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A short history of Polish anarchism

Mike Kusnierz

2001

The movement developed at the end of the XIX century under the influence of anarchist ideas coming from Western Europe and Russia. However, these ideas were not uniform.

We can distinguish the ideas of the controversial Niechayev, valiant Bakunin, anarcho-communist Kropotkin, or pacifist Lev Tolstoy.

The first and the most significant anarchist group in Poland during the Russian rule, was organised in 1903 in Bialystok.

This group mainly consisted of people of Jewish nationality. In the next years such groups appeared in other cities: Warsaw, Lodz, Kielce, Siedlce and other. The Russian revolution of 1905 and the “bloody sunday” in Petersburg strengthened the activity of all groups.

Besides active propaganda, they began to make acts of terror, such as: assassinating police officers or owners of large factories, robbing banks, etc...

Today, most of polish anarchists reject such acts of terror. But one should realise the extent of the cruelty and despotism of the Tsar’s power at the beginning of this century. Young

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Retrieved on 2nd August 2020 from
http://struggle.ws/eastern/hist_poland.html

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anarchists were often executed without a trial. The police very often fired to the demonstrating workers.

Meanwhile, anarchists in Poland began to be influenced by materials propagating anarcho-syndicalism. The followers of this idea rejected terrorism because it was anti-social and because it disrupted the anarchist movement. Instead, they organised revolutionary trade-unions and propaganda activity.

The most significant Polish theorists of Anarchism and Anarcho- Syndicalism were: Edward Abramowski, Waclaw Machajski, professor Zielinski and Augustyn Wroblewski.

E. Abramowski (1868–1918) called himself a “state-rejecting socialist”, but we should keep in mind that in those days “socialism” meant something else than to day. Abramowski wrote such works as: “Ethics and the Revolution”, “The Republic of Friends”, and “The General Conspiracy against the State”.

His alternative for the state were voluntary unions, organised on the principle of interest and mutual services, and associated in cooperatives. These unions would be the main basis of individual freedom, providing welfare, justice, fraternity and order. They would rise from below, spontaneously, without any compulsion. Such unions, associated in cooperatives, should constitute a community without any power and police. The lack of these institutions doesn't mean that chaos will enter into human life. On the contrary, it would emancipate energy and creativity that are now limited by the system.

The example expanding social consciousness during the first “Solidarity” period, following the introduction of the martial law of 13 December 1981 shows how huge are the potential abilities of people who feel that they can change life and reality.

But let's get back to Abramowski. Being strongly influenced by Lev Tolstoy, he also called to refuse to pay taxes and to do the military service. Although he was opposed to the catholic church, he often referred to christ's teachings which were, according to him, against the state and power.

Abramowski also condemned the “state socialism”. He thought that it that the “policy of modern socialism is not the policy of freedom”. Socialism is a strengthening of the state’s power, whose aim is contrary to individual freedom, and tends to secularise every sphere of human life.”

Another significant Polish anarchist was Waclaw Machajski, born in 1876. He began as an active member of the Polish Socialist Party, but later on he turned his back on the inteligentsia. He came to think that all the evil in the world came from the ideologies created by the inteligentsia. He argued that the working class could only be freed by the destruction of the state.

In the years 1920–1939, anarcho-syndicalist ideas influenced a lot the activity of the Union of Trade-Unions (Z.Z.Z.) which wanted to join the IWA. During the II World War, members of the Union created ZSP, the Union of Polish Syndicalists, which took active part in fighting the fascist occupants. It published secretly a newspaper called “The Syndicalist”.

After the war, the anarchist ideas came back to life during the 80’s, when the Movement of Alternative Society was founded. Soon after that, in many cities of Poland, small groups of anarchists appeared. All of them took part in the resistance against the communist regime.

As weapons, besides stones and Molotov cocktails, they used sense of humor, irony, and laughter, making happenings and strret performances. The most known of this kind of groups were: Pomaranczowa Alternatywa (The Orange Alternative), Klub Sigma, Miedzymiastowka Anarchistyczna... Many of those groups are still active within the Anarchist Federation.

The anarchosyndicalist section of the Anarchist Federation has published in the 80’s a newspaper called “Kombinat” (The Factory), and today our Anarchist Workers’ Initiative (Anarchistyczna Inicjatywa Robotnicza – AIR) is publishing a newspaper called “Direct Action” which is distributed to worker s in many cities.

“Solidarity”, which at the beginning, in 1981, had a syndicalist program has recently become just another political party with no interest in the workers’ freedom.