

History of the Polish Anarchist movement, 1919-1929

[KSL Introduction: This article by Augustin Souchy first appeared in *Die Internationale* (published by the anarcho-syndicalist Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands) as *Zehn Jahre Geschichte des Anarchismus in Polen (1919-1929) Ein Bericht sympathisierender polnischer Genossen von AS (Augustin Souchy) [Ten Years of Anarchism in Poland (1919-1929) A Report of sympathetic Polish Comrades]*. It was translated by Peter Silcock and appeared in *Freedom* in 1980. It was later republished in a *Rebel Worker* supplement.]

1980 introduction from *Freedom*

With media attention focused on the Polish working class [because of the birth of the Solidarity movement], we are taking this opportunity to publish an article on the Polish anarchist movement. Readers interested in the early history of the Polish movement should see 'Towards a history of anarchism in Poland' (FREEDOM, Anarchist Review, 2 April 1977)

[<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/g4f674>] and the *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* no. 2, 1977, which contains the article 'History of the Anarchist Movement in Poland, 1905-1915'.

[<http://libcom.org/library/cienfuegos-press-anarchist-review-2>]

In the not too distant future, we hope to publish another article (based on correspondence with exiled Polish militants) which deals with the history of the anarchist movement in Poland from the 1930s to the immediate aftermath of World War II. This particular article was first published in *Die Internationale* of April 1930 and has been translated by Peter Silcock. (End of 1980 introduction).

The anarchist movement in Poland prior to the war formed an essential and constituent part of the anarchist movement of Tsarist Russia. Brought into existence shortly before the outbreak of revolution in 1905, it met with a powerful response in the industrial areas of the former Congress Poland, and predominantly in that part of it which bordered on Russia proper. In those heroic days of 1905, the anarchists showed matchless and unflinching courage, their uncompromisingly revolutionary tactics of direct action placing them at the head of the other workers' organisations in the towns of Bialystok, Wilno and Warsaw. Thus it happened that within a relatively short space of time the anarchists found greater popularity with the masses, who saw in them the only genuine protagonists of revolutionary ideas; they would tolerate no compromise in the struggle

against the capitalists and the state, nor did they hesitate when called upon to defend the material and moral interests of the revolution, paying with their own lives when necessary. They fought, lived and died in accord with the ideas they proclaimed. Only the defeat of the 1905 revolution and the dawn of reaction could weaken the anarchist movement, but were unable to deal it the final blow. For all that, the decline of the movement was inevitable in view of the fact that only its deeds, but not its ideas, had penetrated to the masses. In a great many cases anarchism conveyed no more to the workers than a notion of terrorism, of 'bumping off' the capitalists, of expropriation. Even anarchists who had sacrificed themselves body and soul often interpreted anarchism to mean just that. Yet such considerations should not dissuade us from according them the recognition which no-one who is accounted with their unyielding constancy and revolutionary demeanour can properly refuse.

Hence anarchism as a social revolutionary idea could neither take root in the minds of the workers nor outlast the age of reaction. The bourgeoisie and the 'socialists' of all other tendencies had no little hand in convincing the workers that anarchism was to all intents the same as murder, robbery and chaos. The world war brought the emergence of the anarchist movement to an end: it was already so weakened by then that it was no longer capable of making its cry of protest heard. In that wild surge of tumultuous passion it was the first movement to be forced out of existence. It did not even have time to defend itself against the calumnies of the bourgeoisie, and thus the prejudice that equated anarchism with murder and arson was spread further afield and strengthened its hold.

The February revolution opened the gates of the prisons. It meant freedom for comrades who, although Polish by birth, had predominantly been involved with the Russian movement. When the world war came to an end, they were able to return to Poland. Of the once flourishing movement they could find no remaining trace. The rising generation, having been nurtured on Romantic 'delusions of moral independence', knew nothing of anarchism and the masses were intoxicated by the creation of 'their own' independent Poland. Influenced by the revolutionary wave from the East which reverberated through central Europe, Poland was to become a 'people's republic'. Workers' councils were formed and in Lublin a popular government was constituted which would later hold office as the Socialist government headed by Moraczewski. At the same time, the former Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania joined with the

left wing of the PPS [Polish Socialist Party] to form the Communist Workers' Party of Poland. which called on a Poland now liberated from the tsar to extend the hand of friendship to the Russian working class, itself liberated from the yoke. The Nationalists and the opportunist Socialist Party of Poland, however, exploited the proximity of Russia and Germany for quite different ends. They deceived the masses into believing that union with Russia or Germany, whether revolutionary or not, meant a return to the servitude which it had cost Poland so much blood to abolish. Nurtured on the patriotic slogans of the PPS and the National Labour Party, the masses put their trust in these and would have torn limb from limb anyone who tried to deprive them of their 'freedom'. The heroic return of Marshal Pilsudski finally won the masses over to the party of independence, for Pilsudski was known to them of old as a comrade-in-arms. But the course of events was soon to teach the masses different lesson. Pilsudski organized the march on Kiev and unleashed a bloody conflict with the Russian proletariat. Owing to the tactics of the Russian commanders, who did not restrict themselves simply to the defence of endangered revolutionary territories, Pilsudski was afforded the opportunity of lending to his imperialistic endeavours the semblance of a 'defensive war'. All class distinctions were thrust into the background as patriotism and nationalist propaganda reached their peak – everything was thrown into the struggle against the 'bolshevik invasion' – and thus Pilsudski was able to regain the prestige which he had lost in the wake of the bloody defeat at Kiev. This had as its result the complete failure at all efforts made by the populist socialists of the newly 'resurrected' Poland; in the politics as in the social life of the country, the road was now open to capitalist and statist reactions.

A broad section of the worker masses, which adhered to the PPS, voted in the elections for its 'socialist conception of independence', but in comparison with the parties at the right and centre, the PPS was no more than a dwindling minority in the Sejm. The elections demonstrated that the majority of workers looked to the Christian Democratic Party, an outpost of reaction on the class terrain. Even the Communists, who had fought against nationalism in the PPS whilst still members of the party, now had their attention entirely fixed on events in Russia and held the creation of a 'proletarian state' to be the ultimate aim of socialism. Hence it was understandable that many revolutionaries who inhaled the enthusiasms of the time should allow themselves to be seduced by the illusions of independent statehood; and in this way the class struggle was

relegated to the background. Its place was filled by the party political ambitions of right and left social democracy.

It was under such circumstances that those who had remained loyal to anarchism were compelled to resume their work. On the one hand the worker masses were entirely under the sway of nationalist propaganda, whether mounted by Christian Democrats – who preached cooperation between capital and labour, or by the PPS, which, in order to retain its influence, was promising the workers and peasants a workers' government. And on the other hand, those workers who had achieved a revolutionary consciousness equated every criticism directed against the dictatorship of the proletariat with the counter-revolution. Almost no-one had even the slightest notion of the meaning of anarchism, or even worse, many had a false conception of it.

The most urgent task was therefore to draw attention to its existence. Independently of any group, Polish editions of *Mutual Aid* and *An Appeal to the Young* by P. Kropotkin were issued in 1919 as the first two anarchist publications in Poland since the war. [See endnote for further details on publications.] In that same year a group of Polish workers issued a broadsheet entitled *Bread and Freedom*. The eventual fate and further activities of this group remain completely unknown; what little information it has been possible to uncover suggests that the group was dissolved when the greater part of its members emigrated to Russia. A group of older comrades was formed in 1920 and undertook the illegal publication of a paper in the Jewish language. Entitled *The Voice of Freedom* only one issue appeared, although two further issues of *Bread and Freedom* were published legally. Kropotkin's pamphlet on *Modern Science and Anarchism*,² heavily abbreviated in order that it might be passed by the censor, was also published that same year in Lemberg.

The activity at this group became more intensive with the founding in 1921 of the first group of school-pupils. This latter group spread anarchist ideas in the schools by word of mouth. Considering the illegal circumstances in which this work was done, great precautions were taken and the work restricted to the more worthwhile and reliable elements. This was naturally insufficient for these youths, who were eager for action. A *Letter to Youth* explaining the principles of anarchism was duplicated on a hectograph and these letters then placed in the pupils' desks before classes began.

But since this work yielded unsatisfactory returns, the group made efforts to establish contact with broader circles by turning to the workers. Our comrades had themselves appointed as teachers to the educational courses for workers which were then being instituted by the trade unions, and through this educational work were able to successfully to acquaint audiences drawn from a large number of trade unions with the ideas of anarchism. There being no comrades amongst the listeners themselves, however, they met with no success in forming workers' groups on this occasion. The work was useful nonetheless: through it the audiences grew accustomed to the word 'anarchism' and became familiar with its nature and content. This alone meant a great deal at that time. This promising work had to be discontinued when the higher levels of the trade union bureaucracy, which had fallen under the control of the Communists, victimized our comrades and finally disbanded the educational centres under the pretext that these had been closed by the police.

At this point work was begun in another area which was of great importance from the organizational viewpoint. The People's University, founded by the PPS and later to be dominated by the Communist Party, became the focus of intense activity. Seeing here an area which was well-suited to the task of carrying their propaganda to the workers, our comrades were amongst those who contributed greatly to ousting the PPS from its position, while the workers themselves were increasingly distancing themselves from it. The 'New Economic Policy' of the Russian Communist Party was persuading many of the latter to think about Russia in rather more critical terms, and this had also created an objective situation which enabled anarchist criticisms to be heard. In these circumstances, anarchist propaganda carried out among the workers at the People's University was assured of success. It was here that the first anarchist workers' group was founded. This group undertook an intensive propaganda by word of mouth, its efforts persuading the People's University to organise a lecture on Francisco Ferrer. Advertisements were posted throughout the city and announcements made from speakers' platforms. A large crowd of workers and school pupils attended and were able once again to learn about anarchism for the first time in very many years.

The work of this small number of anarchist pioneers had already brought major successes. To a certain extent, anarchism was winning acceptance as a social revolutionary idea which could hold its own among the other socialist tendencies, and the traditional well of prejudice was

breached step by step. Interest in anarchist ideas grew to an extent that exceeded the expectations of the pioneers. But at the same time as there was an improvement in the objective prospects for anarchist activity, immense difficulties arose to control the movement. Propaganda works were severely handicapped on the one hand by the complete absence of contact with the anarchist movement abroad, and on the other hand by the still chronic shortage of literature in the Polish and Yiddish languages which still exists to this day. In the country itself there were no technical facilities for the illegal publication of literature; even once these were located, the exorbitant sums demanded meant that the opportunity had to be passed over. For the time being therefore, the youth group was forced to suspend its propaganda work and turn the whole of its attention to organizational work, in the first instance to develop international contacts, and where possible to ascertain whether any other groups were to be found in the country and to use such resources as were available in order to publish what literature they could.

Contacts formed in the past allowed it to establish communication with a group of anarcho-syndicalist workers in upper Silesia. With their technical assistance, the first pamphlet in the Polish language, *The Fundamentals of Syndicalism*, was published in 1923. This pamphlet was smuggled across the border and the copies distributed in a relatively short time, some of them being sold and the rest given out free. Unconnected with this was the successful establishment of contact with a German anarchist group in Danzig, with whose help predominantly anarchist literature was brought into the country and used to lay the basis for an organizational library. *The Syndicalist*, *The Free Worker*, and *The Libertarian* were received regularly. These books and papers were of incalculable value for propaganda work amongst youth in the schools, the majority of whom had a command of the German language, and were also of use as teaching aids for those comrades who undertook their instructional work in theoretical groups. Yet none of this could circumvent the need for literature in the Polish and Yiddish languages. Attempts were made to achieve this end. In 1922 an approach was made to the International Working Men's Association for financial assistance to allow the necessary work to be done. The secretariat of the IWMA, however, imposed the condition that the choice of titles for publication should be made in consultation with itself, which would have meant that all the pamphlets would by necessity have been of an anarcho-syndicalist complexion. The group, on the other hand, demanded complete autonomy but gave an undertaking that international literature on syndicalism would be

published at regular intervals. Since these transactions were conducted through written channels, and indirect ones at that, no result was forthcoming.

It was at this time that the existing propaganda groups were partially reorganised. Some of the 'older' comrades moved across to the youth group. But since this new group found itself occupied exclusively with organisational matters, a further group had to be formed for the purpose of undertaking propaganda work. Thus in 1923 the 'variegated' group was formed, drawing its members from those in the workers' group who were active in the People's University and from among the youth. Relations between the two groups were never more than distant, since the 'older' group adopted an attitude of slight suspicion towards the 'variegated' group and showed reluctance to instruct it in organisational matters. When the question arose of sending a delegate to the international anarchist conference, the 'variegated' group declared itself in favour, but fundamental differences arose within the 'older' group when it came to elect a representative. The 'variegated' group, composed of anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists, achieved complete agreement in this matter and consequently sent a delegate in its own name. Closer contacts with anarchist organisations abroad opened up new channels at home, notably communication with comrades in East Galicia and personal contact with comrades in Lublin, Warsaw and elsewhere. The discovery of already existing groups afforded new opportunities for the movement to expand. Not only did this make it possible to distribute and sell literature on a larger scale, but also gave rise to the necessity of organising the movement on a country-wide basis. Communication with the new contacts was handed over to the older group, while the 'variegated' group busied itself with propaganda work. In 1923 it published a hectographed paper in Yiddish, *Anarchist and Bolshevik Communism*, written by a comrade to explain the basic attitude of the anarchists to the Bolshevik state. A pamphlet in Polish entitled *The Truth about Makhno*, also hectographed, was published at the time of Makhno's trial. The same method was used to print Rudolf Rocker's pamphlet on *Councillism or Dictatorship* which, in the event, could not be brought over from England. And in the same year Kropotkin's *The Great French Revolution* was issued by the Książka Press.

Debates were held with other groups. The 'variegated' group played a leading role in a group of joiners founded in 1922 by members of the building trade unions. Here comrades from other groups gave talks and took a lively part in the discussions. This same group founded a second

workers' group some time later. The original group then became increasingly more active as its ranks were swelled by intellectually mature comrades who were capable of undertaking propaganda work despite a ban by the authorities. It was only by working to such a system that the organisation could successfully be built up in secret in the initial stages, and it was this, in fact, which opened the way to slow but sure progress under the regime of police informers and white terror. In the autumn of 1923 several of the comrades from the 'older' group left the country and settled in Paris. In this way the group lost the best of its members and effectively ceased to exist. The 'variegated' group, which had intended to devote itself exclusively to propaganda work, had to be reorganised and became the effectual coordinating group. It took over the correspondence with those at home and abroad and found itself burdened with the entirety of the educational work in the theoretical groups. This resulted in attention being focused entirely on the existing membership and on raising its quality. The comrades who had transferred their field of activity to France generated an intensive activity. Early in 1924 they organised a group there and published 2000 copies of a pamphlet entitled *The Aims of the Anarchists*. Despite immense difficulties a number were successfully smuggled into the country and proved very popular; a quantity was sold legally through the left-wing bookshops. The legal Communist Party paper *Kultura Robotnicza* [Workers' Culture] was sharply critical of this pamphlet and repeated the familiar accusation that anarchism was a 'petty-bourgeois ideology'. Yet the very fact that a Communist party gave attention to an anarchist pamphlet is proof that anarchist ideas had penetrated to the masses. With the assistance of the IWMA, three pamphlets in the Polish language were published in Paris within a short space of time: *The Kronstadt Uprising*, *The Russian Tragedy* and *The Communist Party and the Russian Revolution*, 2000 copies being printed. Initially, however, there was a reluctance to sell these pamphlets in the country, for the groups felt that it was still early to engage in anti-Communist propaganda, since this would serve only to injure the Communist Party without reaping any advantage to the anarchist movement. Only later, when our comrades had reached a stage at which they could move freely in and out of Communist circles, did these pamphlets prove invaluable, since their incisive and logical criticisms contributed greatly in clarifying in a pertinent manner doubts which had arisen in the ranks of the Communists themselves. *The Kronstadt Uprising* in particular laid that historic epoch of 1921 open to the workers, who knew of it, if at all, only through the misrepresentations

of the Communists, and showed them the role which anarchists had played in the Russian Revolution.

In 1924 an edition of Kropotkin's *The State: its Role in History* was published legally in Warsaw and almost completely sold out. A special issue of an anti-militarist paper entitled *Pionierzy* was published in Krakow. Although the greater part of this paper was made up of blank spaces to which the censor had contributed the word 'suppressed', its anti-militarist nature was nonetheless clearly apparent. Intended as a test of the extent to which legal methods could be employed for anarchist propaganda, it demonstrated immediately how foolish it would have been to entertain any illusions in this respect. In Warsaw, where the censor was of a less liberal outlook, this publication was banned in its entirety. While the police did succeed in seizing a number of copies, the majority had already reach their intended destinations.

The network of informers and provocateurs, which had achieved a deep penetration of the Communist ranks, also inflicted considerable harm on our young movement.

In 1924 the People's University arranged an excursion which was alleged by an agent provocateur to be a communist conference. Many of the comrades were thrown into prison merely because they had taken part in the excursion. But since it could not be proved against them that they were anarchists, they were regarded as Communists. Liberated on bail after a short period in prison, they were forced to flee abroad. This put an end to the work at the People's University which was now disbanded. The arrest of those comrades had no subsequent effect on the organisation. Whilst in prison they spread propaganda amongst the Communists and they won over a number of comrades who became vigorously active once they had been released, particularly in Communist circles and amongst workers in the large factories, where previously it had been difficult to gain a foothold. The primary result of this propaganda was to force the Communists to react, since major splits took place in several of the party branches, which we shall have more to say about later on.

Trials which mobilized public opinion were the anarchist trials of Makhno and of A. Lewin. Makhno's trial vindicated him of the charge that he had initiated pogroms of the Jews in the Ukraine, and compelled both the bourgeois and the workers' Press to acknowledge him as a man of ideals. Despite the fact that the president of the tribunal attempted to prevent Makhno from stating his views, he succeeded nevertheless in presenting a brief outline of the philosophy of

anarchism. His acquittal was used by political opponents, notably the Communists, to argue that the anarchist were in the pay of the police, an accusation which they never tired of repeating when they saw that the anarchists were mounting an intensive campaign of activity. The sentence of four years' penal servitude passed against comrade Lewin for alleged possession of a rubber stamp belonging to the as yet non-existent anarchist organisation, however, showed only too clearly that the epigones of Marx will stop at no demagogy, however brazen, when it comes to neutralising a political opponent. The entire press carried lengthy reports of 'the first anarchist trial in free Poland' at the time, and did not neglect to point out that 'anarchism was more dangerous than communism'. [on A Lewin (Anya Levin) "Anya Levin was arrested in Warsaw in February 1924 as she got off the train with a suitcase full of anarchist literature. She was sentenced to a substantial jail term in Poland." see <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/18944r>]

Both the trial of Makhno and that of comrade Lewin were taken up by the independent socialist paper *Nasza Wolnosc*, edited by the former social-democrat Wieniawa Nugoszowski [Tadeusz Wieniawa-Długoszowski], where a heated debate was carried on between anarchists and Communists on the subject of Makhno. With regard to the affair of comrade Lewin, the papers' editors adopted a sympathetic stance, pointing to the insubstantiality of the charges. There is no doubt that these two trials helped the pioneers of the anarchist movement to break down the wall of silence. Indeed, anarchism was steadily becoming better known in Poland. Early in 1925 the Paris group began to publish a paper under the title of *Najmita* (The Wage Slave). Intended for workers abroad, *Najmita* was also smuggled into Poland, but while it galvanised propaganda work, the paper was incapable of making up for the lack of literature. It aroused great interest throughout the country, and demand for it could not be satisfied as a rule owing to the difficulties of transportation. But the paper was unable to take into account the requirements of work within groups, since the latter needs pamphlets first and foremost if it is to be conducted effectively. Thus the national organisation made efforts to convince the group in Paris that the work of groups abroad ought to be more subordinate to the needs within the country. But the comrades abroad, in their enthusiasm over the success of *Najmita*, were inclined to believe that propaganda amongst the emigrants would train new anarchist leaders who, on their return to Poland, should initiate useful activity. No agreement could be reached on this question.

In 1925 a Polish edition of Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread* was published legally.

Its rapid growth notwithstanding, the anarchist movement in Poland was not yet able to intervene directly in connection with the political and social events of the day. This emerged with particular clarity during the so-called 'May Revolution' of Pilsudski in 1926. To be able to exert some influence on the course of events during the three days of the May Revolution, what was needed was a flexible, tightly controlled, and sufficiently large organisation. But at this time the work of the anarchists was unfortunately not only much too weak, but also organised in a very deficient way. In spite of their distance from everyday struggles, the anarchists did perceive the true character of the 'May Revolution' immediately, in that they depicted it as being no more than a political putsch, in contrast to the KPP [Communist Party of Poland] – to say nothing of the PPS – which succumbed to the spell of Pilsudski's oratory, took part in the demonstrations in his honour, and even directed its people into the fight against the reaction – and to the aid of the 'revolutionary' Pilsudski.

It was the May events which finally gave rise to the conviction that the organisation of the movement throughout the country was a matter of necessity. In June the coordinating group reached an agreement with the groups inside the country, by which it was decided firstly to establish provisionally a national organisation to be known as the Anarchist Federation of Poland, and secondly to convene a national conference for the month of August.

Even before the conference, the coordinating group issued a manifesto, the first document to appear in the name of the AFP, which was timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Bakunin's death. Several thousand copies were printed and sold in factories and trade union branches. At the same time the paper *Wolny Proletariusz* (The Free Proletarian) was published for the first time in Krakow. It was directed towards a mass audience in a much more pronounced way than *Glos Anarchisty*, but technical problems stopped publication after four issues. In August the first conference was held and passed resolutions in three areas; on questions of principle, tactics, and organisation. The resolutions on principles and tactics were published, while those on organisation were communicated to the groups through confidential channels. The section on principles discussed the problem of the capitalist order, the positive bases of anarchism, its position on the revolution and so on. The section on tactics then formulated a position on the 'May Revolution' and gave an evaluation of the situation in the country and a

critique of the political parties, the parliamentary system and the reformist trade unions. The section on organisation set out the view of the conference that the anarchist movement in Poland would have to adopt methods of group organisation in order to further its development. On the basis of this assumption the conference thought it legitimate to lay stress on the publication of a series of pamphlets, since it regarded as premature any attempt to publish a paper designed for mass circulation. With regard to the publication of manifestos, the conference stated its opposition to the practice of circulating these amongst the masses at periodic intervals for the purpose of calling attention to the movement. There was then a brief summary of methods of work which were suited for use in the trade union movement; it was resolved to continue publication of *Glos Anarchisty* as the bulletin of the AFP, but also to make use of other legal papers. The coordinating group was recognised as the secretariat and would act as a connecting link within the national movement and a representative in international contacts.

In accord with the guidelines approved by the conference, the secretariat began to function and devoted most of its attention to publishing work. The task of issuing pamphlets which had been delegated to it was not to be satisfactorily carried out by the secretariat until later, and then only to a degree. 1927 saw the publication of a pamphlet entitled *The Origins and Nature of the International Working Men's Association*. The 'GA' now published by the secretariat was appearing regularly, each month. In addition to articles which were theoretical in content, the *Glos* or the bulletin of the AFP, i.e. as its semi-official organ, also published articles justifying the tactical line of the organisation, as adopted by the groups in view of current problems. The section of news about the international anarchist movement also contained a large amount of information.

The violent quarrels which broke out within the KPP on account of the so-called 'May error' provided an opportunity for our comrades to open a more energetic and enterprising propaganda campaign, as indeed did the ferment which developed around the 'Trotskyite' opposition. In June 1926 a hectographed document commenting on these internal conflicts was issued by one of the groups. In September of the same year another group published a manifesto in the Polish and Yiddish languages to be distributed in connection with International Youth Day, which made a very favourable impression. There was a steady increase in the number of theoretical groups, predominantly composed of former members at the KPP. The propaganda work carried out by

these groups amongst the workers represented a major threat to the KPP. With the presentiment that anarchism would come to be an even greater 'threat' the Warsaw KPP published a set of theses on anarchism.

The existence of a number of active groups in Warsaw led to the necessity of establishing internal links. It was intended that this should bring to an end the detrimental system under which various groups issued separate manifestos. In October 1926 the Warsaw AFP formed a council of delegates. The first trade union group was created to bring together comrades in the different branches of industry for purposes of propaganda. An anti-militarist circle and in addition a student group were also formed. The issues of a magazine called *Wolna Młodzież* (*Free Youth*) were published, and for the 1st May a paper, *The Wage Slave* as well as a manifesto which, however, fell into the hands of the police.

The encounter with the mass propaganda of the Communist Party was not without results for the form of propaganda by the AFP. The focus shifted from the group to the masses. In particular, a propaganda campaign of this type evolved at the time of the Sacco-Vanzetti affair.

As in every other country, so in Poland, the case of Sacco and Vanzetti unleashed a storm of public protest. The daily press declared itself in support of the two anarchists. The Socialist as well as the Communist parties tried to conceal the fact that Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists, or alternatively made them out to be sympathisers of the Communists. Thus the task of the anarchists became one of presenting Sacco and Vanzetti in a true light and making the best use of opportunities to spread propaganda. The AFP issued a series of statements and leaflets, often two in one day. Banners were displayed everywhere and slogans presenting our demands for the two fighters painted on the walls. At every workers' meeting our comrades drew attention to the ideas of Sacco and Vanzetti. A pamphlet on the case was published in July 1927 and 2000 enthusiastically received copies were distributed within a short space of time. The weekly magazine *Polska Wolność* organised a public petition which collected signatures from individuals and organisations for transmission to the Governor of Massachusetts. The attempt to arrange a mass protest demonstration by all the left tendencies came to nothing as a result of narrow-minded party sectarianism, but a strong police guard was placed on the American embassy in Warsaw.

The Sacco-Vanzetti campaign marked the first time that the AFP intervened on a mass basis. It would, of course, have been unrealistic to expect a subsequent mass influx of workers into our organisation, but propaganda work was made easier and advanced rapidly on a large scale. Ultimately, however, the infrastructure of the organisation was much too weak to allow it to master the situation that presented itself. In addition, the application of mass tactics led to less importance being attached to work in the group, and this too had a deleterious effect on the general condition of the organisation.

When the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign came to an end, the secretariat proposed that a national conference should be held. This proved impracticable for technical reasons and was reduced to the calling of the so-called Preparatory Conference in October 1927.

The conference revoked the resolutions of the first conference of 1928 and also rejected the 'Platform' of the 'Russian Anarchists Abroad'. The conference drew up its own statement in which it defined the AFP as an organisation which based itself unambiguously on a class analysis, and it rejected all the deviations contained in the 'Platform' which led to the sanctioning of a 'transitional stage' in the period of transition and to attempts to establish an 'anarchist power' during this period.

The conference stated its opposition to the various centralist tendencies contained in the 'Platform'. In the declaration, the AFP acknowledged as its aim the overthrow of capitalism and the state by means of the class struggle and the social revolution, and the creation of workers' and peasants' councils as the basis of the future social order. The major task of the AFP within the framework of the present order was the intensification of class struggle, the enlargement of the area of conflict by direct economic actions on the part of the revolutionary trade union organisations, the struggle against the political parties, against militarism. This declaration was recognised as binding for all existing active groups; it provided the sole basis on which newly formed groups could be accepted into the organisation. In this way the theoretical and organisational consolidation of the movement was attained and any future intrusion of undesired elements whose relation to anarchism was unclear, now became impossible.

The conference found no solution, however, to the problem of its task with regard to the principles of propagandist tactics. The provisional secretariat was to adhere in future to the mass line as it had been put into practice during the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign. 4000 copies of a

manifesto printed to mark the 10th anniversary of the Russian Revolution were published in November, and the *Glos Anarchisty*, following a lengthy break, reappeared in January 1928 with a reply to the anti-anarchist theses of the Warsaw KPP agitprop machine. In March there appeared a double issue of *Glos Anarchisty* which was given over to the subject of anti-parliamentary struggle in connection with the elections to the Sejm. In print, the anti-parliamentary campaign took the form of comprehensive manifestos and several leaflets, 22000 copies of which appeared in the Polish and Jewish languages. A lack of money prevented the publication of an anti-parliamentarist pamphlet compiled by secretariat; but a meeting was arranged in connection with the document. The effect of this campaign was to make anarchist activities significantly more popular. The bourgeois press drew attention to the threat of anarchist propaganda in Poland.

In May 1928 a leaflet was issued on 'The Third Anniversary of Fascism'. In July about 5000 copies of the anti-militarist manifesto entitled *Sacco-Vanzetti*, in the Polish and Jewish languages, were distributed by the secretariat.

Work in the provinces did not advance at an equal pace. New contacts were successfully made in Galicia and Congress Poland owing to the selling of *Walka* and the popularity of the anarchist slogans – and as a result of the anti-parliamentary and May campaigns. Two centres were smashed by police reprisals, but on the other hand new groups were formed in several of the smaller towns of Congress Poland. The lack of money stood in the way of forming closer contacts with the provinces by means of speaking tours, and this also had an inhibitory effect on the independent evolution of work in those localities. The inadequacy of communication made the transfer of pamphlets published abroad quite impossible.

In August 1928 the Warsaw organisations held a conference which passed a resolution setting out its position on the preparation of a national conference, on methods of internal work in the groups, and on the need to pay greater attention to the theoretically orientated groups as well as to the expansion of publishing activity. In addition, an organisational structure was proposed and subsequently adopted by all the active groups within the country.

On the strength of the decisions reached by the Warsaw conference, the secretariat took steps to obtain pamphlets from abroad and to re-start the publication of the *Glos*, the latter successfully. Relevant texts were studied diligently. In general, however, propaganda work was

falling off significantly towards the end of 1928 and this led in consequence to self-criticism within the organisation and to an alteration of the guidelines for political work.

It should also be mentioned that comrade Urmanski Urban was tried in Tarnow and sentenced to five years' penal servitude for his membership of the AFP. Early in 1929, comrade S. Witling was arrested in Krakow for possession of AFP manifestos and sentenced to four years in prison.

At the present moment, anarchism in Poland is undergoing a deep crisis. The persecution of not only revolutionary groups, but in fact of every honestly socialist assembly, is the order of the day. Although the overwhelming majority of workers has by now seen through the Pilsudski regime they have not drawn the lessons and are even returning to the PPS, since it is making leftist gestures in this situation.

Even the KPP is experiencing a profound crisis as a result of internal dissensions and 'purges' as well as an immense onslaught of police terror.

The anarchist movement in Poland has a heavy road to travel. The line of work followed hitherto must be analysed, errors avoided, and closer cooperation established. The lack of propagandist literature has been the most serious deficiency until now, and this will have to be remedied.

Objective conditions auger well for the revolutionary tasks of anarchism in Poland.

Hence it cannot be a matter of indifference to any revolutionary or to any anarchist organization whether ten years of anarchist propaganda in Poland are to disappear without trace, or whether the banner of the anarchist idea once again is raised in the Poland of the bourgeoisie and the large landowners, the Poland of Pilsudski.

This article was first published in *Die Internationale* of April 1930 – the weekly organ of FAU, the German section of IWA at the time of the height of its influence. The first English translation by Peter Silcock appeared in 'Freedom' V41/19 [Note from the *Rebel Worker* reprint.]

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KSL