may understand what is happening before our eyes. It is quite a significant declaration. It implies, among other things, that we will not learn much about solidarity itself. We will instead learn that on which

¹ “Tygodnik Powszechny” [The Universal Weekly], is a Roman Catholic weekly. It provided a free voice for Catholics during the Communist era and today is considered the voice of liberal Catholics in Poland. The first issue appeared on 24 March 1945. Karol Wojtyła used to be one of many prominent contributors [trans.].

the “light of the idea” falls. So the book, somewhat contrary to the title, is devoted to things which thanks to solidarity were brought to light. Apart from the term “idea,” Tischner uses another word that describes solidarity, “virtue.” 99

Tischner places his reflections in the field of ethics. He then asks, “why solidarity?” He immediately answers: there is no justification, just the word “solidarity”, because it is right. The historical context confirms this intuition. The word “solidarity” was uttered, we should take it up and not look for more adequate terms that describe what happened in August ‘80, especially because Tischner is not interested in the word itself nor the idea. He focuses on the phenomena revealed through the community experience thus called. Thus, Józef Tischner begins his thinking with a fact. This fact is the real solidarity of people. The fact refers to an idea that requires some illumination, but, in fact, it is this idea that ties together these reflections. Tischner uses two biblical metaphors so as to describe the situation. The first are the words of St. Paul “Bear ye one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2). The other is the parable of the Good Samaritan. In both we have the motif of man’s bending over the misery of another. To reach out and take on someone’s burden on one’s shoulders, one first has to notice those in need around oneself. Then one must realize that another’s suffering is not their own business, but my trouble as well. The idea of solidarity brings to light many other hidden truths. It is the light that illuminates things that were obscure. Thanks to solidarity it turns out that people are connected with each other by different relations. It is not so that some relational ontology requires solidarity, but the ethics of solidarity may require some philosophical reflection.

Here, the direction is reversed. Ethics is not a consequence of some ontology, but ontology may reveal itself thanks to ethics. One can notice a distinct influence of Lévinas with his ethics as first philosophy. On his way man, just like the often-mentioned Good Samaritan, meets the suffering. People suffer either because of a misfortune like an illness or an unfortunate twist of fate, or because of evil done to them by others. This latter suffering may be avoided and that is why its absurdity makes man willing to help. Tischner underscores that solidarity is born out of the pain that we feel when bending over the sufferer. Solidarity is solidarity especially with the victims. Man’s answer is an ethical answer. Tischner emphasizes this many times placing the idea of solidarity right in this context. The ethical character of solidarity implies certain consequences. Solidarity must be born within man. It cannot be imposed on anyone. It is born in one’s conscience which is the most interior, the most intimate sphere of man. It seems that one can point out a distinct link between the idea of conscience thus understood and the earlier Tischnerian concept of the axiological-I and the later agathological-I. Although Tischner never “translated” these terms, he forcefully underscored this fact, which is significant. Tischner wants solidarity to be born in the deepest parts of subjectivity. It cannot be forced, it cannot be imposed. It must be a

100 personal answer of man to the voice of the one who calls. Solidarity is the solidarity of consciences, a particular unity of the most personal among human voices.

However, a conscience is not something that everybody has. There are people without consciences and solidarity with them is impossible. One can kill one's conscience, one can also awaken it or regenerate it. Thus it is dependent on man's freedom. Man in a free way chooses himself. He chooses that which is the most real in him. By the same token, he can, in a free way, kill his humanity. Conscience is also the trace of God within us. Tischner says that a God who does not speak within the conscience is an idol, not God. Emphasizing the role of conscience has yet another dimension. The question of internalizing solidarity is worth pondering. It seems that with solidarity thus understood one can hardly imagine a top-down decree on the rule of solidarity. The example of such an external idea that governs social relations is justice. We should be just regardless of our consciences and personal opinions on justice. Does solidarity imposed from the outside cease to be solidarity? If it is not solidarity of consciences, but an external principle, it somehow negates itself. This doubt may have serious consequences for deliberations that aim at building a community based on the principle of solidarity. The ethical character of this idea demands a lot from the authentic community of people-in-solidarity. Solidarity that comes "out of duty" is sham solidarity.

By grounding the phenomenon of solidarity in the deepest parts of subjectivity, Tischner notices another "fact" that illuminates and brings to light hidden relations and dependencies – in solidarity people stand in the truth. Tischner writes that they come out from the underground. They are themselves, without feigning. Earlier they played different roles, solidarity helped them face others without masks. People-in-solidarity want to be called by their own names. As I said before, one cannot notice this fact in a community seemingly showing solidarity. People that sham solidarity, that show it only under compulsion or according to custom, do not emerge out of their undergrounds, on the contrary, they are not themselves, as they would actually be if they were not in feigned solidarity with the suffering. Placing deliberations about solidarity in the context of conscience bears another consequence. Being in solidarity does not only mean coming together to the aid of those in need. It also implies relying on the other, assuming that there is something lasting in the other, that he will never let me down. Conscience may be this foundation of steadiness. To rely on someone is to believe in his steadiness, to trust that he will not let me down. At some other time, it would be worth pondering to what extent this intuition is related to Ricoeur's idea of a subjectivity that is connected to a continuity formed by keeping promises.

Tischner formulates the fundamental principle of solidarity, faithfulness, in the chapter on betrayal. Man, by taking up the burdens of others is not helping them to endure suffering. First of all, he becomes the confidant of someone's hope that it is possible to overcome troubles, alleviate

suffering. This hope cannot be betrayed. A man who shows solidarity is, ¹⁰¹ first of all, a faithful man. Uniting in faithfulness builds trust. Only when I trust that someone will not let me down, can I lay my hope in his hands. I trust that he has a conscience and that this conscience obliges him to be faithful. It is worth noting that Tischner constantly attempts to describe a certain phenomenon whose basis is in a social fact. He does this with the help of tools that are useful for describing dialogical relations: one man meets another, takes another's burdens on his shoulders, there is faithfulness and trust between them. This dialogical relation does not even require a community in the background. The man who shows solidarity is, first of all, a faithful man. The merciful Samaritan has no one with whom he could share solidarity for the one who is suffering. Neither does he have anyone on whom he could rely in need. What's more, it seems that nonetheless, or maybe because of this, he shows solidarity. Can the Tischnerian solidarity be drawn from the Gospel parable? Will the tools useful while describing quite an intimate situation be equally effective in depicting social phenomena? Finally, an audacious question: to what extent can what Tischner describes be called solidarity?

Solidarity and Dependability

Prepositions play an important role in the concept of solidarity described in *The Ethics of Solidarity*. With their help solidarity binds men together. Tischner carries out an interesting operation here which breaks our linguistic habits. Struck by the unusual character of the prepositions used we are arrested by these fragments of the text. Thus Tischner may be sure that we will not overlook them. Commonly we speak about solidarity with someone, someone that needs help and with whom we are in solidarity. Tischner puts it otherwise; he writes about solidarity with somebody, *for* somebody, *toward* everybody. First, solidarity is *for* somebody. There is someone who needs help and another person, a man-in-solidarity, is needed just *for* him. A community of people who want to help gathers around the one in need. This is solidarity with someone. We are in solidarity with each other *for* him. But the foundation of solidarity is this *for*. The Samaritan was in solidarity although he acted on his own – a community forms afterwards.

Finally, the preposition *toward*: solidarity is addressed toward everyone. In the solidarity grammar there is no preposition *against*. Solidarity is not a community against anyone, but always for somebody, addressed to everybody. Although it is not possible to share solidarity with people without a conscience, though they may regain it one day, it is not addressed against them. It would seem that Tischner understands solidarity as helping the one who suffers, which, what's more, creates around him a community. "Solidary *for* somebody" sounds rather awkward. Tischner, by introducing this preposition makes us, willing or not, stop at this *for*. "I am *for* somebody" is more than "I am with somebody." This change of

¹⁰² prepositions reveals to us the essence of relations among men. To be with somebody, to be in solidarity is not enough. One has to be *for* somebody. But this path, in which solidarity and mercy are entwined, rapidly curves. Tischner does not follow his intuition but sets about describing another fact, another experience. This experience seems to overthrow the former analyses. It happens already in the first chapter entitled “Solidarity of Consciences.” He writes that the origin and foundation of solidarity is something that everyone is concerned with in life. Later he enumerates simple obligations: teaching, sowing, working at a university. The aim of solidarity is to make these obligations as they should be: to make a book be a book, a university be a university, the truth to be the truth. People-in-solidarity should be united by a simple obligation, not fear, not some *against*.

In the previous analyses, rooted in the parable of the Samaritan, solidarity appeared as an answer to evil done to a man. Here a somewhat impersonal category of “simple obligation” comes up. If solidarity was solidarity *for* somebody, here this *for* disappears. To be more precise: “*for* somebody” is transformed into “*for* something.” It is possible to be in solidarity with somebody *for* some reason, not necessarily *for* a suffering man. Earlier on Tischner emphasized not only the personal addressee of solidarity – it is from the cry of the wounded that the whole solidarity movement begins – but even the type of his suffering. Solidarity was, above all, the help given to someone who was hurt, but to a lesser extent it was given to someone who suffers because of misfortune: illness, accident or an unfortunate twist of fate. Here suddenly a new face of solidarity appears. The reason for the solidarity movement can be simply that which everybody is concerned with in life. This raises some new questions, especially if we take at face value earlier New Testament references. Does this perspective not blur the idea of solidarity? Does it not change the movement of people-in-solidarity into a group of interests, even the most noble? This is because they may aim at sowing and plowing, teaching well, putting out fires, in those cases a community organizes around certain values and goods, not the sufferers.

Tischner underscored that a community is secondary to this *for* somebody. Is the community united by a simple obligation still the solidarity community? Does every community have to be built on solidarity? It seems that there comes to light a dispute that takes place undetected between the phenomenological ethics of values and the radical philosophy of dialogue. Recently Jacek Filek pointed to this crack in Tischner’s thought. The essence of this dispute is the answer to the question whether man stands before other men or before values. Perhaps *The Ethics of Solidarity* is the beginning of this tension. It seems that the very kernel of this problem is the question, “can a community be built only on dialogical relations?” Ought it not be rooted in impersonal values so that it is long-lasting and capable of surpassing the framework of immediate dialogical encounters of the hurt and the Good Samaritans? The community described in the

excerpts in which Tischner writes about what everybody is concerned with in life completely recedes from the common understanding of the word “solidarity.” Who, with whom and for whom is in solidarity? How do I sow in solidarity? How do I teach kids at school in solidarity? Perhaps it is better to use the word “dependability” to describe such a community. 103

Is it possible to reconcile dependability with solidarity? It seems that we may venture here a certain dialectic of the community. But we have to refer to the causes of solidarity, the causes of August ‘80. This is not the time nor place for historical and political analyses, although, in order to better understand Fr. Tischner, we should take a quick look. According to him, the Solidarity movement was not closing ranks to fight against someone, but it was a movement which eventually wanted to lead to a situation where the truth is the truth, justice is justice and, above all, when Polish work ceases to be sick. So the situation in which Solidarity occurred was a contradiction of dependability, the sickness of dependability. Work, which shapes so many interpersonal relations, was sick. It was sick with the crisis of trust, excessive suspicion, exploitation and bad organization. This caused suffering for individuals and for whole social groups. People could not do what they were concerned with in life. They could not achieve things that were the most important to them. This suffering demanded help and healing. In such a situation one could either do nothing or start fighting. It is quite easy to imagine a revolution (leaving aside its political results) directed against those that were guilty of the sickness of Polish work. The Poles chose a third path, the path of solidarity. Their aim was to restore dependability.

Paradoxically, one can say that the aim of solidarity is to lead to a situation in which solidarity will no longer be needed. Solidarity manifests itself as the mechanism of the functioning of communities, a mechanism which allows them to mend and heal what is sick. Then a special involvement is needed, one that reaches as deep as is possible, the involvement of the community of consciences. One may understand the history of communities as the interweaving of dependability, the crisis of dependability and finally the solidarity which has to restore the original state of dependability. This interpretation partly relieves the strange tension between dependability and solidarity (let me remind you that throughout Tischner is speaking about solidarity). However, several essential questions may be posed in response to this interpretation. Among them the significant one is: does not the community of dependable people require consciences? Or, what must happen in the community of dependable people that the above mentioned crises appear: suspicion replaces trust and exploitation takes the place of the dialogue of work? The fact of crisis implies abandoning the ethos of work. Since trust was replaced with suspicion and various sicknesses emerged, it means that in this very moment a concrete community was not the community of consciences. Then it was both non-dependable and non-ethical. Only solidarity, by revealing the ethical level, can heal the situation.

What does this healing mechanism consist in? An ethos permits us to face the truth: people come out from their undergrounds, can discern the hidden bonds that bind them. Dependability and focusing on what everybody is concerned with in life may lead, sometimes in an unconscious and uncontrolled way, to the dulling of consciences. The truth about real interpersonal bonds becomes obscure, it no longer organizes the life of a community. We do not feel solidarity with the needy because we do what we are concerned with, and not what they are concerned with. It is easy to stop noticing the needy. Is this condition a genetic illness of dependability or an unnecessary, although possible, pathology? This is another issue. Solidarity appears as an emergency service for sick communities. This sickness may even consist in the ignorance of the community that it is a community. In everyday life we do not need an emergency service. We recall it when something bad happens. However, this medical metaphor is somewhat awkward. An emergency service is help that comes from the outside. Solidarity from the outside will not help much. Solidarity that touches what is most personal, must be born from within. A sick person has to know that there is something wrong with him so as to want to be cured. Since his sickness consists in abandoning the ethos, how can he want to return to it? Solidarity then is not the aid of a specialized service, but a self-healing mechanism of communities that are capable of naming their ailments. Tischner does not have to justify this mechanism. It is a fact.

Solidarity Without Consciences

If we agree that the above analyses somehow render the basic sense of solidarity from Tischnerian reflections, it is easy to notice that many phenomena that in good faith we call solidarity today do not include the elements drawn by Tischner from the events of August '80. It seems proper to allow that solidarity without these significant elements is so imperfect, that using this term means abusing it. Can solidarity be decreed by law and become present in articles external to the conscience? It would be solidarity without conscience, a form of state aid, entered in the system of tax transfers; aid to the poor imposed on the rich. This kind of solidarity may be a cure for human ailments, but it will by no means be the solidarity of consciences, as this kind of solidarity is born within a man and does not come from the outside. This cure will manage the symptoms of the sickness, however, the community will still be sick. At this point a natural doubt emerges: can the community of consciences last and can a system be built on such an experience? For the aim of solidarity is to lead to a situation in which the unusual state of solidarity will become unnecessary.

If in this situation the state claims the right to rule the consciences of its citizens, this may raise certain doubts. What's more, the state that wants to build its foundations on solidarity soon observes around itself

the opponents of solidarity. Then solidarity becomes a blade directed ¹⁰⁵ toward these opponents. Solidarity then is no longer being *for* the other but *against* someone: solidarity against the adversaries of solidarity. In the Tischnerian grammar of solidarity there was no room for the preposition *against*. Imposing solidarity has a similar effect like demanding it from someone. “Be in solidarity with me” may be both an act of desperation on the part of the offended and a brutal tool for fighting for one’s own business. It is easy to treat the above comments as a footnote for the present political situation. The mechanism of appropriating terms of positive connotations is well-known and does not require any further comments. This is not the point here. If the word “solidarity” is to have a meaning, it cannot be treated instrumentally. Tischner himself realized the problem of broadening the meaning of solidarity already when writing *The Ethics of Solidarity*. The word that was to be the focus of his analyses was suggested by the ongoing events. But quite early he noticed the temptation to totalize the idea of solidarity. And he did much not to yield to this temptation. Many experiences described in *The Ethics of Solidarity* are analyzed without using the word “solidarity.” Tischner simply gives an account of what the light of this idea illuminated: in the field of dialogue, work, exploitation, democracy, education. He often evades the very word even where he observes significant links between solidarity and the problem in focus.

In the chapter on education he shows it as a trust of hope. A child puts his hopes in the hands of its father, the task of a teacher is to evoke a child’s own hopes, to awaken the young person so that they may care for their own hopes. And Tischner closes this sketch with the sentence: “The ethics of solidarity becomes in this perspective an ethics of awakening.” As we see, he does not care about sealing every experience with the label “solidarity.” He willingly abandons this word if he finds another that appropriately describes the essence of a certain phenomenon. It is true that the ethics of awakening thus conceived obviously grows from the solidarity of consciences: without this ethical basis education changes into drilling or enslavement. Still, we find the following phrase somewhat awkward: “a teacher teaches in solidarity.” The state of solidarity between teachers and students is reserved for unusual situations; when they treat themselves as peers so as to find a remedy for a sickness or suffering. In everyday life though, education is not a sickness, nor suffering. It is a beautiful relation of the trust of hope and describing it as “solidarity” smacks of abuse. Tischner avoids such abuses. And that is why, when considering the problem of education, he prefers to talk about “the ethics of awakening” rather than “the ethics of solidarity.”

As another example may serve the history of the title of the above-mentioned text from the book *Poland is the Motherland*. It was published for the first time in fall 1981 under the title “Perspectives on the Ethics of Solidarity.” Thus entitled it reached several underground publishers. The same text came out as “Perspectives on the New Ethos of Work” only in 1985 in the form of a book published in Paris. The change is significant.

106 Tischner must have thought that the original title is confusing: there is a lot in the text about the crisis of trust, the sickness of Polish work that consists in the lack of communication. Perhaps one may repeat after the sketch on education that in the context of work, the ethics of solidarity becomes the new ethos of work. It is worth noting that what does not change in all these reflections is not the term solidarity, but the notions of ethics and ethos. And finally comes the last note of Tischner's struggle with the idea of solidarity. In 1996 Józef Tischner delivered a lecture entitled, "The Ethics of Solidarity Years Later," in which he underscored the irreplaceable ambiguity of the notion of solidarity and then attempted to describe the ethics of solidarity, examining the reasons for its disintegration.

The conclusions are rather grim: solidarity belongs to the past and the changes that took place after The Round Table Agreement transformed what remained of solidarity into its own caricature.² The main reason for the disintegration of this ethos is the actual change of "human solidarity" into "factional solidarity." While in the true solidarity there were no borders and no *against*, the factional solidarity limits itself to a certain group. The group requires consolidation so as to distinguish itself from other, hostile groups. Solidarity then serves for emphasizing differences, imposing divisions. Particularism, if allowed in solidarity, makes it become its own opposite. In the 90's Tischner did not further define the ethics of solidarity, he did not address the challenges that the ethics of solidarity faces. He diagnosed the time of the transformation and pointed at various hidden traps, but he did not do it under the aegis of solidarity. This may be explained in many ways. It seems that Tischner himself felt the particular character of this phenomenon, its character of an event. The above-quoted examples of caution with which he used this term surely prove that he felt this limitation. Solidarity treated as a remedy for community ailments negates itself. The tool is always external, while solidarity is spontaneously born within a community. When treated instrumentally, solidarity changes into a skeleton key used ineffectually to open various locks.

Varied applications of solidarity forcibly show how fragmentarily and instrumentally it is treated. For Poles the high value of the term "solidarity" has become quite harmful for solidarity itself. We would like to embrace so many phenomena with this important word, that its meaning becomes more and more obscure. It expands and loses its contours. It seems that the solidarity program built on the grounds of a street survey – individual convictions about the nature of solidarity – would not only be superficial, partial and grotesque, but it would also expose its essential weakness: no reasonable person would make it the foundation of social life. One may risk a perverse thesis: solidarity should free itself of the very word "solidarity" if it is to reveal its essence. Tischner writes that the word, which in August '80 simply fit, today seems to have lost its special significance. It is loaded with too much of a burden to be able to raise itself up.

² Cf. footnote 20, p. 63.