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Collaboration with the Bolsheviks during the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1920 exemplified by the Biała Podlaska region

The subject and research methodology

In August 1920, the residents of central Poland first faced the Bolsheviks and communist ideas enforced by the Soviet Army and political officers. The occupants adopted the following modus operandi towards Polish lands: the Red Army takes control of an area, and then the security services proceed to infiltrate the local administration, involving collaborators who are either brought in or have been previously integrated in the community. This particularly involved members of organisations such as the Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee, a quasi-government embedded in the Russian-controlled city of Białystok on 23 July 1920 as well as revolutionary committees, as a form of temporary local structure for the new authorities.

This article tackles the phenomenon of collaboration within Polish territories with the occupant as exemplified by the Biała Podlaska region, which was occupied by the Soviets for a few weeks in August 1920. The author analyses the scale of collaboration, its symptoms and types. The literature on this subject, while vast, does not treat 'collaboration' as a separate research problem. The most prominent historical source that has been researched, due to its valuable insight into the aforementioned topic of collaboration, are documents issued by the Polish judicial system in the post-war period. Not long after the Bolsheviks were ousted, the Public Prosecutor's Office and District Court in Biała Podlaska heard several dozen of cases against individuals facilitating Bolshevism in 1919–1920. In accordance with the law binding at the time,

acts of collaboration were prosecuted under articles 108 and 126 of the penal code and exhibited the nature of “creating favourable conditions for the enemy in the form of [...] allowing war abuse of people who remained loyal to their country, which undoubtedly acts to the detriment of the state and translates as high treason”.¹ The prosecution and judicial files constitute an abundance of objective historical records that have never been analysed. The regional court of Biała Podlaska sheds more light on the enigmatic term used in the article title to describe the research scope. It was founded in 1919 and had jurisdiction over the areas of Biała, Konstantynów, Radzyń and Włodawa, which made up the Northern-Eastern part of the Lublin Voivodeship, also known as the Southern Podlasie. This region adjoined the left bank of the Bug river at its halfway point. At that time, these territories constituted central Poland and were largely rural areas, with great national and religious diversity. And although Polish Catholics constituted the vast majority of residents in those rural areas, Ukrainians, Belarusians and the so-called local inhabitants (people without national self-awareness) – i.e., members of the Orthodox and Uniate churches – constituted 40% of the local population. The majority of urban areas were mainly inhabited by Jews.

The sources of conflict

The Polish Bolshevik war of 1919–1921 was not just a territorial dispute. It was a war of ideas, in which the Polish dream of restoring independence so brutally stolen almost a century ago, collided with the dogma of the Marxism-Leninism doctrine. This ideology pushed the Bolsheviks’ state westwards and ordered that the statehoods emerging on territories previously occupied by the German army during World War I, were to be considered as an antagonising counter-revolution which needed to be crushed. Polish historical sentiments, traditions and attitude clashed with the Russian internal imperative to spread the revolution. Poland was supposed to be a bridge that would link the engulfed by the revolution Russia with western Europe, which was home to strong and labour centres that appealed to the Bolsheviks. The subjugation of those territories became the *sine qua non* of Bolshevism. It was commonly thought that the Bolsheviks would either

¹ State Archives in Lublin, Branch in Radzyń Podlaski, District Court in Biała Podlaska (next: SALBRP, DCBP), F. 256, p. 37.

seize control of that bridge, use it to reach the West and continue their advancement, or fail miserably.²

This ideology entailed vigorous action undertaken by the Soviet authorities, hoping for a successful export of the revolution. On 13 November 1919, the All-Russian Executive Committee passed a nullification of the Brest-Litovsk treaty and called on people living under German occupation to cooperate with Bolsheviks to establish “the power of labourers and peasants.”³ Five days later, Lev Trotsky raised a rallying cry to begin the Western offensive on all fronts⁴. On 2 July 1920, in the order to invade Poland, Mikhail Tukhachevsky wrote “the Army of Red Arms and the Army of the plundering White Eagle come face to face in a deadly duel. Over the dead body of White Poland shine shimmering lights showing the way to the worldly ravages of war. Our bayonets will carry peace and happiness to the tormented people. Onwards, to the West! The time has come. Onwards to Vilnius, Mińsk and Warsaw! Forward march!”⁵

Preparing for the revolution in Poland

Poland played an especially difficult role during the initial stage of the newly emerging Soviet state. While developing its own statehood, Poland had to face the Bolshevik revolution. The communist movement became a centrifugal force. As in the initial phase of World War I, Russians mobilised nearly 500,000 people in the Lublin Governorate. After the evacuation, these lands came under direct influence of the Bolshevik ideology. By and large, these people propagated communism around the subsequent Lublin voivodeship by petitioning for creating factory committees as well as labourers and military delegate councils. The remigrants served as transmitters for the communist ideology and the Bolsheviks’ art of war. In the spring of 1919, a far-left movement advocating for Bolshevism became active in the Kingdom of Poland,

² W. Balcerak, *Geneza i uwarunkowania wojny polsko-bolszewickiej* [in:] *Wojna polsko-sowiecka 1920 roku: przebieg walk i tło międzynarodowe: materiały sesji naukowej w Instytucie Historii PAN, 1–2 października 1990*, ed. A. Koryn, Warszawa 1991, p. 10–12; J. Szczepański, *Spółeczeństwo Polski w walce z najazdem bolszewickim 1920 roku*, Warszawa–Pułtusk 2000, p. 23; N. Davies, *Orzeł biały, czerwona gwiazda*, Kraków 1999, p. 25.

³ A. Przybylski, *Działania wstępne w wojnie polsko-rosyjskiej 1918–1920*, Warszawa 1928, p. 5.

⁴ J. Szczepański, *Spółeczeństwo Polski...*, p. 23.

⁵ A.L. Szcześniak, *Wojna polsko-radziecka 1918–1920*, Warszawa 1989, p. 5.

mainly in the form of the Communist Party of Poland, which in the mid-1920s morphed into the Polish Communist Party.⁶

The origins of communist groundwork were to be the labour delegate councils fighting for the nationalisation of land and manufacturing plants. They advocated destroying estates, and murdering their owners and priests. Labour delegate councils were to infiltrate small farms and cooperatives of small farms which were supposed to form district councils and evolve further to regional equivalents. The People's Militia was the councils' enforcing body, whose members could be recognised by a red armband. It consisted mainly of farm labourers.⁷

The result of both external propaganda and anti-state activities, which constituted an alternative to the newly emerging Polish state structures, was a reluctance to volunteer for the Polish Army. Among that group, the Jewish community was traditionally aversive. The Regional Military Draft Office in Biała Podlaska recorded 1328 deserters⁸ in 1919–1920.

The labour delegate councils were supposed to be a viable alternative for the emerging Polish state authorities. An instruction issued by the Communist Workers' Party of Poland in 1919 stated that: "There, where the influence of the labour delegate councils is irrefutably stable and where municipal councils were dissolved, it is vital to remove mayors, commune heads etc., leaving solely the administration. For managing affairs, it is necessary to create commissariats on municipal, regional and district levels; they will then manage all the necessary affairs". They were created in almost all farms in the Lublin Voivodeship.⁹

The war and the revolution

The German army, victorious on the Eastern front in World War I, managed to retain discipline to a certain degree but even so, the stench of a revolution was tangible. Within the military units, military councils started to spring up and voiced their demands for soldiers to return home. According to an agreement with Russia, the Germans gradually left the previously occupied territories.

⁶ S. Krzykała, *Rady delegatów na Lubelszczyźnie 1918–1920*, Lublin 1968, p. 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁸ H. Mierzwiński, *Wojna polsko-sowiecka 1919–1920* [in:] *Rok 1920 na Podlasiu. Materiały z sesji popularno-naukowej zorganizowanej 10 XI 1990 r. w Białej Podlaskiej*, ed. H. Mierzwiński, Biała Podlaska 1991, p. 79.

⁹ S. Krzykała, *Rady delegatów...*, pp. 168–178.

They were closely followed by the Bolshevik army which, before the Poles even realised, seized Mińsk and Vilnius respectively. On 12 January 1919, the Soviet Superior Command ordered Polish lands to be occupied as far as the Neman river, and on 12 February, up to the Bug river. In the first days of August 1920, the Red Army crossed the Bug river and entered the Biała Podlaska region: on 1 August it seized Brest and in the following days Biała Podlaska and towns lying further to the south – i.e., Radzyń Podlaski and Łuków.¹⁰

A campaign launched by the Soviet Russia aiming at »awakening class awareness' among the locals grew stronger in the occupied territories. From the perspective of the Bolshevik authorities, the Red Army was there to play a significant role. In all its units, there were special 'Soviet teams' whose task was to form communist structures in each and every town, farm and factory under occupation. Revolutionary committees were being formed which attracted the most opportunistic social element.¹¹

Revolutionary committees, which proved their effectiveness in Russia, constituted a reliable element of power executed by 'labourers and peasants'.¹² The Red Army appointed all regional, municipal, communal as well as farm and factory-based revolutionary committees across the occupied lands of Poland. Systemically, they were of a civilian and military nature, albeit directly subjugated to the military units in the given territory. There were usually two commissars at the head of such committees: military and civilian. A military commissar was an officer of the Red Army, whereas a civilian commissar was a representative of the local residents. These commissars were tasked with appointing the People's Militia, the so-called 'red militia'. The revolutionary committees were accompanied by tribunals, the responsibility of which was to pursue enemies. The decisions of such tribunals were final and binding with no possibility to appeal.¹³

The members of most revolutionary committees on the occupied lands were far-left activists – i.e., members of groups such as the Jewish 'Bund' or 'Poale Zion' as well as members of the Farm Labourers Union or radical activists from the Polish Socialist Party. The volunteers for the rural revolutionary committees were, as a rule, illiterate workmen with no land, and so there were occasions when the Bolsheviks forced commune heads or communal secretaries to join

¹⁰ H. Mierzwiński, *Wojna...*, pp. 71–90.

¹¹ N. Davies, *Orzeł biały...*, pp. 152–153.

¹² W.G. "Kokoulin, Sozdaniye riwolucionnykh komitetow w Tomskoj gubernii (diekabr 1919 – janwar 1920 g.)", *Gumanitarnyje problemy wojennogo diela* 2016, 3, pp. 3–12.

¹³ J. Szczepański, *Spoleczeństwo Polski...*, p. 324.

a committee so that at least one member could read and write.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it was common for such committees to become clubs for opportunistic delinquents, who caused some problematic issues that even the civilian communist authorities following the Red Army had trouble dealing with.¹⁵

The first decisions issued by the revolutionary committees ordered people to surrender arms and remove Polish emblems and Catholic crosses from the local administration buildings. Moreover, archival files were destroyed, stocks of agricultural produce were confiscated and rich merchants forced to pay contributions, while shops had their goods impounded. In addition, these committees executed administrative functions. Bolshevik soldiers adopted a policy of terror. The members of the Catholic clergy were especially vulnerable to attacks, whilst the safety of the priests depended on the attitude of individual commissars and Soviet commanders.¹⁶

According to the Soviet concept, which was based on a rational assumption that the communist ideas and the Polish party representing them were still weak, command over the occupied lands should be given to the Polish communists imported directly from Soviet Russia. On 18 July 1920, a Polish Bureau for the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was founded, whose members were Feliks Dzierżyński (the head of the committee), Edward Próchniak (secretary) as well as Julian Marchlewski, Józef Unszlicht, and Feliks Kon. The aforementioned Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee was the new designated government of Soviet Poland. Its manifesto, advocating civil war, proclaimed: "Bring a new order to Poland! Release political prisoners, your brothers and chiefs in the revolutionary battle! Banish owners of lands and factories, seize and protect national goods as a matter of priority: factories, farms and forests! Find arms quickly to protect your newly found freedom! Form local revolutionary committees everywhere may you go!"¹⁷

The Polish counterrevolution

The Bolshevik threat united the politically divided Polish society. On 1 July, 1920 the Sejm appointed the State Defence Council, with representatives of all political options. The appeal of the Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski to the Polish

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 330–331.

¹⁵ N. Davies, *Orzeł biały...*, p. 153.

¹⁶ J. Szczepański, *Spółczesność Polski...*, pp. 333–351.

¹⁷ *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej. Wybór dokumentów 1866–1925*, ed. H. Janowska, Warszawa 1984, p. 587.

nation on 3 July encouraged people to take action, and the following excerpt incited action to repel the invader: “The invaders, coming from the heart of Asia, are attempting to break our heroic armies, destroying Poland, our realm, burning our villages and our cities, and once done they will begin their frightful reign over the ashes”.¹⁸ Across the country, defence committees began to form, involving representatives of social elites.¹⁹ The defence of Poland adopted a the patriotic and religious character, which appealed especially to the local conservative population whose morality was based on idealistic, patriotic and Catholic beliefs and mindsets.²⁰ The strongly anti-Bolshevik attitude of a Catholic bishop of the Podlasie diocese, father Henryk Przeździecki, played a significant role and solidified the approach of the Polish Roman Catholic Church.²¹

The Propaganda

The Bolshevik invasion was foreshadowed by a massive propaganda attack to which many European lands seemed susceptible. In the West, the members of the labour class expressed pro-Bolshevik sentiments and formed committees named “Hands off Russia” and protested against ‘Polish imperialism.’²² A powerful wave of communist ideology hit Polish soil. Marian Zdziechowski characterised it as follows: “Before the invasion, skilful propaganda was supposed to lay the groundwork for all the routes and channels of the lands to be conquered, taking advantage of all political and social deficiencies, internal squabbles, setting people against one another, trying to bribe some, making promises to others while all the way weakening and undermining the morality of the people. Once the signs of deep divisions emerged through the cracks, the invasion was imminent.”²³ Circles focused on social development, universal joy and progress, were especially susceptible to the communist propaganda of Soviet Russia.²⁴

¹⁸ H. Mierzwiński, *Wojna...*, p. 164.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

²⁰ M. Bechta, *Narodowo radykalni. Obrona tradycji i ofensywa narodowa na Podlasiu w latach 1918–1939*, Biała Podlaska 2004, p. 25.

²¹ H. Mierzwiński, *Wojna...*, p. 60; M. Bechta, *Narodowo radykalni...*, pp. 46–47.

²² H. Mierzwiński, *Wojna...*, pp. 75–76; A.J. Leinwand, “Why During the Polish-Bolshevik War Did Soviet Propaganda Discourse Dominate European Public Opinion?,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 2021, 124, pp. 35–70.

²³ M. Zdziechowski, *W obliczu końca*, Warszawa–Ząbki 1999, p. 98.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Anticipation of the invasion

Even before the Bolshevik invasion, the supporters of revolution, who would normally be planted by the Red Army, stepped up their activity. This manifested itself through fierce criticism of the then government accompanied by wishes for Bolshevik involvement.²⁵ Moreover, they would discourage people from enlisting in the army and the campaign to join assault groups.²⁶ Jewish youth evaded military service in great numbers by, for example, malingering or fleeing to the Western parts of Poland.²⁷ Among other phenomena, defeatist predictions spread²⁸, sleeper cells were planted that would become active once the Bolsheviks entered the territories²⁹ and finally the activity of pro-communist circles thrived. One example of the latter was a meeting of Jewish youth in Radzyń Podlaski on 23 February, 1920. According to Symcha Kronenberg, who happened to be in the police service, a dozen people congregated under the pretext of a party. The gathering was led by Abram Lejb Hering who came from Warsaw, read out some Polish brochures and translated them for the attendees into Yiddish. Some of the cited lines were “Denikin already broken, Bolsheviks will crush the Poles. Us, young Jews enlisted in the military should organise ourselves and fight the Poles”. He called upon the Jewish youth to accustom themselves to the military through drills and demonstrate readiness for the moment “when the Bolsheviks come to stand by their side against the Polish state”. The other participants expressed similar sentiments and anti-Polish songs were sang. The age of those gathered ranged from 14 to 18 years old.³⁰ One of the participants declared that he would formally become an active collaborator after the Bolsheviks occupied the lands.³¹

In July 1920, the police received intel on communist meetings in the Jewish Labourers Union office in Biała Podlaska. A police raid ended in the arrest of the members of the Cukunft, a Jewish youth association board.

²⁵ SALBRP, DCBP, F. 1, p. 59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁷ P. Borek, *9 Dywizja Piechoty i Południowe Podlasie w wojnie polsko-sowieckiej (1919–1920)*, Biała Podlaska 2021, p. 174.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 96.

³⁰ State Archives in Lublin Branch in Radzyń Podlaski, Prosecutor of the District Court in Biała Podlaska (next: SALBRP, PDCBP), F. 71, pp. 4–7.

³¹ SALBRP, DCBP, F. 256, p. 2.

This organisation was linked to a communist Bund fraction. The police found there anti-state and pro-Bolshevik brochures³². Eventually, the threat of a potential, pro-Bolshevik diversion made the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs dissolve the Bund, Poale Zion and all other associations that were under the influence of these parties. Their publications were closed and their leaders interned.³³

The background for these phenomena was unrest and anarchy promoted among the society after the annexation. This is clearly illustrated by revolts against the gendarmerie of the Polish Army in the town of Działy in the Radzyń district. On 21 January 1919, gendarmes apprehended a poacher. A few hours afterwards, a hostile crowd of a several hundred local villagers, under the leadership of the arrestee's brother, gathered outside the station. They demanded the immediate release of the detainee. The soldiers were captured and moved to the People's Militia post in Czemierniki. The gendarmerie was considered by some to be the 'army of the lords' and they were encouraged to join the 'Red Militia' in the town of Lubartów, and even issued threats ("We will teach you, you bourgeois pigs"). An interesting analysis of the national sentiments of the Biała Podlaska region could be found in the request for dismissing the charges against the accused leaders of the uproar. The prosecution indicates that "the German occupants remained the longest in the Podlasie region, and after they had gone, the Polish society was driven by various and conflicting political views and the people were faced with the duality of the state authorities at any given moment, either the formally established authorities such as the People's militia, the state police and the gendarmerie, or the Citizen's Guard, which was the result of a spontaneous sense of necessity imprinted in a healthy civic instinct." Finally, the slogans coming from the East also had a major impact. All things considered, it laid the ground for explicit or implicit purposes at the time. The events from 21 January 1919 in Działy, were nothing but an emerging class struggle in which the gendarmerie, viewed as a symbol of the lords and the bourgeoisie, clashed with the People's Militia in Czemierniki and Lubartów, representing the 'people's power'.³⁴

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

³³ P. Borek, *9 Dywizja...*, p. 174.

³⁴ SALBRP, PDCBP, F. 127.

Indications of collaboration

The Soviet army, entering the region of Biała Podlaska in August 1920, was warmly welcomed in particular by the Jewish youth, the radical members of the Polish Socialist Party, Bund and Poale Zion as well as members of the pro-revolutionary Farm Labourers Union.³⁵ Wearing red bows, they enthusiastically welcomed Bolshevik troops as they passed by. Occasionally, local peasants were reported to show similar enthusiasm, although this resulted from their lack of awareness of the reasons for the war or the Russians' intentions. Therefore, some poor peasants even expressed pure joy at seeing the Red Army, and their enthusiasm was fuelled by the communist propaganda³⁶. Local towns and villages would host special meetings, where Soviet agitators and local collaborators delivered their impassioned speeches.³⁷ Moreover, the sympathetic attitude of the Red Army towards the Polish proletariat and peasantry was displayed, whereas cities and villages were provided with a great abundance of pamphlets and posters.³⁸ Hence, on some farms of the Masovia and Podlasie regions, servants would even erect triumphant arches to welcome the entering Soviet army and loot the manor belongings, claiming that from that day on, everything had become the common property of the labourers.³⁹

The most extreme indication of collaboration with the Bolsheviks was the participation in the revolutionary committees. In Radzyń Podlaski, the entire board of the Farm Labourers Union with its chairman Aleksander Zamyłko held such membership. Having been arrested by the Polish authorities, Aleksander broke out of custody in order to come back with the Bolsheviks to the town of Suchowola, near Radzyń. There he held a rally and advocated murdering the lords, while his wife, leading the ladies of the court, plundered the palace belonging to the aristocratic Chetwertyński family.⁴⁰

The Bialski revolutionary committee gained notoriety since its members spoke Russian and persecuted patriots.⁴¹ The members of the revolutionary committee in Konstantynów would confiscate agricultural produce and livestock for the Bolsheviks as well as coordinate the 'red militia', and denounce

³⁵ H. Mierzwiński, *Wojna...*, p. 85.

³⁶ J. Szczepański, *Spółeczeństwo Polski...*, p. 374.

³⁷ H. Mierzwiński, *Wojna...*, p. 85.

³⁸ S. Kawczak, *Milknące echa. Wspomnienia z wojny 1914–1920*, Warszawa 1991, p. 361.

³⁹ J. Szczepański, *Spółeczeństwo Polski...*, pp. 375–376.

⁴⁰ SALBRP, DCBP, F. 810, p. 31.

⁴¹ SALBRP, PDCBP, F. 72.

those in hiding. Moreover, they held pro-communist agitational rallies. To quote the testimony of Leon Maciaszek: “I attended one such meeting and I saw old Glodring-Hershek. He gave a speech but since he spoke in Yiddish I did not get most of it.” It was highlighted that “Poland will no longer be sovereign, but in our hands”.⁴²

Estera Ruchla Frajberg, a dealer in the town of Parczew, was a well-known communist, who was renowned especially among labourer circles for being passionate about the political economy and politics. At the age of 27, even prior to the invasion, Frejberg was fervently calling on the workers union to implement communism, abolish private property as well as divide nationalised property between workers. Upon the Bolsheviks’ arrival in Parczew, Frejberg became the head of the local revolutionary committee. According to testimonies, she was a fervent activist, cooperating with her cousin, Herszberg. They held rallies and confiscated private property together.”⁴³

Another sphere of activity for collaborators in August of 1920 was the pro-Bolshevik ‘red militia’, which recruited local renegades and criminals released from prison or custody by the Bolsheviks. Marian Śłupecki from Biała Podlaska, former sergeant of the State Police, discharged from service due to bribery, serving his criminal sentence in the local prison and released by the Soviets in August 1920, is a vivid example of such practice. As highlighted in the prosecution act: “Śłupecki ostentatiously pinned a large red bow to this chest, stopped speaking Polish and instead communicated solely in Russian, eventually serving with the Bolsheviks with such devotion that he personally pursued and tracked down Polish state officials and policemen hiding in Biała Podlaska even though it did not fall within the jurisdiction of the secretary of the Bolshevik police. [...] According to the accounts of multiple witnesses, during searches of the houses abandoned by the state officials, Śłupecki did not feel inhibited by the official nature of those visits [...] and took the opportunity to steal any household item he desired at the time.”⁴⁴

The leader of the ‘red militia’ in the town of Janów Podlaski was Lejb Szejnkłaper, who through his loyal and obedient assistant, Noech Rozenblum denounced a police intelligence agent in hiding, Jakub Ostapczuk, to the secret Soviet police.⁴⁵

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ SALBRP, DCBP, F. 151.

⁴⁴ SALBRP, PDCBP, F. 74.

⁴⁵ SALBRP, DCBP, F. 304.

Józef Krzyżanowski also played a part in the ‘red militia’ campaign in Radzyń Podlaski by manifesting a red armband and providing carriages for the invaders as well as denouncing Polish soldiers in hiding. In 1925, he was sentenced to 4 years in one of the toughest prisons. In his appeal for pardon to the President of the Republic of Poland, Krzyżanowski accounts for the motives behind his actions in August 1920 in the following manner: “As a simple man, I was in the dark on the possible results of my actions; sympathising with the Soviet authorities wasn’t malicious or profit-driven. By joining the militia, I just wanted to support the livelihoods of my elderly parents and large family living in grinding poverty, as well as for fear of possible conscription into their army.”⁴⁶

Meanwhile in Konstantynów, the ‘red militia’ established by the Bolsheviks consisted solely of Jews.⁴⁷ Similar ethnic composition could be observed in the town of Łosice, where Wulf Ruzal did some outstanding work and “obeyed all of revolutionary committees orders”, including during the Polish counter-offensive “along with other militants fled with Bolsheviks”.⁴⁸ In Parczew, Idel Liwerant and Chaim Szenker joined the ranks of the ‘red militia’, their biggest feat was denouncing a spy, priest Zygmunt Brudnicki who fled from the town of Lubień and was staying with the local vicar.⁴⁹ In the village of Jasionka, in the Parczew district, Aleksander Frąckiewicz participated in Bolshevik requisitions.⁵⁰ Szymon Marczuk from the village of Sławatycze was an active member of the ‘red militia’ and was described by the prosecutor as “a man deeply hateful towards the Polish identity”.⁵¹

Another interesting phenomenon that occurred in the region and was entered into records, was a tendency for prisoners of war to serve in the Soviet army. For instance, Noech Śpiewak from Radzyń Podlaski, having served in the 34th infantry regiment of the Polish Army in Biała Podlaska, became a medical orderly in the Budyonny Army after being captured.⁵²

Cooperation with the invader did not always mean holding posts in the occupational authority structures. Moszko Liberzon and Berek Grynblat from Radzyń Podlaski adopted such an approach and denounced all individuals expressing pro-Polish sentiments, especially members of their own ethnic

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁴⁷ SALBRP, PDCBP, F. 104, pp. 36–37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵¹ SALBRP, DCBP, F. 150, p. 2.

⁵² SALBRP, PDCBP, F. 167.

group.⁵³ In the village of Zaniówka, in the region of Radzyń Podlaski, such a mindset was also represented by Marianna Lipko.⁵⁴

A classic example of collaboration with the Bolsheviks was recorded in the occupied village of Kajetanka, in the Konstantynów region, and portrayed by the pro-Soviet attitude of Andrzej Hryciuk, a man without shaped political views and tormented by political circumstances. In winter 1920, during a National People's Union meeting in Janów Podlaski, 58-year-old Hryciuk delivered his anti-clerical and anti-governmental speech, fuelling animosity of the national democrats and representatives of the state administration. Interestingly, during an anti-Bolshevik rally, aimed at promoting support and encouragement for joining the Polish army, organised on the eve of the invasion, Hryciuk gave a similarly passionate and solemn speech pledging all livestock and produce he owned to the cause of defending the state and declared that he would join the ranks of the army that would repel the enemy from the borders of the Podlasie region. After the speech so full of patriotism and devotion, Hryciuk was kissed publicly on the stand by the regional chief executive. Shortly thereafter, when the Red Army arrived, he would welcome the Bolsheviks with the following words: "I lived to see true freedom. Until now, I was not allowed to say anything in the fear of being murdered by the bourgeois government. Let Poles, the bourgeoisie be swallowed by hell, ravaged by cholera, for them to never come back, be drowned by the Vistula river". After the Bolsheviks were ousted, Hryciuk defended himself by claiming that two of his sons were in the Polish military, while the third one died fighting the Bolsheviks. The prosecution, however, made the point that "the extenuating circumstances that Hryciuk presented, while factual and noble on the part of his sons, caused him a great deal of suffering. Hryciuk gave voice to his predicament by denouncing his sons to the Bolsheviks, claiming it happened without his blessing and if only he could, he would have put a stop to it. Moreover, in order to prove himself to the Bolsheviks, Hryciuk offered his property and assets to the Soviet army as a compensation for this development beyond his influence."⁵⁵

The lower-ranking state officials, living within the borderlands threatened by the invasion and who did not manage to escape on time, found themselves in a difficult situation. Not only were they at risk of the Bolshevik prosecution,

⁵³ SALBRP, DCBP, F. 256, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

but also as the educated few, would often be forced to participate in the revolutionary committees and risk being accused of collaboration. Józef Mark, the Reconstruction Bureau Supervisor in Radzyń Podlaski, shared such a fate as he was charged with provisioning the Soviet army during the 5 days of the Bolshevik occupation.⁵⁶

A separate group that could be distinguished and accused of collaboration are those people who associated and kept friendly relations with the Bolsheviks.⁵⁷

Confronted with Soviet occupation, the Polish elites and people with strong national and patriotic sentiments had to face submission to an authority of degenerates, alien to the Polish traditions, and often criminals lured to the Bolshevik revolutionary committees. Since they were the only power at the time, cases when the locals referred their most trusted individuals to those committees in order to extinguish pro-Bolshevik enthusiasm and ensure stability were common. Such examples could be observed in areas where people had a high level of national awareness, especially the South-West of the Biała Podlaska region. The following situation, which occurred in the village of Przegaliny in the region of Radzyń Podlaski, aptly illustrates that mood. To quote a witness: “When the Bolsheviks came and forced people to sign up to the [revolutionary] committee, the farm owners were reluctant, as always. Then, there was a volunteer but with a criminal record and right before he was about to be chosen, we refused and proposed Jan Żuk instead, as he was a good and decent man. Żuk rebuffed but the Bolsheviks went ahead and signed him up.”⁵⁸ Similarly, in the village of Branica in the same region, Józef Mikołajczyk, who was appointed to establish the ‘red militia’, paid a lot of heed to the safety and protection of the local citizens and their property in the face of the invasion. Mikołajczyk would carefully select his associates to be respectable and informed the local community of all his activities.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The occupation of the Biała Podlaska region, even of those areas which remained under the Bolsheviks’ rule for the longest period, did not take more than a fortnight. The counteroffensive of the Polish Army that began a day after

⁵⁶ SALBRP. PDCBP, F. 79, p. 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

the victorious battle of Warsaw on 15 August, 1920, provoked an immediate Red Army retreat. This could be seen even in places where members of the revolutionary committees picked up their guns to fight alongside the Soviets. In Biała Podlaska, armed local communists fled upon hearing the first gunshots of the imminent Polish counteroffensive. The Bolsheviks fled eastwards along with the members of the revolutionary committees, 'red militia' and a significant number of Jewish communities.⁶⁰ Some of them would return to Poland in the following months or years as Soviet agents or fugitives. One of the main reasons that they would give to the Polish authorities for their escape was fear of a pogrom. Estera Frejberg, an idealistic communist heading the revolutionary committee in Parczew, shared the following testimony on returning to the country: "Between 15–20 August 1920, with the other fugitives I left Parczew for the Soviet Russia, fearing a Jewish pogrom. I was confused as even one of my good friends poisoned herself after being raped by a soldier."⁶¹ The Bolshevik propaganda only fuelled those fears.⁶²

Due to the fact that the communist movement in the region of Biała Podlaska remained fairly limited, the collaboration with the Bolsheviks was rather marginal (there are fewer than a hundred investigations and court cases in the records). The advancing Soviets were supported mainly by members and sympathisers of the Internationalist Left, dominated either by Jews (residing in towns and cities), or Ukrainians and Belarusians (living in the north-east of the region). It is worth mentioning that they represented mainly the underclass, whereas the backbone of these groups unambiguously supported the joint effort to defend the country. The majority of the orthodox Jews, largely populating this area, backed the Polish side without hesitation, fearing the Soviet vision of atheisation. They were aware of the potential consequences of a social revolution and civil war on the Polish territories. Rabis and Jewish traders chaired the State Defence Committees, National Defence Committees, and also became members of the Citizen's State Defence Committees.⁶³

Those who sided with the invaders were communists, people evading the Polish judicial system, opportunists hoping for a quick buck especially from confiscated properties, as well as poor peasants, often orthodox, with little national and political awareness or morality. Some of the individuals were

⁶⁰ J. Szczepański, *Spoleczeństwo Polski...*, pp. 408–409.

⁶¹ SALBRP, DCBP, F. 151, p. 5.

⁶² N. Davies, *Orzeł biały...*, p. 243.

⁶³ P. Borek, *9 Dywizja...*, pp. 172–173.

coerced to work for the Bolsheviks fearing for their lives, families and properties. It is worth highlighting the phenomenon of conscious joining revolutionary committees by the representatives of the local elites to prevent the risk of renegades and criminals seizing power, which could have been detrimental to the local community. It seems to serve as an explanation to Norman Davies' revelation that among the opportunists joining the committees, there were conservative representatives of the national democracy; however, he failed to elaborate on it any further.⁶⁴

Even though the region of Białą Podlaska did not remain under Soviet occupation for too long, the consequences of collaboration with the Bolsheviks turned out to be long-term and significant. First and foremost, the Soviet invasion uncovered the existence of a pro-Bolshevik 5th column in Poland, represented by the members and supporters of the communist movement. It transpired that the Internationalist ideology was for them superior to the independence of their home country, and their allegiance lay with Soviet Russia. This mindset sealed the fate of the Communist Workers' Party in Poland and other communist parties in the Second Polish Republic. They were branded traitors, whereas the communists disgraced themselves in the eyes of the society. During the interwar period, they centred around the illegal political faction, popularly considered to be agents of the Soviet Union, governed through the Comintern and financed by Moscow.⁶⁵ Individuals cooperating with the Bolsheviks, who remained in the country or returned from the East, were under strict police surveillance, which successfully traced every step of anyone accused of communism until the outbreak of World War II.

Moreover, the fact that Jews constituted a considerable percentage of collaborators, their escape in the Soviets' footsteps which was so massive that it sometimes even paralysed the daily lives in the Jewish communities⁶⁶, led to a surge in antisemitism and laid the groundwork for the stereotype of a Bolshevik-Jew.⁶⁷

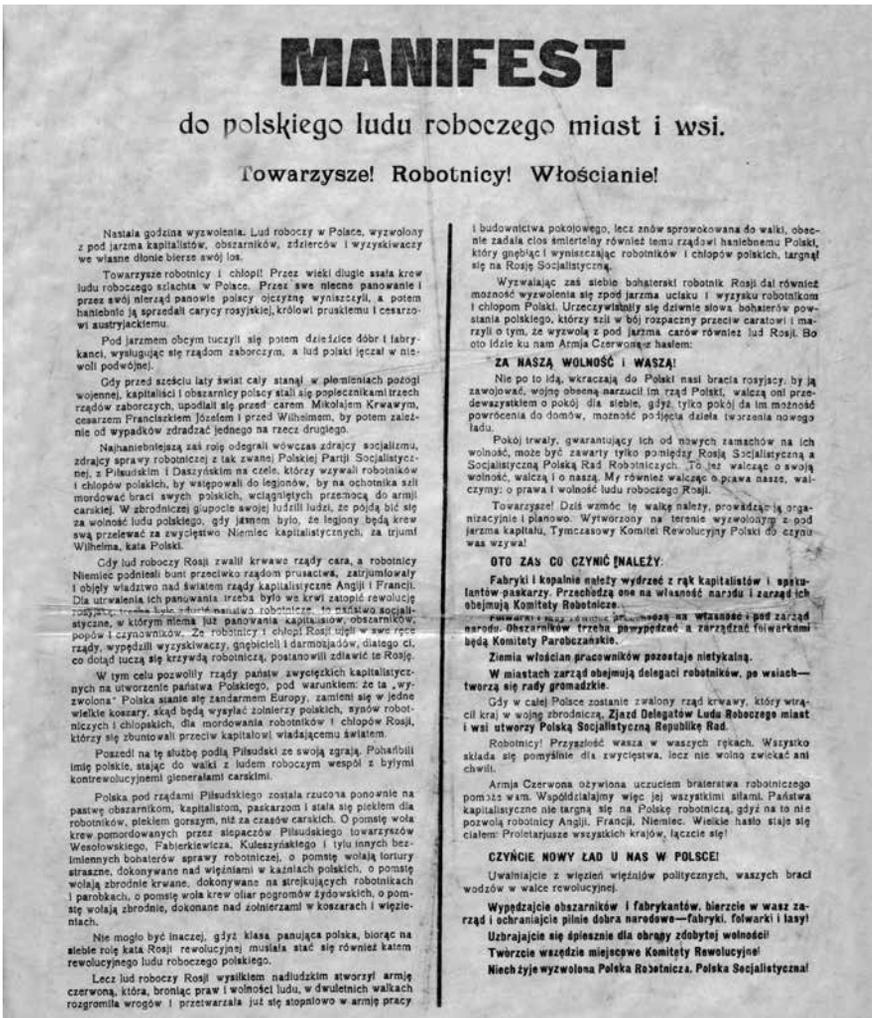
Last but not least, the operational methods used by the Soviets and the local collaborators in the region of Białą Podlaska in August 1920, gave the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–153; D. Magier, "Co konserwatywni endecy robili w bolszewickich komitetach rewolucyjnych?", *Podlaski Kwartalnik Kulturalny* 2007, 1, pp. 61–64.

⁶⁵ *Idem*, "Korespondencja Enii Edelman. Materiały do badań nad działalnością komunistyczną w zakładach karnych II Rzeczypospolitej na przykładzie Siedlec i Białej Podlaskiej", *Szkice Podlaskie* 2006, 14, pp. 91–108.

⁶⁶ J. Szczepański, *Spółczesność Polski...*, p. 414.

⁶⁷ SALBRP, PDCBP, F. 104; M. Bechta, *Narodowo radykalni...*, pp. 46–47.



A manifesto by the Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee to labourers and peasants, Siedlce 14 August 1920 (National Archives in Krakow, Collection of posters and posters, F. 3011)

word 'Bolshevik' a new insulting connotation, which the locals would use for a long time to signify those who are ruthless, inhumane and immoral.⁶⁸

Translated by Anna Orłowska

⁶⁸ SALBRP, PDCBP, F. 99; H. Mierziński, *Wojna...*, p. 89.

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Collaboration with the Bolsheviks during the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1920 exemplified by the Biała Podlaska region

The invasion of the Bolsheviks on Poland in 1920, as well as Polish contact with the communist ideology and the Soviet army left traces in the human psyche and socio-political life for years to come. Although the Bolshevik occupation of areas of central Poland did not last long, it offered numerous insights and observations that had a great impact on the awareness of the population, determined their worldview and perception of the Soviet Union throughout the interwar period. One of the issues was the cooperation of individuals or representatives of extreme left political and social organisations with the invader. This article presents an analysis of collaboration with the Bolsheviks in the region of Biała Podlaska, which is similar to the territory of the district court in Biała Podlaska. The post-war prosecutions and trials against people supporting the occupier constitute the main historical source of this study. The author attempts to identify the causes, types and consequences of the collaboration of Polish citizens with the Bolsheviks in August 1920.

KEYWORDS: Bolsheviks, collaboration, communism, the Polish-Soviet War, Soviet Russia, Poland, Biała Podlaska

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Kolaboracja z bolszewikami podczas inwazji sowieckiej na Polskę w 1920 roku na przykładzie Białej Podlaskiej

Najazd bolszewicki na Polskę w 1920 r. i zetknięcie się Polaków z ideologią komunistyczną i armią sowiecką zostawiły ślady w psychice ludzkiej i życiu społeczno-politycznym na długie lata. Choć okupacja na zajętych przez bolszewików terenach centralnej Polski nie trwała długo, obfitowała w liczne spostrzeżenia i obserwacje, które wywarły duży wpływ na świadomość ludności, determinowały ich światopogląd i postrzeganie Związku Sowieckiego przez cały okres międzywojenny. Jedną

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z tych kwestii była współpraca z najeźdźcą indywidualnych osób lub przedstawicieli skrajnie lewicowych organizacji politycznych i społecznych. Artykuł analizuje zjawisko kolaboracji z bolszewikami w regionie białskopodlaskim, pokrywającym się terytorialnie z białskim okręgiem sądowym. Właśnie powojenne postępowania prokuratorskie i rozprawy sądowe przeciwko osobom wspierającym okupanta stanowią główne źródło historyczne, na którym oparty został niniejszy tekst. Autor opisuje to zjawisko, próbuje określić przyczyny, rodzaje i konsekwencje kolaboracji obywateli polskich z bolszewikami w sierpniu 1920 r.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: bolszewicy, kolaboracja, komunizm, wojna polsko-bolszewicka, Rosja sowiecka, Polska, Biała Podlaska

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