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Jarosław Szarek: The Battle of Warsaw 1920. The Defeat of the Empire of Evil

The text below written by the President of the Institute of National Remembrance on the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw appeared in the French daily "L'Opinion" (14 August 2020) alongside with articles by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Prof. Andrzej Nowak. It was simultaneously published in the monthly "Wszystko co najważniejsze", and in newspapers in Latvia, Estonia and Algeria.

nale communiste (ou Komintern) dont la vocation est de contrôler les partis communistes de 32 pays du monde afin de servir les intérêts politiques de la Russie bolchevique. A l'été 1919, Grigori Zinoviev, qui dirige le Komintern, écrit : « On peut affirmer que dans un an, toute l'Europe sera communiste. Et la lutte pour le communisme se transportera en Amérique, peut-être même en Asie et sur les autres continents. »

Propagande. Mais au préalable, les bolcheviques doivent se débarrasser de leur ennemi intérieur, les Russes « blancs », dirigés par le général Anton Dénikine. Grâce à ces circonstances, les Polonais parviennent à reprendre les territoires appartenant à la République d'avant les partages au XVIII^e siècle : Vilnius, Minsk et une importante partie de la Biélorussie. Stopper Dénikine marchant sur Moscou étant la priorité pour les bolcheviques, ces derniers envisagent donc de conclure une trêve sur le front polonais. Dès janvier 1920, ils soumettent à la Pologne une proposition de traité de paix qui vise surtout à produire un effet de propagande visant à fourvoyer l'opinion publique internationale. Car, en réalité, les préparatifs de l'offensive

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rage aux forces de l'ennemi, qui tentent de la contourner et de la briser, l'armée polonaise est obligée de battre en retraite, tout en gardant, cependant, sa capacité de combat. Face au danger, et forte de l'appui de l'Église catholique, la société polonaise se mobilise : plus de 100 000 volontaires, dont 30 000 Varsoviens, répondant à l'appel à rejoindre les rangs de l'armée.

Parallèlement, le gouvernement polonais cherche du soutien à l'étranger. Plutôt que de lui offrir de l'aide, le Premier ministre britannique David Lloyd George propose à la Pologne de servir d'intermédiaire dans les pourparlers de paix avec les Bolcheviques qui, en pratique, exigent la restitution du pouvoir aux communistes polonais. La France se comporte mieux, en envoyant en Pologne d'importantes quantités d'armes et de munitions. Comprenant la gravité de la situation, le pape Benoît XV écrit dans une lettre datée du 5 août : « Ce n'est pas que l'existence de la Pologne qui est menacée, mais toute l'Europe risque

Une coopération française déterminante



La France fut l'un des rares pays à soutenir la Pologne dans sa guerre contre les bolcheviques. Les Polonais étaient soutenus par le général Maxime Weygand (au premier rang, deuxième en partant de la droite), considéré aujourd'hui comme l'un des artisans de l'opération qui a consisté à arrêter l'avancée de l'Armée rouge. Affecté comme instructeur dans une école d'infanterie auprès de l'armée polonaise lorsque celle-ci était formée en France, Charles de Gaulle rejoindra ensuite avec elle la Pologne. En juillet et en août 1920, au moment où le danger fut le plus grand, il a combattu sur le front, ce qui lui a valu d'être décoré de la plus haute médaille militaire polonaise, Virtuti Militari. De Gaulle notait dans son carnet : « Et surtout, surtout, je sens les regards suivre dans la rue mon uniforme. Une vieille dame m'a abordé pour me dire : – Tant que les Français seront là nous pouvons espérer. Mais ne partez pas. – Eh ! non, nous ne partirons pas. »

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The Battle of Warsaw in 1920 was not only a culminating moment of

the Polish-Bolshevik war but also one of the decisive events in the history of Europe and the world. The British diplomat Lord Edgar Vincent D'Abernon, an eyewitness to those events, claimed in his book *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World* that the Poles had saved the Western civilization from the fanatical tyranny of the Soviet. Unfortunately, the European nations are not aware of this historical fact.

Led by Vladimir Lenin, once they seized power in Russia, the Bolsheviks strove to export the revolution to Europe. Their march to the West began in late 1918, when following the defeat of Germany in World War I, the Red Army entered the lands of Ukraine, Byelorussia, and the Baltic countries after the German occupational troops left. Poland that had just regained independence was the main stumbling block on its way. The Polish-Bolshevik war began in January 1919.

The Communist International (Comintern) was founded in Moscow in March 1919 as a body to supervise communist parties from 32 countries across the globe, and a political tool of the Bolshevik Russia. In the summer of 1919, the Comintern's Chairman Grigory Zinoviev stated: "One can say with full confidence: In just a year from now, all of Europe will be communist. And the struggle for communism will move to America, and perhaps to Asia and other parts of the world."

But first the Bolsheviks had to deal with an internal enemy, the White Russians commanded by General Anton Denikin. Thanks to this, the Poles seized in 1919 the lands that were part of the Commonwealth before the partitions of the 18th century, namely Wilno, Minsk, and a

major part of Byelorussia. To stop Denikin's march on Moscow, the Bolsheviks had to sign a truce on the Polish front. In the winter of 1920, they sent peace proposals to Poland which were aimed for propaganda goals and were meant to mislead the world public. Meanwhile, preparations for an offensive and concentrations of Red Army units in the area of Smolensk were underway.

The Polish Chief Commander Józef Piłsudski decided to make a preventive move. On April 21, 1920, an alliance was signed in Warsaw between Poland and the Ukrainian People's Republic that also fought to maintain independence in the face of the Bolshevik activities. The Polish-Ukrainian offensive helped recapture Kiev, but just a month later the enemy drew reinforcements from within Russia and the allies were forced to retreat. The main Red Army offensive began in Byelorussia on July 4, 1920. The Commander of the Western Front Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky issued an order to his soldiers, addressing them with the words: "Fighters of the workers' revolution! Fix your eyes on the West. It is in the West that the fate of the world revolution is being decided. Over the dead body of White Poland lies the way to the world fire of revolution."

The Polish army was unable to contain the enemy troops that outnumbered it, and was forced to retreat. As the Polish forces continued their westward retreat, they evaded being encircled and destroyed, thus maintaining their fighting potential. In the face of the deadly threat, the nation got immensely mobilized, the Catholic Church also playing a big role in it. More than 100,000 volunteers responded to

calls to join the army, including 30,000 citizens of Warsaw.

Meanwhile, the Polish government sought help abroad. British prime minister David Lloyd George, however, offered only mediation in peace talks with the Bolsheviks, who in practice demanded the transfer of power to the Polish communists. France behaved somewhat better as it offered substantial supplies of weapons and munitions. Pope Benedict XV realized how grave the situation was when he noted in a letter of August 5: "It is not only Poland's existence as a nation that is imperiled, but the entire Europe faces the atrocities of a new war."

As part of its massive propaganda efforts under the slogan "Hands off the Soviet Russia," Moscow had mobilized communist parties and leftist trade unions in all of Europe to act against Poland. Railway workers in Germany and Czechoslovakia blocked trains with military supplies to Poland. The governments of both countries silently sympathized with the Bolsheviks. The only safe passage for the transports led through Rumania.

For political reasons, the Red Army was advancing in two divergent directions, which ultimately was one of the reasons why the Bolsheviks were defeated. The Western Front pushed westward on Warsaw with the aim to break through to Germany. Meanwhile, the South-Western Front took a south-western turn to cross the Carpathians and start a revolution in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

There emerged a huge gap between the troops attacking Warsaw and those advancing through Lwów towards the Carpathians, with only

weak Bolshevik units in between. Józef Piłsudski decided to exploit it and strike from the south on the rear of the Bolsheviks moving on Warsaw. Conducted since August 16, 1920, the Polish offensive forced Tukhachevsky's troops to retreat in panic. After ten days, the enemy was destroyed, sustaining considerable losses: 25,000 dead and 66,000 taken prisoner. An armistice signed in Riga on October 12 ended the war. Poland's independence was saved.

The Battle of Warsaw marked the first defeat of the Soviet empire of evil, thanks to which the fate of the world took a different course than Lenin would have wanted. Soon after the defeat near Warsaw, he admitted: "The Polish war was the most crucial turning point not only for the politics of Soviet Russia but also for the world politics. (...) In Europe, it was possible to seize everything. But Piłsudski and his Poles inflicted a gigantic, unprecedented defeat to the cause of the world revolution."

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