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Polish political elites on events in Russia in the first months after the November 1917 Bolshevik coup d'état

Zarys treści: W artykule podjęto próbę omówienia pierwszych polskich reakcji na przewrót bolszewicki. Na przełomie 1917 i 1918 r. wspólne zdecydowanej większości komentatorów było przekonanie o nietrwałości rządów bolszewickich. Zgadzano się też zazwyczaj, że Lenin i jego partia to siła destrukcyjna, kontynuująca rozpoczęte wraz z wybuchem rewolucji lutowej dzieło zniszczenia imperium carskiego. Motywowana ideologicznie krytyka bolszewizmu choć niewątpliwie dominowała nie była na gruncie polskim powszechna. Część komentatorów, głównie lewicowych, akcentowała znaczenie antywojennych haseł bolszewików i – jak wierzono – ich pozytywny stosunek do kwestii samostanowienia narodów.

Outline of contents: The article attempts to discuss initial Polish reactions to the Bolshevik coup d'état. In late 1917 to early 1918, the majority of commentators were all convinced that Bolshevik rule would be short-lived. It was also generally agreed that Lenin and his party were a destructive force that was continuing the work of destroying the tsarist empire that had begun with the outbreak of the February Revolution. Though undoubtedly dominant, ideologically motivated criticism of Bolshevism was not universal in Poland. Some commentators – mainly leftists – stressed the importance of the Bolshevik anti-war slogans and what was believed to be their positive attitude towards the issue of the self-determination of nations.

Słowa kluczowe: przewrót bolszewicki, Rosja, listopad 1917 r., polskie elity polityczne

Keywords: Bolshevik coup d'état, Russia, November 1917, Polish political elites

From the very outset, the revolutionary events of 1917 in Russia aroused great interest among the Polish political elite. It goes without saying how important historical conditions were in this case. The overthrow of the tsardom and resultant turbulent transformations in the boundless territories of the Russian state must naturally have seemed extremely important in terms of the Poles' efforts to regain independence.¹

¹ In the early spring of 1917, leading Polish politicians, with Roman Dmowski and Józef Piłsudski at the fore, were of the opinion that the fall of the tsarist regime was a fundamental breakthrough

It is therefore understandable that the fall of Alexander Kerensky's government in November 1917 was not only immediately recorded but also contributed to the formulation of more general comments.²

The Bolsheviks' takeover of power in Russia was an event whose historical significance is difficult to overestimate. It not only impacted the fate of the Russian state in the 20th century, but also significantly determined the main directions of world politics throughout this period. At the same time, there is no doubt that the long-term consequences of the revolution in Russia were initially difficult to imagine even for the most insightful of observers, and of course not only for the Poles. After all, it would not so much have required extraordinary political intuition as clairvoyance to predict that this newly proclaimed communist government would for decades shape the political reality of a country that had until recently been ruled by Tsar Nicholas II and where the Marxist-leaning labour movement had not had wide support except in the largest cities, and where the majority of the population was of peasants. At the end of 1917, it was seen as natural to assume that the Bolshevik coup was the next significant – but short-term – episode in the revolutionary events that had started with the fall of the tsardom. With the takeover of power by Vladimir Lenin and his party not being accompanied by mass popular participation (despite later propaganda portrayals), it is understandable that even for attentive foreign observers, the landmark significance of this new turning point in the course of the Russian revolution would only become clear with the passage of time.

This article attempts to characterise the first comments made by Poles on the Bolshevik coup d'état and formulated as events unfolded. The author takes the moment of Russia's signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the central states on 3 March 1918 as the end of the study period. Although it did not bring a fundamental change in the view of Russian affairs, this event undoubtedly introduced new themes into the discussion of the subject within the Polish political elite. The time period under consideration therefore covers less than four months at the turn of 1918.

Although the proposed subject of course constitutes only a small fragment of the wider question of Polish opinions about Bolshevism and post-revolutionary Russia,³ it seems to be important and interesting, and has for many years not been a subject of particular attention for researchers.⁴ It should be noted, of course,

in the ongoing world war. Cf.: K. Kawalec, *Roman Dmowski 1864–1939*, Wrocław–Warszawa, 2002, pp. 164–166; A. Nowak, *Polska i trzy Rosje. Studium polityki wschodniej Józefa Piłsudskiego (do kwietnia 1920 roku)*, Kraków, 2001, pp. 31–32.

² All dates in this article are given according to the Gregorian calendar.

³ Of the older publications, an article discussing the first comments on the Bolshevik Governments published in Warsaw's main daily newspapers are noteworthy. Cf.: A. Paczkowski, "Dzienniki warszawskie o rewolucji październikowej w Rosji (listopad – grudzień 1917)", *Rocznik Historii Czasopiśmiennictwa Polskiego*, 2 (1967), pp. 138–159.

⁴ For the years 1918–1939, see: M. Kornat, *Bolszewizm, totalitaryzm, rewolucja, Rosja. Początki sowietologii i studiów nad systemami totalitarnymi w Polsce (1918–1939)*, vols. 1–2, Kraków, 2004;

that the historian Jan Tokarski wrote interestingly about these matters relatively recently. However, with regards to the first months of Lenin's rule, the author in principle only took into consideration the interpretations of Ignacy Daszyński, Roman Knoll and Józef Wielowieyski. Tokarski also referred briefly to discussions held at the end of February 1918 at the forum of the Polish National Committee in Paris, but leaving the opinions of other authors from different political circles beyond his sphere of interest.⁵ It would appear therefore that there is a gap to be filled here.

Taking into consideration the present article's topic it needs to be stated that, at the time, Poles learned about the situation in Russia from three main sources. These were information published in foreign press, agency dispatches and, of course, eyewitness accounts. The wartime conditions gave the neutral Scandinavian national capitals Copenhagen and Stockholm a particularly important role as centres for relaying news from Russia.⁶ Russian press was available to only a limited extent in Poland. However, German, Austrian, Swiss and Dutch newspapers were often consulted. In this last case, it allowed the Poles to discover, at least indirectly, what the elites of Entente countries were thinking about contemporary Russian events. Not forgetting the limitations imposed by wartime censorship, it should also be added that the information that arrived along various routes to Poland from the east was often contradictory. This of course did not facilitate the task of commentators.

The political sympathies of authors and their general knowledge of Russia, including the specifics of socialism in Russia, of course also had a fundamental influence on the formation of the opinions that Poles expressed about the Bolshevik coup d'état. For understandable reasons, the geographic and psychological distance that individual representatives of the Polish political class had from the events being described was extremely important.⁷

G. Zackiewicz, *Polska myśl polityczna wobec systemu radzieckiego 1918–1939*, Kraków, 2004.

⁵ J. Tokarski, *Historie przyszłości. Wizje bolszewizmu w Rosji 1917–1921*, Warszawa, 2012, pp. 93–96, 106–113, 118–123.

⁶ The press and agencies of the neutral states had not only easier access to Russia, but also better opportunities to transfer information from there to the West, to areas controlled by each of the coalitions fighting in the First World War.

⁷ It does not need to be explained in greater depth that, irrespective of the significant differences resulting from the ideological attitude of various circles, people who had been subject to tsarist rule before 1917 had a different perspective on Russian affairs than did Poles from the lands controlled by Austro-Hungary and Germany. At the same time it should be stated that, in Warsaw, Kraków and Poznań alike, in most cases the same sources of information on the Bolshevik revolution were used. At the turn of 1918, authors from the Kingdom of Poland, Galicia and Greater Poland considered Russia to be a force that at the time had no direct influence on political processes going on in ethnically Polish areas. On the other hand, the perspective of people living in the borderlands of the former First Republic of Poland after the Bolshevik revolution

It must be stated that the fall of the government headed by Kerensky was widely anticipated among attentive Polish observers. It has long been suggested that another turning point was approaching in Russia, and would most likely take the form of a military coup or an attempt to establish a hard left rule. After the spectacular conflict between Kerensky and General Lavr Kornilov in particular, the Bolsheviks began to be seen as a political force in rapid ascendancy during a genuine break-up of the former tsarist state.⁸

“A new revolution in St. Petersburg has long been foretold,” said one moderate right-wing author just after the Bolshevik coup d’état. As the anonymous journalist of the *Kurier Polski* stated, this was precisely how the political project that assumed that democratic reforms could go on in Russia while the country continued to be involved in a war ultimately failed. Kerensky, who the Polish commentator believed was trying to rule “based on a socialist–bourgeois bloc” and to “reconcile capitalists with socialists [and] English imperialism with the Russian revolution”, ultimately turned out to be politically bankrupt and void of public support.⁹ A similar conviction was expressed in a piece on 10 November 1917 by the leading journalist of *Kurier Warszawski*, that with Kerensky’s fall, the policy “that relied on cooperation between all citizens, all classes, and all stakeholders agreeing with the revolution” also became a fiasco. Bolesław Koskowski emphasised that although the Russian prime minister “endured patriotically to the end” and tried with great determination to save the country from anarchy and also to “maintain its external dignity”, he was in fact doomed to failure. The editor of the opinion-making journal sympathetic to National Democracy explained that this atmosphere of fomenting revolutionary zeal, in which the “dark and dissatisfied masses” felt their strength, provided further confirmation that “Russia has not yet matured into relations that would ensure the dominance of moderate elements”.¹⁰ A lack of surprise at Kerensky being overthrown was also expressed by other Polish commentators.¹¹ Importantly, these included both those who saw the Russian Prime Minister as a doctrinaire and an idealist removed from reality, and the members of circles that did not hide certain hopes for the famous lawyer and his political camp. For example, in the first commentary after the Bolshevik revolution in the conservative *Czas*, one could read that “the catastrophe that

was fundamentally different, and all the more so that of the Polish elites who were then at the epicentre of revolutionary events in Petrograd and Moscow.

⁸ anon., “W Rosji”, *Nowa Gazeta*, 27 September 1917, no. 478, p. 1; B.K. [B. Koskowski], “Na końcu drogi...”, *Kurier Warszawski*, 12 October 1917, no. 282, pp. 1–2; M. Harusewicz, *Za carskich czasów i po wyzwoleniu. Jan Harusewicz, wspomnienia, dokumenty*, Londyn, 1975, pp. 243–244, 249.

⁹ “Nowa rewolucja”, *Kurier Polski*, 10 November 1917, no. 308, p. 3.

¹⁰ B.K. [B. Koskowski], “Na jak długo?”, *Kurier Warszawski*, 10 November 1917, no. 311, p. 1.

¹¹ *Pamiętnik księżnej Marii Dzdzisławowej Lubomirskiej: 1914–1918*, prepared for press by J. Pajewski, Poznań, 1997, pp. 554; “Nowa rewolucja”, *Głos*, 11 November 1917, no. 293, p. 1; “Przegląd polityczny”, *Piast*, 18 November 1917, no. 46, pp. 11–12.

befell Kerensky had been hanging in the air since the Kornilov affair and since the moment that the majority in the council of workers and soldiers passed into the hands of the maximalists".¹² On the other hand, a representative of the leftist independence party who did not hide his sympathy for the deposed prime minister judged that "Kerensky could only owe it to his own genius that he had stayed so long at the helm of the disorganised and unravelling state that was to become the revolutionary."¹³

There is no doubt that the vast majority of Polish commentators read the Bolshevik coup as just another, and by no means the last, episode in the course of the Russian revolution in the sense of a historical process that began with the events of early 1917. The February Revolution naturally appeared then to be the highlight of gigantic transformations taking place in the vast areas of the former Romanov empire. Against the background of the other political milieus, the representatives of the extreme left stand out clearly, declaring from the outset that they treated the "electrifying news" from Russia as a turning point in the fight against capitalism and "the announcement of a dawning of freedom across the world".¹⁴ At the end of 1917, however, they did not have broader popular support in Poland.¹⁵

It is also hardly surprising that in trying to read the meaning of the Russian transformations many Polish commentators looked for historical analogies. These were especially found in the French Revolution of the late 18th century. Besides the obvious differences that authors identified between Nicholas II's Russia and the former monarchy of Louis XVI, the conviction was that the dynamics of the revolutions in both these large states had certain similarities. This was the opinion of a journalist of the pro-independence left, who a few days after Kerensky's fall stated: "This is the third fundamental revolution; after the liberal revolution in the persons of Milyukov–Bailly, after the Kerensky–Robespierre radical revolution, today a strictly socialist Lenin–Babeuf revolution takes power."¹⁶ Another example of an analysis following a similar convention is an article published in Andrzej Niemojewski's *Mysł Niepodległa*. On November 20, 1917, the author wrote: "The Russian revolution is developing classically. After the Jacobin–Mensheviks

¹² "Triumf anarchii", *Czas*, 9 November 1917, no. 518, p. 1.

¹³ T. Świącicki, "Trzeci akt", *Nowa Gazeta*, 10 November 1917, no. 558, p. 1.

¹⁴ Odezwa Zarządu Głównego SDKPiL (listopad 1917), in: *Materiały archiwalne do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich*, vol. 1: March 1917 – November 1918, compiled by A. Zatorski et al., Warszawa, 1957, pp. 458–460; Rezolucja konferencji partyjnej PPS–Lewicy (grudzień 1917), in: *Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878–1918*, compiled by F. Tych, Warszawa, 1975, pp. 550–551. Cf.: "Wulkan rewolucyjny", *Głos Robotniczy*, 14 November 1917, no. 85, p. 1; *Rewolucja i wojna* [Warszawa, 1917].

¹⁵ However, it must not be forgotten that Polish supporters of Bolshevism then carried out large-scale agitation among Poles in Russia. See: A.J. Leinwand, "Działalność agitacyjna i propagandowa komunistów polskich w RSFRR w latach 1918–1920", *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, 40 (2005), pp. 25–30.

¹⁶ C.P. [Cz. Poznański], "Po przewrocie w Rosji", *Nowa Gazeta*, 13 November 1917, no. 563, p. 1.

came the Girondin–cadets, [and] after them the Bolshevik–Sans-culottes.”¹⁷ It is very telling that the conviction that the late-18th-century equivalents of Lenin’s party were to be found in groups to the left of the Jacobins was held by both cited journalists, even though they represent different political circles. The view being expressed here – that in Russia “there is today no one to the left of the government” – was also shared by many other commentators. For example, it was stated in the liberal *Nowa Reforma* of 11 November 1917 that the “short manifesto” issued by Lenin and his party was “like an extract” dissected from “all the most extreme doctrines”, and at the helm in Petrograd “there stood people considered to be supporters of ‘anarchy and communism’”.¹⁸ It is significant that even when the Russian events gave rise to comparisons other than late-18th-century France, the authors’ associations raised no doubts. A conservative Kraków daily wrote, among other things, that “the situation in St. Petersburg” after the Leninist coup d’état was clearly reminiscent of “the situation in Paris under the rule of the commune in 1871”.¹⁹ In many commentaries, including those formulated for private use only, the view was that “the new maximalist revolution” in Russia “seems to foretell an ultimate anarchy”.²⁰ In the immediate estimation of the Eastern Borderland landowner and later famed diplomat Michał Kossakowski, “The March prologue could not have been bloodless in defiance of the law of history and the psychology of the dark masses.”²¹

In late autumn of 1917, the prevailing conviction among the Polish political elite was that the increased popularity of the Bolsheviks that had enabled them to take control of Petrograd was primarily due to the anti-war slogans being proclaimed by Lenin and his party. In an anarchic Russia exhausted by war and experiencing economic collapse, the prospect of making peace would have seemed all the more attractive for the fact that faith in victory had long since been lacking.²² As an anonymous representative of the Polish People’s Party of the Kingdom of Poland stated at the end of November 1917, “The desire for peace among the army and population is so common that, despite being otherwise reluctant, they favour the ‘Bolsheviks’ over Kerensky and his supporters.”²³ At the same time, Konstanty Srokowski, the liberal-democratic activist from Galicia wrote: “The only one, in the present moment of Russian life, who can have some chance of taking power, who can awaken trust, is he who wants to and can restore peace, immediate

¹⁷ “Sankiloci bolszewicy”, *Mysł Niepodległa*, 20 November 1917, no. 398, pp. 763.

¹⁸ “Nowy przewrót w Rosji”, *Nowa Reforma*, 11 November 1917, no. 522, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Triumf anarchii...*, p. 1.

²⁰ S. Dzierzbicki, *Pamiętnik z lat wojny 1915–1918*, Warszawa 1983, pp. 264; S. Karpiński, *Pamiętnik dziesięciolecia 1915–1924*, Warszawa, 1931, p. 157.

²¹ M. Kossakowski, *Diariusz*, vol. 2: *29 kwietnia – 31 grudnia 1917*, ed. D. Tarasiuk et al., Lublin, 2016, p. 272.

²² B.K. [B. Koskowski], “Dyktatura proletariatu”, *Kurier Warszawski*, 23 November 1917, no. 324, p. 1; “Pokój się zbliża – co nam czynić?”, *Zorza*, 15 December 1917, no. 50, p. 700.

²³ “Z Rosji”, *Wyzwolenie*, 25 November 1917, no. 47, pp. 451.

peace, unreserved peace.” He believed that although most Russians did not take the Bolshevik “extreme Blanquist doctrine” seriously, nor even their proclaimed “plan to socialise the land”, and even less the “slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat”, it was nonetheless the case that “by the extremeness of his theories” and “resistance in action” Lenin effectively gave the impression that he was striving to end the war, which elevated him to the very crest of the revolutionary wave.²⁴ There were many more similar-sounding opinions at that time.²⁵

Questions about the deeper meaning of the Bolshevik anti-war slogans provoked divergent responses, revealing important differences of opinion between Polish commentators. Many leading representatives of the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socialistyczna, PPS) and the Polish Social Democratic Party of Galicia and Cieszyn Silesia (Polska Partia Socjalistyczno-Demokratyczna Galicji i Śląska, PPSD) were inclined at the turn of 1918 to declare faith in the honest intentions of Lenin and his colleagues. “The Bolshevik government,” the editors of a major PPS publication wrote in early December 1917, “did everything they could to promote the acceleration of peace.”²⁶ Even just before Russia signed the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk, a leading politician in the party wrote that “workers, peasants and Russian soldiers will not stop at vain promises”, undertaking extensive action for “universal and democratic peace”.²⁷ In the pro-independence socialist camp, such opinions were usually accompanied by the conviction that Bolshevik pronouncements should be taken in good faith – that they wanted to act in accordance with the principle of self-determination of nations. In December 1917, the editors of *Robotnik* characterised the goals of the Bolshevik foreign policy by writing, among other things: “The Russian Revolution desires a truly democratic, popular peace, based on the right of every nation to independently determine its own destiny”.²⁸

Unlike the socialists, representatives of various centrist and right-wing Polish communities usually doubted the sincerity of the anti-war slogans of Lenin’s party. Bolshevik propaganda in favour of ending the war was most often treated as a cynical ploy by political frauds, calculated solely to garner popular support. They believed that the pacifistic slogans served purely to enable the communists to take power and, subsequently to implement far-reaching plans.²⁹ Sometimes, such comments were accompanied by the observation that the Bolsheviks were

²⁴ K.S. [K. Srokowski], “Siła Lenina”, *Nowa Reforma*, 27 November 1917, no. 548, p. 1.

²⁵ “Przegląd polityczny”, *Jedność Robotnicza*, 25 November 1917, no. 48, p. 5; “O pokój”, *Czas*, 22 December 1917, no. 590, p. 1; M. Kurman, *Z wojny 1914–1921. Przeżycia, wrażenia i refleksje mieszkańca Warszawy*, Warszawa 1923, p. 288.

²⁶ “Przegląd polityczny”, *Jedność Robotnicza*, 1 December 1917, no. 49, p. 3.

²⁷ Ignis [M. Baumgart], “Czerwone widmo”, *Jedność Robotnicza*, 17 February 1918, no. 7(6), p. 4. See also: J. Kwapiński, *Moje wspomnienia 1904–1939*, Paris, 1965, p. 115.

²⁸ “Proletariat i pokój”, *Robotnik*, December 1917, no. 286, p. 2.

²⁹ “Lenin”, *Czas*, 10 November 1917, no. 520, p. 1; “Bolszewicka wolnościowa obłuda”, *Ziemia Lubelska*, 3 February 1918, no. 56, p. 1; S.A. Kempner, “Co to jest bolszewicyzm?”, *Świat*, 16 February 1918, no. 7, pp. 1–2.

very socio-technically adept, conducting remarkably cohesive and ingenious propaganda, while also displaying good knowledge of the mentality of Russian society.³⁰

The diversity of opinion on the Bolshevik stance on peace and the self-determination of nations translated into differences of opinion of what the Leninist attitude towards Polish independence was. One might dare to posit that while representatives of most Polish political schools paid little attention to the new Russian authorities' declarations on this matter, the socialists' pronouncements on the Polish issue significantly influenced the overall assessment of the November 1917 Russian revolution.

The leaders of the PPS and the PPSD suggested that the Bolshevik positions on the Polish question created an opportunity for a just division of the disputed territories in the east of pre-partition Poland, and in the more distant future opened up the prospect of the different peoples inhabiting these areas coexisting. One especially eloquent expression of this thinking was a two-part article that appeared in the pages of the Kraków *Naprzód* in mid-November of 1917. The author of the text, who was probably Emil Haecker, declared on behalf of the Galician socialists that in the dispute between Lenin and Kerensky they were "wholeheartedly" on the side of the Bolshevik leader. "Lenin," the PPSD publicist wrote, "is the man who is today, in impressive manner, saving the honour of the socialist banner in the world, reviving the faith of the masses in the socialist ideal of the international fraternity of all peoples – a faith undermined during this terrible war by socialists such as Guesde and Thomas, Vandervelde and Branting, Kerensky and Plekhanov." Interestingly, Lenin, who according to the author had "formerly" been an "all-Russian centrist", had his views on the national issue changed by, among others, his stay in Kraków and Zakopane in the years 1912–1914.³¹ It is worth adding that the personal records of the senior statesman of the pro-independence left Bolesław Limanowski described this "editorial on Lenin" as "good and strong".³² A day later, in the PPSD daily, it was held that the communist leader "wants independence for Poland without any 'conditions' on the part of Russia". Against this background, Kerensky was presented as a two-faced politician who had never "clearly and bluntly" said "what he intends for Poland."³³

One may of course wonder to what extent the pronouncements of the PPS and PPSD leaders were expressing a genuine belief in the purity of Bolshevik intentions in this regard. It is possible that, convinced that Leninist rule was transitional, at least some of the leading Polish socialists assumed that it was of no importance whether the declarations of the Russian communists were sincere. Certainly it was thought that they were worth popularising for their value to the struggle to

³⁰ G. Doborzyński, "Chleba i igrzysk", *Wiadomości Polskie*, 14 December 1917, no. 157, pp. 4–6; S. Grabski, *Pamiętniki*, vol. 2, in press. W. Stankiewicz, Warszawa, 1989, pp. 31–33.

³¹ (h) [E. Haecker?], "Lenin (I)", *Naprzód*, 14 November 1917, no. 262, p. 1.

³² B. Limanowski, *Pamiętniki (1907–1919)*, compiled by J. Durko, Warszawa, 1961, p. 520.

³³ (h) [E. Haecker?], "Lenin (II)", *Naprzód*, 15 November 1917, no. 263, p. 3.

implement Polish independence goals in the final stages of the Great War.³⁴ In this context, it is therefore not surprising that, commenting in early 1918 on the peace negotiations that had been underway “for several weeks” between Russia and the central states, the members of the Central Workers Committee of the PPS did not fail to point out that “representatives of revolutionary Russia demanded, in full agreement with all Polish workers, that the occupiers leave our country, and let us decide our destiny ourselves”.³⁵

It should be remembered that in the view of the leading PPS activists, let alone those of the PPSD, Lenin and his closest collaborators were not anonymous politicians. At the same time, past experience in mutual relations did not encourage enthusiastic judgments on Bolshevism. By the second half of July 1917, in the pages of *Jedność Robotnicza* there was already in-depth discussion – admittedly annotated by the editorial office to the effect that “the author alone is responsible” for the opinions presented – arguing that Lenin could not be considered to be continuing the idea of Karl Marx and that the party he led was “no longer a social democracy”.³⁶ In the context of such statements, the comments by many leading Polish socialists on Bolshevism in late 1917 and early 1918 were undoubtedly something new. At the same time, it does not seem that the leadership of the PPS or the PPSD contained many who believed that the communist governments could turn out to be anything more than a short phase in the Russian revolution. For example, Kazimierz Czapiński, a politician who personally knew Lenin from pre-war times, indicated that the frequently voiced belief in the “economic backwardness of Russia as an agrarian state” could not have lost its validity with the advent of the Bolshevik coup d'état. The assumption that “the industrial proletariat of St. Petersburg (and Moscow) will probably not be able to stay in power for long” appeared correct to the leading publicist of *Naprzód*. The PPSD activist clearly suggested that, regardless of the expected “counter-revolutionary actions”, the Leninist government would – in the sense that it was part of the wider process of emancipation of the masses in the former tsarist state – leave a lasting positive mark on the history of Russia and all of Europe. According to this view, Bolshevism being in power was a continuation of transformations that were allowing “tens of millions of Russian people” to be included in “cultural life.” Above all, it signified a final deadly blow to “tsarist despotism” which could “no longer be reborn in its old form”.³⁷ A similar point of view to that outlined in the article

³⁴ J. Holzer, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna w latach 1917–1919*, Warszawa, 1962, pp. 85–87.

³⁵ Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (hereafter referred to as: AAN), Polska Partia Socjalistyczna-Frakcja Rewolucyjna, sygn. 15/III/3, p. 97, Odezwa CKR PPS, January 1918. See also: “Mowa posła Daszyńskiego w delegacjach”, *Naprzód*, 29 January 1918, no. 24, p. 3.

³⁶ S.M. [J. Moczulski?], “Wodzowie rewolucji rosyjskiej. I. Lenin”, *Jedność Robotnicza*, 22 July 1917, no. 30, pp. 2–3.

³⁷ (cz) [K. Czapiński], “Rewolucja rosyjska a polska ‘demokracja’”, *Naprzód*, 23 November 1917, no. 270, p. 1.

by Czapiński was also expressed by Mieczysław Niedziałkowski at that time. The young PPS ideologue not only argued against the opinions being spread widely in Poland that the Bolshevik movement was associated with the excesses of “outraged riffraff”, but also defended the Bolsheviks’ right to call themselves Marxists. According to Niedziałkowski, some actions by the Lenin government, at least “on the issue of agriculture”, were attributable to the specific demands of Russian social and economic realities. “In a word,” the PPS activist wrote, “the people who carried out the last revolution in Russia, belonging to the extreme socialist left, [...] are in no way a ring of madmen with dark imaginations, thirsting for human blood and ready to hang the ‘bourgeoisie’ for any reason.”³⁸ At the same time, Mieczysław Baumgart also expressed the opinion that although the Bolsheviks might be described as “extreme” and “intransigent”, they undoubtedly belonged to the circle of “revolutionary socialism”.³⁹

Thus, it is easily noticeable that in late 1917 to early 1918, pro-independence socialists were inclined to recognise that the PPS and the PPSD had some ideological kinship with the Bolshevik party, being doubtless perceived as extremely radical, but nonetheless part of the international socialist movement in its broad sense. They also believed that Lenin and his companions were being forced to act under particular conditions that were unheard of west of Russia. Such convictions meant that criticism of Bolshevism was subdued in the Polish socialist movement during the period in question. This does not mean that the comments avoided information coming in on, for example, how the communists were repressing political opponents, including those of the left. Readers of the socialist press were informed that “the Lenin–Trotsky government is executing its policies with total ruthlessness” and that it was not to be expected that the public expressing its will in Constituent Assembly elections would “stop the Bolsheviks from continuing their current tactics”.⁴⁰ It was also feared that “the need to negotiate with the military and bureaucratic German government” might adversely affect the Bolsheviks’ allegedly “consistently revolutionary” position on ending the war.⁴¹ All this, however, did not change the existing interpretation scheme, which employed special pleading for the Russian revolutionaries. A classic example of this way of thinking can be found in an article by Niedziałkowski summing up the year 1917 that was published in *Jedność Robotnicza*. The author argued that the Bolsheviks’ undoubted mistakes were “errors of tragic necessity”, and the violence used by

³⁸ M. Niedziałkowski, “Idee bolszewickie”, *Nowa Gazeta*, 9 December 1917, no. 610, p. 1.

³⁹ Ignis [M. Baumgart], “Co nam da pokój?”, *Jedność Robotnicza*, 30 December 1917, no. 53, p. 4.

⁴⁰ “Bolszewicy u władzy”, *Naprzód*, 20 December 1917, no. 292, p. 2.

⁴¹ “Zagraniczna polityka rosyjskiego rządu”, *Naprzód*, 29 December 1917, no. 298, p. 1. Critically, although accentuating anti-German issues rather than levelling charges against the Bolsheviks, the socialists adopted the provisions of the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk with Ukraine. Cf.: “Pochód reakcji”, *Robotnik*, March 1918, no. 287, pp. 1–2.

the Russia's communists was principally a consequence of the "cursed history of the tsarist state".⁴²

The argument used by Niedziałkowski, however, was certainly not accepted without criticism by the leaders of Polish socialism at the beginning of 1918. This is clearly evidenced in a statement by Jędrzej Moraczewski at the meeting of representatives of the left-wing pro-independence party in early February that year in Kraków. The PPSD politician claimed that the efforts by the Bolsheviks "in the field of administration and provisioning" had been a complete fiasco. In assessing that the Leninists "cannot satisfy the peasants" and "are aggravating religious feelings", Moraczewski suggested that "they are at the end of their rule".⁴³ The future prime minister's pronouncements, which were delivered at a closed session and in a small group, are undoubtedly of great importance. At the same time, it should be noted that Tomasz Arciszewski expressed to the same audience that the opinion that "in Russia, which did not believe in revolution, today there are deep social reforms".⁴⁴

At the turn of 1918, voices speaking of the lasting and positive effects of Leninist rule were also to be heard from other circles belonging to the broader pro-independence left. As one author in this circle put it, "the Bolshevik revolution is not the end of the world, but it is a necessary historical process" – one that by the end of the war would have entirely changed the face of Russia, and with it the whole of Europe, from what it had been before the Russian Revolution. "The agrarian reform, the laws of nationality, changes in inter-state relations will be – as far as can be seen – the most important fruits of the present upheaval."⁴⁵ From today's perspective, the statements of some authors are difficult to treat as anything other than the result of a deep misunderstanding of the very essence of the communist governments in Russia, although they were admittedly only in their embryonic phase at the time. By way of illustration, there is also an article by Gustaw Daniłowski published at the beginning of February 1918 in *Nowa Gazeta*. The columnist of the Warsaw daily argued that although the actions of the Bolsheviks included "numerous errors", Lenin's party ideology had "creative elements, fresh grains that the winds of history will carry across the soils of the world to bring forth the shoots of new life". In another passage of this article Daniłowski argued that in the actions of Russian communists it is difficult to discern the "bloodthirsty character of the French Revolution". "The Bolsheviks," the author wrote, "are waging war with their armed opponents, they are locking people up, but not cutting their heads off. [...] Instances of murder are the transgressions of marauders, the

⁴² M. Mirski [M. Niedziałkowski], "Rok 1917", *Jedność Robotnicza*, 6 January 1918, no. 1, p. 2. See also: H. Krahelska, *Wspomnienia rewolucjonistki*, Warszawa, 1934, pp. 258–259.

⁴³ "Narada krakowska z lutego 1918 r.", compiled by J. Holzer, *Przegląd Historyczny*, 3 (1958), p. 542.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 551.

⁴⁵ M. Zaleski, "Bolszewizm a państwo polskie", *Nowa Gazeta*, 15 January 1918, no. 27, p. 1.

reflexes of mindless mobs bred in the dark by the *ancien régime* in disrespect of the law, the acts of a desperate slave released from the stocks.”⁴⁶

On the basis of the above-mentioned opinions, one should not draw excessively far-reaching conclusions. Among the independence left, there was no shortage of critics of Bolshevism at the turn 1918. A sober assessment of Russian reality was included in a text by Michał Sokolnicki. Arguing robustly against Daniłowski’s theses, he warned against accepting propaganda messages from the east in good faith. Sokolnicki was of the opinion that even if indeed “thousands have not yet gone to the scaffold” in Russia, “mass murders” should be expected soon.⁴⁷ At that time, at least some authors from the left-wing pro-independence circle shared the point of view of the close collaborator of Piłsudski.⁴⁸ As Bogusław Miedziński later recalled, among Piłsudski’s people, a negative opinion of Bolshevism was gradually growing at the beginning of 1918, accompanied by a growing conviction that a future Poland would also be under threat if Lenin’s supporters remained in power in Russia.⁴⁹ The position of the leaders of the National Workers’ Union with regard to Russian communism at that time was also telling. At the beginning of February 1918, the organisation’s congress unequivocally condemned the Bolsheviks as “hypocritical ‘defenders of freedom and law’” and responsible for “hideous acts committed against the Polish population in Russia”.⁵⁰

Apart from the left wing, none in Poland had any reason to sympathise with Bolshevism. The radicalism of Russian communist slogans was sufficient to evoke unambiguously critical opinions. One additional factor was, of course, information on the practices of the Bolshevik governments or, more broadly, the situation in Russia where an apocalypse was thought to be underway, which was generally regarded as confirmation of earlier predictions. The point of view of many people is well reflected in a concise but impassioned entry in the journal of Jan Dąbrowski. Under the date 2 February 1918, this later-known historian noted: “The news that comes from Russia could perhaps drive even the most resilient to despair. The only consolation is that these governments of madmen will probably not last long.”⁵¹

As already mentioned, among what could loosely be termed the Polish centre-right, they did not believe, as the PPS and PPSD did, that Lenin and his associates were really inclined to have balanced relationships with the nations of Central

⁴⁶ G. Daniłowski, “W sprawie bolszewików”, *Nowa Gazeta*, 2 February 1918, no. 58, p. 1.

⁴⁷ M. Sokolnicki, “Jeszcze w sprawie bolszewików”, *Nowa Gazeta*, 4 February 1918, no. 61, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Piłsudski himself was in the fortress in Magdeburg at the time, where he was “completely cut off” from his surroundings, and although he had access to the *Magdeburgische Zeitung*, little information from Russia reached him. The future Marshal’s initial reactions to the Bolshevik revolution are not known. Cf.: W. Jędrzejewicz, *Józef Piłsudski 1867–1935. Życiorys*, Warszawa, 2002, pp. 51–52.

⁴⁹ B. Miedziński, “Moje wspomnienia (dokończenie)”, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 37 (1976), pp. 101–102, 117. See also: *Narada krakowska...*, pp. 545, 551.

⁵⁰ AAN, Narodowy Związek Robotniczy, 41/I-1, p. 52, Uchwały zjazdu NZR, February 1918.

⁵¹ J. Dąbrowski, *Dziennik 1914–1918*, compiled by J. Zdrada, Kraków, 1977, p. 109.

and Eastern Europe. Many representatives of this section of the Polish elite also expressed anxiety at the threat of communist ideas penetrating ethnically Polish lands. "Whatever changes," wrote an author from National Democracy at the beginning of 1918, "Russian bolshevism will remain alongside us for a long time, perhaps overthrown politically, but still prevailing in the minds, dispositions and ambitions of the Russian masses."⁵² It was pointed out that further outbreaks of the "plague" might appear in Poland with the return from the east of an impoverished and communist-indoctrinated Polish population, especially of former soldiers.⁵³ Many commentators were also visibly disturbed by the increased activity of "Polish Leninists".⁵⁴ Needless to say, it was well known that domestic extreme left-wing circles, both in Poland and among Poles deep inside Russia, perceived the Bolshevik revolution primarily as a prologue to world revolution.⁵⁵

Understandably, the earliest and particularly strong fears of Bolshevism were voiced by members of nationalist and conservative circles, and particularly those east of the front line.⁵⁶ The context here was the shocking and horrifying events in the borderlands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where many thought that not only was Polish property being destroyed, but also "a steamroller was being used to crush the entire political system and all cultural institutions".⁵⁷ One symptom was the petition "Poles from the Polish and Belarusian part of Lithuania" that was submitted to the Regency Council. Referring to their

⁵² B.K. [B. Koskowski], "Plany pp. Mandelbaumów", *Kurier Warszawski*, 17 January 1918, no. 17, p. 2.

⁵³ Pismo Rady Regencyjnej do wojsk J. Dowbor-Muśnickiego (13 II 1918), in: *Materiały archiwalne...*, p. 561; "Bolszewicy a polska siła zbrojna", *Kurier Poznański*, 5 January 1918, supplement to no. 4; I. Kosmowska, "Polacy w Rosji", *Mysł Polska*, 1918, vol. 1–2, pp. 19–22.

⁵⁴ "Polscy leninowcy", *Ziemia Lubelska*, 16 November 1917, no. 576, p. 1; Wł.St. [W. Studnicki], "Przeciwstawienie się rewolucji", *Naród a Państwo*, 9 February 1918, vol. 5, pp. 26–29; A.J. Leinwand, "Działalność agitacyjna i propagandowa komunistów polskich w RSFRR w latach 1918–1920", p. 30.

⁵⁵ Within the extreme Polish left there was a widespread view that only a global revolution could realise the vision of "a happy humanity of shared ownership and collaboration". In this context, it is hardly surprising that the negative attitude towards the idea of an independent Poland that typified these communities was strengthened by the conviction that a revived Republic would become a "counter-revolutionary dam", preventing a merger of the "Russian and German revolutions". For more on the position of representatives of the internationalist wing of the Polish left towards the events in Russia at the end of World War I, see: G. Zackiewicz, "Przyszła Polska i Europa w koncepcjach polskich socjalistów (od Aktu 5 listopada do zakończenia I wojny światowej)", in: *Akt 5 listopada 1916 roku i jego konsekwencje dla Polski i Europy*, ed. J. Kłaczek et al., Toruń, 2016, pp. 138–140.

⁵⁶ A. Garbiński, "Przestroga rosyjska", *Kurier Warszawski*, 30 December 1917, no. 359, p. 2; E. Romer, *Dziennik 1914–1918*, p. 630; E. Woyniłłowicz, *Wspomnienia 1847–1928. Cz. 1*, compiled by J. Iwaszkiewicz, Wilno, 1931, pp. 198–206.

⁵⁷ S. Zieliński, *Liga Narodowa na Rusi 1890–1920. Fragment historii pracy polskiej na kresach południowo-wschodnich*, ed. A. Wątor, Szczecin, 2016, p. 71. See further: P. Majewski, "Bolszewicy w oczach Polaków 1917–1920", *Przegląd Wschodni*, 4 (1999), pp. 659–664.

ancestors as “promoters of Western civilisation in the east of Europe”, the authors of the text stated, among other things: “We do not want to abandon our country to the Russian revolution, which reduces everything to anarchy, nor to the reaction that will inevitably follow and again direct the energy of Russian society to the destruction of non-Russian nationalities, and above all the Poles.”⁵⁸

Both the extreme overtones of Leninist theories and the determination with which they were from the very beginning brought into effect gave rise to questions about the actual role of communists in the historical drama unfolding in Russia. In the second half of December 1917 the previously-cited Koskowski judged that if he treated the actions of the Bolsheviks as an intentional plan, it was “the most utopian political experiment the world has ever seen”.⁵⁹ On January 10, 1918, the leading Galician conservative stated, “The Bolsheviks are not concerned with the unity of Russia, but with the anarchy they have sown spreading to countries that are separated from Russia and to the whole world.”⁶⁰ In turn, a writer for the publication of The People’s Union (*Zjednoczenie Ludowe*) described Lenin and his companions as fanatics trying to demolish the “entire former social order,” and three weeks later stressed that it was a political milieu for which “homeland is an empty word”.⁶¹ Another author writing on the same matter pointed that although Lenin’s government “aspires to rule over the entire former Russian state”, in practice it governs only Petrograd, Moscow and a few other cities that were significant industrial centres before the war. As a right-wing Polish politician stated: “Other cities and entire provinces are in anarchy and civil war.”⁶² The radicalism of the communists’ actions and their particular predilection for destroying the existing social order also aroused plain amazement among those Polish observers who, although not socialists, recognised the need for extensive future social reforms in Poland. They, too, often came to the conclusion in the first weeks after the Bolshevik coup d’état that “Russia is now without rule”, and as a result of the Leninist experiments, “the entire state Russian organisation has fallen apart”.⁶³

Under these circumstances, at the turn of 1918, the way that many Polish observers interpreted events involved perceiving that the Bolsheviks showed strength in the particular determination with which they continued the destruction of Russia’s existing position as an empire – a task started by the fall of the

⁵⁸ AAN, Zbiór druków ulotnych, sygn. 3, p. 1, Deklaracja złożona Radzie Regencyjnej na audiencji z 19 December 1917 r., n.d. See also: “Szaniec od wschodu”, *Głos*, 22 November 1917, no. 304, p. 1; W. Bułhak, “Aleksander Lednicki i Przedstawicielstwo Rady Regencyjnej Królestwa Polskiego w Rosji Radzieckiej”, *Przegląd Historyczny*, 3–4 (1990), p. 541.

⁵⁹ B.K. [B. Koskowski], “Utopia nad utopie”, *Kurier Warszawski*, 19 December 1917, no. 350, pp. 2–3. See also: “Ziemia w Rosji”, *Mysł Niepodległa*, 30 December 1917, no. 402, pp. 858–859.

⁶⁰ J. Hupka, *Z czasów wielkiej wojny. Pamiętnik nie kombatanta*, Niwiska, 1936, p. 332.

⁶¹ “Bolszewicy i rokowania pokojowe”, *Zorza*, 2 February 1918, no. 5, p. 33. Cf. also: A. Wierzynek [W. Kosiakiewicz?], “Nastroje noworoczne”, *Świat*, 5 January 1918, no. 1, p. 1.

⁶² W. Glinka, *Pamiętnik z Wielkiej Wojny*, vol. 3, Warszawa [1928], pp. 191–192.

⁶³ “Rozkład Rosji”, *Nowa Reforma*, 24 November 1917, no. 539, p. 1.

tsardom. In numerous commentaries it was suggested that the fragmentation of the former tsarist state would for many years, if not decades, affect the fate of this part of Europe. It remained contentious whether the present events in Russia should be attributed to a premeditated plan, whether motivated ideologically or resulting from clandestine Bolshevik machinations. It might be closer to the truth that the unprecedented collapse of the until-recently great state was an uncontrolled process influenced by various factors and political circles both in Russia and abroad. Probably due primarily to the fact that the imminent collapse of communist rule was widely expected in the closing weeks of 1917, the motif of Jewish conspiracy was relatively weakly employed at first. As a comprehensive scheme for explaining the course of the Russian revolution, it quickly became more significant. It is worth emphasising that the appeal of an antisemitic framing of events in Russia was in no way exclusive to the nationalist camp.⁶⁴ For example, the view that the Russians were “under the Jewish dictatorship,” was expressed in the personal notes of Jan Hupka, a conservative associated with the Supreme National Committee (Naczelny Komitet Narodowy, NKN).⁶⁵ The claim that “Russia is now ruled by Jews” could also be read in a magazine published by Galician Polish People’s Party at the end of 1917.⁶⁶

In the eyes of many Polish commentators, the fact that the current beneficiaries of the deepening crisis in the Russian state were primarily the central states lent more credence to the enduring rumours of close relationships between the Bolshevik Party and Germany. At the beginning of December 1917, a landowner from the Eastern Borderlands sympathetic to the National Democrats assessed the orders of the new Russian authorities as bringing to mind “naivety and blindness, exceeding all limits of acceptable stupidity”, but that they might also be “in outright treacherous service to the Germans”.⁶⁷ Less than a month later, the same author noted in a private diary: “In Lenin’s work it is difficult to distinguish ideological work from deliberate work ‘*pour le roi de Prusse*’ and the tsardom; in any case, there are sufficient facts to justify the assumption that the Bolsheviks were widely held to be working to restore a monarchy under German patronage.”⁶⁸ The opinions circulating in Warsaw that “Lenin’s performance” was “a German play, [and] eminently dangerous in its repercussions”, were scrupulously recorded by the wife of Prince Zdzisław Lubomirski.⁶⁹ The popular view that “Lenin is working with

⁶⁴ S. Cywiński, *Kartki z pamiętnika (1914–1920)*, Wilno, 1931, p. 83; Z. Lubicz-Zaleski, *Dziennik nieciągły 1904–1925*, compiled by M. Willaume, Paryż, 1998, p. 209; “Notatki”, *Rok Polski*, January 1918, no. 1, p. 71; *Sankiloci bolszewicy...*, p. 765.

⁶⁵ J. Hupka, *Z czasów wielkiej wojny...*, p. 327. See also: “Upiory”, *Dziennik Poznański*, 23 January 1918, no. 19, p. 1.

⁶⁶ “Przegląd polityczny”, *Piast*, 30 December 1917, no. 52, p. 10.

⁶⁷ E. Romer, *Dziennik 1914–1918*, Warszawa, 1995, p. 607.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 624.

⁶⁹ *Pamiętnik księżnej...*, p. 556.

a clear willingness to help autocratic Germans” was also expressed by the local NKN activist from Rzeszów, Wincenty Daniec.⁷⁰

Regardless of their assessment of the true intentions of the Bolshevik leadership, all Polish commentators were of the opinion that the war on the Eastern Front had actually ended. As expressed by an anonymous representative of the People’s Union in mid-December 1917, even if a government was formed in Russia that “wanted to conduct a war”, it would not be able to “draw the demobilised soldiers back to the ranks”.⁷¹ Other authors, too, generally expressed the view that if the red banners of communism waved over Petrograd, the ongoing collapse of the Russian army would not only not stop, but would, on the contrary, accelerate.⁷² It appeared inevitable that in that situation the conditions of peace in the east would be dictated – *de facto* in a completely arbitrary manner – by Germany. “Before the Bolshevik Revolution,” claimed a writer for the weekly published by the NKN at the end of January 1918, “it was possible to speak of the war being a draw. [...] The Bolsheviks have now become such a valuable ally of the central powers that they have extended their triumph extensively; soon the natural treasures of Russia will open to the central powers that have the means and organisation to be able to exploit them.”⁷³

The prospect of a *Pax Germanica* in Central and Eastern Europe was a nightmare for the nationalists more than anyone.⁷⁴ They judged that while the collapse of the tsardom was beneficial to the Polish *raison d’état*, the disintegration of the Russian state under the Bolsheviks brought the real threat of permanent German domination throughout this vast area. Zygmunt Lubicz-Zaleski, who was then staying in France, but thanks to his contacts with leading National Democrat politicians was well-informed about the situation in Eastern Europe, noted in his diary on November 13, 1917 that “today’s Russia is a madhouse guarded by the Germans”.⁷⁵ In the face of the historical catastrophe of the Russian state, it was suggested that the Polish nation could become “a counterbalance to Germanic expansion” in the east, but that would require not only the support of Entente nations, but also the consolidation of society around such a goal.⁷⁶ Anxiety over

⁷⁰ W. Daniec, *Nasz ostatni biuletyn wojenny. Pamiętnik z przeżyć wielkiej wojny z dziennych notatek*, Rzeszów, 1931, p. 161. See also: J. Hupka, *Z czasów wielkiej wojny...*, pp. 326, 329.

⁷¹ *Pokój się zbliża...*, p. 700.

⁷² “Na progu roku nowego”, *Dziennik Poznański*, 3 January 1918, no. 2, p. 1; W. Studnicki, “Sytuacja i horoskopy”, *Naród a Państwo*, 6 January 1918, vol. 1, p. 8.

⁷³ G. Doborzyński, “Polityka czwartego wymiaru”, *Wiadomości Polskie*, 27 January 1918, no. 164, p. 4.

⁷⁴ S. Cywiński, *Kartki z pamiętnika...*, p. 79; S. Karpiński, *Pamiętnik dziesięciolecia 1915–1924*, p. 157; “Pokój z Rosją”, *Wiadomości Polityczne*, December 1917, no. 12, pp. 8–9.

⁷⁵ Z. Lubicz-Zaleski, *Dziennik nieciągły 1904–1925*, p. 209.

⁷⁶ AAN, Komitet Narodowy Polski w Paryżu, sygn. 4, k. 62v.–64 v., Protokół posiedzenia z 27 II 1918; “Koniec pasywizmu”, *Wiadomości Polityczne*, January–February 1918, no. 13–14, pp. 2–3.

the growth of German influence in the former tsarist empire, which was potentially very dangerous to the Polish cause, was also expressed by those in circles in sharp political disagreement with the National Democrats. The central states' treaty with the Ukrainian People's Republic was a hostile German gesture towards the Polish nation according to the leading Cracovian conservative Władysław Jaworski.⁷⁷

Regardless of the divisions on the Polish political scene, the Bolshevik coup d'état, and even more so its various consequences that were already visible at the turn of 1918, of course prompted most Polish commentators to question why the Russian state, which had until recently been a great power, had succumbed to catastrophic collapse so quickly. Although not all authors – and leftists in particular – shared the thesis that the great empire had “turned into an ochlocracy”,⁷⁸ the overwhelming tone of comments was similar, nonetheless. Without going into too much depth, it must be said that the predominant view here was, as one author put it: “Russia has revealed herself to be a horde without patriotism and without character.”⁷⁹ It was held that the sinister consequences of centuries of corrupt tsarist rule, which “killed all national instincts in the Russian people” had made slaves of the inhabitants of this great empire, and kept them for years in darkness and fear.⁸⁰ “Only now,” wrote a conservative journalist in mid-January 1918, “does it transpire how artificial the building erected by Peter I was, and what fragile foundations the monstrous edifice of Russian statehood had been built on.”⁸¹

Among the Polish elites, from the pro-independence left to the right, there was no shortage of voices claiming that Bolshevism should be seen as a typically Russian phenomenon, and that Russia would forever be characterised by a particular blend combining the tendency to use brutal violence in political struggle, a nihilistic destructive streak and a predilection for taking all social phenomena to the extreme.⁸² It was in this very spirit that Dmowski interpreted the development of the situation in the former tsarist state, concluding in a private conversation that “combining the Eastern political system with Western progressive principles and scientific ideas” could not have had any other effect “on the Russian mind, with its peculiar

⁷⁷ W.L. Jaworski, *Diariusz 1914–1918*, compiled by M. Czajka, Warszawa, 1997, pp. 234–237, 246–248.

⁷⁸ Politicus, “Rosja jako ochlokracja”, *Kurier Polski*, 21 November 1917, no. 319, p. 2.

⁷⁹ “Z Nowym Rokiem”, *Dziennik Poznański* 1 January 1918, no. 1, p. 1.

⁸⁰ “Bolszewizm”, *Tydzień Polityczny*, 5 February 1918, no. 4, pp. 38–39; B. Srocki, “Państwo w rozkładzie”, *Nowa Gazeta*, 19 February 1918, no. 87, p. 1; M. Kossakowski, *Diariusz*, vol. 3: *1 stycznia–31 grudnia 1918*, ed. M. Korzeniowski et al., Lublin, 2016, p. 45.

⁸¹ “Bolszewicy i pokój”, *Czas*, 12 January 1918, no. 20, p. 2. See also: “U źródeł rewolucji”, *Przegląd Poranny*, 17 November 1917, no. 316, p. 2; “Ideologia bolszewicka”, *Kurier Polski*, 24 January 1918, no. 22, p. 3.

⁸² “W piekle rosyjskim”, *Zorza*, 2 February 1918, no. 5, pp. 36–37; “Bolszewizm”, *Kultura Polski*, 17 February 1918, no. 7, pp. 97–98.

propensities”.⁸³ Another Polish observer of the time wrote about Russia: “A terrible ordeal has been unleashed over this country, whose sons are now with their own hands dealing out historical justice for their own and their fathers’ own guilt.”⁸⁴

In the Polish political thought of that period, the view was repeatedly expressed that social reforms needed to be carried out in a reborn state. This was thought to be an essential condition if the attractiveness of the Bolshevik idea was to be diminished among the workers and peasantry. The need for democratisation was verbally recognised by members of practically all political circles.⁸⁵ However, the scope and reach of such reforms was already debated, which of course involved a sharp political dispute over the political shape of the Republic of Poland.⁸⁶ It is also worth adding that Dmowski, for example, indicated another factor as “a very strong antidote to Bolshevik agitation”. This was, according to the leader of the nationalist camp, the “hostile mood towards Jews among the masses”.⁸⁷

To end this brief review of the opinions on the situation in Russia that were being formulated in the first months after the Bolshevik coup d’état, it should once again be emphasised that Poles were commonly convinced that Lenin and his companions would inevitably fall.⁸⁸ It was not obvious when the Bolshevik experiment was expected to end, or who would then take power in Petrograd. Most of the commentators claimed that the realities of Russia, which changed kaleidoscopically, nothing was easy to foresee. Usually, however, they were inclined to believe that “the parties overthrown” during the revolution would “no longer return to power”. Neither the cadet government variant nor the rebuilding of Kerensky’s political position seemed likely.⁸⁹ Srokowski is therefore considered to be representative of the majority opinion in Poland, when in mid-December 1917 he anticipated: “The higher the waves of anarchy reach, the farther the inevitable absolutism will spread.”⁹⁰ It was quite commonly expected that the

⁸³ E.J. Dillon, “Spotkania, rozmowy i korespondencja z Romanem Dmowskim”, *Glaukopis*, 5–6 (2006), pp. 21–23. See also: Z. Wasilewski, *Dwa typy kultury* (2 December 1917), in: id., *Na wschodnim posterunku*, Warszawa, 1919, pp. 422–430.

⁸⁴ J.O., “Wojna domowa w Rosji”, *Dziennik Wileński*, 18 November 1917, no. 265, p. 1.

⁸⁵ B.K. [B. Koskowski], “Demokracja! Demokracja!”, *Kurier Warszawski*, 19 December 1917, no. 320, pp. 1–2; Przygodny, “Wschodnie niebezpieczeństwo”, *Rok Polski*, December 1917, no. 12, pp. 1–6; M. Mirski [M. Niedziałkowski], *Rok 1917...*, p. 1.

⁸⁶ “Widmo anarchii”, *Ziemia Lubelska*, 5 January 1918, no. 8, p. 2; W.L. Jaworski, *Diariusz 1914–1918*, pp. 238, 240, 242–243; F. Młynarski, *Wspomnienia*, Warszawa, 1971, pp. 152–153.

⁸⁷ “List R. Dmowskiego do I. Paderewskiego (3 II 1918)”, in: M. Kułakowski [J. Zieliński], *Roman Dmowski w świetle listów i wspomnień*, vol. 2, London, 1972, pp. 94–95.

⁸⁸ “Upadek rządu Kiereńskiego”, *Czas*, 16 November 1917, no. 530, p. 1; W. Witos, *Moje wspomnienia*, cz. 1, compiled by E. Karczewski, J.R. Szaflik, Warszawa, 1988, pp. 404–405; M. Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki 1914–1965*, vol. 1: 1914–1925, ed. W. Starska-Żakowska, Warszawa, 2009, p. 139.

⁸⁹ “Kiereński i Lenin”, *Nowa Reforma*, 13 November 1917, no. 524, p. 1; F. Jabłczyński, “Z rosyjskiego chaosu”, *Nowa Gazeta*, 17 December 1917, no. 625, p. 1; L. Kulczycki, “Maksymaliści rosyjscy u władzy”, *Wiadomości Polskie*, 20 January 1918, no. 163, pp. 5–7.

⁹⁰ K.S. [K. Srokowski], “Zawieszenie broni”, *Nowa Reforma*, 18 December 1917, no. 582, p. 1.

critical moment for the communists would be when they signed what one would have expected to be a very unfavourable peace with the central states.⁹¹

At the turn of 1918, the sum of Polish politicians and journalists failed to anticipate that Russia might re-establish its position as a superpower in the foreseeable future. It was expected that the country would be weakened for years, even for generations, and perhaps even become federalised. Some authors did not exclude that all non-Russian territories of the former empire might become independent, nor a scenario in which Russia would be under the occupation of the great powers.⁹² Meanwhile, one exception to correctly anticipate the rapid regeneration of the “Eastern Colossus” was a columnist for the Warsaw magazine *Mysł Niepodległa*, who drew attention to historical precedents in writing: “When it comes to Russia and its misfortunes, one must always remember that this strange agglomeration emerged from the most dangerous situations to successfully defend itself.”⁹³

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⁹¹ L. Chrzanowski, “Pałace zagadnienie chwili”, *Kurier Polski*, 9 December 1917, no. 337, p. 1; “Układy z chaosem”, *Głos*, 26 February 1918, no. 55, p. 1.

⁹² “Rozkład Rosji i kwestia polska”, *Głos*, 16 January 1918, no. 16, p. 1; L. Wasilewski, “Granice państwa polskiego na wschodzie”, *Kultura Polski*, 10 February 1918, no. 6, pp. 84–85; “Rosja i Ukraina”, *Czas*, 15 February 1918, no. 76, p. 1.

⁹³ *Sankiloci bolszewicy...*, p. 764.

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