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THE POLISH QUESTION AT THE INTERNATIONAL
SOCIALIST CONGRESS IN LONDON IN 1896
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE SECOND
INTERNATIONAL

This paper is the first broader approach to the Polish question at the London Congress of the 2nd International.¹ It is also an attempt at scrutinising the views of that organisation concerning the national question in general.

When on September 28, 1864, at a meeting in St Martin's Hall, London, the International Workingmen's Association was founded, later referred to as the 1st International, it was prompted by the intention of English and French labour leaders to express their solidarity with the national uprising of January 1863 in Poland. As Karl Kautsky said once: "The Polish question stood at the cradle of the International."² For the twelve years of its existence the 1st International was sympathetic to the Polish aspirations to independence. The demand for the independence of Poland constituted a part of the political programme of that organisation created by Marx.

¹ Earlier, the matter was mentioned by: L. Wasilewski, *Międzynarodówka robotnicza wobec hasła niepodległości Polski* [Worker's International and the Slogan of Polish Independence], "Niepodległość," vol. II, 1930, pp. 32 - 42; A. Czubiński, *Ruch socjalistyczny w Europie wobec odbudowania państwa polskiego* [Socialist Movement in Europe and the Rebuilding of the Polish State], "Kwartalnik Historyczny," 1968, No 3, pp. 624 - 630; A. Głowacki, *Międzynarodowy ruch socjalistyczny i odbudowa Polski (1889 - 1918)* [International Socialist Movement and the Rebuilding of Poland, 1889 - 1918], Szczecin 1974, pp. 27 - 38; W. Najdus, *SDKPiL a SDPRR, 1893 - 1907* [Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania and Social-Democratic Workers' Party of Russia, 1893 - 1907], Wrocław 1973, pp. 42 - 44. Other authors (among them Bronisław Radlak and Jan Sobczak) wrote just a few lines on the subject.

² K. Kautsky, *Finis Poloniae?*, "Neue Zeit," July 8, 1896, No 42, p. 484.

The Polish struggle for freedom occupied a specific place in Marx's and Engels's strategic reckonings: it was weakening the three most reactionary European powers—Russia, Prussia and Austria—the Holy Alliance which hampered progress on the whole of the European continent. It constituted a barrier stopping the advance into Europe of the most reactionary of the three—tsarist Russia. Irrespective of the fact that it was not the popular masses but the gentry that led the struggle, the Polish liberation movements in the 19th century as a whole served the cause of European progress.

The decline of the 1st International and its final dissolution in September 1876 coincided with the almost total disappearance of Polish patriotic conspiracies. Thus, the Polish question faded away from European politics.

The labour movement which was developing alongside with capitalism and always accompanied it, seemed to have forgotten its old symbols. In a sense it was a different movement. The *avant-garde* narrow cadre organisations which formed the 1st International were replaced in Europe by mass socialist parties which were becoming increasingly important, together with their growing parliamentary electorate, in the political life of their countries; they were more interested in the everyday affairs of the working class than in distant "final" goals of its struggle.

In Poland itself the situation was different. The Polish labour movement was only beginning to rise at the turn of the 1870s and could not yet afford to attend to the daily needs of the workers. It lacked the necessary pressure groups, and where it was the strongest, i.e. in the Russian-occupied part, in the tsarist empire, ruled absolutely and without a constitution, it did not have any political rights, any opportunities to form unions, neither for political nor even economic purposes. Up to 1906, it did not even have any parliamentary representation. Throughout the 1880s it remained at the stage of gathering forces and laying plans.

But even this nascent movement could not and would not resume the national question in that very same spot where it has been dramatically broken by the defeat of the January Uprising of 1863.

First, because it was the gentry that had led both the last and

the previous Polish liberation uprising while the young socialist movement considered its prime duty the weaning of workers from the spiritual care of their "elder brothers"—the propertied classes.

Secondly, from the 1870s to the 1890s the atmosphere in the country did not favour the insurgent dreams. The post-uprising trauma lasted a long time and penetrated to all the social strata.

The critical attitude of the first generation of Polish socialists towards the national uprisings did not mean that they neglected the problem of national oppression. But they sought a resolution of the national question in a manner which would protect them from another attempt at taking over spiritual leadership by forces alien to the social interests of the proletariat.³ Thus, it is no wonder that they did not ask to place the slogan of Poland's independence upon the flag of the international labour movement as did the 1st International.

On the other hand, there was no one to ask for it in the 1880s. After the dissolution of the International Workingmen's Association failure marked for many years any attempts at forming an organisation which in view of the broad development of national labour movements and the consolidation of socialist parties (then called social-democratic) in particular countries would coordinate their struggle.

In July 1889, on the hundredth anniversary of the destruction of Bastille, representatives of the European socialist parties succeeded in gathering at the International Congress which marked the beginning of the organisation later to be known in history as the 2nd International. The Congress was attended by representatives of the Polish socialist movement.⁴ Several delegates of the Polish labour movement from all the three partitions took part in the successive Congresses of the International. Prior to the fourth

³ Report from the international convention called on the 50th anniversary of the November Uprising to Geneva by the editors of "Równość," Geneva 1881. Reprinted in: *Pierwsze pokolenie marksistów polskich*, ed. by A. Mojska, vol. I, Warszawa 1962, p. 423.

⁴ The Polish participation in the work of the 2nd International (1889 - 1914) has been discussed by the author in *Polskie partie w II Międzynarodowce* [*Polish Parties in the 2nd International*], in: *Historia II Międzynarodówki*, vol. II, Warszawa 1978, pp. 679 - 784.

Congress convened for the end of July 1896 in London, the Polish socialists took a step which, if it had been approved by the Congress, would mean that the Polish question could have revived the interest of the international organisation of the proletariat.

The initiative was born of the new political trends, new programme attitudes in the national question, that have appeared in the Polish labour movement. The Polish Socialist Party (PPS), founded in November 1892 at the convention in Paris, tried to build a bridge between Marx's former standpoint in the Polish question and the modern socialist movement rising in the Polish lands, and to incorporate the programme of the country's independence into the political targets of the Polish labour movement.⁵

But in the new situation on the European political stage, when in all the constitutional countries of the continent there arose labour parties which were growing increasingly strong and fought their battles in the parliaments of their own states, on the basis of their political institutions, the slogan of Poland's independence could not count on winning the same position it held in the European socialist movement at the time of the 1st International. The PPS, sensing this mood, did not at first flaunt its independence programme on the international stage. It was well aware that national slogans were looked at with suspicion by the majority of the parties in the 2nd International. There were also fears that this suspicion could be used by the internationalist wing of the Polish movement, the Social-Democratic Party of the Polish Kingdom (SDKP) in order to undermine the "Orthodox" image of the PPS, its socialist credibility on the international stage.

But when in 1895, after arrests had for several years broken up the national organisation of the SDKP and its Warsaw survivors had joined the PPS, and when, beginning with April of the same year, the press organ of the SDKP "Sprawa Robotnicza" stopped appearing (the next number was issued more than a year later, in May 1896), the PPS decided that the moment had

⁵ *Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878 - 1918* [Polish Socialist Programmes, 1878 - 1918], collected and with a historical commentary by F. Tych, Warszawa 1975, pp. 216 - 260.

come to try and win over the International to the slogan of Poland's independence and thus consolidate the party's position in that organisation.

The idea was launched by the prominent sociologist and PPS activist, Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, who lived in Paris at the time.⁶ He headed the Paris branch of the Foreign League of Polish Socialists (the PPS foreign organisation) and was the editor of the "Bulletin Officiel du Parti Socialiste Polonais" which was published abroad by the PPS, mostly for the milieu of the 2nd International.

"Though you will curse me," he wrote on October 26, 1895, from Paris to the chiefs of the Central Board of the Foreign League of Polish Socialists (ZZSP) in London, "I shall now tackle a new (matter): enclosed here is the draft resolution on the question of Poland's independence which I suggest the ZZSP should propose for the agenda of the international congress in London due to convene next year [...]. The entire civilized world would be shaken by such a slap in the face administered to the tsarist government by the proletariat, while PPS would gain powerful moral support. As to the significance of such a move for agitation purposes, as to the spiritual uplift—the results would be simply incalculable."

Although the draft mentioned the "joining of the separated parts of one nation," it was really concerned with independence for only one part of the country: that which was ruled by the Russian tsar. True, it was the biggest part, but not the whole Poland. The draft did not mention the parts under the Prussian and Austrian rule. Not only because formally the PPS was a party active only in the Russian-ruled part but also for quite a different reason: the fear of losing the support of the German and Austrian socialists.

Two weeks later came a cautious reply from London. "We are ready to take this risky step," wrote on November 9, 1895, Bo-

⁶ For more about him see W. Bieńkowski, *Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, życie i dzieło* [Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, His Life and Work], Wrocław 1969.

⁷ Central Archives of PUPW Central Committee (hereafter quoted as: CA KC PZPR), 305/VII/50, card 134.

lesław Antoni Jędrzejowski on behalf of the Central Board of the ZZSP, "but before we table this motion or inform the French, Belgians, English and perhaps the Swiss, we must be sure about the Germans. Only then shall we ask you to tackle the French. For the Germans are the prime force, and after all, generally speaking, we would not want to be at variance with them."⁸

In the same month the draft congress resolution was presented to Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the two chairmen (the other was August Bebel) of the German socialist party (SPD). It read as follows :

Considering :

— That the oppression of one nation by another serves only the interests of capitalists, and is fatal to the working people of both the Polish nationality and that of the partitioning power ;

— That particularly the Russian tsarism which draws its internal forces and external importance from the conquest and partitioning of Poland, constitutes a constant threat to the development of the international labour movement ;

the Congress declares

— That the independence of Poland is a political demand necessary for the international labour movement as well as for the Polish proletariat.

The main emphasis of the resolution was thus placed on the significance of the slogan of independence for Poland to the international labour movement. This was meant to free the resolution from the suspicion of nationalism.

Liebknecht suggested two amendments to the resolution.⁹ To the sentence : "considering that the oppression of one nation by another serves only the interests of capitalists" he added "and despots" and after the formulation of the demand for Poland's independence he added "and autonomy." This last addition was somewhat enigmatic, but Liebknecht's support was so eagerly sought after that the text of the motion went out into the world with both the amendments.

Later on, in a conversation with the leaders of the ZZSP in

⁸ CA KC PZPR, 305/II/21, book VI, card 356 - 357.

⁹ B. A. Jędrzejowski from London, Dec. 12, 1895, to K. Kelles-Krauz in Paris, *ibidem*, book VII, card 30.

London, Liebknecht, asked about it, explained what he meant by the word "autonomy" added to the motion. According to the account by Józef Piłsudski, who was present at the talk, "it is to mean not 'autonomy' in the sense of dependence from another state, but independence, an autonomy without dependence. He said that the matter concerned not ethnographic Poland but the widest possible and the furthest to the east."¹⁰

In June 1896, the PPS decided to publish the congress motion in the matter of Poland's independence in its journal "Przedświt", published in London.

The article said cautiously that the fate of the motion at the Congress "was at present impossible to foresee." Although the PPS counted on "a considerable part" of European leaders to support it, yet it had "many opponents" who "sympathized with us as comrades in struggle but considered our tactics (in the national question) erroneous."¹¹ The article emphasized the conviction of the European parties that only a bourgeois or petty-bourgeois movement could be the carrier of patriotic slogans, but that "it was difficult for them to imagine our situation which forces the working class to take up demands which in their countries had been resolved by middle-class democracy." As proof of it, "Przedświt" quoted the leader of the Italian socialists, Filippo Turati, who, when his support for the PPS independence resolution at the London Congress was being solicited, said: "The Polish socialists should not concern themselves with independence just as the Italian socialists do not support the irredentists who want to separate Trieste and Trentino from Austria."¹²

The text of the resolution was sent to the European socialist press and personally to the most prominent representatives of the labour movement together with appropriate comments. The "acid test" came when the resolution was moved at the international meeting convened in London on February 1, 1896, the tenth

¹⁰ J. Piłsudski from London to Workers' Central Committee (hereafter: CKR) of the PPS in Poland. "Niepodległość," vol. XV, 1937, p. 426.

¹¹ *International Socialist Congress in London*, "Przedświt," vol. VI, 1896, No. 6, pp. 1-2.

¹² *Ibidem*.

anniversary of the hanging of four members and leaders of the Proletariat Party at the Warsaw Citadel.¹³ Present at the meeting were outstanding British and German socialists. Speeches were made by Harry Quelch, Tom Mann, Eleanor Marx-Aveling, Eduard Bernstein, Friedrich Lessner. The meeting unanimously voted the text of the PPS resolution for the London Congress.¹⁴

It seemed that the first step to assure international support for the PPS resolution had been taken. Soon others followed: the PPS leadership abroad approached a group of leaders of the 2nd International for a statement for the PPS publication *Pamiętka Majowa 1896* [*May 1896 Memoir*] destined for the PPS in all the parts of Poland under occupation. A special request concerned their attitude towards the struggle of the Polish workers for freedom against the Russian tsarist rule.

Contributions were sent in by leaders of the 2nd International. From England: Edward Aveling, Tom Mann, Harry Quelch; from Belgium: Louis Bertrand; from France: Paul Argyriades, Louis Dubreuilh, Jules Guesde, Jean Jaurès, Alexandre Millerand, Paula Mink, Edouard Vaillant; from Germany: Eduard Bernstein, Friedrich Lessner (both still in exile in England), Wilhelm Liebknecht, Julius Motteler; from Italy: Antonio Labriola; among the Russian leaders: Pavel Axelrod and Pyotr Lavrov.¹⁵ Some of them, such as Mann, Bernstein, Liebknecht and Labriola, came out clearly in support of Poland's independence.

Yet, from the very first weeks of the efforts to assure the international support for the PPS resolution, clouds began to gather over the whole question. Jules Guesde, leader of the French Workers' Party, on learning from Kelles-Krauz about the draft resolution, cried: "But it's impossible! Stop it. An international congress cannot pass anything like that, cannot change the map of Europe. If this resolution were taken seriously by the govern-

¹³ L. Wasilewski, *Międzynarodówka Robotnicza wobec hasła niepodległości Polski* [*Workers' International and the Slogan of Poland's Independence*], "Niepodległość," vol. II, 1930, p. 33.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, and "Bulletin Officiel du Parti Socialiste Polonais," vol. V, 1896, No. 8, p. 9 (L'Anniversaire des Quatres Martyrs. Angleterre).

¹⁵ *Pamiętka Majowa 1896. Wydawnictwo Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej spod trzech zaborów* [*1896 May Memoir. Publication of the Polish Socialist Party under the Three Partitions*], London 1896. Printing House of the Foreign League of Polish Socialists.

ments, there would be only one result : the renewal of the Holy Alliance of three emperors against Poland, and this we consider a most dangerous thing for European socialism."¹⁶

So the matter concerned not only ideological priorities but also purely political implications, fears of "changing the map of Europe ;" they were probably uppermost in the minds of the leaders of West-European social-democratic parties.

According to Kelles-Krauz, Guesde "mostly emphasized that the international proletariat could not and would not assume responsibility for an armed insurrection in Poland, stimulated by its sympathy, to break out suddenly ; its suppression would hamper the advance of socialism and could provoke a European war. I explained to him that we are not crazy and would not cause the outbreak of an uprising without proper conditions for international revolution ; that we are arousing the workers' consciousness which is now our only way to independence, and that we are awaiting future events in order to make use of the opportunity and so that we are behaving as does any socialist party in Europe in the matter of any political aspiration. The eventualities are twofold : either a general Russian movement for a constitution which then could not be the same for the whole of Russia ; or an outside movement of the European proletariat which the tsarist government would oppose. He said that he agreed absolutely with the latter argument and that the European proletariat would then rebuild Poland as a dam against tsarism.

All the time I emphasized that the whole question was with us a matter not of patriotic feelings but the workers' class interests [. . .]. When I added that Liebknecht had helped in the drafting of the motion and that, with him, the whole German social-democratic parliamentary group was favourable to it, which surprised him very much, he seemed somewhat convinced."¹⁷

That insistence on the part of Kelles-Krauz that "the whole question is a matter not of patriotic feelings but the workers' class interests" reflected more his personal views than those of the whole of the PPS. The right wing of the party, led by Józef

¹⁶ K. Kelles-Krauz from Paris, March 15, 1896, to ZZSP Central Board in London (CA KC PZPR, 305/VII/50, c. 38 - 39.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, c. 39 - 40.

Piłsudski, clearly staked their hopes on preparing, given favourable circumstances, an anti-Russian uprising in the Polish Kingdom. It was meant rather as an act accompanying a European war which was thought to break out sooner or later.

The sceptical reaction of French socialist leaders to the PPS draft congress resolution prompted even more strenuous efforts towards winning the support of other parties.

On April 24, 1896, the secretary of the Central Board of the ZZSP, Bolesław Antoni Jędrzejowski, approached the Italian philosopher and socialist thinker, Antonio Labriola, who had earlier, in the May Memoir, shown himself as a supporter of the idea of Poland's independence; Jędrzejowski asked for the support of the Italian Socialist Party for the PPS motion for the London Congress.¹⁸ He presented the motion as a continuation of the attitude of the 1st International towards Poland, particularly of its Geneva Congress of 1866, and as a blow to the "petty-bourgeois radical patriots."¹⁹ Jędrzejowski assured Labriola that he had already won the support of Liebknecht and the parliamentary group of SPD in the Reichstag as well as that of the Belgian, English, and Bulgarian comrades. "Now we are under-

¹⁸ A. Labriola, *Korespondencja* [Correspondence], Warszawa 1966, pp. 491 - 495. [Labriola's correspondence with B. A. Jędrzejowski, 1895 - 1897, with introduction by F. Tych, pp. 473 - 561].

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 492. The matter was not always dealt with quite "cleanly" by the PPS right wing in the ZZSP Central Board. Apart from criticizing the essence of Rosa Luxemburg's views and wishing to influence Labriola adversely *a priori*, it did not shirk unsavoury insinuations. Between the lines of one of his letters B. A. Jędrzejowski hinted to Labriola that the fact that the list containing the names of persons wanted by the tsarist gendarmerie, obtained by the PPS, did not show that of Rosa Luxemburg was no accident. Though, as is well known, the SDKP always championed the idea of the revolutionary overthrow of tsarism and the building of a democratic republic on its ruins, Jędrzejowski informed Labriola about the "predilection (of the SDKP) for a constitutional Russian monarchy (A. Labriola, *Korespondencja*, letter of 5.5.1896, *ibidem*, pp. 497 - 502). He also misinformed him about the true character of workers' demonstrations in Russia, belittling their significance in order to convince Labriola that there was really no reason to count on the revolutionary movement in Russia and the possibility of its overthrowing the rule of tsarism. K. Kelles-Krauz often protested to the ZZSP Central Board against such methods in discrediting the SDKP. He defended the view that they were unworthy of the PPS and that in any argument with the SDKP only the merits of the cause should be discussed.

taking appropriate efforts among the French, and at the same time we would like to ask you for help from the Italian comrades."²⁰

After his experience with Guesde and in order not to frighten Labriola that by demanding the independence of Poland the PPS wants to shape up the political map of Europe, he tried to calm him by saying that in reality the question concerned only the Russian-occupied part and that even there it was not a matter of the immediate future, because there must first arise favourable circumstances with the crucial condition of the tsarist rule threatening the international proletariat.²¹ In other words, PPS would cause a rising against the tsarist regime only when Western Europe would be in danger.

Labriola wrote back that he would "propagate and support" the resolution "with all his strength" but that he doubted whether it would obtain the support of the leadership of the Italian party. "Here utopian internationalism is still being wooed." So he suggested that he would write an article justifying the PPS resolution in the theoretical organ of the Italian socialists, the "Critica Sociale." He also wanted to find support for the resolution in France, although he saw objections there, too "I have just written to Georges Sorel ("Devenir Social") asking him to sound the mood in France. You know very well that nowadays many French socialists posture as Russophiles."²²

During all this diplomatic bustle there came an event which no one had foreseen: on April 29 and May 6, 1896, two issues of the theoretical organ of the German social democratic party "Die Neue Zeit" published an article by Rosa Luxemburg which dealt with the attitude of the Polish labour movement towards independence. The article was headlined *Neue Strömungen in der polni-*

²⁰ A. Labriola, *Korespondencja*, p. 493.

²¹ "Although the independence of the country is also of extreme importance to the parts under the Prussian and Austrian occupation"—wrote Jędrzejowski, "it is simply a matter of life to the Russian part and its socialism; the decisive battle must be waged there. Of course, we want to choose the right moment ourselves, and the best would be when the international proletariat and the freedom of Western Europe are threatened by Russian tsarism." (*Ibidem*, pp. 493 - 494).

²² *Ibidem*, p. 496.

schen sozialistischen Bewegung in Deutschland und Oesterreich, and was written from a position alien to that of the PPS.²³

For the PPS, which was seeking support of European socialist leaders for their resolution, the surprise was twofold: first, the SDKP, the party of the Polish social-democrats, and its ideology had been considered non-existent; secondly, no one thought that "Róża," persecuted by the PPS, almost eliminated by them from the previous, Zurich Congress of the 2nd International in 1893, had access to the leading theoretical socialist journal in the world. Nobody suspected that the article would launch a great international press discussion about the Polish question.

In her article Rosa Luxemburg reminded her readers that up to the beginning of the 1890s the socialist movement in Poland and the independence drive were two different political directions. Lately, a new trend surfaced in the Polish socialist movement, which she called "social-patriotic," and which tried to combine the independence slogans with the socialist movement, referring to the old sympathies manifested by Marx and Engels for the Polish national-liberation efforts. But since then, argued the author of the article, the social and political situation in Europe had changed so much that referring to Marx's attitude had become ahistorical. "A monstrous crime has been committed on Poland," all nations should be free, but "not everything that is desired is by the same token possible, and not everything that is possible by itself is also possible especially for the proletariat."

The basic argument of the article was as follows: the slogan of the rebuilding of independent Poland is utopian because it is contrary to the objective direction of socio-economic development, and hence is unacceptable to a socialist party whose doctrine rests on the principle of the consistence of its purpose with the objective tendencies in social development. How, according to the author, do these "objective tendencies" look? The Polish propertied classes in all the three partitions are loyal towards the occupiers. This results from the economic interests of those classes, of their almost complete switch to trade and industrial relations with the

²³ R. Luxemburg, *Neue Strömungen in der polnischen sozialistischen Bewegung in Deutschland und Oesterreich*, "Neue Zeit," 1896, April 19. No. 32, pp. 176 - 181. May 6, No. 33, pp. 206 - 216.

economic territory of the appropriate partitioning state. "The economic relations between the three parts of Poland are so insignificant that they cannot be reckoned with in the economic life of those parts." These are the objective tendencies which arise beyond the will and influence of the proletariat.

The proletariat ought to fight for the elimination of states as institutions of social and political oppression in general, hence also states which have carried out the partition of Poland. But before it happens, it cannot strive for the fragmentation of the existing states for this would atomize the labour forces. And everything which leads to the fragmentation of workers threatens their cause. "The only way of effective struggle for all the interests of the Polish workers lies for the Polish socialists (in the Prussian and Austrian parts) in a common political programme with the German and Austrian social-democrats and, by accepting the existing state borders as a *fait accompli*, to give up the utopia of creating a Polish class state with the help of the proletariat. Only in this way can they speed up the moment when the proletariat's final victory will completely liberate the Polish nation."

Thus, the author of the article defended the idea of preserving the current territorial form of both the German and the Austrian state as long as it was not possible to abolish the institution of the capitalist state as such. Naturally, before this happened she would prefer to see them as states in which all the constituent nations enjoyed equal rights. She considered this the target for which the Polish proletariat should struggle at this stage together with the proletariat of the partitioning powers.

She did not mention at all the existence of the PPS London resolution. It seemed as if her article were written without any connection with that document.²⁴ Was it really so? This astonishing coincidence in time could not be accidental.

Rosa Luxemburg's article upset the leadership of the PPS. It had appeared in the publication of the most influential party

²⁴ She wrote the following note to the last sentence of her article: "When this article was already written, we received the draft resolution, published in 'Le Parti Ouvrier,' the Paris organ of the Allemanites, which is to be presented at the London international congress by, of course, the social patriots, and which claims that the rebuilding of Poland is necessary in the interest of the proletariat."

in the 2nd International, considered the leading theoretical Marxist journal in the world; its arguments could easily have been listened to by the European socialist opinion, while creating a sort of moral alibi for those among the German and Austrian socialists who were ill-disposed towards the PPS resolution, because the arguments against that resolution came from Polish social-democrats.

From Italy, from Labriola came messages that the article in "Neue Zeit" had seemed convincing to the leaders of the Italian socialist party and that it had made difficult their winning over to the PPS resolution. Labriola also wrote that he had tried to recommend the PPS resolution in the "Critica Sociale," the theoretical biweekly of the Italian party, but the only result was that on the following pages of that same issue its editor, the prominent Italian socialist Filippo Turati, criticized both the resolution and Labriola's recommendation.²⁵ Moreover, Victor Adler, a friend of Labriola and leader of the Austrian socialists, would not reply to his letters requesting a public support for the Polish resolution.²⁶ Also unsuccessful were his efforts to gain the support for the PPS resolution of Gregorio Agnini, one of the pioneers of the Italian socialist movement, chairman of the socialist parliamentary group.

Unaffected by all this and deeply believing in the idea of Poland's independence, Labriola was still trying to win support for the PPS resolution. But everywhere he hit a stone wall of reluctance. As no declaration for the resolution was forthcoming from Adler, he asked him at least to publish his paper in the "Critica Sociale," in the Vienna social-democratic journal the "Arbeiter-Zeitung," but Adler refused to do even that. On May 22, he wrote to Labriola that "*la chose polonaise a pris un caractère un peu verwickelt*—and I cannot just simply publish your article."²⁷

A week later Labriola received from Paris still less comforting news from Georges Sorel. The latter wrote "*qu'il n'y avait aucune*

²⁵ Text of Labriola's letter of recommendation to the editors of "Critica Sociale" and their original reply in "Critica Sociale," 16.5. 1896.

²⁶ A. Labriola from Rome, May 11, 1896, to B. A. Jędrzejowski, *Korespondencja*, p. 510.

²⁷ A. Labriola, *Korespondencja*, p. 515.

chance d'intéresser les socialistes français en ce moment à la question polonaise. Monsieur Déville n'est pas partisan de soumettre cette affaire au congrès."²⁸

One of the founders of the Italian socialist party, Leonido Bissolati, declared outright: "We share the opinion contained in the articles of Rosa Luxemburg because they appeared in the "Neue Zeit" that is in the organ of scientific socialism which expresses the official opinion of the German social-democrats."²⁹ And when Labriola tried to explain the matter, he replied: "I value your information very much but I think that the arguments of Rosa Luxemburg remain valid and irrefutable."³⁰

Soon, the Italian party invited Rosa Luxemburg to expound her criticism of the PPS resolution in the "Critica Sociale" to the Italian socialists. Her article *La questione polacca al congresso internazionale di Londra* appeared there on July 16, 1896.³¹

Bad news was still flowing from Labriola: when he tried to gain the support of Pablo Iglesias, the sometime founder of the Spanish branch of the 1st International, the leader of the Spanish socialists, he replied that in his opinion "the Polish resolution should not be accepted."³²

Moved by this kind of news, Józef Piłsudski, who at the time was in London, in the foreign leadership of the PPS (Central Board of the ZZSP), wrote home:

"I am increasingly apprehensive about the fate of the motion. Labriola is sparing no effort, he writes letters every few days and has sent an article to "Critica Sociale" about it, but Turati, blast him, added to it a note with quotations from Rosa Luxemburg's article in "Neue Zeit." The Frenchman Sorel, whom Labriola had approached on the matter, replied that the French will not probably understand what it is about. The motion will certainly be carried but it would not look nice if it were amended or if it encountered a strong opposition."³³

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 516 (at the time, Gabriel Déville was one of the leading French socialists).

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 517.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 529.

³¹ No. 14, pp. 217 - 220.

³² A. Labriola, *Korespondencja*, p. 518.

³³ "Niepodległość," vol. XV, 1937, p. 129.

The PPS leaders were disturbed by the fact that Rosa Luxemburg's article in "Neue Zeit" not only functioned politically but was also an obvious emanation of the views harboured by many West-European socialists.

It was time to devise some counter-action to the article. Thanks to the good offices of Ignacy Daszyński, the leader of Polish socialists in Galicia, the Austrian part of Poland (the party itself was an autonomous part of the Austrian social-democracy), the Central Board of the ZZSP succeeded in causing Victor Adler, to write to his friend Karl Kautsky, editor of "Neue Zeit," a letter of intervention. "I have just read the extremely untimely elaboration of Comrade Luxemburg..." he wrote on May 13. Privately he added a remark which would not have pleased the inspirers of his intervention: "I am afraid that the unnecessary but harmless Polish resolution for London may, thanks to her, blow up into an affair [...]."³⁴ Austria, one of the partitioning powers, was also a party in this matter and Adler was not indifferent to the interests of his country. That is why the PPS resolution seemed to him unnecessary. Formally, it concerned only the Russian-occupied part, but Adler must have been aware that any changes in the Polish question in the Russian-occupied part immediately affected the interests of the other two partitioning powers. That political "leap into the unknown" was becoming increasingly unacceptable to the socialist parties in Austria and Germany, and to some others as well. It was no accident that even earlier Adler could not, or perhaps would not, try and win official support for the PPS draft resolution at the congress of the Austrian social-democratic party convened in April 1896 in Prague. Despite the fact that it was precisely Ignacy Daszyński who was the rapporteur in the matter of the preparations to the London Congress, the whole thing boiled down to his reading out the text of the PPS resolution during his report on the preparations to the Congress. The resolution was neither discussed nor voted, nor supported by the convention.³⁵

³⁴ V. Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Babel und Karl Kautsky. Gesammelt und erleutert von Friedrich Adler*, Wien 1954, p. 207.

³⁵ Fifth congress of the social-democratic party in Prague, "Naprzód," April 23, 1896, No. 17, p. 2.

This was another blow because the Central Board of the ZZSP counted on Daszyński and his influence on Adler, the leader of the Austrian socialists.⁸⁶

Although in the letter to Kautsky, quoted before, Adler announced his forthcoming reply to Rosa Luxemburg's article in "Neue Zeit," but in the event he did not do even that. "Neue Zeit" published only an article, sent in with his blessing, written by Samuel (Emil) Haecker, one of the leaders of the Polish Social-Democratic Party in Galicia. This text appeared in the issue of June 3, four weeks after the last instalment of R. Luxemburg's article.

Haecker's article was rather a polemical "credo" in an independence—of Poland—spirit than a matter-of-fact reply demolishing point by point all the arguments of Rosa Luxemburg. Among other things Haecker wrote that "the independence of Poland is in absolute harmony with socialist demands"⁸⁷ and that it was not a utopian demand. But he did not engage in any concrete arguments as to the means which in the situation then obtaining would lead to the regaining of independence. He rightly pointed out that R. Luxemburg's economic arguments rested on brittle foundations: she absolutised the primacy of economics over politics and the integrating role of the modern capitalist development. But it was just the part of his reasoning which, considering the article's addressees, could have been vital that Haecker treated somewhat lightly. He calmed the qualms of the German and Austrian comrades arguing that contrary to R. Luxemburg's diagnosis, the unity of the PPS in all the three partitions would not loosen the bonds between PPS-D of Galicia and the Austrian socialists or between PPS in the Prussian-occupied part and the SPD.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ "As concerns the motion, it will probably be passed, now Daszyński will work on the Austrians. There will be a Congress there on April 5, and he will report on the subject of the (London) Congress," wrote J. Piłsudski from London to the national organisation of the PPS. (Letter of March 24, 1896, "Niepodległość" XIII, 1936, p. 469).

⁸⁷ S. Haecker, *Der Sozialismus in Polen*, "Neue Zeit," June 3, 1896, No. 37, pp. 324-332; let us recall what Engels wrote in 1892, three years before his death, in the introduction to the new Polish edition of the Communist Manifesto: ... "the independence of Poland is just as much needed by the workers of the rest Europe as by the Polish workers." (*Marks i Engels o Polsce [Marx and Engels on Poland]*, vol. II, Warszawa 1960, pp. 205-206).

⁸⁸ S. Haecker, *Der Sozialismus in Polen...*, pp. 324-332.

All in all, Haecker's article purely declarative and weakly argued, which was reportedly dictated by Daszyński and Victor Adler, was not a convincing reply to R. Luxemburg.

On June 6, 1896, the long-expected talks between the foreign leadership of the PPS and Liebknecht were held. Great hopes had been pinned on these talks. It was thought that Liebknecht would be able, thanks to his prestige, to break down the resistance of other prominent European socialists to the "Polish resolution." After the big workers' meeting in London on that day in honour of the venerable old leader, B. A. Jędrzejowski, who spoke good German, invited him and Karl Marx's daughter and son-in-law, Eleanor and Edward Aveling, together with prominent German socialist activists in exile, Julius Motteler (the famous "red postmaster" in the times of the emergency laws against socialists in Germany) and Friedrich Lessner, and described the situation. As he wrote later to Kelles-Krauz, "at his (Liebknecht's) request, I wrote down everything we know from you and Labriola about the unfavourable attitude of the French, and he solemnly promised that he would persuade them out of it. Here I must add that the Germans (Liebknecht and Motteler) consider our motion of great importance precisely because of the French, for they think, rightly, that the passing of that motion by the congress will be the best manifestation against the Franco-Russian alliance. Finally, Liebknecht promised to second our motion at the congress in a special speech on behalf of the German party. Briefly, we could not wish for anything better as concerns Liebknecht's visit."³⁹

According to Józef Piłsudski, who was present at the conversation, Liebknecht said also that "he will be proud" to defend the PPS motion "at the congress and prior to it," that he would write an article on this matter in the central organ of the German party, the Berlin daily "Vorwärts," and at the end gave a toast: "*Noch ist Polen nicht verloren.*"⁴⁰

Towards the end of June, 1896, the fate of the motion was still so uncertain that some PPS leaders seriously considered its with-

³⁹ B. A. Jędrzejowski from London, June 16, 1896, to K. Kelles-Krauz in Paris. CA KC PZPR, 305/11/22, book VIII, c. 211.

⁴⁰ J. Piłsudski from London, June 9, 1896, to CKR PPS in Poland, "Niepodległość," vol. XV, 1937, p. 426.

drawal.⁴¹ The attitude of the French was the most perplexing. The leading French socialists, Jules Guesde, Edouard Vaillant and Paul Lafargue, became the object of earnest efforts on the part of both PPS and Polish socialdemocrats. "Liebknecht came to Paris earlier and went to stay with Lafargue who, as you know, is the least favourably inclined towards us among the Guesdites ; sometimes ago he brought Rosa (Luxemburg) to the sitting of the Conseil National. In view of this, please write quickly what have you decided with him and whether he has undertaken to influence the Guesdites in any way as concerns our question ?," alerted Kelles-Krauz from Paris the Central Board of the ZZSP.⁴² Shortly before the Congress in London he complained : "Generally speaking, there will be difficulties with the Guesdites. It is too much for them to understand our programme. As concerns Guesdites, Dubreuilh told me expressly that we have opponents in them. [. . .] As concerns Blankists—and probably the Allemanites share their views—they seem to have utopian internationalism in common with the Italians. I talked with Dubr[euilh] : he cannot understand that we want to gain independence *before* introducing socialism as a stage, a minimum, although I've argued that after all they want to abolish the senate, and the Belgians and Austrians to gain general elections also *before* abolishing capitalism, although socialism will bring complete political, not only national freedom".⁴³

Two reasons motivated such a wary, sometimes downright critical attitude of the leaders of West-European social-democrats towards the PPS independence resolution. One could be called "doctrinal." It was apprehended that national slogans might obscure the image of class and social contradictions ; that they might disturb the process of the workers' political emancipation. It was thought that they could become a bridge towards the workers on the part of various non-socialist or even hostile trends ; that they might distract the workers' attention from their main

⁴¹ J. Piłsudski from London, June 25, 1896, to CKR in Poland, *ibidem*, vol. XVI, 1937, pp. 502 - 503.

⁴² K. Kelles-Krauz from Paris, June 10, 1896, to ZZSP Central Board in London, CA KC PZPR, 305/VII/50, c. 74.

⁴³ K. Kelles-Krauz, June 29, 1896, from Paris to ZZSP Central Board in London, *ibidem*, c. 82.

goal : class struggle for their own social liberation. This was often mixed with attitudes more rooted in sentiment than precise strategy. They could be termed, after Otto Bauer, "naive cosmopolitanism" or, according to Kelles-Krauz, "utopian internationalism." It was generally felt that the task of the Socialist International should be the abolishing of national barriers between the workers of various countries ; it should not concern itself with the founding of new states or the establishment of new nations. The world was divided into two camps, according to the dichotomy : "International of the proletarians" and "international of the capitalists."

The other reason, though connected with the first, had really a different origin and different predominant features. It resulted from the gradual integration of the West-European social-democrats with the existing state structures ; this surfaced drastically and unexpectedly for many people at the outbreak of World War I, but had been ripening for years as also did the turning of European socialist organisations from *avant-garde* groups into mass parties. It was an attitude which was perhaps best and most succinctly expressed by the leader of the French socialist left, Jules Guesde, in the conversation with Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, mentioned before : fear of any change in the state boundaries in a stabilised Europe.⁴⁴

These two motivations could be seen in various patterns, various components. They were a mixture of orthodox resentments and quite modern political conditioning.

In the latter part of June there appeared in Paris the next issue of "Sprawa Robotnicza," the journal of the SDKP, edited by Rosa Luxemburg, and revived after more than a year ; it featured the text of a resolution on the national question for the London Congress, this time drafted by the SDKP. Now the Congress had the choice of either adopting or dismissing the PPS resolution, as well as the choice between one or the other Polish resolution. The SDKP motion, doubtless written by Rosa Luxemburg, contained the same arguments as her April-May article in

⁴⁴ About the analysis of the attitudes of the 2nd International towards the national question see F. Tych, *Klassenkampf und nationale Frage in der Zeit der II. Internationale*, in: *Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung* (XI, "Linzer Konferenz," 1975), Wien 1978, pp. 238 - 260.

"Neue Zeit." Józef Piłsudski estimated "on the spot" that "this motion is against us and says that the rebuilding of Poland before the social revolution is a pipedream, and that it will naturally follow the revolution." He also warned that, although Rosa Luxemburg had received a mandate for the London Congress from Polish workers in the Prussian partition, the PPS would not accept her as a member of the Polish delegation.⁴⁵

That "counter-resolution," as "Sprawa Robotnicza" called it, proposed by the SDKP, proclaimed, among other things, that "the ultimate overthrow of national oppression can be gained only through the overthrow of the capitalist order—the source of all oppression; hence the most effective means of gaining national liberation is the strengthening of international solidarity of workers in all the countries and the unity of workers in every state irrespective of national differences, in order to conduct a joint political action based on class struggle."⁴⁶

SDKP was not sure whether its standpoint would find support with the International; neither did it know if the PPS resolution had any and whose backing. So it spared no effort to explain the reasons of the Polish movement's internationalist wing to the leaders of the International. This was the purpose of another article by Rosa Luxemburg which appeared in "Neue Zeit" early in July, and which was formally a reply to Haecker's article.

"Rosa," wrote Piłsudski in a letter, "has again published an article in "Neue Zeit" against us, an article full of figures and economics, definitely better written than the first, and directed mainly against the social patriots in the Russian part. Our reply will not reach Congress in time, so we shall wait for what the Congress has to say in this matter, and then, accordingly, we shall either raise our voice or simply refute Miss Rosa's 'teachings'."⁴⁷

To a reader even slightly familiar with party literature and the language of socialist propaganda of the time the very heading

⁴⁵ J. Piłsudski from London, June 25, 1896, to CKR PPS in Poland, "Niepodległość," vol. XVI, 1937, p. 500.

⁴⁶ Article *Dwie rezolucje* [*Two Resolutions*], "Sprawa Robotnicza," June 1896, No. 24. Reprinted in: *Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy. Materiały i dokumenty*, vol. I, part 1, pp. 435 - 436.

⁴⁷ J. Piłsudski, July 15, 1896, from London to CKR PPS in Poland, "Niepodległość," vol. XVII, 1938, pp. 49 - 50.

of her article : *Social-Patriotism in Poland*, conveyed the idea of a foregone assessment of the direction represented by the PPS. For in the opinion of those times, social-patriotism was a mixture, indigestible for a Marxist, which tried to combine "orthodox" socialism with an ideology which originated outside the labour camp and ought to have remained alien to it.

This time the author did not beat about the bush, did not try to create appearances that her article had no connection with the London resolution. On the contrary. Bit by bit, she critically analysed the text of the PPS resolution. Where in her previous article she spoke about the Prussian and Austrian partitions, she now concerned herself with the proper area of PPS activity that is the Russian part.

She indicated what, in her opinion, had changed since the old Marxian strategy in the Polish question : then Russian bayonets were threatening democratic Europe, and the Polish liberation struggles erected a barrier between Europe and those bayonets, while now the extremely reactionary political system of Russia was looming over Europe, and could not be solved by the Polish liberation efforts ; here only socio-political changes in Russia itself could be of decisive influence. The Russian working class, which was growing in strength in step with the advance of capitalism "guarantees the annihilation of absolutism from within." All the more so as the social image of the Polish lands had thoroughly changed since the national uprisings in effect of this selfsame advance of capitalism ; the Polish bourgeoisie now saw its future in access to the Russian markets and that was why "it subjects itself to foreign rule ;" the gentry, on the other hand, "once the vanguard of the Polish society, now trails behind the bourgeoisie," and was economically ruined ; the peasantry "has no political image at all," and where it has "its peculiar feature is still the traditional hatred of the gentry and distrust towards every national movement in which the peasant suspects a lordly swindle ;" the middle classes were diversified, some drew profits from Russian markets and did not have any centrifugal tendencies, some were threatened by big industry and those "have become the adopted fathers of the orphaned national aspirations ;" finally, the intelligentsia which in Poland came "mostly from impoverished

gentry and petty bourgeoisie :” the Russifying system mobilized it to patriotic stances because it imposed on it a foreign language in schools and universities and blocked its careers, access to offices and higher army ranks. But it still had access to professions, jobs in industry and commerce, and so the young intellectual in revolt, on achieving professional stability in a bourgeois society “as a mature man adopts the physiognomy of that society and becomes ‘sober’ and ‘reasonable’.” There remained the proletariat about which, as Rosa Luxemburg wrote, it could be said : “since the ruling classes have deserted the flag of state independence, the proletariat should raise it.” But these were only appearances for the proletariat could not act against the natural trends in socio-economic development as it would destroy its historic mission of the grave digger of the capitalist system when the latter exhausted its development reserves. Hence the general conclusion that “today in Poland there is no social class which would be interested in rebuilding Poland, and no force which could support this interest in practice.” The process of “organic incorporation” of the economic organism of the Polish Kingdom into the Russian state thus was not a demand formulated by the Polish social-democrats but only the ascertainment of an objective process which a Marxist could not ignore. Yes, the Polish national rights must be defended but in the Russian-occupied part the proletariat could “stand watch over the endangered nationality” only by fighting “for political freedom in Russia.”⁴⁸

The tone and arguments used by Rosa Luxemburg were exactly what suited best the mentality of her addressees : leaders and activists of West-European socialist parties, and primarily the German social-democrats. In her article she made use of the mechanistic, “natural” as it were Marxist interpretation with its typical absolutisation of “objective economic and social processes,” which was at the time very popular in those circles. By this token she provided a doctrinal alibi for the distrust of social-democrats in independent European countries towards any national irredentists.

⁴⁸ R. Luxemburg, *Der Sozialpatriotismus in Polen*, “Neue Zeit,” July 1, 1896, No. 41, pp. 459 - 470.

Several of her arguments would strike a critical reader : (i) absolutisation of economic factors and their impact on political attitudes ; (ii) overestimation of the importance of Russian markets for the economy of the Polish Kingdom ; (iii) static view of the attitudes of popular classes towards the national oppression, which was in her interpretation dynamic only in historical perspective (turned towards the past) ; (iv) omission of the role which could be played by the national-liberation movement in the struggle against the reactionary government (she was right in saying that tsarism will be destroyed from within but she did not take into account the possibility of the national-liberation movement being one of the vital components of those internal forces which would overthrow tsarism) ; (v) ignoring the fact that the elimination of national oppression and life in an independent state clearly shows up the social contradictions in one's own nation and thus favours workers' class struggle ; (vi) one-sided adoption of the variant that the downfall of capitalism will take place on the existing political map of Europe and that no changes will occur on it before the victory of socialism. In her arguments, she petrified the existing European pattern, made it permanent for the whole capitalist era. Only socialism would create a new situation, also for the Polish people.

Barely a week after the appearance of the article the most important objections against Rosa Luxemburg were raised by the man who opened for her access to the "Neue Zeit" that is Karl Kautsky. Thus for the first time, except for Labriola, someone outside the circle of Polish socialists took part in the pre-congress discussion on the Polish question. It was not just anybody but the man considered "the pope of Marxism" after the recent death of Friedrich Engels. Even the title of his article was significant : *Finis Poloniae* ?. He reminded the readers that since the Great French Revolution the independence of Poland was a matter of vital importance to the revolutionary parties in Europe ; "It was the most important of the international political tasks and of the European revolution." "The enemies of tsarism were the natural allies of European revolution."⁴⁹ But this situation remained un-

⁴⁹ K. Kautsky, *Finis Poloniae* ?, "Neue Zeit," July 8, 1896, No. 42, p. 484.

changed so long as there existed "a complete lack of revolutionary class inside Russia" and so long as the petty gentry was the most politically active class in Poland itself. But since both in Russia and in Poland the development of capitalism created the working class, and the Russian revolutionary movement grew in international importance more than the Polish movement, the situation underwent a change: the Polish question lost its extraordinary international significance for the European revolution.

So far Kautsky's arguments took the same line as Rosa Luxemburg's. But then followed a polemic. Kautsky declared that the socialist movement believed in certain moral and political principles which it must always put forward irrespective of whether they could be realised under the existing political system or not. "The programme should express what it is that we demand from the present society or state, not what we expect of them." One of those demands was precisely the demand for national freedom for the peoples deprived of it. "Even should Poland's independence be absolutely impossible before the proletariat gains political power, the London international congress could not be charged with ridiculous utopianism for adopting the Polish resolution just as the 1st International had not been for its Polish resolutions."

Kautsky also undermined Luxemburg's concrete historical arguments: he said that as industry developed in Russia so the rivalry would grow between the Russian and Polish bourgeoisie and the latter would, at least on these grounds, become "more accessible to the national idea;" that R. Luxemburg had disregarded the petty middle classes too much both concerning their numbers and their impact of political pressure as well as their attraction to matters of state. The same was true of the intelligentsia. Its attitude was static towards the peasants, not taking into account the fact that the Polish peasant would become increasingly interested in the national question. "In view of all these facts," concluded Kautsky, "we are very far from agreeing with Miss Luxemburg that the national movement in Poland is a thing of the past, without strong roots in the present, and that it is in absolute contradiction with the trends of economic development."

Finally, Kautsky demolished Luxemburg's idea which had probably provided the main motivation for her attitude: the fear that the national fragmentation of the proletariat will adversely affect its social, class struggle. It is possible, he argued, that the natural gravitation of the Polish proletariat from all the three partitions towards itself creates inconveniences, even dangers for the socialist movement in Austria, Russia and Germany, that it would certainly be better if there were only one centralised organisation in each of these countries instead of the national federalism that in practice existed inside the party, but after all "it is not from agitation for independence that stem the defects of national federalism but precisely because of the lack of independence."

All this indicated that "the Polish proletariat was unable to deploy all its forces in the practical struggle nor to round up its organisation as long as Poland remained divided; that only in a united independent Poland would the Polish proletariat find the basis needed for exercising in the state an influence appropriate to its development."

Kautsky's article coincided with the climax in efforts on the part of the SDKP and PPS in the matter of the Polish resolution in view of the impending date of the Congress. For this reason Rosa Luxemburg arrived in Paris from Switzerland on July 12. Her visit had two goals: the publication of two numbers, 24 and 25 of "Sprawa Robotnicza" (the last issues of that paper, as it turned out) so that they would appear in time for the Congress and form an additional support for the delegates of the SDKP; and winning over the French socialists and the leading members of Russian revolutionary exiles residing in Paris for the SDKP stance and against the PPS resolution.

From Adolf Warski, with whom she was staying, she learned that Paul Lafargue, one of the leading French socialists, son-in-law of Karl Marx, had praised her several times for her article in "Neue Zeit," and that the mere fact of its appearance in that paper "had immensely impressed" the French. Warski told her that Jean Allemane, the leader of another trend in French socialism, the Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Révolutionnaire, had also

praised her warmly. "Briefly, the whole of France is ours."⁵⁰ But she was apprehensive of the Russians. She was not sure of the standpoint of old Pyotr Lavrov, known for his close ties with the Polish socialist movement, a man of immense prestige, the leading theoretician of the revolutionary *narodnik* movement. On the other hand, she counted on the support of Ilya Rubanovich, who moved in Lavrov's circle and was very much involved in the work of the 2nd International,⁵¹ as well as on that of the Paris correspondent of SPD press, Boris Krichevsky, who, albeit grudgingly, wrote an article supporting the attitude of the SDKP and published in "Leipziger Volkszeitung."⁵²

Yet another personage was mobilised for the defence of SDKP standpoint. It was a friend of Rosa Luxemburg's during her studies in Switzerland, the later famous Alexander Helphand-Parvus. He published his article *The Polish Question* in another influential daily of the German social-democrats, the "Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung" edited by him in Dresden.⁵³ The basic idea of the article was contained in its very first sentence: "The immediate political goals of the social-democratic party are concerned not with the atomisation of Europe but with its elimination." The article was a polemic with Kautsky's article and fully concurred with the views of Rosa Luxemburg.

R. Luxemburg was not certain about the stance of George Plekhanov, at the time the most influential of Russian Marxists. True, for the past few years he had been at odds with Leon Jogiches, the man closest to her, in Russian affairs; he had also written an article backing the slogan of Poland's independence for PPS's *May 1896 Memoir* (the article was late and appeared in the April issue 1896 of "Przedświt"). Nevertheless, judging from certain symptoms, she thought that he could support the "counter-resolution" of SDKP; "Plekhanov wishes to make peace with

⁵⁰ R. Luxemburg, *Listy do Leona Jogichesa-Tyszki* [*Letters to Leon Jogiches-Tyszka*], collected and edited by Feliks Tych, vol. I, Warszawa 1968, p. 115.

⁵¹ "I do not know, if things will turn out well with Lavrov," she wrote. "Adolf says that he is becoming 'neutral' and is squibbling. But Rubanowich is ours as always, and much can be done with him," (*Ibidem*).

⁵² "Leipziger Volkszeitung," July 23, 1896.

⁵³ "Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung," July 25, 1896.

us—And why? There are several reasons. (1) the effect of the articles in “Neue Zeit.” (2) The beast sees that the resolution of social-patriots will not pass and that ours is a protest against tsarism. He has to vote for it and he understands that it will pass in one form or another.”⁵⁴ Despite this, R. Luxemburg expressed her fear that the Russian delegation might not support the point of view of the SDKP.⁵⁵ Yet, after three days in Paris and intense canvassing she wrote about the effects of her “diplomatic offensive” almost euphorically: “Things are almost settled with Lavrov. Yesterday, I went to him twice. Our relations are very cordial. He promised to give his answer today, it’s nine-tenth certain he’ll sign. Then I’m promised Jaurès almost certainly. Immediately after obtaining Lavrov’s signature we are going to Vaillant. Lafargue, I’m assured, he is *tout à moi*... I’ll see Allemane the day after tomorrow, they’re with us but they must be strengthened. Last week, Milton [a Polish social-democrat living in London—*F.T.*] sent a good article to ‘Justice.’ We do not know yet, if it has been accepted. Tomorrow or the day after the issue will be here. Today we’ll write a short article to ‘People,’ we’ve got our pals there [...]. I’m delighted with our resolution... It will be a triumph such as we do not need any greater.”⁵⁶

But things were not that smooth. On July 17, Rosa Luxemburg saw Edouard Vaillant, the legendary member of the Paris Commune and the leader of the left wing of the French socialists, primarily in order to obtain his backing for her serving on the political commission of the London Congress; the same commission in which the two Polish resolutions were to be discussed. She also counted on his signature under the SDKP resolution. Vaillant was an influential man in the 2nd International. But he received Rosa with less enthusiasm than she expected. He told her that “he wants to avoid a Polish discussion at the Congress” and so he is for the adoption of a resolution couched in general terms which would be unanimously passed. But he would “in no case allow”

⁵⁴ R. Luxemburg, *Listy do Leona Jogiches-Tyszki...*, letter of July 13, 1896, p. 122.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁵⁶ Letter of July 15, 1896, *ibidem*, pp. 126 - 128.

the PPS resolution.⁵⁷ This was a lot but less than his signature on the SDKP resolution which Luxemburg had hoped for.

In Paris R. Luxemburg learned about an anonymous article published in three successive issues of the central organ of the German social-democrats, the daily "Vorwärts," headlined *On the Tactics of Polish Social-Democrats*, written in the defence of the PPS stance. She suspected the author to be Ignacy Daszyński. Only later was she to learn that it had really been written by Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, one of the PPS leaders.⁵⁸ It was originally meant for "Neue Zeit" as a reply to the first series of Luxemburg's articles. But then Haecker had reacted more quickly than Jodko. The latter's article appeared in "Vorwärts" thanks to Wilhelm Liebknecht. It could seriously endanger Luxemburg's efforts so, despite the Paris bustling around, three days after the last instalment of Jodko's article, she sent a reply to "Vorwärts:" "The last instalment of the other was on Saturday, I wrote on Sunday, and today I've sent it," she informed Jogiches, who also had been alarmed by that article.⁵⁹

None of them knew that even earlier a reaction to Jodko's article in "Vorwärts" had come from none other than Georgi Plekhanov. His article appeared on July 23, Luxemburg's two days later.

What elements did those texts introduce into the discussion?

Jodko's article briefly outlined the history of the evolution of the Polish labour movement from the stage exclusively "international" up to the adoption in 1892 of the programme of the rebuilding of independent Poland, and justified the latter. His polemic with Rosa Luxemburg contained arguments similar to those of Kautsky. But he additionally justified the "separatism" of the Polish socialist movement by involving the weakness of the revolutionary movement in Russia.

It is the last statement that caused Plekhanov's sharp reaction.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Letter of July 17, 1896, *ibidem*, p. 129.

⁵⁸ [W. Jodko-Narkiewicz], *Zur Taktik der polnischen Sozialdemokratie*, "Vorwärts," 15-16 and July 17, 1896, No. 163-165.

⁵⁹ R. Luxemburg, *Listy do Leona Jogichesa-Tyszki...*, letter of July 20, 1896, p. 132.

⁶⁰ G. Plekhanov, *Zur Taktik der polnischen Sozialdemokratie*, "Vorwärts," July 23, No. 170.

He charged Jodko with a too pessimistic assessment of the prospects for the socialist movement in Russia and gave it to understand—thinking of the SDKP—that there was a trend in the Polish socialist movement, which did not share that pessimism. The recent strike by scores of thousands of workers in St Petersburg, which Jodko did not even mention in his article (Plekhanov did not know that the article had been written before those strikes) indicated that it was the trend in the Polish socialism represented by the SDKP that was right about the prospects for a Russian revolution, not the one represented by the author, hence the PPS.

The article by Plekhanov, who only recently in his contribution to PPS's *May Memoir* declared his full support of revolutionary Russia for the Polish national question, took the PPS leaders by surprise. They were not aware that Plekhanov did not really change his stance in the Polish question. He only changed his opinion of the PPS, discouraged by its attitude towards the Russian movement reflected also in Jodko's article. Only less than a month ago, when Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz reported his talk with the French leader Dubreuilh concerning the support for the resolution, he noted :

"One thing impressed him strongly : when I told him that Plekhanov was with us. According to him, there was nothing strange in the Germans and Austrians backing us because their political interest requires it—against Russia—but the Russians, that is something to think about."⁶¹

Thus Plekhanov was an important figure not just as himself but also because his attitude could influence the French.

Rosa Luxemburg's reply to Jodko's article, published two days after Plekhanov's, was extremely sharp.⁶² She blamed Jodko for not understanding the very principle of the dominant trend of social development in the doctrine of scientific socialism, and his taking absolutely no account of that principle while outlining the political goals of the proletariat. Next she charged him with

⁶¹ K. Kelles-Krauz, June 29, 1896, from Paris to ZZSP Central Board in London, CA KC PZPR, 305/VII/50, c. 82.

⁶² R. Luxemburg, *Zur Taktik der polnischen Sozialdemokratie*, "Vorwärts," July 25, 1896, No. 172. Reprinted in: R. Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke*, B. I/1, Berlin 1970, pp. 52 - 56.

identifying Russian tsarism with Russia as such, with her people, the working class and their revolutionary potential. She also maintained her opinion that the programme of winning an independent democratic Polish republic did not take at all into account the country's political and economic realities. In the political practice it leads to the breakdown of the unity of action of the Polish workers and those in "their" partitioning states.

Luxemburg's article appeared two days before the opening of the London Congress and was the last in the pre-Congress press discussion concerning the Polish resolution. The rest of the battle was to be fought on the floor of the Congress.

On Monday, July 27, 1896, the delegates and guests of the Congress gathered in the London Queen's Hall which could seat 2,000.

Among them were the leading representatives of the whole "alternative" socialist universe. Present were delegates from nearly all the European countries, North and South America, Australia. At the time, the socialist movement was not divided internationally into revolutionary and reformist trends, as it came to be after World War I, when besides the Socialist International there existed the Communist International. Moreover, next to socialists of various shades the Congress was also attended (for the last time) by anarchists.

Among those present were people whose names have gone down in the history of the international labour movement. From Germany came, among others, Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel, Paul Singer, Eduard Bernstein, Clara Zetkin; from Russia (or rather from the Russian political exiles), among others, Georgi Plekhanov and Pavel Axelrod; from Austria, Victor Adler, Karl Kautsky and others; from France e.g. Jules Guesde, Paul Lafargue, Jean Jaurès, Edouard Vaillant, Gabriel Déville, Alexandre Millerand; from England, among others, Sidney and Beatrice Webb: Bernard Shaw, Henry Hyndman, Harry Quelch, Keir Hardie, Tom Mann; from Sweden Hjalmar Branting; from Belgium Emile Vandervelde.

The Polish labour movement was represented by: from the PPS, among others, Ignacy Mościcki, Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz and Józef Piłsudski (who had stayed abroad for the purpose of

attending the Congress); from PPS-D Galicja, Ignacy Daszyński; from SDKP, Rosa Luxemburg, Julian Marchlewski, Stanisław Wojewski (a Polish worker from London) and Adolf Warski (the PPS delegates succeeded in rejecting his credential).

The Congress agenda provided for the following items: (1) Agrarian Question; (ii) Political Action; (iii) Economic and Industrial Action; (iv) War; (v) Education and Physical Development; (vi) Organisation; (vii) Miscellaneous Questions.

The national question was to be discussed under the item "Political Action," and so had been first sent to that Commission.⁶³ The Polish delegates sitting on it were Jodko-Narkiewicz and Daszyński. Ultimately three motions or draft resolution on the Polish question were sent to the Commission: the PPS draft, the SDKP draft and the draft of one of the English branches, the Social-Democratic Federation, resembling the PPS standpoint and proposing that Congress declare that the question of Poland's autonomy and liberation from the heinous oppression of Russia, Prussia and Austria is in the interest of the whole civilised world, and that there should be a joint international agitation for the absolute political liberation of Poland.⁶⁴

"One does not know," wrote Piłsudski in a letter, "what will come out of it. Possibly our motion will be passed, although perhaps in a changed form."⁶⁵

But reality turned out to be quite different. The Congress passed no separate resolution either in the Polish question or the national question in general. Only in item three of the Congress resolution concerning the political action of the proletariat one paragraph mentioned "the right to self-determination" of all the oppressed nations:

"The Congress declares in favour of the full autonomy of all nationalities and its sympathy with the workers of any country at present suffering under the yoke of military, national or other despotisms; and calls upon the workers in all such countries to fall into line, side by side with the class-conscious workers of the world,

⁶³ *Verhandlungen und Beschlüsse des Internationalen Sozialistischen Arbeiter und Gewerkschaft-Kongresses zu London vom 27. Juli bis 1. August 1896*, Berlin 1896.

⁶⁴ "Niepodległość," vol. XVII, 1939, p. 41.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 42, letter of June 6, 1896.

to organise for the overthrow of international capitalism and the establishment of International Social-Democracy.”⁶⁶

The name of Poland was not even mentioned.

How did it come about that instead of a concrete resolution drawing the attention of the world labour to the situation of the Polish nation and its struggle for independence, the Congress resolution contained only general formulations which were simply a compromise acceptable, as shown by the voting, to all, but which did not in the least degree indicate the actual position occupied by the Polish question or the national question in general?

To a large extent the reasons lay outside the intrinsic significance of the disputes concerning this particular matter. For from the very beginning the discussion in the Political Commission came under the impact of a question which had dominated the whole London Congress: the great dispute between the social-democrats and the anarchists concerning the very concept of political struggle.

But the dispute does not explain everything. It was the general attitude towards the Polish resolution on the part of the most influential leaders of the 2nd International that was decisive. In effect of various motivations the tabling of this question did not suit the purpose of any of the main parties of the 2nd International: the French, German, Austrian nor the English delegation. For none of these countries did then question the existing political map of Europe, while the process of integration of the West-European socialist parties with the existing political structures in their own countries was fairly advanced. The fates of the resolution concerning Poland's independence was an example of it. It was a fact that even Wilhelm Liebknecht, who often declared himself in favour of independence for Poland, and despite his earlier concrete promises, did not say a word supporting the Polish resolution in the political commission of which he was a member. As a matter of fact, the discussion in the commission is not known. There is no shorthand report, and the minutes are very brief. All we know is that the draft resolution submitted

⁶⁶ *International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress, London 1896. Report of Proceeding, London, The Twentieth Century Press Ltd, p. 31.*

to the commission and drawn up by an unknown small group was adopted without amendments. The PPS and PPS-D delegates, Ignacy Daszyński and Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, who served on the Commission (SDKP had no representatives on it), had been unable to cause even the name of Poland to be mentioned in the resolution. Several days after the Congress, B. A. Jędrzejowski wrote to Antonio Labriola that this had been due to the fact that ... the Poles could not find their way to the room where the Commission was deliberating.

"The most important was the task of the Political Action Commission," wrote Jędrzejowski. "It was to make impossible the repetition of the scandal with the anarchists. So only little time could be devoted to our question. Since it was considered less important, it was discussed at the first sitting of the Commission with only the French, English and Danes present. The representatives of other nationalities (Poles, Russians, Germans, Italians, Balkan Slavs, Austrians, etc.) did not even have time to find their way to the room where the Commission was sitting! It proved impossible to return to the resolution at the next sittings, all the more so during the Congress debate. History can be made this way, too!"⁸⁷

At the Congress plenary session the question was equally unlucky. Of the six days of deliberations three were wasted in checking the mandates. Lots of time was consumed by the obstructions used by the anarchists. Eventually, little time remained for the Congress to deal with important essential matters. "They were in a frightful hurry," reported Piłsudski, "they voted everything en bloc, closing the discussion at once so that 12 speakers on political matters were immediately eliminated, including ours who was to indicate that the resolution contained also our motion. The reporter of the Commission for political affairs remarked that it had considered that what was good for Poland was equally desirable for all the peoples in the same situation; that is why the Commission had generalised our motion and tabled the resolution adopted unanimously by the Congress."⁸⁸

⁸⁷ A. Labriola, *Korespondencja*, p. 542.

⁸⁸ J. Piłsudski from London, Aug. 4, 1896, to CKR PPS in Poland, "Niepodległość," 1938, vol. XVII, p. 60.

“Unanimously.” So the SDKP delegation as well as that of the PPS voted for the resolution.

The question was tabled on Thursday, July 30, at the plenary afternoon session. Immediately after the first tiff with the anarchists, G. Lansbury read out the report of the Political Action Commission and the Congress resolution proposed by it.⁶⁹

The first paragraph of the resolution concerned the very notion of the idea of political action by the proletariat (“The Congress declares that with the view of realising the emancipation of workers, and enfranchisement of humanity and the citizen, and the establishment of the International Socialist Republic, the conquest of political power is of paramount importance.”) It was not until the third paragraph that mention was made of the attitude towards the struggle of conquered peoples for their freedom; it contained the formula quoted earlier.⁷⁰ Item four dealt with the emancipation of women, item fifth and last of the resolution denounced colonial policy.

Such was the political framework and the contexts of the national question in the Congress resolution.

According to Daszyński's report from the Congress, published in Cracow “Naprzód,” the political Commission's rapporteur justified “the reason for disregarding the resolution on Poland's independence” arguing that not only Poles but also other nations were suffering under the despotic rule of foreign masters, for instance the French in Alsace and Lorraine, or the Armenians torn between Russia, Turkey and Persia.⁷¹ Hence, when the matter came to be discussed at the plenary session of the Congress, it was no longer the “Polish question” but the generally treated question concerning unnamed countries “at present suffering under the yoke of military, national or other despotisms.” The abandonment of the Polish resolution was questioned by no one at the Congress. None of the Polish delegates took the floor.⁷²

⁶⁹ A. Hamon, *Le Socialisme et le Congrès de Londres*, Paris 1897, p. 150.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 151, and *Verhandlungen und Beschlüsse*, p. 17.

⁷¹ I. Daszyński, *Międzynarodowy Kongres Socjalistyczny w Londynie* [*International Socialist Congress in London*], “Naprzód,” Aug. 13, 1896, No. 33, p. 3.

⁷² A. Hamon, *Le Socialisme et le Congrès de Londres...*, pp. 152 - 156; *Verhandlungen und Beschlüsse...*, pp. 18 - 20.

After some of the anarchists left the session, the resolution was unanimously adopted.

"It is absolutely necessary," said "Przedświt" in its account of the debate "that the Congress should clearly and explicitly express its opinion on this matter ; whether it sympathises with the oppressed peoples' drive for independence or not. Once this question is resolved the need to state one's attitude towards every nationality separately is no longer valid. The other side of our motion, that is the protest against tsarism, has been at least partly resolved by the Swiss resolution which had been carried on the morning of the same day."⁷³

"Przedświt" added that "this turning away of the delegates attention from our concern and focusing it primarily on the Russian movement was probably due to the Petersburg strike which by breaking out just before the Congress must have filled with hope all the hearts of the foes of tsarism. It would have been difficult for us to demand an identical resolution especially concerning our movement for it would have looked like envying the Russian socialists their success. That is why we in the Commission have adopted the motion for the resolution which we are printing below and which, after all, fulfilled all our demands."⁷⁴

True, in June, shortly before the London Congress, the public opinion of working Europe was stirred by the news of a big strike of textile workers in St Petersburg in which 45,000 workers took part. It was the first organised industrial action in Russia of such proportions.

In a situation when the demand for Poland's independence was not related to any forceful insurrectional movement in the country itself, and the action of the Petersburg workers, compared with the previous inertia in the Russian movement, roused certain hopes in the world of the International, in such a situation it was obvious that political interest would focus on the strikes. Impressed by them the Swiss delegation suddenly moved a motion at the Congress plenary session, which proposed the passing of

⁷³ Zjazd Międzynarodowy [International Congress], "Przedświt," July 1896, No. 7, p. 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

a resolution "expressing joy at the first ever appearance of a delegation of a truly Russian labour organisation at an international convention, and recognizing this organisation which is such a powerful enemy of tsarism. In view of the recent strike of Petersburg workers, the resolution was very timely and was carried by acclamation."⁷⁵

In its post-congressional reflections "Przedświt" wondered what had been the reason that the Congress devoted so little time to the vital matter of "the attitude of socialists to national oppression." True, formal questions and the struggle with anarchists had turned the Congress attention away from that matter and consumed most of the time. Yet, the Polish socialists knew full well that the reason for such a feeble resonance of their motion in the Congress and for its being kept in the background, lay elsewhere.

The journal saw it in the fact that the majority of West-European countries did not see any urgency in the national question. "National oppression either is there non-existent so there is no need to bother about it, or the question whether to support national aspirations or not is combined with so many problems of internal politics that it cannot be considered in the abstract; for instance the attitude of France and Italy towards Alsace and Trieste."⁷⁶ But the PPS leaders were aware that this was only one side of the question. The other was the fear, which existed not only among the West-European socialists but also partly in the PPS own ranks, that the national slogans might obscure the social goals of the proletariat's struggle. "How it [i.e. the tabling at the Congress of the problem of struggle against national oppression—F.T.] was necessary can be seen in the fact that our tactics was misunderstood by many of our comrades, that some reproached us for including the matter of independence in the programme, that they did not distinguish us from plain patriots, finally the fact that there existed an opposition in this question also in our own ranks. Today the matter has been solved."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁷⁶ *Rzut oka na wyniki Zjazdu* [A Look at the Results of the Congress], "Przedświt," July 1896, No. 7, p. 11.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

Did the leadership of the PPS and its organ "Przedświt" believe that the London resolution, or rather the few lines of its resolution dealing with the national question, had really "solved" the attitude of the 2nd International towards the national question?

In effect, neither the stand of the SDKP nor that of the PPS won the day at the Congress, although both the groupings later claimed officially that their resolution, albeit in an altered guise, gained the approval of the Congress. SDKP was jubilant mainly because PPS had been unable to force through its "nationalist" resolution and because the Congress granted priority to social affairs, to the general political struggle of the workers for power; PPS, on the other hand, rejoiced because the question of the struggle against national oppression had been reflected at all in the political resolution of the Congress.

Assessments for internal use struck a much lower key. "Our motion sort of passed, sort of did not," wrote Piłsudski in his letter to the leadership of the national organisation of the PPS. "The Congress generalized our motion and spread it to all the conquered nations, expressing its sympathy with them—not a word about Poland in this—so the result is neither fish, flesh, fowl or good red herring, but we must pretend everything's all right and say that our motion had passed."⁷⁸

Several days after the Congress had closed B. A. Jędrzejowski in a letter to A. Labriola, who was alarmed that "the Polish resolution had disappeared from the Congress agenda,"⁷⁹ tried to explain the reasons for this. He saw them in several factors in the "inability to conduct any discussion" at the Congress, which drove the resolutions to generalizations; in "the fear of the French to address anything specially against Russia," and "secondly", he added, "who could foresee that the Congress would take place under the impact of the recent Petersburg strike."⁸⁰

It was only a few months after the London Congress that the

⁷⁸ J. Piłsudski from London, Aug. 4, 1896, to CKR PPS in Poland, "Niepodległość," vol. XVII, 1938, p. 60.

⁷⁹ A. Labriola, *Korespondencja...*, p. 538.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 539 - 540.

Central Board of ZZSP concluded pessimistically that Liebknecht, Labriola "and a few old Germans (probably F. Lessner, and J. Motteler—F.T.) were the only ones who had so far understood us and genuinely collaborated with us."⁸¹

The trouble was that those "few old Germans" did not have much say on the Polish question even within their own party, the SPD. Much more typical of its opinion was that expressed to Kautsky after his article "Finis Poloniae?" by Ignaz Auer, member of the five-person leadership (Vorstand) of the SPD and the party's secretary. He blamed Kautsky for viewing the Polish question as if it concerned only Russia, when in reality it also concerned Prussia and Austria. He considered that the whole area "von Memel bis zur Oder" should be treated as a protective belt with regard to "Eastern barbarity" and so nothing from that territory could be given to Poland. "Naturally, the London Congress will vote for the rebuilding (of Poland) but that will not be the only stupidity it will commit."⁸²

Auer's fears, expressed a few days before the opening of the Congress, were—as we know now—ungrounded. The most influential members of the International had ideas not much different from his.

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In the final reckoning, the Polish socialists failed to make the regaining of independence by Poland the special focus of interest of the 2nd International, as was the case with its predecessor, the 1st International.

But there was no doubt that if the 2nd International did concern itself at all with the national question and passed the later famous formula "about the right of every nation to self-determination," a formula adopted by V. I. Lenin as the starting point for all his ideas about the national question as well as in his arguments with Rosa Luxemburg, this was due only to the

⁸¹ B. A. Jędrzejowski, Dec. 1, 1896, from London to K. Kelles-Krauz in Paris, CA KC PZPR, 305/II/, book IX, c. 421.

⁸² I. Auer, July 23, 1896, from Berlin to K. Kautsky. Archives of the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. Archiv Kautsky D.II/224.

efforts of the Polish socialists. According to "Naprzód," this role of Poles was confirmed by the rapporteur of the political Commission at the Congress, George Lansbury, who "explicitly pointed out that the above resolution had been promoted by the motion of the Poles and that the Commission had unanimously tabled it because of all the conquered peoples."⁸³

So in this case the Poles became the spokesmen of those conquered peoples. They caused a great international discussion to flare up on the eve of the London Congress (at the Congress itself no arguments were exchanged on the subject) both in the press and in the lobbies on the attitude of the working class towards Poland's struggle for independence. This debate had important implications concerning the labour movement's standpoint on the national question in general.

Significantly, the 2nd International did not take up again the subject of the national question at any of its later congresses.

In 1910, this question appeared at the Congress in Copenhagen only in the narrow context of the separatist policy on the part of Bohemian trade unionists with regard to the national Austrian trade-union movement; the broader aspects of the national question were not reflected in the resolutions. Similarly, when the colonial question would appear on the agenda of the 2nd International, it was not treated as a national question.⁸⁴

Interestingly, not only the national question was dismissed during the London debates. Another important group of problems—although it was listed first among the chief items on the agenda—was dealt with by the Congress in a general way. It was the agrarian question.

The way these two questions were treated in London was symptomatic of the ideological and political image of the 2nd International. It resulted from the very concept of the labour struggle prevalent in the political circle of that organisation. For as long as reforms in the existing socio-political system were sought after, not its overthrow, so long only the question

⁸³ I. Daszyński, *Międzynarodowy Kongres Socjalistyczny w Londynie* (c.d.), "Naprzód," Aug. 20, 1896, No. 34, p. 2.

⁸⁴ See J. Jemnitz, F. Tych, *Die II. Internationale und die Kolonialfrage*, in: *Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung ("XIII. Linzer Konferenz" 1977)*, Wien 1981, pp. 30 - 56.

of consolidating the political presence of socialists and of the strength of their pressure on the actual political institutions was of vital importance. Less so was the problem of those tactical and strategic contexts which became particularly important in the perspective of struggle for power that is the question of alliances. The proper slogans in the national and peasant questions could mobilise political allies who would give quite a different impulse and significance to the political struggles of the existing socialist parties. But these were affairs closely connected with the general strategy of the labour movement.

Thus, the fate of the independence resolution was decided primarily by two factors combined in various variants and proportions :

(1) doctrinal assumptions : distrust of the national question and its classless nature ; it was related more to the bourgeois-democratic than proletarian revolution ; dislike of involving the forces of the proletariat into the foundation of new bourgeois states and new national barriers ; dislike to involve socialist parties into goals different from those which were immediately concerned with the social fight of the proletariat and served its political action ;

(2) political assumptions : fear of upsetting the existing political map of Europe, particularly manifest in the social-democratic parties in those countries which had partitioned Poland, but also visible in other parties, especially the French which did not want to weaken Russia in their own state's interest.

The first group of reasons was rooted mostly in the past. The other, in the future of the movement, in the inchoate attitudes of socialist parties related to the advancing process of integration with the system of political structures in their own states.

The fate of the resolution on Poland's independence at the London Congress revealed not only certain essential phenomena and processes occurring within the 2nd International. For it became the occasion for a confrontation, on an international stage, of two different concepts, two various paths leading to the liberation of the Polish nation, proclaimed and carried out within the Polish socialist movement.

One trend, traditional by now in the revolutionary wing of the Polish labour movement since its formation in the second half of the 1870s, preferred by the first Polish Socialist groups and the Proletariat Party, continued by the SDKP and its ideologue, Rosa Luxemburg, put first among the aims of the proletariat the social goals and the preparation of the socialist revolution. It considered that this revolution, which would be international in its essence, would automatically, as it were, resolve also the question of restoring freedom to the Polish people. It would liberate it from all oppression and make equal among the free and free among equals. This trend did not want to engage the forces of the proletariat, before achieving socialist revolution, in the creation of new bourgeois countries and new state barriers. It estimated that the proclamation of national slogans, classless in their nature, could endanger the ideological and political independence of the workers, and create a bridge for an ideology alien to the concept of social revolution. It considered the international unity of workers as the main guarantee of winning freedom from national oppression as well as from all forms of oppression and exploitation.

This, of course, did not mean that a revolutionary party was to be indifferent to the destiny of oppressed nations, including that of its own Polish nation. On the contrary. Hostility towards national oppression was an integral part of the political doctrine of all the trends in Polish socialism. It was not thought that the Polish nation was irrevocably doomed to oppression until the victory of the socialist revolution. The idea was that struggle against national oppression prior to the victory of a social revolution would mean struggle for equal national rights within the general demands for the democratisation of political relations in the existing system of states. It was considered that in the social system then prevailing in Europe and the world, which was thought to be doomed to a short life, involving the proletariat in the foundation of new capitalist states would be simply an ideologically risky waste of its forces.

The other trend, much more recent, which at the time of the London Congress was three-and-a-half year old as a programme in the Polish labour movement, proclaimed that one

should not wait for socialist revolution in order to restore independence to the Polish people. It was thought that even the "minimum programme" that is the programme of pre-socialist transformations should contain the demand for an independent democratic Polish republic. The argument ran that the regaining of independence would "mop up," as it were, the battlefield of class struggles and in effect should facilitate the workers' fight for socialism.

This was the reasoning that moved Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, the initiator of the PPS resolution for the Congress. It should be added, for the sake of truth, that not all the leaders and ideologues of the PPS placed the independence slogan in such clear proletarian class contexts as did Kelles-Krauz or the people akin to him in their ideas. Many PPS leaders treated the labour movement, the politically most active national force, simply as an instrument in their independence visions. Moreover, this process, then only nascent, in the PPS, gathered impetus with time. The most prominent of its exponents was another leader present at the birth of the London resolution, Józef Piłsudski.

This different interpretation of class and social contexts of the independence slogans led later to an ideological and political polarisation within the PPS.

One thing is quite certain: the fate of the London resolution on the independence of Poland, irrespective of the failure of its original conception in the forum of the Congress, was a kind of "internationalisation" of new, dating only to 1892, programme concepts in the Polish labour movement: the combining of the socialist movement with the struggle for the country's independence. These events were irrevocable.

The fate of the Polish resolution did something else: it heralded perhaps the earliest phenomenon which surfaced so dramatically in August 1914 in the political life with the unexpected breakdown of the 2nd International that accompanied the outbreak of World War I. Almost all the main parties of the 2nd International, which not long ago declared the supra-national and supra-state unity of the labour movement, turned out to be solidary with their governments at war. It was a sort of summing

up of integration processes which in 1896 were still embryonic but had already marked their impact on the fate of the Polish resolution.

(Translated by Krystyna Kępicz)