

Communist Party of Poland

The Soviet-Polish war in 1920 and the working class movement in Poland

The Great October Socialist Revolution and the First World War changed the balance of power and political map in Central and Eastern Europe. In November 1918 new countries - Poland among them, were created. In Poland bourgeoisie came to power. There were two main political groups. The main aim of the National Democrats, allied with tsarist Russia and later the Entente, was to preserve a reactionary social relations and prevent the outbreak of the revolution. On the other side of the bourgeois camp was Jozef Pilsudski cooperating with the central powers. He gained the control over the army and the reactionary paramilitary forces such as Polish Wehrmacht.

The first Polish government, formed in November 1918 with support of socialists and peasants movement, had a key role in channeling the revolutionary position of the masses. It has promised land reform and new labour law introducing inter alia 8 hour workday. This government soon was replaced by the other with participation of socialists and later with the National Democrats.

The workers movement was divided into two camps. The Polish Socialist Party (PPS) based on slogans of the national independence, planned to establish bourgeois Poland with some concessions towards workers and peasants. In key moments the PPS betrayed interests of the workers by supporting the bourgeois governments. Reformists joined and sabotaged the workers' councils. In 1919 the PPS withdrew their delegates allowing police and army to crush the councils. PPS declared to be against the war with the Soviet Russia, however when the war started it abstained from condemning counterrevolutionary aggression. PPS joined the nationalist propaganda campaign. In July 1920, during the war with the Soviet Russia, PPS entered the government.

On the other side, the revolutionary movement proposed the internationalist attitude and called the workers of all countries to unite against the capitalism. On 16th of December 1918 the Socialdemocracy of Polish Kingdom and Lithuania and the PPS-Left joined to form the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPRP). The party was active in several urban centres but lacked structures among peasants. They started to form the Red Guard. The longest episode was activity of Red Guards in the industrial region Zagłębie in southern Poland, where militias for some time controlled the mines and factories. This attempt of the revolution was suppressed by the army.

The economic situation in Poland was grave. As a result of destruction of the industrial centres during the First World War the working class was very small and mostly employed in small and medium companies. Before the offensive of the central powers in 1915 the industry was evacuated and hundreds of thousands of Polish workers were moved to the Russian Empire. Many of them were already acknowledged with the revolutionary ideas and formed the workers and soldiers councils. After October 1917 over a 100 thousand Poles participated in the Revolution in the ranks of the Red Army, some of them as high ranking commissars. Polish units in the revolutionary armies were created and participated inter alia in capturing Kremlin during the fight in Moscow.

The perspectives of Polish relations with Soviet Russia were rather good. Already in November 1917 the Peoples' Commissars Council announced that all nations of the Russian Empire have right for self determination. In September 1918 Lenin signed a decree cancelling former agreements with the Austro-Hungary and Prussia on dividing Poland.

In 1919 Polish authorities provoked a border conflict with the Soviet Russia in the interests of the landlords who demanded return of their lands collectivised by the bolsheviks after the October Revolution. Polish government was acting in accordance with plans of the Great Britain, France and

the US to destroy the Soviet Russia. In 1919 Pilsudski's army started the military actions against the Soviet Russia and captured several towns and cities in the East, including Vilnius and Minsk. In June the allied powers gave Poland permission to occupy the eastern Galicia – part of Ukraine.

On 28th of January 1920 authorities of the Soviet Russia in announcement signed by Lenin and sent to Polish government, confirmed the right of Poland for self-determination and that all issues may be solved with talks and agreements. Poland has rejected all of the peace offers proposed by the Soviet Russia. Instead, in April 1920, Pilsudski signed the agreement with the Petlura regime of Ukrainian nationalists. On 25th of April, consecutively with anti-Soviet actions of Wrangel's army at Crimea, Polish offensive at Ukraine has started. On 7th of May Kiev was captured but in July at the northern front Polish forces started to withdraw. The Red Army liberated Ukraine and Belarus and at the beginning of August came close to Warsaw.

On 30th of July 1920 the Temporary Polish Revolutionary Committee was created in Bialystok. In its decree it announced the will to form the Polish Soviet Republic with the revolutionary government. It established factory' and peasants committees that will own the means of production. Authors of the Manifesto issued by the Committee summoned workers and peasants to enlist to the volunteer revolutionary forces.

The KPRP organised resistance against the war and underlined a class character of the war, warning that the Polish army is counter-revolutionary. The party called the soldiers to defect and join the Polish Red Army which was to be formed. Communists organised demonstrations and strikes in the industrial centres. In Warsaw, Lublin and Lodz mass meetings under the slogan of the defence of the Soviet republics were held. On 1st of May 1920 over 30 thousand people demonstrated in Warsaw against the war. The first conference of the KPRP in May 1920 gave the party task of „explaining to the masses that both in the interest of the Polish working class and the entire population is the defence of the Soviet Russia and Ukraine from the attacks of Polish and international imperialism.” It called workers to participate in the revolutionary activity, strikes, demonstrations, and gatherings, and to cooperate with the Red Army on creation of the workers' councils as a new organs of power. Polish Communists aimed to start a revolution in Poland and create a Polish Soviet Republic.

At the same time socialists from the PPS entered the bourgeois government formed in Warsaw and called the workers to enlist the national army. They have formed a volunteer forces in defence of the bourgeois state. Peasant party also entered the government. On 15th of July 1920, when the Red Army was approaching Warsaw, the parliament voted land reform announcing that 80% of land will be divided between a small and medium farmers.

In mid of August 1920 the Polish bourgeois army stopped the Red Army at the outskirts of Warsaw and counterattacked. The revolutionary forces were stretched to the limit and collapsed under the military attack. In 1920 the opportunity to carry the revolution west was lost.

The war deteriorated political relations in Poland. Especially strengthened the landlords that has gained huge lands in the East. Poland became a frontline country with militaristic policy, more dependent from the foreign powers, mainly France.