

Anarchism in Poland

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From 1772 until 1918 Poland as such did not exist; the country was partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The anarchism movement thus sprang from the emancipatory impulses of various nineteenth-century underground groups that fought to reestablish the Polish state. The area occupied by Tsarist Russia experienced the bloodiest persecutions. The first anarchist group, consisting mostly of young Poles of Jewish descent, was organized in 1903 in Białystok. In the following years, the group's activities spread to other cities: Warsaw, Łódź, Kielce, Siedlce, and others. The goal of these groups was to disrupt the civil order set by the occupants. They often engaged in acts of terror: robberies, assaults on the police, bombings, and so forth. At the same time, some anarchist groups began to be interested in anarchosyndicalism, which rejected terrorism and focused on organizing revolutionary trade unions and engaging in various propaganda activities.

Polish anarchism thrived among socialist philosophers. Edward Abramowski (1868–1918, author of *Socialism and the State* and *A Public Collusion against Government*) advocated, as an alternative to the state, voluntary unions based on principles of common interest and collaboration. Influenced by Leo Tolstoy, Abramowski suggested that unions provide a foundation for individual freedom, while safeguarding justice and social order.

Jan Waclaw Machajski (1866–1926) began his political career as a member of the Polish Socialist Party, but soon rejected its bureaucracy and intellectual elite and believed the state should be destroyed by the working class. From 1920 to 1939, a short period of Polish independence, Abramowski and Machajski's anarchosyndicalist ideas influenced the Union of Trade-Unions (Związek Związków Zawodowych) (ZZZ), a 130,000-member organization from 1931 to 1939. After World War II began, anarchist ideas influenced Poland's subsequent struggles, opposing the Nazis during the war and Russian rule from 1946 to 1989. During World War II, members of ZZZ created Związek Syndykalistów Polskich (Union of Polish Syndicalists), participating in many resistance activities, including the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

In the 1980s, anarchist ideas reappeared, with the Movement of Alternative Society. Shortly thereafter, small anarchist groups emerged in various cities across Poland in opposing the communist regime. These groups resorted to what Peter Sloterdijk calls *kynicism*, the recourse to irony and humor to undermine repressive regimes, organizing street happenings, performances, and impromptu performance events. These groups included Pomarańczowa Alternatywa (The Orange Alternative), Klub Sigma (Club Sigma), and Międzyzmiastówka Anarchistyczna (Anarchy International). In the 1980s the anarchosyndicalist section of the Anarchist Federation published the newspaper *Kombinat* (*The Factory*), and the Anarchist Workers' Initiative (Anarchistyczna Inicjatywa Robotnicza) (AIR) published the newspaper *Direct Action*. Although initially founded on anarchist organization, in 1989 Solidarność (Solidarity) emerged as an official political party.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism ; Solidarność (Solidarity)

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