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The February Revolution and its Consequences in Propaganda of Leftist Independence Circles in the Kingdom of Poland in 1917

*Rewolucja lutowa i jej konsekwencje w propagandzie środowisk lewicy
niepodległościowej w Królestwie Polskim w 1917 roku*

ABSTRACT

One of the key events for the Polish cause during World War I was the February Revolution of 1917. This was reflected, among others, in propaganda of Polish left-wing parties (the Polish Socialist Party, the Polish People's Party, the Party of National Independence etc.) for whom Józef Piłsudski was the main authority.

Politicians of these parties claimed that the fall of tsarism in Russia was caused by several factors. First of all, the following issues were mentioned: weakness of tsarist rule and wartime defeats; shortages of food supply in cities; activities of both the liberal opposition and the revolutionary movement in Russia; and, last but not least, external (British) inspiration of the coup d'état.

In the propaganda of left-wing independence parties, Russian liberals were criticized. Paweł Milukow, Aleksander Guczkow and other politicians from this circle were accused of imperialist tendencies. The hopes of Polish activists were associated with the actions of Russian democratic socialists, above all Aleksander Kiereński. It was thought that revolutionary changes in Russia would end only after reaching peace.

In the summer and autumn of 1917, among Polish socialists and other left-wing sympathizers of Piłsudski, there was a widespread conviction that Russia was on the verge of another coup d'état.

Key words: the February Revolution, 1917, Russia, the Kingdom of Poland, propaganda, leftist independence circles

In a study written in summer 1917 by Ludwik Kulczycki titled *Druga rewolucja rosyjska (Second Russian Revolution)*, an assessment was formulated that the takeover in Petrograd had been 'a key fact which will

surely affect the world in numerous ways'. It's hard to assume the view was questioned by prominent representatives of Polish political circles. A veteran of a worker's movement, at the time already distanced from socialism, referring to i.a. events of 1905 also noted: 'In our society the second wave of Russian revolution aroused significant interest, though it has often been accompanied by reckless judgements, in the influence of the second Russian revolution on the transformation of social and political relationships in Europe'¹.

Kulczycki's words may serve as a convenient pretext to discuss the commentaries relating to Russian events, as formulated by the representatives of the native political class with the emphasis on those interpretations which served propaganda purposes and – at least potentially – had a chance to reach Poles in the Kingdom and therefore affect their views in the first months after the fall of the Tsardom². Obviously, the February Revolution context was studied many times in research works, however, mostly from the viewpoint of the assessment formulated by leaders of major political circles³. The question of actions taken in attempt to shape the opinions of the Polish society regarding the contemporary occurrences in Russia seem no less interesting, even though it is not an easy matter to examine. The holistic context of such a topic is obviously impossible in a short overview study. Therefore, the author of this article resorted only to the analysis of content distributed in printed form over the span of nearly eight months of 1917 by the leftist independence circles in the Kingdom of Poland without addressing the question of the effectiveness of the message⁴. The Bolshevik coup was established as a milestone for these considerations but although it was no doubt a consequence of previous events, it constituted – also as assessed by many of the contemporaries – a sign of a breakthrough and opened a new phase of political evolution in Russia.

While defining the term of leftist independence circles it has to be established that in early 1917 the major hub of these communities in Kingdom of Poland was the Central National Committee (CKN).

¹ L. Kulczycki, *Druga rewolucja rosyjska*, Warszawa 1917, [p. III].

² Circulating among the public interpretations regarding Russia, cannot be taken as the actual opinions of the creators of the message. Therefore it is of particular significance that certain content was being emphasised in the opinion-forming circles.

³ For newer literature on the topic see e.g.: J. Tokarski, *Historie przyszłości. Wizje bolszewizmu w Rosji 1917–1921*, Kraków 2012, pp. 47–53.

⁴ Apart from the difficulties associated with researching that last issue, the notion that the influence on broad masses of the Polish society regarding Russian events of 1917 consisted not only of prints seems like a truism.

This diverse political environment, sometimes wrongly associated with Pilsudskites, bonded over the hostility towards Tsarist Russia, but also the belief in the need of restoring Poland as a democratic country in which the peasants and workers gain a significant voice in shaping the political life. We can assume, just like the leading researcher of the problem, that at the time there were four major components of the leftist independence circles. The circle included not only the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and Polish People's Party (PSL), but also radical intellectual groups such as National Independence Party (PNN) or a more centrist Union of Democratic Alliances (ZSD). Last but not least, we need to list environments stemming from the national movement, most importantly the National Workers' Union (NZR)⁵. Although that last organisation left CKN shortly after the February Revolution, their initial reactions regarding ground-breaking events in Russia were included in the article⁶. It should also be noted that in summer 1917 another attempt to create a formula for cooperation of leftist independence circles was made, which resulted in the assembling of Coordinating Committee of the Democratic Parties of Poland (KPSD). The intention to join the alliance was announced not only by PPS and PSL but also PNN and ZSD. Within leftist independence circles we should also include persons not affiliated with any of the aforementioned groups, who participated in the forums of e.g. Polish Military Organisation⁷.

History of the Polish leftist independence circles during World War I was often the point of interest for historians. In 2003, a comprehensive study regarding CKN was published⁸, as well as a series of important articles on various themes regarding the topic over the years⁹. Also, several monographs were created, whose more important fragments involve thoughts and political activity of leftist independence circles¹⁰. This does

⁵ J.Z. Pająk, *Centralny Komitet Narodowy w latach 1915–1917*, 'Dzieje Najnowsze' 1997, 3, pp. 159–161.

⁶ Regarding political alignment of the national-worker's environment in spring 1917 r. see: T. Monasterska, *Narodowy Związek Robotniczy 1905–1920*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 176–182.

⁷ *Nowe porozumienie się lewicy*, 'Rząd i Wojsko' [hereinafter: 'RiW'] 30 VI 1917, 21, pp. 5–6.

⁸ J.Z. Pająk, *O rząd i armię. Centralny Komitet Narodowy (1915–1917)*, Kielce 2003.

⁹ Cf. e.g.: J. Lewandowski, *Koncepcje polityczne Wydziału Narodowego Lubelskiego 1915–1917*, in: *Szkice z dziejów polskiej myśli politycznej*, ed. J. Jachymek, A. Koprucki, Lublin 1987, pp. 53–72; J.Z. Pająk, *Wydział Narodowy Radomski (1915–1917)*, 'Rocznik Świętokrzyski. A Series. Nauki Humanistyczne' 2005, 29, p. 99–114; idem, *Lewica niepodległościowa na Kielecczyźnie w latach I wojny światowej*, 'Między Wisłą a Pilicą. Studia i materiały historyczne' 2010, 10, pp. 111–128.

¹⁰ J. Holzer, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna 1917–1919*, Warszawa 1962; J. Molenda, *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe w Królestwie Polskim 1915–1918*, Warszawa 1965; idem, *Piłsudzczyca a narodowi demokraci 1908–1918*, Warszawa 1980; D. Nałęcz, *Sen o władzy. Inteligencja wobec*

not change the fact that the literature on the subject still lacks a comprehensive study of the issues indicated in the title of this paper.

The primary sources in the presented article are press publications. Most press titles issued in 1917 in the Kingdom of Poland associated with the leftist independence circles, including periodicals signed by NZR, were covered by the query. Regarding periodicals issued legally, we should obviously take into account the limitations existing at the time due to censorship¹¹. A secondary, far less significant than press, source category used in this study are leaflets. Although the author attempted to include a wide range of pronouncements of political environments operating in rural areas, we can dare say that similarly as was in the case of newspapers, the majority of leaflets had a greater chance of reaching the population of urbanised areas, especially the largest urban areas such as Warsaw, Lublin or Łódź, than people from villages.

As it was already mentioned, the context in which the leftist independence circles viewed the development of events in Russia in the beginning of the war was shaped by the belief that the country of Nicholas II, for a long time regarded as a safe haven of reactionism, became the greatest enemy of Polish national interest. The defeat of Tsarist Russia was therefore identified as not just a 'victory for democracy and freedom' on a Europe-wide scale but, most importantly, constituted the fulfilment of elementary conditions for initiating the goal of re-establishing the Republic of Poland¹². 'The Great European War', wrote one of the authors from CKN shortly after the fall of Tsardom, 'inspired in Poland all that is patriotic and capable of active politics, not just through opposition towards Russia but also legionary involvement and a decisive programme of final liberation from Moscow's clutches'¹³.

In this context the enthusiasm with which the leftist independence circles welcomed the fact that 'Tsar-tyrant fell in with his ministers' in Russia in mid-March 1917' is hardly surprising¹⁴. CKN propaganda immedi-

niepodległości, Warszawa 1994; J. Dufurat, *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej. Od Ligi Kobiet Pogotowia Wojennego do Ochotniczej Legii Kobiet (1908–1918/1919)*, Toruń 2001.

¹¹ For more information on Polish press in the Kingdom under occupation of its territory by the Central Powers see: A. Garlicka, *Prasa w Królestwie Polskim pod okupacją niemiecką i austriacką (1915–1918)*, in: Z. Kmieciak et al., *Prasa polska w latach 1864–1918*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 272–291.

¹² Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie [hereinafter: AAN], Zbiór druków ulotnych, ref. no. 1, sheet 1, Odezwa CKN, 3 V 1916; Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego [hereinafter: BUW], ref. no. DU XI P.19[1965], Odezwa CKR PPS, 22 X 1916.

¹³ St.A.K. [S. Kempner], *Rewolucja rosyjska a kwestia polska*, 'Nowa Gazeta' [hereinafter: 'NG'] 25 III 1917, 144, p. 1.

¹⁴ Biblioteka Narodowa w Warszawie, ref. no. DŻS IA 5 Cim., Odezwa PPS 'Do ogółu ludności!', 15 III 1917.

ately broadcasted suggestions that it was an event of a groundbreaking significance. Artur Śliwiński, the leader of PNN, for example, stated in 'Widnokraj' that the dethroning of Nicholas II can be compared 'probably only with the fall of Louis XVI or, if we take contrast into account, the ultimate failure of Napoleon'¹⁵.

Notable is the caution with which the leftist independence circles formulated the first public commentaries after the February Revolution regarding the Russian events. In the issue of 'Nowa Gazeta'¹⁶ from 16 March 1917, a legally issued daily newspaper promoting the political objectives of CKN, an opinion was brought forth that although 'in the context of Russian anarchy' associated with noticeable decay of 'reactionary bureaucratic system' it was relatively easy to 'unleash revolution', 'it is uncertain where it will lead us'. The author of the article, without jumping to conclusions on how great was the impact of external factors on the development of events in Petrograd, argued that the 'coup' constituted only a beginning of revolutionary changes, not their conclusion. 'Therefore, even if', as the columnist of the Warsaw's daily newspaper suggested, 'the revolutionary events were intertwined with the influence of Mr Buchanan, then the latter may be sorely disappointed, if he believes that the unleashed forces will support the interests of England'¹⁷.

Analogous interpretations at the time were present in a periodical titled 'Wyzwolenie', which was addressed to other reader circles. In the first commentary presented after the February Revolution in a PSL periodical, it was stated that although in the former Tsarist empire 'broad reforms were announced', their implementation might face significant difficulties because it was uncertain whether 'new unrest and new riots do not emerge, which will prevent Russian from adequately organising their country'¹⁸. Another example is an article published several weeks later in 'Ziemia Kielecka', where they warned against 'excessive enthusiasm regarding the aftermath of the revolution, which have not yet left the state of, perhaps creative, chaos'. The aforementioned article also contained an opinion that the provisional government 'consisting of varied elements' is a 'weak government, unable to control the administrative incapacity caused by the revolution'¹⁹. 'In Russia', as commented by a publicist of an illegal

¹⁵ A. Śliwiński, *Rewolucja w Rosji*, 'Widnokraj' 25 III 1917, 10, p. 1.

¹⁶ All dates in the text were provided in accordance with the Gregorian calendar.

¹⁷ S., *Rewolucja w Rosji*, 'NG' 16 III 1917, 128, p. 1. See also: A., *Anglia a rewolucja rosyjska*, 'NG' 26 III 1917, 146, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Przewrót państwowy w Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 25 III 1917, 12, p. 133.

¹⁹ *Co nam niesie rewolucja rosyjska?*, 'Ziemia Kielecka' [hereinafter: 'ZK'] 14 IV 1917, 15, pp. 1–2.

periodical issued by NZR, 'it is easier to unleash dark forces of revolution on the foundation of widespread discontent than pacify it afterwards, especially for the purpose of harnessing it for wartime interests'. The British inspiration suggested by an anonymous author, visible 'in preparation and execution of the revolution', was meant to represent the desperation of the authorities in London, who were convinced that establishing separatist peace between Russia and Germany is only a matter of time. A commenter of NZR stated an opinion that calculations of the British may prove invalid especially since the 'liberal party' they supported was likely to be ousted from power. According to the author the scenarios of a 'new revolution under even more radical slogans, this time: anti-war ones' and counter-revolution, even with a chance of reinstating the overthrown tsar were both possible²⁰. PPS activists were also very cautious in their assessment. Among the wishes directed to the 'Russian nation' so that they would 'be capable of reinforcing modern standards in their country' and carry out a great feat of democratisation of the country there were concerns that 'counter-revolution has great powers at their disposal'. It is notable that in the first post-revolution comment published in 'Jedność Robotnicza' analogies to events of 1905 were formulated. It was expected that 'at any moment internal fights could break out within the group responsible for carrying out the Revolution'²¹.

In the article taken from a periodical supported by PPS, which was cited above, a viewpoint was openly expressed that the revolution in Russia was caused by a complicated combination of seemingly conflicting factors. According to an anonymous author, it was something of a paradox that factors contributing to the overthrowing of Nicholas II included both 'war fatigue and discontent from its horrible burden' as well as 'pursuit of continuing the war at the side of the coalition'²². The following issue of the periodical had also no intention of proving that the extraordinary events in Russia should be seen only as a confirmation of the broad influence and political maturity of the leaders of their proletariat. A columnist of a weekly socialist periodical assessed that there were three parallel and co-dependent processes in Russia: 'the palace revolution', the prologue of which started already with 'the murder of Rasputin', 'the parliamentary revolution' devised 'in cooperation with an English ambassador', 'finally – the workers' revolution, which attracted some soldiers of the Petersburg garrison as well'. Answer to a key question regarding the nearest future

²⁰ *Rewolucja rosyjska*, 'Kiliński' April 1917, pp. 9–11.

²¹ *Rewolucja w Rosji*, 'Jedność Robotnicza' [hereinafter: 'JR'] 25 III 1917, 13, pp. 1–2.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 1.

of Russia appeared to be uncertain. A commenter of the PPS's periodical included in his predictions both a continuation of a 'bourgeois-liberal' government, 'victory of counter-revolution', the establishment of military dictatorship with nationalist focus, as well as the establishment of a 'more radical government, based on the masses'²³.

The questions analysed here, which regarded the genesis of the February Revolution and its possible consequences, were raised in the first weeks after the coup at the Neva also in other pronouncements of the leftist independence circles from the Kingdom of Poland. A dominating opinion was that a multitude of causes dictated the ultimate course of events in Russia. For example, editors of 'Nowa Gazeta' supported a claim that the revolution was a result of three main tendencies. The following factors were brought up: disorganisation of the reactionary government resulting in the economic collapse of the empire, outburst of revolutionary unrest always possible in the country since 1905, and finally the efforts of more or less liberal forces, long since antagonistic towards bureaucratic reactionaries supported by Great Britain with the intent of maintaining 'the eastern colossus' within the Entente. First news from the Neva were to indicate that new Russian authorities seek to 'bring law and order into an organism completely ravaged by gangrene'. The editorial office associated with a newspaper of the leftist independence circles, however, assessed that the announcement of the 'victory of constitutional spirit over the disorder of absolutism' is definitely premature²⁴. As described by Jan Turski, it was justified alone by the fact that slogans promoted in a city of a large empire were unlikely to become popular across wide semi-wild stretches of the Russian Far East²⁵. Scepticism of 'Nowa Gazeta' editors regarding the chances of successful political transformation of Russia stemmed from a view that the prolonged war would impede any creative processes. Also pointed out was the incompatibility of many key slogans brought forth by the new bourgeoisie-liberal government with socio-radical plans of the Russian leftists²⁶. Significant in this context is the conclusion contained in 'Nowa Gazeta' article of 30 March 1917: 'After barbaric Asian tsardom – a democratic republic. It is almost impossible to believe in such a metamorphosis'²⁷. More optimism regarding the

²³ *Rewolucja rosyjska i jej możliwości*, 'JR' 1 IV 1917, 14, p. 1.

²⁴ S., *Zamach stanu w Rosji*, 'NG' 17 III 1917, 130, p. 1; idem, *Wielki przewrót w Rosji*, 'NG' 19 III 1917, 133, p. 1.

²⁵ J. Turski, *Znak zapytania nad Nową*, 'NG' 21 III 1917, 137, p. 1.

²⁶ S., *Rozwój rewolucji rosyjskiej*, 'NG' 22 III 1917, 139, p. 1; P.G. [P. Górecki], *L'ordre règne*, 'NG' 31 III 1917, 156, p. 1.

²⁷ S., *Republika w Rosji*, 'NG' 30 III 1917, 154, p. 1.

chances of transforming Russia into a lawful country going down a path of Europeanisation and progress, was displayed by a Tadeusz Hołówko of 'Widnokrąg'. However, even that did not deny that the former tsarist empire will become a spectacle of anarchy and social experiments²⁸.

Even in the first weeks after the revolution, the propaganda messages of leftist independence circles were of the opinion that Russian revolution, arranged under a slogan of continuing the war, may reach an entirely different conclusion²⁹. As it was highlighted, even the most ambitious declarations of new government in Petrograd cannot obscure the fact that pacifist tendencies in Russia grow more significant³⁰. 'It is', as one of the publicists wrote in mid-April 1917, 'the voice of the people's attitude so strong that it cannot be silenced, not by the provisional government invoking their commitment to allies, nor by allies who further propagate the Great War'³¹. At the same time, with vicious satisfaction, a commenter of 'Rząd i Wojsko' asked whether the directorial talent of the British ambassador who inspired the coup in Russia would bring desired results³².

A claim that the combat capabilities of Russian army had been reduced to a minimum and that the notion of ultimate conclusion of Eastern front operations is being considered daily, led to the observation that 'currently, there is zero threat' of Russians returning to Poland³³. The moment was described in leftist independence propaganda as particularly important³⁴. The starting point was the belief that the 'liberal bourgeoisie', which assumed power in Russian with the approval of the Entente, did not stop treating ethnically Polish lands as their area of influence³⁵. A socialist named Mieczysław Niedziałkowski stated in an article of 22 April 1917 that Russian leaders such as Paweł Milukow or Aleksander Guczkow are

²⁸ T. Hołówko, *Dwa pierwiastki rewolucji rosyjskiej*, 'Widnokrąg' 1 IV 1917, 11, p. 4.

²⁹ P.G. [P. Górecki], *Bliżej końca...*, 'NG' 4 IV 1917, 163, p. 1.

³⁰ *Przewrót w rządzie rosyjskim*, 'Wyzwolenie' 1 IV 1917, 13, p. 145. Cf. also: *Ku nowej drodze*, 'Wiadomości Robotnicze' April 1917, 7, p. 1.

³¹ S., *Rewolucja wre...*, 'NG' 13 IV 1917, 177, p. 1. See also: P.G. [P. Górecki], *"Chcemy pokoju"*, 'NG' 16 IV 1917, 182, p. 1; *Rosyjska polityka zagraniczna*, 'NG' 1 V 1917, 210, p. 1.

³² S., *Rewolucja rosyjska*, 'RiW' 15 IV 1917, 15, p. 5. Cf. also: *Co słycać w Rosji?*, 'Wyzwolenie' 22 IV 1917, 16, p. 175.

³³ *Nowe koniunktury*, 'RiW' 15 IV 1917, 15, p. 3.

³⁴ It can be assumed that the statement was not intended only for propaganda use and that the leftist independence circles indeed assumed that the February Revolution is the 'epilogue to the war', at least on the Eastern Front. Cf.: T. Hołówko, *Przez dwa fronty*, introduction by J. Pisuliński, Rzeszów 2014, p. 248; A. Nowak, *Polska i trzy Rosje. Studium polityki wschodniej Józefa Piłsudskiego (do kwietnia 1920 roku)*, Kraków 2001, pp. 31–34.

³⁵ T. Szpotański, *Rewolucja rosyjska a sprawa polska*, 'Widnokrąg' 7 IV 1917, 12–13, p. 2; W. Rzymowski, *Rewolucja w Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 8 IV 1917, 14, p. 151; Roch, *Państwo Polskie a rewolucja rosyjska*, 'Polak' April 1917, 4, pp. 7–8.

mostly 'personally virtuous' but 'influenced by imperialism and the idea of indivisibility of a great All-Russian empire'³⁶. As stated several weeks later by Leon Wasilewski, 'they are eager to promise us "The Netherlands" in form of Poznań, Gdańsk and Opole but in the east they did not move a step back beyond the borders defined by Tsarist Russia'³⁷. The response of the Provisional Government regarding Polish national interest was met with disappointment within the leftist circles recognising the authority of Józef Piłsudski³⁸. There were even voices that the Russian pronouncements are 'awkward, insincere and insulting'³⁹. Regarding evident disorganisation in the army and the lack of will to fight among Russian soldiers, the possible efforts of Russia regarding submitting the lands to Polish control were already devoid of causative powers⁴⁰.

Therefore, it was a visible tendency – understandable in this context and especially noticeable in case of PPS – to re-evaluate the stance of leftist independence circles towards the Central Powers⁴¹. Facing the Russian events and the growing belief that the act of 5 November will mostly remain an unfulfilled announcement, their followers were accustomed to the maturing decision to oppose the Germany and Austro-Hungary⁴². It needs to be noted that the earlier, conditional in case of the leftist independence circles, acceptance of monarchy as the system of future Poland had been questioned. Since spring of 1917, republican slogans were accompanied by further requests regarding the system of reborn Republic⁴³. Notable was the way in which the view was formulated – for instance in 'Rząd

³⁶ M. Mirski [M. Niedziałkowski], *Rewolucja rosyjska a niepodległość Polski*, 'JR' 22 IV 1917, 17, p. 1. See also: B. Korwin, *Polska wobec rewolucji rosyjskiej*, 'Goniec Częstochowski' 28 III 1917, 71, p. 1; A., *Program Milukowa*, 'NG' 14 IV 1917, 179, p. 1.

³⁷ L. Wasilewski, *Za przykładem taty*, 'Widnokrąg' 14 V 1917, 19, p. 2.

³⁸ P.G. [P. Górecki], *"Za waszą i naszą wolność"*, 'NG' 12 IV 1917, 175, p. 1; Z powodu oświadczenia rządu rosyjskiego, 'JR' 15 IV 1917, 16, p. 1; J. Molenda, *Polskie Stronnictwo*, p. 120–121.

³⁹ A. Płoski, *Święto wiosny*, 'ZK' 21 IV 1917, 16, p. 4.

⁴⁰ A known activist of the leftist independence circles suggested that the response of the Provisional Government should be treated as an offer which would be a starting point to further talks regarding 'establishing lasting peace between Russia and Poland' (T. Szpotański, *Odezwa Tymczasowego Rządu Rosyjskiego w sprawie polskiej*, 'Widnokrąg' 22 IV 1917, 15, p. 2). See also: *Ważna wieść*, 'Kiliński' April 1917, p. 12.

⁴¹ AAN, Akta Jędrzeja i Zofii Moraczewskich, ref. no. 3, sheet 50, *Odezwa CKN, March 1917*; BUW, ref. no. DU XI P.19[2005], *Odezwa Warszawskiego OKR PPS, April 1917*.

⁴² AAN, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – Frakcja Rewolucyjna [hereinafter: PPS–FR], ref. no. 15/III/2, sheet 17, *Okólnik CKR PPS, April 1917*; *Zjazd CKN*, 'Biuletyn' 12 V 1917, 100, p. 7–8.

⁴³ For more details see: G. Zackiewicz, *Idea odbudowy niepodległego państwa jako monarchii w polskiej debacie politycznej po 5 listopada 1916 roku*, in: *Lata Wielkiej Wojny. Dojrzewanie do niepodległości 1914–1918*, ed. D. Grinberg et al., Białystok 2007, pp. 303–305.

i Wojsko' – that February Revolution had put Poles in new neighbourhood conditions, and that Republican Russia is something entirely different from Tsarist Russia⁴⁴. Hence the opinion stating that it was the socialists of KKN who were the first to express the need to change the system⁴⁵.

Common in the entire political environment of PPS was the critical attitude towards prominent persons in government of prince Gieorgij Lwow corresponding with hopes placed in Russian leftists. There is no doubt that the latter motif was especially emphasised in the propaganda of Polish socialists. A characteristic expression of that was a letter which was sent to 'Russian comrades' by PPS leadership on 5 April 1917. Leaders of the party emphasised that the 'great task' involving destruction of 'the most dangerous bastion of reactionaries' was possible especially due to the efforts of the authors of the article. Statements of lack of faith in good intentions and especially the promises of the liberal bourgeoisie were accompanied by a belief that the socialists will be able to reinforce the democratic republic in Russia. It was also suggested that the Great Revolution would prove to be a direct introduction to establishing peace under the terms of respecting rights of nations to self-determination. 'You can do us a great favour', pleaded the representatives of the Central Workers' Committee (CKR) of the PPS to similarly aligned parties in Russia, 'by forcing your government to truly recognise our independence and renounce the intentions of conquering us'⁴⁶. Subsequent weekly periodicals issued by party structures in Warsaw and Łódź wrote of 'the light of freedom' which shone on the Russian horizon, as well as 'a joyous moment' when 'the red flag flies at the peak of the Tsar's palace'. 'The Russian proletariat and peasant revolutionaries', stated authors of one of such messages, 'is not satisfied with the current result. They demand the ruling bourgeoisie to arrange a constituency, impose a democratic republic and promptly end the war'⁴⁷. It is worth noting that of all the mentioned pronouncements, the PPS representatives did not make any significant distinctions in the circles of Russian leftists. In the party's press also expressed was a view that all directions of Russian socialism currently support complete independence

⁴⁴ *W sprawie naszych sojuszów*, 'RiW' 20 V 1917, 18, p. 6.

⁴⁵ M. Niedziałkowski, 1914–1918, in: *Księga Jubileuszowa Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej 1892–1932*, editorial committee A. Krieger et al., Warszawa [1933], pp. 126–129, 144–145.

⁴⁶ AAN, Archiwum Londyńskie Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej [hereinafter: ALPPS], ref. no. 305/III/38, pdt. 5, sheet 7, Komunikat PPS, [April 1917].

⁴⁷ BUW, ref. no. DU XI P.19 [1999], Odezwa Warszawskiego OKR PPS, 12 IV 1917; AAN, PPS–FR, ref. no. 15/IV/6, sheet 12, Odezwa OKR PPS in Łódź, 1 V 1917. See also: *Uchwały lubelskie*, 'Biuletyn' 2 V 1917, 98, p. 1.

of Poland⁴⁸. Previous objections of 'Lenin's group' regarding the case were considered outdated. Therefore, there is no doubt that Aleksander Kiereński had the attention of PPS leaders. He seemed to be not only a charismatic politician but also 'for the longest time' expressing 'a high level of understanding for national aspirations of the Polish proletariat'⁴⁹. In an article of May 1917, Feliks Perl even called Kiereński 'the only friend' of Poland in the first government of Russia after February Revolution⁵⁰.

Other groups included in leftist independence circles also favoured the opinion that in order to make advantageous developments possible for Poles to happen, it is imperative that socialist democracy gains a decisive voice in the former Tsarist Empire⁵¹. It also has to be pointed out that, at least in certain cases – more clearly than it was the case in PPS – there were concerns resulting from a particularly far-reaching radicalism of significant factions of the Russian leftists⁵². What is notable, in the first weeks after the February Revolution there were already publically raised opinions that the popularity of socialist slogans from the east may prove a detrimental factor in the restoration of independent Poland⁵³. People's party and radical democrats associated with CKN were both in agreement that Kiereński should be recognised as the most distinguished politician of the Russian left and, at the same time, as a long-time supporter of Poland. He was seen as the people's tribune who was 'no less tough and unyielding than a Jacobinic French revolutionary' while also making heroic efforts in order to 'avoid the guillotine'⁵⁴.

Sympathisers of leftist independence circles were informed of the approaching downturn resulting from political battles in mid-May 1917, for example by 'Nowa Gazeta'. In the article, which was issued several days before restructuring of the Provisional Government, there was a statement that 'the fate of the war party has been sealed'. Stanisław Kempner, referring to the pattern of the Great French Revolution, wrote about the latest situation in the east: 'Internal divide is so great that even without prophetic powers we can predict that Russia approaches the same moment as when Jacobinism triumphed in Gironde. Whether this be a bloody period of convention or just revolutionary evolution which

⁴⁸ Res [F. Perl], *Sprawa wojny i pokoju w Rosji*, 'JR' 29 IV 1917, 18, pp. 2–3; *Robotnicy rosyjscy o niepodległości Polski*, 'Walka' 1 V 1917, 1, p. 2.

⁴⁹ M. Mirski [M. Niedziałkowski], *Revolucja rosyjska*, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Res [F. Perl], *Nowy Rząd Tymczasowy w Rosji*, 'JR' 27 V 1917, 22, p. 1.

⁵¹ A., *W Rosji*, 'NG' 20 IV 1917, 190, p. 1; J. Molenda, *Polskie Stronnictwo*, p. 121.

⁵² *Z Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 29 IV 1917, 17, pp. 185–186.

⁵³ The fact was accurately pointed out by A. Nowak, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁵⁴ St.A.K. [S. Kempner], *Jeszcze o źródłach rewolucji rosyjskiej*, 'NG' 7 IV 1917, 169, p. 3.

soothes the attitudes of those who put the spirit of imperialism over internal development, we cannot tell⁵⁵. Several days later, already after the dismissal of Guczkow and Milukow, another comment published in 'Nowa Gazeta' read 'great unrest spreads over Russia', and ministerial changes still have not brought the expected breakthrough⁵⁶. Such opinion, expressed by one of the leaders of PNN, still had not expressed the tone articulated by the general representation of Polish independence left. An overall satisfaction was demonstrated there resulting from the fact that top representatives of bourgeoisie faction of Russian revolutionaries, seen as supporters of continuing the military operations and politicians displaying patronizing approach to Poles did not enter the government. In an article published in 'Widnokrag', Wasilewski stated: 'Removal of power from Guczkow and Milukow shall weaken imperialist tendencies in Russian authorities, at least for now'⁵⁷. Perl also provided a similar assessment of the developments⁵⁸. Another article published at the time stated, in turn, that although Kiereński and politicians close to him oppose Bolshevik slogans of immediate withdrawal of Russia from war, they shall endeavour to 'encourage the Entente to immediate peace without compensations'⁵⁹.

Hopes associated with the 'Russian Mirabeau', who was credited with the intention of giving the revolution the properties of 'fighting for a great cause', grew with the increasing belief that he has a dominant influence on the politics in Lwow's cabinet⁶⁰. One of the authors already stated in June 1917 that the rumours of a 'dangerous sickness' which Kiereński contracted should be treated as particularly worrying because the future of Russia depended on the health of that politician. As it was elaborated on by a publicist of 'Nowa Gazeta': 'The socialists like Czcheidze, Ceretelli, Plechanow, etc. are not fitting for the crucial tasks of today'⁶¹. The Polish leftist independence circles were not particularly delusional about the Bolsheviks who were mostly accused of excessively doctrinal approach to reality and succumbing to Blanquist or even anarchistic influences⁶². This did not collide with the belief that the propaganda of Vladimir Lenin's

⁵⁵ Idem, *Rozłam w Rosji*, 'NG' 13 V 1917, 230, p. 1.

⁵⁶ P.G. [P. Górecki], *Pod znakiem anarchii*, 'NG' 21 V 1917, 244, p. 1.

⁵⁷ L. Wasilewski, *Po upadku Guczkowa i Milukowa*, 'Widnokrag' 28 V 1917, 21, pp. 2–3. See also: *Z Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 27 V 1917, 21, p. 225.

⁵⁸ Res [F. Perl], *Nowy Rząd*, p. 1.

⁵⁹ *Po tamtej stronie drutów kolczastych*, 'NG' 25 V 1917, 252, p. 1.

⁶⁰ *Rewolucja rosyjska i jej skutki*, 'NG' 7 VI 1917, 273, p. 1.

⁶¹ Z., *Kiereński*, 'NG' 6 VI 1917, 272, p. 1.

⁶² S.M. [J. Moczulski?], *Wodzowie rewolucji rosyjskiej. I. Lenin*, 'JR' 22 VII 1917, 30, p. 2–3.

party towards ending the war significantly affect the situation in the country overtaken by the revolution⁶³.

A lot of emphasis in leftist independence circles' propaganda of the Kingdom of Poland was dedicated to the question of the future relations of Russians with non-Polish nations comprising the former empire. The starting point was the belief that one of the most important consequences of the fall of Tsardom was 'shattering the artificial internal unity of the enormous country'. The result was – as stated by Wasilewski in spring 1917 – that 'outward forces of contemporary Russia, bound by the chain of Petersburg's centralism were unleashed'⁶⁴. The cited author, who wrote after the reconstruction of Lwow's government added that 'the dissolution of Russia as a country' resulted in a 'centralist reaction' among new Russian elites. Without drawing conclusions regarding further developments, Wasilewski predicted that the possible successful overcoming of separatist aspirations would have to be 'executed at the cost of democratic liberties'⁶⁵. Such an opinion clearly indicated that hopes involving 'revolutionary people's Russia', where socialists distinguished in revolutionary activism play an important role, were met with considerable worries⁶⁶.

It is worth noting that independence propaganda of the left in the Kingdom did not emphasise the transformations carried out due to the revolution in Russian countryside. Even the representatives of PSL did not utilise that notion to great extent. Therefore, it seems as though the radical attitudes in that area were being toned down⁶⁷. The most comprehensive article on the topic, published in summer 1917 in 'Wyzwolenie' weekly periodical, only contains a suggestion that expropriation of land owners is such a complicated matter that 'it is unlikely to be carried out immediately'. The author of the article also emphasised that he considers the decision of Russian elites regarding final agreements until the assembly of the constituency chosen in democratic elections to be appropriate⁶⁸.

⁶³ *Przewroty w Rosji*, 'NG' 24 VII 1917, 359, p. 1; *Rząd ocalenia rewolucji*, 'NG' 25 VII 1917, 361, p. 1.

⁶⁴ L. Wasilewski, *Konsolidacja czy rozkład*, 'Widnokrąg' 4 VI 1917, 22, p. 2. See also: *Rewolucja w Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 8 IV 1917, 14, p. 156; *Z Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 10 VI 1917, 23, p. 245.

⁶⁵ L. Wasilewski, *Konsolidacja*, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Polska zjednoczona*, 'Do Czynu!' July–August 1917, 13, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Even short mentions involving the 'fights over land' in Russia could not be completely ignored by peasants in the Kingdom. Cf.: J. Molenda, *Polskie Stronnictwo*, pp. 119–120.

⁶⁸ J. Młot [A. Bogusławski], *Sprawy rolne w Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 1 VII 1917, 26, pp. 270–271.

Being aware that the groundbreaking events in Russia did not stop just at the palace coup, especially since the assessment that the country which just recently was a bastion of reactionary now experiencing growing influence of radical intelligentsia and workers' parties, forced the representatives of leftist independence circles of the Kingdom to formulate more general conclusions⁶⁹. Several weeks after the February Revolution, a publicist of 'Ziemia Kielecka' was of the opinion that the events in Russia 'will affect the East just as the French Revolution influenced the West'⁷⁰. In mid-1917, the Russian revolution was already wholeheartedly presented as an event which had 'tremendous impact on all cultured nations'⁷¹. There was a suggestion in the background – mentioned before as well – that 'a great wave of people's democracy' is rising on the Old Continent, launched mostly thanks to the defeat of 'the everlasting guardian of subjugation and slavery' in Europe⁷². Socialist especially emphasised that western societies, emboldened by the example of the Russian example, not only demanded more than ever for the war to be ended and for lawful peace to be restored but also formulated slogans for democratisation and deep social reforms⁷³. 'Today', as it was written in one of PPS's periodicals, 'even the most docile learn that the people have power which forced the government supported by the greatest military strength to withdraw'⁷⁴. It needs to be highlighted that alongside such voices there were also statements that the fight for ultimate sanctioning of a new egalitarian social order in Europe will most likely require entire decades, plus interruptions along the way⁷⁵.

Starting from July 1917, more and more visible were pessimistic assessments in the propaganda of leftist independence circles regarding expected development of events in Russia. Emphasised were the problems piling up before the rulers at Neva⁷⁶. Uncertainty among Polish commenter

⁶⁹ A different, and in the light of available sources difficult to accept, opinion: J. Holzer, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁷⁰ A. Płoski, *Święto wiosny*, p. 1.

⁷¹ Res [F. Perl], *Walka o demokrację*, 'JR' 24 VI 1917, 26, p. 1; Ignis [M. Baumgart], *Potęga Rewolucji rosyjskiej*, 'JR' 15 VII 1917, 29, p. 2.

⁷² M. Mirski [M. Niedziałkowski], *Przed świtem*, 'JR' 22 IV 1917, 17, p. 1. See also: AAN, ALPPS, ref. no. 305/III/45, pdt. 12, sheet 15, Odezwa ZSD, PSL, PNN i PPS, 20 VI 1917; T. Święcicki, *Wojna a demokracja*, 'ZK' 28 IV 1917, 17, p. 1; *Znaczenie dla nas Rewolucji Rosyjskiej*, 'Walka' 1 V 1917, 1, pp. 1–2.

⁷³ [From the editor], 'Robotnik' July 1917, 283, p. 1.

⁷⁴ *Wojna a rewolucja*, 'Do Czynu!' July-August 1917, 13, p. 4. See also: *Niech żyje Republika Polska!*, 'Nowiny Socjalistyczne' June 1917, 2, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁵ M. Mirski [M. Niedziałkowski], *Socjalizm w "praktyce"*, 'JR' 12 VIII 1917, 33, p. 1; *Prawa ludu*, 'JR' 26 VIII 1917, 35, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁶ K., *Anarchia w Rosji*, 'NG' 1 VII 1917, 316, p. 1; S., *Dyktatura w Rosji*, 'NG' 28 VII 1917, 367, p. 1; *Z Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 29 VII 1917, 30, p. 316.

was caused by the fact that the Russian government, moving 'continuously leftwards', not only failed to withdraw the country from the war but launched another, however desperate, attempt to restore the situation on the Eastern Front. The fact that such activities were not stopped even by Kiereński, leader of yet another government cabinet, in whom such great hopes were put⁷⁷, was an even more unpleasant surprise. Although the representatives of PPS, PSL or PNN had no doubts that the offensive in Galicia was executed under the pressure of the Entente, the disappointment was still undeniable. Perl even stated in 'Jedność Robotnicza' that Kiereński 'was unable to' or 'could not consistently' conduct a policy in line with previous declarations. 'If the offensive', noted the leader of PPS 'proved successful, the imperialist tsarist goals and intentions would be inevitably brought back as strong as ever'⁷⁸.

Failure of the Russian army at the Galician front⁷⁹, increased pressure on the government, both from abroad and from Maximalist opposition which grew in influence, forced many authors to admit that there was a new downturn coming and that the days of Kiereński's government are over⁸⁰. In an article of 9 August 1917 a publicist of 'Nowa Gazeta' wrote that if the prime minister were to succeed in his tasks, he would have to be a Russian 'Danton, Gambetta and Napoleon at the same time': 'There are three goals to fulfil: tackle the chaos, guarantee freedom and successfully wage war'⁸¹. Therefore, there is nothing surprising that the variant which began being considered highly probable in that context was the possibility of establishing a counter-revolutionary military dictatorship in Russia. The most likely candidate for the Napoleonic mission, at least until August 1917, was Gen. Ławr Kornilow⁸².

The open conflict between Kiereński and Kornilow was presented in the propaganda of leftist independence circles of the Kingdom as another,

⁷⁷ J.M. [J. Moczulski], *Wodzowie rewolucji rosyjskiej. II. Premier Kiereński*, 'JR' 5 VIII 1917, 32, pp. 3–4.

⁷⁸ Juliusz [F. Perl], *Dzisiejsze oblicze rewolucji rosyjskiej*, 'JR' 8 IX 1917, 37, pp. 2–3. See also: *Nowe natarcie rosyjskie*, 'Wyzwolenie' 15 VII 1917, 28, p. 295; S., *Finlandia*, 'NG' 7 IX 1917, 442, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Z., *Dalszy rozwój rewolucji*, 'NG' 7 VIII 1917, 385, p. 1; *Na froncie rosyjskim*, 'Wyzwolenie' 12 VIII 1917, 31–32, pp. 327–328.

⁸⁰ r., *Przyszłość Rosji*, 'NG' 1 VIII 1917, 374, p. 1; *Z Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 19 VIII 1917, 33, pp. 337–338.

⁸¹ A., *Nowy gabinet rosyjski*, 'NG' 9 VIII 1917, 389, p. 1. See also: *Ze świata*, 'RiW' 27 VIII 1917, 23, p. 8.

⁸² S., *Nowy dyktator in spe*, 'NG' 31 VIII 1917, 429, p. 1; *Z Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 9 IX 1917, 36, p. 365.

somewhat unavoidable phase of the Russian revolution⁸³. Sympathies of the environment could not raise any doubt. It was written about Kiereński that although his political line under pressure from 'the coalition' and 'the imperialist party' were faced with crisis in Russia, and that he himself did not avoid 'certain errors', he remained a symbol of liberty movements regardless and 'heroically defended the democratic rights'⁸⁴. Even Perl, sceptical toward the Russian prime minister, wrote in this context that the victory of Kornilow, synonymous with the victory of the reactionaries, would be 'calamity for democracy in the entire Europe'⁸⁵.

Victory of Kiereński must have been quite unexpected by the leftist independence circles since they practically announced his end⁸⁶, and only slightly regained hopes they had in that politician. Characteristic were the suggestions that although 'Kornilov's mutiny' was suppressed, the war raged on and 'the Russian republic has not been well-established yet'⁸⁷. Although it would be an overstatement to say that 'Maximalist revolution' was widely expected, such scenario indeed was seriously taken into account, and the growing importance of Lenin's party was noted. In the last few weeks before the Bolshevik coup, it was rare to publically pass verdicts regarding long-term opinions on the future of Russia⁸⁸.

As a summary, we can invoke the article by Hołówko, which was published in mid-October 1917 in 'Nowa Gazeta'. While suggesting that the perspective of establishing peace is close, the author noticed that regardless of any negative consequences the war proved to be a positive turn because it 'killed the evil and shame of Europe – the Tsardom'. 'We stand', as written by Hołówko, 'on the precipice of a new era – which we do not yet know; but we do know that it will be better than the previous'⁸⁹. A known Pilsudskite apparently did not expect that a possible communist rule would become anything more than a short-lived episode in Russia's history. At the threshold of the Bolshevik coup, Hołówko – just like activists close to him from leftist independence circles but also representatives of

⁸³ r., *O dyktaturę*, 'NG' 11 IX 1917, 448, p. 1; idem, *Walki w Rosji*, 'NG' 13 IX 1917, 452, p. 1.

⁸⁴ e., *Chaos...*, 'NG' 17 IX 1917, 459, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Juliusz [F. Perl], *Kiereński i Kornilow*, 'JR' 23 IX 1917, 39, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁶ S., *Zamordowanie Kiereńskiego?*, 'NG' 12 IX 1917, 450, p. 1.

⁸⁷ r., *Republika Rosyjska*, 'NG' 19 IX 1917, 463, p. 1.

⁸⁸ a., *W Rosji*, 'NG' 27 IX 1918, 478, p. 1; Z *Rosji*, 'Wyzwolenie' 30 IX 1917, 38–39, pp. 385–386. From time to time leaflets contained statements of noticeable but 'distant rumble of the revolution', which will 'dethrone tyrants and despots', can hardly be considered as clear in their message. Cf.: 'Ojczyzna i Postęp. Z Dokumentów Chwili' 31 X 1917, 70, p. 59.

⁸⁹ T. Hołówko, "Wojna wojnie", 'NG' 6 X 1917, 495, p. 1. See also: *Nowe dni*, 'Robotnik' October 1917, 284, p. 1.

other Polish and Western European political environments⁹⁰ – stated that the February Revolution was a decisive point of the colossal transformation underway on the vast areas of the former empire of the Romanovs.

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STRESZCZENIE

Jednym z kluczowych wydarzeń z punktu widzenia sprawy polskiej w czasie I wojny światowej była rewolucja lutowa. Znalazło to w 1917 r. odzwierciedlenie między innymi w propagandzie lewicowych partii niepodległościowych z Królestwa Polskiego (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Partia Niezawisłości Narodowej i inne), dla których głównym autorytetem pozostawał Józef Piłsudski.

Politycy wspomnianych partii twierdzili, że upadek caratu w Rosji był uwarunkowany różnymi czynnikami. Wskazywano tu na takie przede wszystkim kwestie jak: słabość władzy carskiej i klęski wojenne Rosji; braki żywnościowe w miastach; działalność zarówno opozycji liberalnej, jak też ruchu rewolucyjnego w Rosji; a także, zewnętrzna (brytyjska) inspiracja przewrotu.

W propagandzie partii lewicy niepodległościowej poddawano zdecydowanej krytyce rosyjskich liberałów, którzy objęli władzę po przewrocie. Paweł Milukow, Aleksander Guczkow i inni politycy z tego kręgu byli oskarżani o imperialistyczne tendencje. Nadzieje działaczy polskiej niepodległościowej lewicy wiązały się z aktywnością rosyjskich demokratycznych socjalistów, zwłaszcza zaś Aleksandra Kiereńskiego. Powszechne było też przekonanie, że rewolucyjne przeobrażenia zakończą się w Rosji dopiero w momencie zawarcia pokoju.

Latem i jesienią 1917 r. polscy socjaliści i inni lewicowi sympatycy Piłsudskiego z Królestwa Polskiego byli przekonani, że Rosja znajduje się u progu kolejnego przewrotu, a dni rządu Kiereńskiego są już policzone.

Słowa kluczowe: rewolucja lutowa, 1917, Rosja, Królestwo Polskie, propaganda, lewica niepodległościowa

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