THE POLISH UNDERGROUND LABOR MOVEMENT

By

W. R. MALINOWSKI

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

SOCIALIST - LABOR COLLECTION

(Reprinted from International Postwar Problems, Volume 1, Number 3, June, 1944)
Distributed by POLISH LABOR GROUP, 55 West 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., which has filed a registration statement and a copy of this printed matter with the Department of Justice, Washington, D. C., as an agent of the Committee of the Polish Socialist Party Abroad, the Representation of the Polish Trade Union Council Abroad, both of London, England, and the Central Leadership of the Underground Movement of the Working Masses of Poland, somewhere in Poland. This registration statement is available for public inspection. The fact of registration does not indicate approval of the U. S. Government of the contents hereof.
THE POLISH
UNDERGROUND LABOR MOVEMENT*

By WŁADYSŁAW R. MALINOWSKI

FOR THE origins of the Polish labor movement, we must turn to the latter half of the nineteenth century. Among the first organized groups, pro-peasant and pro-labor in ideology, were the Progressive and Socialist groups at the time of the Polish “Great Emigration,” which followed the collapse of the anti-Czarist uprising of 1830-31. The centers from which their activities were directed were Paris, Brussels, and London, under the leadership of such prominent progressive émigrés as A. Mickiewicz, J. Lelewel, and S. G. Worcell.

Some years later, a political and trade-union labor movement came into being in Poland itself. The year 1870 saw the emergence of the first known trade-union organizations, and victorious strikes in Austrian-occupied Poland in 1871. Not long afterward, the labor movement started in Russian-occupied Poland, where the first Polish Socialist Party, “Proletariat,” was founded in 1882; thanks to its ideological premises, the formation of this party should be considered the beginning of an organized trade-union movement. German-occupied Poland also saw the emergence of the Polish labor movement during that period.

In 1892, the so-called Paris Convention took place, at which several underground groups met and formed a joint organization which called itself the Polish Socialist Party (P.P.S.). The convention formulated a program embracing both political and economic aims. In distinction to many other Socialist parties of Europe, which based their programs entirely on social-revolutionary goals, the Polish So-

*See the author’s article in International Postwar Problems, March, 1944, on “Underground Resistance in Poland,” in which the general historical background as well as a general description of the Polish underground were presented.
cialist Party included in its program national aims as well, stressing both the social goals and the need to achieve Poland's independence and build a democratic modern State. This was the beginning of the Polish labor mass movement, of which the P.P.S. always remained the political arm, while the trade unions became its instrument of economic struggle. Thus the P.P.S., since its inception in 1892, has played a part in Polish political life analogous to that of the British Labor Party.

The dual struggle for social liberation and national independence has for half a century provided the ideological basis for Polish labor’s political activities. The labor organizations existing in all three parts of Poland were closely connected. At international meetings they always sent demonstrative delegations, which were accepted as a joint Polish labor delegation, emphasizing the refusal to accept the partition of Poland. Thanks to the participation of the masses of the common people and its program, the movement succeeded in achieving leadership throughout the nation as the only force actively fighting for independence and, especially, because of the revolutionary activities in Russian-occupied Poland in 1905.

The outbreak of the First World War gave a new impetus to Polish hopes for the restoration of independence. It found the Polish labor movement in the midst of preparations for another armed uprising (there were Polish Legions in Austrian Poland and underground military groups in Russian-occupied Poland). The movement which had for years advocated struggle now began preparations for the moment when the German, Austrian and Russian armies of occupation would break down. When this finally occurred, in 1918, labor organizations played an important part in disarming foreign troops and establishing an independent Poland.

The representatives of the labor and peasant movements convened in the city of Lublin and, on November 7, 1918, formed the first government of independent Poland, the People's government, headed by Ignacy Daszyński, which, in its famous manifesto, laid down the foundations of a democratic government.

In independent Poland the labor movement became a powerful force. The P.P.S. became a democratic mass party with many representatives in parliament. Its chief goals were the establishment of a
true democracy and the promulgation of far-reaching social and economic reforms. The trade-union movement became ever stronger and more vital in the nation's life, winning progressive social legislation in parliament, conducting successful strikes and winning collective bargaining, wielding an influence in social-security institutions and in local self-government. The movement also developed its own educational, co-operative, and recreational organizations.

The democratic philosophy of the Polish labor movement, with its free and independent character, brought it into conflict with the Communist groups, a conflict which continued throughout the existence of free Poland. At the same time, the Polish labor movement faced the growth of reactionary forces then infiltrating into Polish politics, particularly since Pilsudski's coup d'état in 1926. These developments forced the movement to intensify its fight against the reactionary government and its foreign policy. From 1922 to 1939, the movement played a major part in the constant struggle for democracy in Poland. In fighting the various forms of reaction, the labor movement waged an unceasing struggle against anti-Semitism, closely co-operating with the Jewish labor movement.

In 1935, the democratic opposition successfully boycotted the general elections in protest against the imposition of undemocratic voting laws. The great mass strikes of 1935-1937 (mainly sit-down strikes, known in Europe as "Polish strikes") marked the opening offensive of the democratic forces. On the eve of World War II, the Polish trade unions were very strong and active. The Trade Union Congress (affiliated with the International Federation of Trade Unions and represented in the I.L.O.) was a leading labor force. The membership of Polish unions in August, 1939, approached 1.6 million; of which 600,000 were in the Trade Union Congress, 300,000 of its sympathizers in other workers' federations, and 300,000 in the white-collar unions, which looked to the T.U.C. for help and guidance.

THE CAMPAIGN OF SEPTEMBER, 1939

The Polish labor movement regarded the coming war with Germany as one with the cause of labor, and joined the whole nation in the struggles of the tragic days of September, 1939. It soon became
THE POLISH UNDERGROUND LABOR MOVEMENT

evident that the democratic opposition was the only true leader of the people. When the government left the capital, the Warsaw Committee of the labor movement assumed the initiative, organizing the Citizens’ Committee of Defense and the Volunteer Workers’ Battalions. The same was done in Gdynia (the Polish port on the Baltic), where the initiative was taken by the Transport Workers’ Union (chiefly its seamen’s section). The fight for Gdynia and the defense of Warsaw stamped the September campaign with its true, popular character. Everyone knew who the spiritual leaders were during those tragic days. Everyone in Poland realized that the terrible events of that time proved the truth of the social and political predictions of the Polish Labor Movement.1

In refusing to sign the act of Warsaw’s capitulation, the Polish labor leader, Mieczyslaw Niedzialkowski, said: “The workers do not surrender. The workers continue their fight.” Niedzialkowski (who was later secretly shot by the Germans, together with the prominent peasant leader, Maciej Rataj), as well as the whole labor movement, became to the people the symbols of real leadership, mature and responsible, in the most tragic and difficult days of Poland’s history. The moral, social and political prestige of the Polish labor movement rose enormously.

The Polish labor movement did not suffer an internal crisis during this war, as have the movements of several other countries. It grew ever stronger and developed underground despite brutal German persecutions.

The German invaders immediately launched their grim activities in occupied Poland, combining the mass persecutions of the Polish people as a whole with the most vicious persecution of labor leaders and activists, destroying the movement’s entire organizational set-up and confiscating its property.

The labor movement ceased to exist aboveground, but a new movement was born underground; under the name of the Movement of the Working Masses of Poland, it unites, in the new and tragic conditions, all labor elements and all who believe in and ad-

mire its aims and work. The underground labor movement began its activities armed with the traditions of the fifty years of Polish labor's struggle and with the new glory of its heroic fight and the true leadership it won in the campaign of September, 1939.

THE UNDERGROUND—HOW IT WORKS AND FIGHTS

The Polish labor movement was never sectarian; that is actually true of the trade unions and of labor's political arm, the Polish Socialist Party. Strongly class-conscious, the movement, nevertheless, did not limit its membership and spheres of influence to industrial workers only. It always sought to attract peasants (approaching them through the Union of Farm Laborers and organizing them in its peasant sector), as well as professionals and intellectuals. In recent years the movement paid particular attention to the impoverished middle classes (usually a reactionary element in all countries), in accordance with the new program adopted at the National Convention of the P.P.S. in 1937. This policy has been continued underground. Although the workers are its basic element, the underground labor movement has a vast range of appeal and its members belong to all classes of society.

Working underground, labor has retained its former character as an independent and free movement. Even in its alliances with other movements (the democratic Peasant Party and the Independent Democrats), or in coalition with other political forces of the country in the fight against the German invaders, it has never lost its independent character.

The structure of the movement and its details cannot, of course, be revealed in full until the war is over. The following, however, may be told:

(1) In its underground existence, the labor movement preserves its independence and its unified organizational structure. All its previous activities, political, trade-union and cultural, are continued within the framework of the great movement of the working masses of Poland, functioning underground.

(2) Adapting itself to difficult underground conditions and waging a ceaseless struggle against the foreign occupation, the movement
THE POLISH UNDERGROUND LABOR MOVEMENT

has many efficiently functioning sectors. It plays an important role in the Polish underground army; the “People's Guards,” into which the workers are organized, have a measure of autonomy, but work under the general unified command. A special underground paper devoted entirely to problems of armed resistance and military training, WRN — Gwardia Ludowa (WRN — People's Guard) appears every month. The peasant sector of the labor movement speaks through its own monthly, WRN — Wies i Miasto (WRN — Country and City). White-collar workers, professionals and intellectuals gather about the oldest underground labor paper, WRN — Wolność (WRN — Freedom), which discusses the most pressing questions confronted by the movement, as well as international labor problems.

A special sector of the movement is busy recording German crimes and Nazi criminals, and publishes a historical quarterly, WRN — Kronika Okupacji (WRN — The Chronicle of the Occupation).

All this work is carried on within one movement and under a central leadership, but is entirely decentralized in the execution of the various and specialized tasks involved.

The most important underground papers of the movement, its central organs, are the WRN and the WRN — Robotnik w Walce (WRN — Worker in the Struggle). The title, WRN, is an abbreviation of the Polish spelling of the movement's slogan, “Freedom—Equality—Independence.” These three letters, set beside a hammer and scythes, and framed in a cogwheel, form the symbol of the underground labor movement.

The work of the movement is democratically controlled by the members to the greatest extent possible under the conditions of illegal work. Several underground conventions have already taken place, at which delegates met for many days to formulate, after detailed discussion, the chief outlines of the movement's policy and tactics.

The movement works in close collaboration with all other democratic underground movements, particularly with the white-collar groups and the powerful Political Peasant Movement. (The Program for a People's Poland was the result of this common work.) It also co-operates with various small independent democratic underground groups, as well as with the Jewish underground labor move-
ment, to which it extends all possible help in connection with the special persecution of the Jews.

The movement devotes much attention to domestic policy and carries on an active political struggle against reactionaries of all shades and opposes Communists, who are today using ultranationalist slogans in their attempts to assist the Soviet plans to interfere in Polish internal affairs.

(5) While preserving its full political independence, the movement chooses its allies on the basis of common or kindred ideas, as in its collaboration with the Peasant movement, the Jewish labor movement and independent democratic groups. It also participates, as a group which represents one of the most powerful social elements in Poland, in the work and institutions of the "Polish Underground State" (the underground state institutions, the military command, and the wartime underground Parliament — the underground political representation, recently renamed the Council of National Unity — which is composed of delegates of all the important political movements of the country and which strives to co-ordinate and strengthen the active struggle against the invaders). This limited, wartime coalition furthers the organization of the underground struggle which is carried on in Poland, and also forms the basis of the Polish coalition government in London and its army abroad.

Upon the instructions of the central leadership in Poland, the committee in London designates three of its members to the Polish coalition government, which functions in accordance with the Declarations of Democratic Principles, of July, 1941, and February, 1943, recognized by the movement in Poland as an acceptable basis for participation.

(6) Under the bloody and terrible conditions of the occupation, the movement makes every possible effort to help and assist all of its members, adherents and followers who are in need of help. Its efforts and its relief activities provide the sole means of survival for countless Poles, notwithstanding their political affiliation.

The foregoing is all that can at present be revealed about the organizational setup of the labor movement underground.

*The movement has its foreign representation in London (the Committee Abroad) and its branch in this country (the Polish Labor Group). These two groups are the only authorized representatives of the Polish labor movement outside Poland.
A large part of the work in occupied Poland in the fields of struggle and sabotage (both active and passive) is done by Polish workers, for they, as a social group, have the best strategic opportunities for such work. The slowdown, all types of sabotage in the factories (aimed at hampering the German war machine), railway sabotage, etc., even when not done directly by the workers, require active help, or, at least, their tacit approval and friendly attitude. All these activities involve the greatest danger to the workers, whatever the degree of their active participation in a given sector of the struggle. Compare, for example, the Nazi principle of collective responsibility. The same is true of other forms of active struggle, for the workers constitute the most mobile group of soldiers in the underground army.

The Polish labor movement today is making thorough preparations for the day of the uprising which will strike the final blow against the common enemy. The recently revealed detailed instructions on how to seize factories from the Germans are a good example of these preparations. The underground labor paper, WRN—Gwardia Ludowa, discusses in detail the problems involved, stressing the complicated tasks of the labor detachments in carrying out the attacks. Bearing in mind the aims of the struggle, it states clearly:

"The methods of attack used in the seizure of factories must be selected with an eye to causing the briefest possible interruption in production, so that the factory may resume normal operation rapidly. The commander must teach his fighting detachment to understand these social goals and inculcate in its members the consciousness that they fight not for another's privately-owned means of production, but for their own, socially owned factory; that they must conquer the factory for themselves, for society, and for Poland. . . .

"After the military operation is over, the commander of the factory detachment should immediately appoint a temporary labor committee, which is to function in the most democratic way; this committee, on the recommendation of the commander, should, in turn, appoint a factory labor committee entrusted with the social and economic management of the factory, until it is turned over to the proper authorities, duly and legally constituted."

The daily fight of underground labor may best be illustrated by the heroic act of one of the millions of Polish workers. When the un-
dergound authorities condemned three Gestapo officers to death in retaliation for German bestiality in murdering Polish prisoners, one German captain and two lieutenants were shot at the Café Adria in Warsaw. The underground sentence was carried out in a public place crowded with German officers. The man who executed it realized that he would not come out alive, and went to perform his duty knowing his fate. In his pocket he had a letter explaining why the Germans were to be executed and threatening further reprisals unless the Gestapo discontinued its brutal activities in Poland. He carried out his mission and died. He was a locksmith, Jan Kryst.

Recently the underground press wrote of him: "Let the enemy know that the Poles have ever been a nation which valued freedom and independence above life itself. Among us there have always been thousands of men and women who have been prepared to pay unhesitatingly the highest price in their struggle for freedom and independence. Today the ranks of men and women who have paid the price have been increased through the bestial cruelty of the Germans. Jan Kryst has tens of thousands of comrades who are eager to come out and fight in the open. These men and women will fulfill any order and perform any deed required of them."

The story of Jan Kryst is not unique, but typical. The task of the movement today is not to maintain the morale of labor, which is unchanged, but to provide effective leadership and to utilize most efficiently and to the best advantage the energies of the people, who are ever ready to fight and die.

**AIMS OF THE STRUGGLE**

The Polish underground labor movement is constantly discussing and developing its political strategy and the aims of its struggle—very real and immediate problems to all those who are daily facing death in the fight against the enemy. This work is carried on in the underground periodicals (more than ten are published regularly by the labor movement), in pamphlets and booklets; in addition to this, many secret committees are also working on various specific problems and preparing memoranda for general discussion.

Some of the results of this work have been embodied in the
The Program for a People's Poland and in subsequent detailed memoranda, four of which have already been published. These memoranda were devoted to foreign policy and international problems, to problems of domestic policy, to military and army problems, and to cultural and educational reconstruction (the last issued late in 1943).

The Program for a People's Poland is based on the following principles:

1. Political democracy and parliamentary government. Equality of rights without distinction of race or religion. Autonomous rights for national minority groups.
2. A proper system of local government.
3. Democratic control of a planned economy and industry. Equality of opportunity for all citizens. A just distribution of the national income and work as the only title to a share in this income. The abolition of exploitation.
4. Recognition by the State of the essential role of trade unions, co-operatives and similar bodies.
5. Strong economic and political ties with all the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, especially with Czechoslovakia. (Regional federation within a European and world federative system.)
6. An extensive social-insurance system.
7. Land reform, expropriating the great landed estates and creating sound small holdings for the peasants, and their inclusion in a wide network of co-operatives.

The Program states that "the creation of a people's government is the first step of paramount importance immediately after Poland is freed.

"This Government will hold a new election to the Diet (Sejm) and the Senate under a democratic franchise, and will design a plan for the reconstruction of the Polish Republic on new foundations."

It concludes:

"Only a persevering and decisive fight against the occupying power can be effective in the realization of these principles of political and social reconstruction of Poland's life. The Polish Democratic Bloc must therefore prepare for an armed uprising against the occupying power and for a decisive fight against reactionary elements"
within the nation. Ideologically united and politically disciplined, Polish democracy must win and thus create a new epoch of peaceful domestic development in Poland and of her fraternal co-operation with other free peoples."

In domestic policy, the labor movement is ready to collaborate with all forces now actively fighting the invaders. For this immediate task, it enters into wartime alliances, always bearing in mind, however, its ultimate goal of building a new Poland, founded on the principles of true democracy and social justice.

In international policy, the labor movement believes as strongly as ever in the method of collective security. It opposes both the concept of "spheres of influence" of Great Powers and unilateral action, whether by great or small States. Polish labor stands for Poland's legitimate rights and opposes all groups (including those in which Poles may participate) which work for the realization of foreign aims and interests in Poland. The labor movement fervently desires the establishment of a good-neighbor policy in relation to Poland's neighbors.

* * *

In the midst of its bitter struggle against the Germans, the underground labor movement has never lost its deep interest in the activities, struggles and political thought of the other labor movements of the world. In September, 1943, it published a clandestine pamphlet, *The New Program of the British Labor Party,* which sought to acquaint workers in occupied Poland with the achievements and plans of their British brothers. In the introduction the Polish labor editors wrote:

"Totalitarianism has not succeeded in crushing free thought, in destroying the living ties among men, in halting the work of transforming the old world, which is everywhere continuing despite terror and oppression. It is significant that, despite the differences in the social and economic evolution of the various countries, despite the different historic development and tradition, despite the almost hermetic walls which separated them as the war engulfed one nation after another, the character and results of this work are always

deeply similar. This testifies both to the inner unity of the peoples and to the strength of the democratic and Socialist ideal, which has everywhere been the guiding light. These similarities are also evidence of the mature thinking of the working masses, and especially of the political maturity of the labor movement. . . .

"Today, facing the imminent future, facing all the possibilities which will open with the end of the war, the labor movement responds with a program for the thorough and all-embracing transformation of the social and political life of the individual nations and of the world.

"The labor movement will successfully fulfill the tasks of this transformation, armed with the experience of the past twenty-five years, when it was forced to fight for its existence against both Fascism and Communism. In this fight Socialism has forged new ideas and formulated anew its objectives, placing at the very forefront of its aims the right of the individual to the most complete freedom compatible with social living. Socialism has also become soberly realistic, and favors, along with the introduction of new forms, the preservation, though in altered shape, of those aspects of the present life which still retain their vitality and their social usefulness."

March, 1944