

Anarchist groups in Poland - Łódź 1905 - 1939



An excellent and detailed history of anarchist and other revolutionary groups in Lodz, Poland - then part of the Russian Empire - in the early 20th century.

Social and political situation in Lodz at the beginning of XX century

At the beginning of XX century Lodz was a dynamically developing centre of the cotton and woollen industry. The favourable location of the city and its developing industrial infrastructure caused a rapid migration of the workers in search of the employment in its factories. At the same time, very low salaries and the lack of social security institutions caused the numerous unrests, until the year of 1906 and the general strike with so called "Lodz's lockout" that follow.

The troubles begun in November 1906, when the management of Poznanski's cotton factory decided to fire 96 workers, that they believed to be the leaders of the conflict and unrest within the factory. Learning the list of workers to be sacked, the rest of the factory crew protest against it and Ignacy Poznanski decided to locked out the factory from 17 of December 1906 until the workers accept his decision. In an act of solidarity with Poznanski, owners of six further factories decided to close their gates as well. So, from the beginning of the new year, the biggest city's factories got closed, leaving 25000 workers and 75000 of their family members without job and the means to survive. Workers got support from the Polish society and the international workers movement, so in the first phase of the conflict they kept on demanding the reemployment of 96 sacked leaders. On January 31, 1907 delegation of the workers meet Poznanski in his palace to achieve an agreement including employing the sacked again, but he rejected this demand saying "all of you will die of starvation anyhow". When the rest of protesting workers got to know his stance during the mass rally that followed, they promised a vengeance on him, that couldn't be fulfilled as he escaped to Berlin. After three months of strike and lock out the situation of most families became so difficult that the workers decided to accept the sacking and end the dispute. So the production resumed on 6th of April 1907. The defeat caused a lot of frustration among the working class, and the working conditions after lockout become much worse, as the employers tried to cover the losses caused by lockout by intensifying the pace of production, and generally were taking advantage over defeated workers. This led to the further conflicts between the workers organizations, accusing each other of contributing to the defeat. The conflict soon turn into armed struggle between workers militias of NZR (National Union of Workers - nationalists), SDKPiL (Social Democracy of Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania - the communists), PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and PPS FR (Revolutionary Fraction of PPS - a split leftist group of main PPS), leaving 130 dead. After the assassination of the officers from Russian infantry units based in Lodz on the city main street, Piotrkowska, armed patrols of Russian soldiers were sent to the streets. In April 1907, interparty conference was held in Lodz to stop the wave of terror.

During the conference, it was agreed to establish the factory commissions to oversee the observing the truce between the fractions.

Growth of the popularity of workers parties and the lack of reading skills among workers created a need for constant agitation. Workers parties started to employ the agitators from intelligentsia to recruit new members and organize the workers. These duties were carried out semi-legally, so the agitators were heavily invigilated by a secret police and in case of cover-up either fed the city or gave the names of workers that had joined the party to the Tzarist police. This was the cause of distrust towards the intelligentsia, and the open hostility once the members of this class became leaders of the workers parties. On the other hand, joining the illegal party made it impossible to continue the legal way of life. Party members were facing the choice: either to stay in the party, pay the contributions and follow the instructions of the leaders, risking the arrest and prison, or to leave the party, or even create an own clandestine group of "economical terror" against the intelligentsia. The leaders of the parties, especially PPS-FR defrauded the party funds. All this led, after the lockout, to the massive withdrawal from the parties, with some workers even tearing their party membership cards. Out of the workers disappointment the first anarchist groups have emerged. When the level of living of the working class had fallen dramatically after the lost strike, the anarchist militant groups, committed to both economical terror and the attacks on the management and factory owners, started to gain popularity among the workers. Their actions soon led to 20 casualties among the higher ranks of society.

"Internacjonal" ("The Internationalist")

First anarchist group in Lodz was, created back in November 1905, "Lodz Group of Anarchists - Communists Internacjonal", a local branch of Warsaw organization, recruiting its members among the ranks of PPS and Bund (Jewish socialist party), despite the anti-anarchist propaganda of these parties. In August 1905 anarchist circles of the capital established an anarcho-communist organization, which besides the agitation and propaganda activities was to carry out active terror as a part of its struggle. The organization consisted of four sections:

1. Arms section - aiming at providing the group with firearms and explosives.
2. Technical section - printing an anarchist literature
3. Literary section - acquiring the anarchist literature
4. Organisational section - propaganda and recruitment

Both Warsaw and Lodz branches consisted mostly of the Jewish youth, with the Poles as a minority. All the group's pamphlets were printed in Yiddish, Polish and Russian to ensure they were understood among the multilingual worker's society. In its manifesto, issued at the end of 1905, the group called for a general strike, which was to be carried out without the participation of intelligentsia, deemed as traitors of the working class struggle. The manifesto gave the detailed description of how the strike should have looked like, calling for the act of sabotage on telephone and telegraph lines, blowing up the bridges and setting the police stations and army barracks ablaze. It also encouraged the taking over the shops and distributing the confiscated goods to the poor and hungry. If the anarchists, armed with dynamite, bombs and revolvers had managed to seize a town, they should proclaim there an anarchist commune immediately, to ensure the freedom and wellbeing of its dwellers. Straight after issuing this manifesto, Internacjonal issued another pamphlet, entitled: "The spirit of destruction is a spirit of creation", in which it condemned both the parliamentary democracy and any sort of alliance between a working class and the nationalist bourgeoisie. According to the anarchists, the main reason of the harsh economical situation of lower strata of Polish society was not the conflict between the nations, but the conflict between the classes. In the other pamphlets, the group criticised the PPS for its nationalist and chauvinist views. It also

propose the creation of the anarchist social system, based of free confederation of workers and peasants. To achieve it, the anarchist revolution was necessary, starting with the street clashes and the economical and political terror. From the ideological point of view, the group was similar to the Russian organizations from the "chernoznamyency" current.

Straight after establishing the branch in Lodz, on the 2nd of February 1906 the group issued a pamphlet "To the working men and women", and then "To all the working men and women", in which the anarchist informed, that they are going to teach the working class about the technical side of the revolution: "As soon as we start the strike, the telephone and telegraph lines must be destroyed, so the police can't communicate. We have to destroy the train bridges so that the army will be unable to move round the country, we should also set the barracks, police stations, offices and other governmental buildings ablaze. Destroy the bourgeoisie cafes and restaurants. We should be divided into hundreds of groups, that will carry out the revolutionary manifestations. Blow up prisons, magistrates and the local authority buildings. Every power is to be abolished, prisons arsoned, shops and the warehouses with clothes, food and other goods open to everybody, and all the goods distributed to the poor and naked. Everybody should take as much goods as needed. All the commodities are for a popular use."

The branch in Lodz consisted mainly of shop clerks and poor craftsmen. To get a funds, they terrorized the rich shopkeepers in Baluty and city centre, threatening to blow up their shops and houses. In October 1906 nine members of the group: Jozek Noehow Skomski (aged 19), Jankiel Ickow Wonkowinski (aged 33), Binem Malkow Godsztein (aged 18), Szmul Malkow Granatsztein (aged 19), Jankiel Majchelow Bajsbrut (aged 17), Abram Uszerow Najchaz (aged 19) Hersz Majlech Abramow Wajsberg (aged 25) and Wiktor Beniaminow Bunemfeld (aged 22) were detained, and on 25th of December 1906 put at the court martial. They were found guilty of belonging to the anarchist organization and sentenced to between 8 and 15 years of enforced settlement in Siberia. The Warsaw branch of the group suffered from heavy repression as well, with 16 of its members shoot without a trial. The organization, virtually destroyed, was re - established few months later as a Lodz Federational Group of Anarchists Communists, and managed to create a branch in Piotrkow.

In order to strengthen the Polish organization, in March 1907 Belgian anarchist using the name of Sen-goj came from Brussels, first to Warsaw and then, in the middle of 1907, to Lodz. He was using the fake passport issued on the name of August Waterloo, but his real name was probably Johannes Golcman. He brought a couple of issues of anarchist magazine "Glos rewolucji" ("The Voice of Revolution") and 500 rubels to be shared between Warsaw and Lodz. This sum was not enough to re-establish the propaganda campaign. The group decided to raid a house of merchant Szlomo Gedrich in Lodz to expropriate the much needed funds. Four of its armed members managed to get inside his house and to terrorise its dwellers with a revolvers. One of them, together with a merchant went to the separate room and shoot him by accident. The attackers ran away without any money, during the police chase one of them got arrested.

At the beginning of July anachocommunist from Lodz sent two delegates to the conference in Kowno, where "Federation of Anarchist Communist Groups of Lithuania and Poland" was established. The program of the new organization were proclaimed, stating that "the anarchist aim at the revolution" which should bring "the anarchist system". Bourgeoisie was to be blamed of the failure of revolution in Russia, as it used the sacrifice of the working class to achieve its own goals.

Another proclamations were adopted:

1. The call to all the anarchist groups to federate, in order to strengthen the movement.
2. Decisions on financial issues of the federation.

3. Strategy on the issue of the struggle with other parties' militias.
4. Critique of the trade unions as a tool of bourgeoisie.
5. Call for a mass expropriation of food during the strikes and unrests.

In July, the police arrested a number of activists, who were sentenced to deportation or a enforced labour in Siberia. On the 17th of July August Waterloo was arrested during the expropriational raid in the town of Ozorkow and subsequently sentenced to 15 years of enforced settlement in Siberia. At the end of the year, Lebus Watman, the leader of the "Internacjonal" in Lodz got arrested and on 16th of April 1908 the headquarter of the group was discovered. Explosives, seal of the group and the anarchist literature and magazines were seized there. Altogether, 18 people were arrested and put on trial at the court martial in Lodz on 2nd of April 1909.

Maksymaliści (The Maxymalists)

At the beginning of 1907, ex - members of the SDKPiL militia have organized the Lodz branch of the group "Zmowa Robotnicza" (Workers Conspiracy), formed in Warsaw at the fall of 1906. The main form of activity of the new group was economic terror. "Zmowa Robotnicza" expropriated and killed the factory owners, engineers, clerks and foremen, sharing the money between its members. The leader of the Lodz branch was a man called "Warszawiak". Together with the other members of the group he committed numerous armed robberies, leaving behind the documents stamped with a forged PPS (Polish Socialist Party) seal. Regional Committee of the PPS ordered the party's military branch to liquidate the Maxymalist as a dangerous criminals, tarnishing the reputation of the party. As the result of this action, three members of the Maxymalist group got killed. In response, Maxymalists besieged and wounded two members of PPS in Rogow Dairy. To coup with the anarchist threat, Tzarist police used a provocateur, called "Red Olek," who had helped them before with the liquidation of the Warsaw Maxymalist group. He was transferred to Lodz and put in the Długa St. prison, together with political prisoners. They protest strongly against the presence of the well known traitor, and tried to lynch him. To prevent the mutiny, "Red Olek" was transported to the dock of 3rd Police Station in Lodz, where he committed a suicide by hanging himself in January 1908.

Rewolucyjni Maksymaliści (Revolutionary Maxymalists)

The group was originally named "Centralny Komitet Robotniczy Partii Rewolucjonistów Maksymalistów" (Central Workers Committee of the Revolutionist - Maxymalist Party). The organization existed for two months only, between September and October 1907, as a dissident group of the PPS. After the split, its members committed a series of armed robberies and expropriations, sharing the robbed money between themselves. The group was soon rounded up, and its members put on trial at the court martial in Lodz on 25 of September 1908. Antonii Kubiak (17 years of age), Władysław Zgierski (22) and Walenty Nowicki (21) were all sentenced to death and executed on 29 of September, Hugo Probe (21), Stanisław Szuszanek (24), Ignacy Kozłowski (22) and Krzysztof Gotlieb (20) were sentenced to the enforced labour for life, Józef Zawadzki (17), Rudolf Fidler (19), Edmund Nowakowski (18), August Adamczewski (20) and Stanisław Jesionek (17) to 20 years of enforced labour, Piotr Łagowski (24), Karol Czewiński (21) and Józef Szaflik (22) to 6 years of enforced labour, Aleksander Kochanowski to 4 years of enforced labour, and Feliks Jędrecki (16) to 12 years in prison.

Grupa Syndykalistów - Maksymalistów (Group of the Syndicalists - Maxymalists)

In March 1907 PPS - Frakcja Rewolucyjna (PPS - Revolutionary Fraction) organized a meeting in Cracow to discuss a drop in popularity of the party among the workers. Lodz section of PPS - FR sent 14 delegates

to the meeting, among them Nikifor Kamer (aka "Wicek" or "Załęski"), the popular teacher. During the trip to Cracow he met some anarchists and got acquainted with the theories of Machajski, and since then became an enemy of the party type of organization. He used his contacts as a party cashier to organize a secret anarchist group inside the party and to carry out a series of armed robberies. His group was deconspirated and Kamer, together with two other anarchists, "Jerzy" and "Benc," was put on trial at the party court. All three were subsequently suspended as a party members in August 1907. After the trial, the group split from the party under the name of Group of Syndicalists – Maxymalists, and on 17th of October 1917 carry out an armed robbery on the cashier of Lodz and Factory Railways, named Gawała. They robbed 22045 roubles and wounded the guard. Together with Kamer, Piotr Zybala (nickname: "Gołąb"), Mysłowiec, Kretowicz (nick: "Kuba") and Ignacy Kozłowski took part in the robbery. Soon the other ex-members of PPS – FR joined the group, among them: Jan Czepliński ("Ignac") – railway storekeeper, Adam Ostrowiec ("Wacław"), Jan Osmańczyk ("Piętka") – post office worker, Józef Szymański, Jan Ziółkowski, Konstanty Jakubowski ("Tygrys"), Józef Banaszczyk ("Kuternoga"), Andrzej Jach ("Władysław"), Stefan Słabosz ("Wulkan") and Piotr Szwertner ("Fryderyk"). Last three of mentioned were to become a members of "Revolutionary Avengers" group in the near future. At the end of the year Kamer got arrested, and the group got dissolved – it's members established a new organization, Group of Revolutionists – Terrorists.

Grupa Rewolucjonistów - Terrorystów (Group of the Revolutionists – Terrorists)

Very often, after the death or detention of the leader, anarchist groups used to change its name to mislead Tzarist police, that might have been tracing the group. That was the case with Sydicalists – Maxymalists, after the round up of Kamer at the end of 1907 the group changed its name to Group of Revolutionists – Terrorists. The group also wanted to develop own political program and internal rules, both of this documents were adopted by "Revolutionary Avengers" two years later. In its program, the group expressed its criticism towards both the socialist parties, considered as the traitors of the working class, and intelligentsia, the social class – due to the groups views – using the working people to achieve its own goals. The group also declare the economic terror as a main method of fight and the lifestyle based on anarcho - communist ideas.

Grupa Anarchistyczno – Spiskowa (Anarchist Conspiracy Group)

Once again, the same organization change its name at the beginning of 1908, probably to point out its anarchist views. The very core of the group consisted of Józef Banaszczyk ("Kuternoga"), Andrzej Jach ("Władysław"), Stanisław Słabosz ("Wulkan") and Piotr Szwertner ("Fryderyk"). The organization soon became a basis for a "Revolutionary Avengers", supplying the new group with its weapon and staff.

"Rewolucyjni Mściciele" ("The Revolutionary Avengers")

"Rewolucyjni Mściciele" ("The Revolutionary Avengers") group, during four years of existence, between 1910 and 1913, committed numerous assaults on Tzarist police, administration and the officials of the regime, as well as the train robberies and expropriations. Tzarist authorities, as well as the prosecution service of the Warsaw court, described the group as the anarchist, trying to destroy the structures of the state by violence. Although in case of "Revolutionary Avengers" it's hard to draw the ultimate distinction between the political violence and common crime, the group itself was always trying to point out the political goals of its actions, mainly by leaving the letters explaining its program in the places of its robberies and execution. The group define itself as the economical and political terrorists, struggling to: "free the working class from the yoke of the bourgeoisie and the government." In its program, the group

also stated: "One of our goals as a group is to provide our help and support to our members in prisons and the enforced labour camps, as well as their families." Some part of the money expropriated during the raids was distributed among the members of the group, according to their needs. In the political situation of its time, the group consider the terror as well as expropriation of both private and the government wealth as the only possible means of struggle. "Revolutionary Avengers" reject the fight for independence of Poland: "We do not carry out the struggle for the independence of Poland, although we demand wide political and cultural autonomy for the country." The actions of the group were carried out against bourgeoisie, landowners, intelligentsia, clergy, lawyers, judges, officers and authorities as well as other "social parasites." Open hostility towards intelligentsia, as well as lack of other defined political views of the group make its political stance similar to the program of Machajski, as well as to some anarcho - communist ideas. It's to be pointed out, though, that various actions of the group were against the anarchist principia. In realms of mass repressions and the restriction to the political parties activity after the defeat of 1905 Revolution, "Revolutionary Avengers" gain certain sympathy and support from the part of the working class, being seen as the heroes and the avengers of the working class in the after revolutionary era. It allowed the group to escape the round up. The other reason for the relatively long existence was deep conspiracy and specific code of conduct of its members. The Avengers couldn't carry any suspicious items on them, take part in any public discussion or criticism of the political system, or posses any propaganda materials. They had to pretend to be completely political indifferent, and in the same time inform the organization of own observations and suspicions. Due to those factors, it took Ochrana, Tzarist secret police, more than three years to arrest the members of the group.

All the political and organizational decisions were taken during the general meetings. The group had no formal leadership, and all its members have equal right of voting at the meetings. Only for carrying out the direct actions the commander was elected, and all the participants were obliged to follow his orders. The penalty for trait, fraud of the organization funds or marauding was death. Due to this draconian restriction, such cases were extremely rare. The unwritten rule was that the besieged member of the group should commit a suicide to avoid interrogation by the police. This rule was usually followed. Newly acquitted members were formed in fives, without any contact with the rest of the group, to reduce the risk of trait and being round up. Parallel to this structure, there was a Technical Organization, in charge of firearms supply and the intelligence. Every militant was equipped with Mauser gun, for a long range shooting, and a short range Browning pistol, as well as spare cartridges and loose munition hidden in the coat. Inside the group the bonds of friendship and responsibility between both the comrades and families of those killed or detained were very strong.

The organization were established by Edward Dłużewski "Zemsta", born in 1891 as a son of the caretaker from Baluty district in Lodz, ex - member of PPS - FR in Ozorkow, and Józef Piątek "Sęp," born 1889, ex - leader of the PPS - FR militia in Lodz. First of the mentioned, after numerous direct action carried out on behalf of PPS - FR, during which he had killed at least five people, was arrested and sentenced to death. Due to his young age (he was only 19 at the time of the trial), his death penalty was reduced to 12 years imprisonment. Dłużewski was first imprisoned in Lodz, then transferred to prison in Piotrkow and finally to Kalisz. There he simulated the disease and was put in the prison hospital, from where he managed to escape. He acquitted civil clothes and, walking at nights, came back to Lodz. Here he met "Sęp", who had just left PPS, disappointed with the party policy. At this time, "Sęp" was tending towards anarchism and anti - intelligentsia hostility. Soon he convinced Dłużewski about the necessity of establishing new, well organized and disciplined anarchist group in Lodz. Both of them were critical about the PPS, and together they established "Revolutionary Avengers" group. New organization adopted the program and the statute of the Group of Revolutionists - Terrorists, anarchist organization formed in 1908 by the ex - members of PPS - FR, who joined the new group as well (among them: Andrzej Jacek, Aleksander Jaszke, Stefan Słabosz, Stanisław Niednarkiewicz, Stefan Dembski, Józef Banaszczyk).

Piątek supplied the group with the firearms and conducted the essential training.

The first direct action of the group took place on 22 of October 1910 in the village of Radogoszcz, and was directed against the much hated community wardens, Wende and Jurczenka. Two of the Avengers, "Sęp" and „Zemsta," approached the victims and start shooting, until they made sure they are both dead. The action was carried out for propaganda reasons, to gain a support from a village dwellers towards the new group, and this aim was achieved. As the chief commender of police forces in Lodz wrote in his report; "Enquiry against the Revolutionary Avengers in extremally difficult, as they enjoy the great support from the local community." New members started to join the group, recruited mostly from the ex-PPS members. Quite often they were young men from well off familiest eg. landlord's sons. The organization started to grow, establishing its branches in Warsaw, Czestochowa, Radom, Kielce, Sosnowiec, Bedzin, Kalisz, Zyrardow and Cracow. The Avengers gain a lot of popularity, there was a 500 roubles reward established by a Tzarist authorities for the head of Dłużewski. This led to the attempted arrest of him at Lodz Fabryczna railway station on 2nd of December, during which Ochrana agent Kapłan and Russian army officer Gawryłow got shot dead and two other persons were injured. Avengers managed to run away.

Another actions by Avengers were: armed robbery at the Pabianice fraigth train station on the 7th of December, where 7000 roubles was robbed, and the robbery of the passenger train No. 17, between the stations Lodz Widzew and Noworadomsk. Masked Avengers, armed with Browninigs and Mausers, first stopped the train with a emergency brake, and then, threatened the cashier with the guns, stole a money for the railways workers pay-offs (11000 roubles). As usual, they left a letter in the place of robbery, stated that the action was carried out by the Group of Revolutionary Avengers, sealed with two stamps, red and black, with the name of the group. During the raid, Avengers were weaving the red and black flag.

Police chase only found four coats, left behind by the assailants. The enqiry established, that one of them belongs to Stefan Słabosz "Wulkan." During the search carried out in his flat while he was away, police recovered part of the robbed money, it also established that Dłużewski, Jaszke and Jacha "Siwek" also belong to the group, and probably took part in the robbery. The first attempt to arrest them, led by the chief commander of the police in Pabianice, Kronenberg, took place in the Tuszyn forrest on 21st of March 1910. During this attempt, Kronenberg got wounded, and the Avengers managed to run away. Knowing that their homes are under police surveilance, Avengers were looking for a new hideout. On 15th of April they met Feliks Pastusiak, who promised to help them and hide them in the flat of Waclaw Brzezina, the accountant at the M. Silberstein factory, at 151 Widzewska St. However, the helpers turned out to be police informers, tempted by the 500 roubles reward, and the hideout was soon surrounded by police, army forces and gendarmerie. The siege lasted for two days, from the early morning to the noon of the following day. Later on, Avengers let the traitor's family leave the flat and prepared for a final shoot – out. In the meantime police evacuated the building, and by the order of the local governor, set the house ablaze. Dłużewski and two other comrades committed a suicide, only Słabosz jumped out of the window and got seriously injured. He was transported to the hospital, where he admitted to participation in the group and all its actions and died soon after.

The group avenge the comrades on 3rd of May in Konstantynów, when Drynia, Bednarkiewicz and Siemieniec set the Brzezina's house ablaze. Unable to find a new home in Lodz, Brzezina decided to move away from the city after the statement of the factory workers, who declared, that they are not going to work under him again.

Police started the new enquiry against the Avengers, which led to arrest of the important member of the group, Jan Świątek. He was later hung by the police without a trial.

The death of Dłużewski didn't finish the group's activity, contrary to that, its action became more frequent and spread over the bigger territory. In June, they carry out a robbery on the cashier Rychłowiski, and in August, the group raided the office of Rzucew, killing two people. They also executed the prison wardens: Czerny, Sarnota, Połowcew and Kiryluk. Aiming at giving the group more ideological stance, the Avenger

issued a manifesto "To all the working men and women", started with the words: "The Kingdom of God may be conquered only by the mean of violence." The manifesto was strongly antycapitalist, and it announced further struggle against the enemies of the working class. It also justified the armed struggle as a fight for freedom and the dignity of the working people.

On 19th of July 1911 Stanisław Bednarkiewicz "Sergiej", Józef Piotrowski "Franek" and Roman Prawicki "Serwus Młodszy", waiting on the subway tram stop, were approached by the pickpockets, who found their guns under the coats. The thieves informed the police immediately, and the armed officers board a tram heading towards Zgierz. The Avengers managed to kill them, jump out of the tram and run away. At the beginning of September the police carried out a search in the flat of Chołysz brothers father, the caretaker, on 6 Rzgowska St. During the search, the group of the Avengers turned up, killing two police officers and wounding three others. During the shootout, one of the Avengers, Józef Banaszczyk, killed his comrade Skiba, who got an epileptic fit and was unable to run away. The Avengers never let any of their comrades be arrested alive, so the police can't force him to testify against the others by torture.

In September and November two other train robberies were carried out by the group: fist the freight train between the stations Widzew and Chojny, when the safe was broken, and later the passenger train between Rogów and Płyćwia.

At the beginning of the new year, in January 1912, 32 Avengers were arrested by the Ochrana, 22 of them were later charged and put on trial.

In the new manifesto to the factory workers and peasants, issued in February 1912, the Avengers announced: "Workers! We will conquere the capital by force, we will take the resources from the exploitators, intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, the clergy, the merchants, officers, clerks, the lawyers and judges, journalists and the other social parasites, as well as the police, because all this resources comes from our sweat and tears, and only we should use them. Do our poverty and human dignity spur us to live like a humans or to die with a dignity, to the immediate revenge on the oppressors and to the immediate expropriation of their capital and wealth, and the justice will rule the world. Death to the oppressors! Long life to the worldwide commune!"

On the 7th of April the group robbed the cashier of the Geyer factory, and on 14th executed two wardens, Laszczuk and Chwedczak. All that time, the Avengers point out the political character of the actions, sending the letters to the "Kurier Łódzki" newspaper, in which they explained the ideological views and motivation of the group. They also sent a letter to the chief commander of the Police in Lodz, Rieszanow, promising him their revenge. In May the Avengers robbed two cashiers of Huta Bankowa, wounding three wardens: Prokopienka, Bieda and Rosiak. Later on, they move its main activity to Czestochowa, where they try to kill police commander Pekura. On 2nd of October 1912, after the group came back to Lodz, police was informed about the hideout of Józef Piątek, at 78 Dzielna (now Narutowicza) St., in the Władysław Gonerski flat. The house was surrounded, during the shootout three police officers got killed: Mozel, Podchyłko and Kowalew. Seriously wounded, Piątek got arrested and was transported to the hospital, where he died soon after. Even in hospital, he remained a threat to the Ochrana guards – they run away in panic when he pretended he got a bomb with him. The other militant, who was in the flat with Piątek, managed to run away and was killed in the Widzew forest later.

The discovery of Piątek hideout, that was probably also the group main meeting point, led to numerous further arrests among the Avengers. Józef Banaszczyk was sentenced to death and executed, and eleven other Avengers were sentenced to enforced settlement in Siberia.

Michał Zakrzewski "Jastrząb" was trying to re-establish the group, calling the conference in Zakopane on 26th of May 1913, attended by 14 persons. The main topic was the revenge for killed and imprisoned

comrades, the resolutions adopted spoke about: “gunpowder, bombs, expropriation and the vengeance on the oppressors.” The resolution to PPS was also adopted, accusing the party of cooperation with the police against the Avengers and promising the retaliation, if such a situation occurred again.

Zakrzewski went to Lodz, where he got arrested on 19 of November 1913. Tortured by the police, he gave the names of other members of the group and the address of its meeting point to the prosecutors, and the group ceased to exist shortly after.

According to E. Ajnenkiel, over three years 371 people have joined the group, 51 of them have been later sentenced to death or enforced labour. The biggest trial against the Avengers started in October 1914, with 76 people charged and more than 200 witnesses. After the initial hearing, the case was divided into few smaller trials. After the beginning of the WWI, detained Avengers were moved first to Warsaw, and then to Moscow, when the trials finally concluded with many of the charged sentenced to death or enforced labour, among them: Michał Doroszewski, Władysław Grobelski, Michał Krzemiński, Józef Cimek, Jan Kryster, Franciszek Tomaszewski, Kuno Reis, Jan and Antonii Słabosz, Julian Szwertner, Leon Banaszczyk, Franciszek Dłużewski, Andrzej and Bronisław Chołysz.

“Anarchia” i “Czarny Kruk” (“Anarchy” and “The Black Crow”)

The lack of the historical documents concerning the anarchism often makes it impossible to reconstruct the program and the history of certain groups, especially the ones that reject the terror and the direct action in their activities. Due to their peaceful character, they passed unnoticed by the Tzarist Ochraha, which results in lack of historical documents concerning them. This is the case with “The Black Crow” and the “Anarchy” groups, existing probably between 1907 and 1910. It’s only confirmed, that the first of the mentioned consisted of 7 members, and the “Anarchy” group was probably a branch of Bialystok organization, bearing the same name and established in 1905 as the result of split in the anarchist movement in this city, after which one part of it adopted non – violent tactic and got involved in propaganda and agitation. They condemned “impersonal terror” and presented their program in the manifesto: “Anarchism and the Political Struggle.”

Grupa Polskich Anarchistów (Group of the Polish Anarchists)

In 1920, anarchists in Lodz established a group, which main aim was to spread an anarchist propaganda and ideas. The group issued a paper in Yiddish, named “Głos Wolności” (The Voice of Freedom), as well as the pamphlet: “Contemporary science and the Anarchism” by Peter Kropotkin. In 1921 a group of young people joined the organization, to spread the propaganda among the students. They issued the pamphlet: “A letter to the youth,” circulated in local schools. The group also tried to reach the workers audience, by participating in the free evening classes organized by the mainstream trade unions. The unions cancelled this classes soon after that, to avoid the spread of anarchist ideas, officially by the police order. At the beginning of 1923 the group issued some more pamphlets in Yiddish, among them “Anarchizm i bolszewicki komunizm” (“The Anarchism and the Bolshevik Communism”), explaining the views of the anarchists on the Bolshevik state, and “Prawda o Machno” (“The Truth about Makhno”), distributed during the trial of Nestor Makhno at the Polish court. The group also printed Rudolf Rocker’s “Dyktatura i rady” (“Dictatorship and the Soviets”), but failed to smuggle it from the UK to Poland. In the fall of 1923, most of the members left to France, and the group ceased to exist.

Federacja Polski (Anarchist Federation of Poland)

The Federation was established on 24th of July 1926 in Warsaw, during the First National Conference of Polish anarchists, by the delegates from five cities. Lodz wasn’t represented, delegates from the city

joined the Federation in 1931 as the Baluty section (name of one of the city's boroughs), which indicates the place they lived.

The national paper of the Federation was named "Głos Anarchisty" ("The Voice of the Anarchist"), and was edited in Warsaw, and the political program of the Federation was based on anarchosyndicalism, and the rejection of both the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. During its first national conference, Federation condemned the Piłsudski regime and call for release of all the political prisoners. The Federation rejected the terror as a mean of struggle to focus on the trade unionism, strike actions and anarchist propaganda. It was regularly issuing various papers, such as "Głos Anarchisty", "Walka klas" ("Class Struggle"), "Młody Rewolucjonista" ("Young Revolutionist"), and "Anarchistyczna Federacja Polski" ("The Anarchist Federation of Poland"), as well as numerous brochures and pamphlets. Young anarchists have often joined the communist demonstrations to provoke the discussion and spread the propaganda. The Federation run also its self education classes and organized the lectures.

There are no confirmed information about the strikes or demonstrations organized by the Federation in Lodz, except from the strike of bakers and decorators against the low wages in 1931, joined by the members of AFP in Lodz. There's a report on this strike, signed by S. Łowicki, member of the Federation in Lodz.

After the beginning of the WWII the Federation was officially dissolved, and its members joined the underground armed forces.

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Appendix 1.

Manifesto of the "Internacjonal":

To the working men and women!

Rivers of blood run through the streets of Russia, the soil is soaked with the blood of victims, and yet the new blood is running, and the heads of our brave comrades are falling under the guillotine, the heads of the victims of the capitalist system and its despotic oppressors.

Comrades! The bells are ringing, calling us to the new life, to the new struggle for life and death against the capitalist system and the much hated government, for the creation of anarchist commune.

Comrade toilers! The time has passed, when you remove the dark cloud, not letting you see the light!
Comrade toilers, don't let democratic bourgeoisie cheat you with their promise of political revolution.

Comrades! The toiler can't take any advantage of the political revolution, as he will only win the freedom to starve, the freedom to die, freedom to shed its blood, and the capitalist, our enemies, will have all the rights, the freedom to exploit the toiler, a freedom to suck his blood and strength.

Political revolution will give us nothing, so we have to mobilise all our strength, carry out the propaganda and the struggle against the present order, which means against the ruling class.

What we need is freedom without the government. Nobody is ruling – nobody is oppressed. Our goal is to spread our anarchist idea. Our goal is to defend the case of the working class, don't allow it to be mixed with a mud of the ruling order. Comrades! The democratic government is the institution, by which the bourgeoisie, calling itself the representation of the working class, will cuff your hands again.

Comrades! The historical moment has come, the soil is soaked with the blood of our comrades, and yet the new victims have perished, the new martyrs on the altar of freedom, these are some of their heroic names: Blumenfeld, "Jankiel Kamasznik", "Kuba", student Modzelewski, Abramowicz, Szulc. These names will be remembered and written with fire in the book of revolution.

Comrade toilers! We all have a duty to avenge the heroes, our comrades, victims of the capitalist system. Don't let the death of our heroic comrades scare you, fight against the capitalist system. Forge the sabres, clean the guns. Let the anger explode, let the storm come, in the time of the final war, rip the masks from the faces of your enemies!

Down with the capitalist system!

Long life to the social revolution!

Down with the slayers and the defenders of the private property!

Long life to the anarchist commune!

Signed: Group of the Anarchists – Communists of Lodz "Intencjonal"

(Manifesto was issued on 2nd of February 1906 in Yiddish, translation based on Russian police report)

Appendix 2.

Political program of Revolutionists – Terrorists group, later adopted by the "Revolutionary Avengers"

Our group is a terrorist organization of the political and economic character, which goal is the struggle for the liberation of the working class from the yoke of bourgeoisie and the government. The organization adopts the widespread terror as its mean of political and economical struggle, as well as the expropriation of the money, belonging to both the government and the bourgeoisie.

We do not carry out the struggle for the independence of Poland, although we demand wide political and cultural autonomy for the country, and the equal distribution of wealth among the working people. One of the goals of our organization is to provide help and support for our members in prisons and in enforced labour camps, as well as their families, if only they are dependent on the imprisoned member's incomes and in need of help. We feel also obliged to help our members, who got deconspired and are in need.

The money gained through our actions will be distributed among all the comrades, according to their needs, but some agreed amount will be always left as the organizational resource, under the supervision of the directorate. The directorate is responsible for the organizational funds, and will provide the general assembly with the periodical reports on incomes and spending.

The members of the organization are electing the directorate, obliged to enforce all the resolutions of the general assembly. Important organizational and political issues are discussed on the general assembly. Anybody, who is willing to become a member of "Revolutionary Avengers" and will be accepted as a member of the group is obliged to take part in all the terrorist actions of the group, otherwise he can't be a member.

We do not have any leaders, every member of the group has the right to vote, and all the members are equal. For the time of action only, the commander is to be elected, and all the members will have to obey his orders – although during the action, only. Members of our group are obliged to observe the rules of strict conspiracy, and to live a decent life to prove we are the freedom fighters, not the casual criminals and thieves.

The original document was stamped with two seals, red and black, with the symbols of skull and the crossbones.

Appendix 3.

Statute of the Revolutionists – Terrorists and the "Revolutionary Avengers"

Everybody joining the organization is swearing on his honour, that he will not pass any information about the group and its actions to anybody, otherwise he will be put on trial at the organizational court and might be even sentenced to death. Every member of our group is obliged to strictly follow this statute. Every member of our group is obliged to observe the rules of strict conspiracy, don't possess any suspicious goods, don't have any relationship with suspicious people, don't get involved in political discussions in the factories, but to pretend the complete indifference. Every member of the group must pay attention to the other members' behaviour, and if he finds anything suspicious, report it on the meeting immediately.

For breach of the rules of conspiracy, showing off the weapon etc anybody will be removed from the organization.

Members of our organization are bound with each other with the ties of brotherhood, and will support each other, also the ones who are in prison. They will receive all the possible help, as well as their families, and every possible step will be taken to secure their release.

Agreed amount of money, gained through the direct action, will stay within the group, the rest will be distributed among its members according to their needs.

Nobody can refuse taking part in the action, otherwise will be removed from the organization. If the success of the action requires, that a member of the group will lose his life, the volunteers will be called, in case there will be no volunteers – the draw will be held.

The penalty for not turning up for the action is death, even without the decision of the organizational court. The penalty for desertion from the place of action is death, and every member of the group can shoot the deserter in the head. If the members of the group carry out an action without the knowledge of the organization, they will be removed. Although, if the action is agreed and there's an opportunity to carry it out, and it's impossible to inform the group about it – the members of the group should do it, and report it on the nearest meeting.

The penalty for an executing the innocent man is death.

The penalty for a fraud is death.

The penalty for a trait is death.

The general assembly is the highest authority in the group.

The document was stamped with two seals, red and black, with the symbols of skull and the crossbones.

Appendix 4.

Manifesto of the “Revolutionary Avengers”

Only these will see the day of freedom

Who are free by their free will.

The Kingdom of God might be conquered

Only by the mean of violence.

To the factory workers and peasants!

What is the meaning of your life?

The answer to this question we will find in ourselves. All our life is first of all the struggle for a better piece of bread, for a better place to live, generally, for improving our living. Besides this need, common to all the mankind, every human being got its own targets he's trying to reach.

Achieving those targets on the level, that gives us satisfaction is called the happiness. So, to achieve happiness – is a main goal of human life. To achieve it, we have to carry out the constant struggle against the numerous obstacles.

Everyone of us, toilers, knows the price of happiness, but do we do anything about it, except from complaining? Why is it like this? Why we – all the hungry toilers, knowing well what do we need, are still suffering from the poverty and unemployment, or – even worse – fight each other? It's because we are led by the capitalists and its paid butlers – the intelligentsia – who are poisoning our minds with their propaganda.

Every time the oppressed masses were preparing for the bloody battle with them, and for expropriating their wealth, those dogs feed with the leftovers by the capitalists, those policemen in disguise, the intelligentsia, were hanging around the angry masses with their sweet lies and the hearts of the treacherous beasts. They misled the weak minds of divided toilers and then – instead of the final fight with the capital and just expropriation of the wealth – they got involved in the political parties,

discouraging them from achieving the real targets, making them fight each other, and promising the bright future will come once the bad government will be changed for the worse, or after death.

We shall remember about the last revolution, when so many working people have perished as a victims of intelligentsia, who sent the workers for a fight against the Tzarist government, somehow unsuitable for its allies, the bourgeoisie. The case of the French Revolution shows us, how many toilers will benefit from changing the Tzarist government for the democratic one.

Agitated by the paid butlers, the intelligentsia, French toilers raised the weapons and, for the price of thousands of victims, defeated the feudal regime of king and the nobles. The bourgeoisie was celebrating the victory over the nobles. The castles and public buildings were full of music and joy, but when the toilers demanded them to fulfil their promises, when they demanded the bread and freedom – they've seen the same weapons, they defeat the monarchy with – pointed against them by the new rulers.

Considering this, now we know, that no external force will bring us freedom, nor will the speeches of the traitors – like Daszyński, Wroński, Bebel – and other “friends” of the people paid by the capitalists. They will never help us, they will harm our case by poisoning our minds and turning our attention to the issues of secondary importance.

This quasi – socialists are only using the slogans of freedom, fraternity and equality to gain the support from the working class. But the working class will never be allowed to put those slogans to life, or to claim its share in a capital, created by its own labour. Gentlemen from intelligentsia will call you a bandit or a spy, and kill you in the name of socialist idea, or denounce you to the Tzarist slayers, openly or by using its papers, “Robotnik” and “Górnik”, just as it happens before. Just as well, we can't rely on the education, for the education is in hands of the intelligentsia, and it's used as another mean of oppression against the working class.

Toilers! We will never come out of the hell of poverty, if we keep on believe in the promises of capitalists, if our free will will be restrained be their ideas of good and evil.

We are not going to lie to ourselves, nor pretend to believe, that the wolves will ever stop eating other animals, or our oppressors will invite us to their magnificent palaces, and move to our miserable lodges instead, that they will exchange their finest meals and drinks for our black bread, their silk for our rugs. As the Christ said, the Kingdom of God (and the communion of wealth) belongs to the strong ones. The improvement of life of the working class can't be achieved by our dreams, or by any means thought up by our enemies, that will make the rich even richer and the poor even poorer. It can be only achieved by our own deeds, by hitting the rotten tree of the capital with the axe.

Toilers! We will conquere the capital by force, we will take the resources from the exploitators, intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, the clergy, the merchants, officers, clerks, the lawyers and judges, journalists and the other social parasites, as well as the police, because all this resources comes from our sweat and tears, and only we should use them. Do our poverty and human dignity spur us to live like a humans or to die with a dignity, to the immediate revenge on the oppressors and to the immediate expropriation of their capital and wealth, and the justice will rule the world.

Death to the oppressors!

Long life to the worldwide commune!

Long life to the true brotherhood of the suffering people!

Long life to the Group of Revolutionary Avengers!

Circulation: 22 000 copies.

Appendix 5.

Minutes from the conference of Revolutionary Avengers in Zakopane, 26th of May 1913

The conference was called by Michał Zakrzewski from Lodz, nickname: "Jastrząb"

During the conference, following matters were discussed;

1. The organization of Group of Revolutionary Avengers.
2. Relationship with PPS – FR.
3. Free motions.

The discussion was begun by Zakrzewski, pointing out that after death of "Sęp" – Józef Piątek, the organization ceased to exist, and its remaining member doesn't feel bound with the organizational statute. Nowadays, Russian government is focussing all its attention on investigating and repressing the most militant forces within the labour movement. These repressions have forced the most politically conscious and militant workers to immigrate abroad, mostly to Galicja. The refugees suffer a lot of hardship here, and are starving due to the lack of material resources. So, the time has come to provide help and support to everybody in need. That's why, we decided to re-establish a Group of Revolutionary Avengers and we are hoping that its ranks will be soon filled with brave and ready for everything militants. Our program and our tactic are simple: "Struggle against the oppression, death to the oppressors, guns and bombs for the militants, expropriation as a mean of struggle. Money gained in action will cover the organizational needs and the needs of repressed comrades."

Józef Winiarski "Sowa" has referred to the second point of the conference, stating that PPS – FR has adopted a tactic of oppressing these militants, who don't follow the orders of Central Workers' Committee (the highest authority of the party), and even denouncing the dissidents to the Tzarist police. These repressions are carried out against the members of "Revolutionary Avengers" mostly. As we couldn't bear it any more, we've issued a letter to the Central Worker's Committee, demanding the repressions to be stopped, and threatening to blow up an office of the Committee at the "Trybuna" headquarters, during its meeting if the repressions against our comrades will continue. Most of the members of our Group of Revolutionary Avengers come from the ranks of PPS militia. We know the addresses of secret magazines of firearms and explosives, belonging to this party, as well as we know about some of the expropriations and robberies planned by the party militia. This weapons and explosives should be taken over by our group, and the planned robberies and expropriations should be carried out by the Avenger as soon as possible, as the Russian police is unprepared to deal with such actions due to the lasting truce in the country. Such actions should be carried out during the summer period, as the fields and forests will provide the hideout for the assailants. PPS – FR itself is hesitating with starting the direct action, as the party leadership don't trust the militants, suspecting that they might keep the robbed money themselves.

Considering the third point of the meeting, the decision was taken to rebuild the Group of Revolutionary Avengers, and Michał Zakrzewski "Jastrząb" was elected as its leader, with Józef Winiarski "Sowa" as his deputy.

At the end of the conference, three militant squads were formed, consisting of four people each. Two of them were sent to Warsaw and Sosnowiec, the third one was split and two groups were sent to Lublin

and Kielce as the organizers. The group were ordered to get a job in these places, even the lowest paid and carry out a surveillance to establish the routs of the money transports, as well as the security means during these transports.