

THE COUP IN POLAND IN JANUARY 1919

Waldemar Rezmer

Abstract

The paper examines a little-known unsuccessful attempt at a military coup in Poland in January 1919. The idea attracted notable members of the Polish National Committee, including Stanisław Grabski, and members of other right-wing organisations. Colonel Marian Januszajtis-Żegota took up the leadership at the military level, and Eustachy Sapieha at the political level. The coup was directed against the government led by the socialist Jędrzej Edward Moraczewski. The paper shows the political context of the uprising, the process, and the circumstances of its failure.

Key words: coup, Poland, army, Moraczewski's government, Colonel Marian Januszajtis-Żegota.

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Anotacija

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas istoriografijoje menkai žinomas nesėkmingas bandymas Lenkijoje 1919 m. sausį įvykdyti karinį perversmą. Ši idėja įtraukė žymesnius Lenkijos Tautinio Komiteto narius, įskaitant Stanisławą Grabskį, bei kitas dešiniąsias organizacijas. Vadovauti perversmui ėmėsi plk. Marianas Januszajtis-Żegota kariniu lygmeniu ir Eustachijus Sapieha politiniu lygmeniu. Perversmas buvo nukreiptas prieš socialisto Jędrzejaus Edwardo Moraczewskio vadovaujamą vyriausybę. Straipsnis atskleidžia perversmo politinį kontekstą, eigą ir pučistų nesėkmės aplinkybes.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: valstybės perversmas, Lenkija, kariuomenė, Moraczewskio vyriausybė, plk. Marian Januszajtis-Żegota.

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On the first days of November 1918, Europe witnessed several milestone events which enabled Poland to regain its independence. As a result, the Polish people began to assume power over the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, which had been occupied since 1915 by the armies of the Central Powers. On 7 November 1918 in Lublin, the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland was established. The government was formed from members of the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS) and various people's parties. Ignacy Daszyński, who was a leading activist in Galicia's Polish Social Democratic Party (Polska Partia Socjalno-Demokratyczna, PPSD), became both prime minister and minister of foreign affairs. Jędrzej Moraczewski, also a socialist from the PPSD, was minister of communications. Edward Rydz Śmigły, the commander-in-chief of the Polish Military Organisation (Polska Organizacja Wojskowa, POW), was head of the Ministry of War.

A special manifesto was published. Its purpose was to announce the creation of the state of Poland along republican lines, and the convening of the parliament on the basis of 'five-adjective' elections, and to declare the equality of all citizens, regardless of their background, religion or nationality, as well as freedom of conscience, speech and assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom to march, join a trade union, and strike. Other important issues were also proclaimed, including the introduction of an eight-hour working day, the nationalisation of forests and properties in the hands of generals and Russian officials that had been granted to them by the tsar, the immediate return of the German armed forces to their country, and the release of numerous prisoners, in particular Józef Piłsudski. However, the most important and urgent task was 'the organisation of the regular people's army, the creation of which, in the absence of Józef Piłsudski, is assigned to his deputy, Colonel of the First Brigade of the Polish Legions, Edward Rydz Śmigły'.¹

The initiators of the people's government in Lublin, and the authors of the manifesto, categorically rejected the revolution model which was developing in Russia at that time. They wanted to avoid chaos and bloodshed at all costs. This was stated clearly by one of the leaders of the PPS, who wrote: 'In this very difficult situation, the Provisional People's Government in Lublin, by the fact of its creation, through its Manifesto, through the enthusiasm it has induced, firmly, manly and irrevocably directed the building of the state on the path to democracy, or, to be exact, parliamentary democracy. Communism in Poland received a fatal blow in Lublin on 7 November 1918.'²

¹ Manifest Tymczasowego Rządu Republiki Polskiej z 7 listopada 1918 r. In *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej: wybór dokumentów*. Red. H. JANOWSKA, T. JĘDRUSZCZAK. Warszawa 1984, dok. nr 214, s. 429–431.

² NIEDZIAŁKOWSKI, Mieczysław. *Demokracja parlamentarna w Polsce*. Warszawa, 1930, s. 12.

On 10 November 1918, Józef Piłsudski, who had been released from prison in Magdeburg by the German authorities, arrived in Warsaw. He immediately started talks with members of the Council of Regency, who were willing to hand power over to him as soon as possible, because there was a revolutionary mood in the city. The next day, the process began of disarming the German garrison, and taking over public buildings, train stations and warehouses, supervised by the POW. On the same day, 11 November, the Council of Regency gave Piłsudski power over the army.³ Ignacy Daszyński acted similarly, putting himself at Piłsudski's disposal, and submitted the resignation of the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland.⁴ On 14 November, the final decision of the Council of Regency was 'to transfer our duties and responsibilities to the Polish nation' to Piłsudski.⁵ On the same day, Piłsudski called on Ignacy Daszyński to form a government.⁶

This decision was not easy. Since 12 November, there had been political disputes over the issue, led by Piłsudski, whose intention was not to support any option, but to serve as an arbitrator. During one such meeting, Stanisław Gąbiński, one of the leaders of the National Democratic Party, attempted to persuade Piłsudski to form a government from the activists representing national and people's parties.⁷ On the other hand, activists of the conservatives and the people's parties opted to form a coalition government which would represent a broader political perspective. However, Piłsudski was aware that, because of the situation, he had few political options. He knew that the government he was about to appoint needed to be leftist, at least at the beginning of its existence. That was what people wanted and expected at that time: 'Warsaw is red, I need peace in Warsaw, that's why [...] I am considering Daszyński,' Piłsudski said to the delegation of the Polish Liquidation Committee, the provisional Polish authority in the Austrian Partition and Cieszyn Silesia, which had arrived in Warsaw.⁸ The appointment of a right-wing government would have been extremely risky from a political point of view, because it could have made the situation worse, and provoke a wave of revolutionary acts.

Ignacy Daszyński's appointment as prime minister made right-wing activists deeply dissatisfied. According to them, the three ministries which the National Democratic

³ Dekret Rady Regencyjnej do narodu polskiego o przekazaniu władzy wojskowej J. Piłsudskiemu z 11 listopada 1918 r. In *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej...*, dok. nr 218, s. 436.

⁴ JĘDRZEJEWICZ, Wacław; CISEK, Janusz. *Kalendarium życia Józefa Piłsudskiego 1867–1935*. T. II: 1918–1926. Warszawa, 1998, s. 9; URBANKOWSKI, Bohdan. *Józef Piłsudski: marzyciel i strateg*. Warszawa, 1997, s. 277–278.

⁵ Pismo Rady Regencyjnej do Naczelnego Dowódcy Wojsk Polskich Józefa Piłsudskiego z 14 listopada 1918 r. In *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej...*, dok. nr 222, s. 440.

⁶ Dekret Naczelnika Państwa o powierzeniu misji utworzenia rządu I. Daszyńskiemu oraz o najbliższych pracach państwowych z dn. 14 listopada 1918 r. In *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej...*, dok. nr 223, s. 440.

⁷ JĘDRZEJEWICZ, W.; CISEK, J. Op. cit., s. 13.

⁸ Ibid., s. 14.

Party had been offered did not reflect their political position in the country. That is why they rejected the invitation to join the government, and undertook fierce propaganda and protest actions. Daszyński was particularly violently attacked. Zbigniew Paderewski, one of the leaders of the National Democratic Party, informed Piłsudski that his wing 'cannot cooperate with Daszyński, but is able to accept Moraczewski'.⁹ Daszyński was so discouraged by the fruitless negotiations with National Democratic politicians that on 17 November he gave up trying to form a government.

Moraczewski's government and the political background

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On 18 November, the mission to appoint a government was entrusted to Jędrzej Moraczewski, who was a PPSD member with some political experience (he was a deputy in the parliament in Vienna). Moraczewski was an independence activist, a soldier in the Polish Legions, and a member of the POW. He was a political officer in the Convent of Organisation 'A', which had coordinated the actions of Piłsudski's supporters after Piłsudski had been interned in July 1917. On the last days of October 1918, together with Daszyński, he was in the Polish Liquidation Committee in Cracow, and then went on to become minister of communications in the Lublin government.

Jędrzej Moraczewski copied Daszyński in his attempts to form a cabinet. He did not even change the list of ministers. It was to consist of 19 members, of whom 15 were appointed immediately, and the remaining four were to come from the right wing. Moraczewski was not only prime minister but also minister of communications (on 29 December 1918, Stanisław Stączek was entrusted with this ministry). Józef Piłsudski, as commander-in-chief, also became minister of military affairs, Stanisław Thugutt minister of internal affairs, and Leon Wasilewski minister of foreign affairs.¹⁰ However, the National Democrats did not join the government. Wincenty Witos' activists, representing the Piast Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe 'Piast') also declined to participate in the cabinet. The vacancies were filled with members of the Wyzwolenie Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe 'Wyzwolenie') and the Lewica Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe 'Lewica'), as well as non-partisans and specialists. In the end, out of 19 ministers, 14 represented political parties (six socialists, six leftist people's parties, two radicals), and the remaining five were specialists.

⁹ PRÓCHNIK, Adam. *Pierwsze piętnastolecie Polski niepodległej. Zarys dziejów politycznych*. Warszawa, 1983, s. 33.

¹⁰ THUGUTT, Stanisław. *Autobiografia*. Warszawa, 1984, s. 114–115; PRÓCHNIK, A. Op. cit., s. 33–34; KROPKOWSKI, Leszek. Gabinet Jędrzeja Moraczewskiego 17.XI.1918–16.I.1919. In *Gabinety Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*: praca zbiorowa. Red. J. FARYŚ, J. PAJEWSKI. Szczecin, Poznań, 1991, s. 39.

The agenda and composition of Moraczewski's cabinet were to some extent a continuation of the Lublin government. Piłsudski's idea of forming a government representing various political options collapsed. However, compared with the Lublin government, the new cabinet was less leftist, because a few specialists in the cabinet, formally non-partisan, were more like proponents of a rightist social ideology. The lean towards the right was also noticeable in the agenda of the new government, which was presented on 21 November in a manifesto to the nation.¹¹ It was announced that some social and economic reforms could only be passed by the parliament.

Holding elections and summoning parliament required time. Crucial decisions regarding the political system could not wait, and that is why, four days after his appointment as prime minister, Moraczewski submitted a proposal for a decree concerning the highest authority of the country. The decree, signed on 22 November, stated that Poland was a republic, in which the highest authority was in the hands of the provisional head of state. Piłsudski assumed this role, and was expected to hold it until the parliament sat. Legislative power belonged to the government, which could issue decrees approved by Piłsudski.¹²

Since Piłsudski had become the provisional head of state, he resigned as minister of war, giving the post to Colonel Jan Wroczyński, who became the head of the ministry.¹³ However, Piłsudski remained commander-in-chief of the Polish armed forces.¹⁴

Being aware of the political tensions and the revolutionary mood, it was necessary, before the elections and the formation of the parliament, to implement at least a few reforms, which had been in the manifesto of the Lublin government. On 23 November, a decree was issued. It guaranteed an eight-hour working day, and obligatory insurance against illness and unemployment. It set a minimum wage, and protection for tenants. Earlier declarations were confirmed, concerning in particular the democratic rights of citizens, and equality, regardless of background, religion or nationality, as well as freedom of conscience, speech and assembly, freedom of the press, freedom to march, join a trade union, and strike.

A task which was especially urgent was the creation of the army. Piłsudski knew very well that in the face of internal and external threats, the army was the foundation of authority. On 11 November, he said to Waław Sieroszewski, the minister of pro-

¹¹ PRÓCHNIK, A. Op. cit., s. 35.

¹² Dekret o najwyższej władzy reprezentacyjnej Republiki Polskiej z dn. 22 listopada 1918 r. In *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej...*, dok. nr 227, s. 446.

¹³ *Od Moraczewskiego do Składkowskiego. Gabinet Polski Odrodzonej 1918–1939*. Red. J. FARYŚ, A. WĄTOR, H. WALCZAK. Szczecin, 2010, s. 16.

¹⁴ JĘDRZEJEWICZ, W.; CISEK, J. Op. cit., s. 22.

paganda in the Lublin government: 'Now, the most important thing is the army! Do you know how many organised soldiers I have? Five thousand! The rest, former legionaries, Dowbor's soldiers, they are the cadre!'¹⁵ He also declared: 'The army is only a tool, which needs to be handled gently and skilfully. Due to abnormal political relations, we are not used to treating the army as a machine, which must not be used in a political game. Then the army stops being what it is supposed to be, the defender of the whole nation!'¹⁶

In order to hasten the formation of the army, Piłsudski sought a compromise with the Polish National Committee (Komitet Narodowy Polski, KNP) in Paris, led by Roman Dmowski. This institution was recognised by the Western powers as a Polish political formation. The decision to send General Haller's army to Poland and provide material support was in the hands of the same Western powers. The general military situation in Poland was terrible. The best-armed and best-equipped forces were the units of the former Polish Armed Force (Polska Siła Zbrojna). Members of the POW and volunteers applying to the army had neither weapons nor uniforms. Some armaments, equipment and uniforms were acquired in the first days of November, during the evacuation from the kingdom of the German occupying forces, and some were found in warehouses which had been taken over. Nevertheless, the shortage of military equipment was serious.

From its formation, Moraczewski's cabinet was constantly attacked from two sides, by the rightists and extreme leftists. Right-wing parties remaining outside the government, such as the National Democratic Party (Narodowa Demokracja), the National Labourers' Association (Narodowy Związek Robotniczy), and the moderate People's Party, accused the government of being 'red' and 'socialist', while the extreme leftist PPS Lewica and the Social Democrats of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy), which in mid-November combined and created the Communist Party of Poland¹⁷ (Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski), claimed that the government was 'reactionary'. The composition of the government, as well as the actions of the ministers, came under fierce criticism. 'The National Democrat and communist press assailed the government every day. The communists attacked "in principle", that means, for reasons of principle. The National Democrats did not dare raise any major issues. They raised trivial matters, and ultimately exaggerated them.'¹⁸ The minister of internal affairs Stanisław Thu-

¹⁵ Ibid., s. 9.

¹⁶ Wywiad udzielony przedstawicielom prasy w sprawie obrony Lwowa (20 listopada). In PIŁSUDSKI, Józef. *Pisma - mowy - rozkazy*: wydanie zbiorowe prac dotychczas drukiem ogłoszonych. T. V. Warszawa, 1933, s. 20.

¹⁷ Rezolucja uchwalona przez zjednoczeniowy zjazd SDKPiL i PPS-Lewicy, informująca o powstaniu KPRP z dn. 16 grudnia 1918 r. In *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej...*, dok. nr 234, s. 456-458.

¹⁸ MORACZEWSKI, Jędrzej. *Przewrót w Polsce*. Wstęp i opracowanie T. NAŁĘCZ. Warszawa, 2015, s. 109.

gutt, in particular, was attacked fiercely. He was called a 'Polish Robespierre', and was regarded as the most 'red' minister. A useful pretext to attack him in terms of propaganda, calculated to provoke patriotic emotions, was his ordinance to remove the crown of the eagle from the state's emblem.¹⁹ Thugutt noted: 'The attacks in the press were becoming more and more fierce, in the streets 500 marks was openly offered for my head, which disgusted me, due to the low estimation of the value of my life. I received death threats almost every day.'²⁰

The press offensive was not all. Both the right and the communists organised violent street protests against Moraczewski's government. For the right wing, the visits by Stanisław Grabski and Ignacy Paderewski, prominent KNP activists from Paris, were a good opportunity. The arrival of the latter in Warsaw on 1 January 1919 became a pretext for a large demonstration, and an 'overview' of the potential of the right wing. For the extreme left wing, the arrival in Warsaw of a delegation from the Soviet Red Cross was a good opportunity to demonstrate. On 29 December 1918, in the turmoil, the gendarmerie opened fire on the demonstration: five people were killed and 14 were injured. Communist activists shot and killed one gendarme, and badly wounded two more.²¹

Supporters of the government also organised huge demonstrations. One took place on 8 December 1918. The crowd marched to the building of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, where Prime Minister Moraczewski spoke to them: 'We can be slandered,' he said, 'we can be murdered, but nobody will ever manage to kill or insult what we represent, the Polish nation.' The march went further to Belvedere, and sent a delegation to Piłsudski, who stated that he was expecting the results of parliamentary elections to settle the dispute. Everybody claimed that they represented the majority, and the elections would reveal where the majority was and what it wanted. 'I am determined to submit myself and the army to the will of the nation, expressed through the Parliament,' Piłsudski announced.²²

Talks about reforming the cabinet and forming a coalition government, conducted in December 1918 between Piłsudski and Stanisław Grabski, an envoy of the KNP from Paris, were unsuccessful.²³ The demands of the right wing were too high. However, Grabski concluded that Piłsudski and Moraczewski were responsible for the failure of the negotiations, because they were not willing to share 'the power they grasped with the party which was pro-allied in the time of war and socially moderate. Morac-

¹⁹ THUGUTT, S. Op. cit., s. 121.

²⁰ Ibid., s. 123-124.

²¹ MORACZEWSKI, J. Op. cit., s. 136.

²² PRÓCHNIK, A. Op. cit., s. 38.

²³ More: GRABSKI, Stanisław. *Pamiętniki*. Do druku przygotował i wstępem opatrzył W. STANKIEWICZ. Warszawa, 1989, s. 88-95.

zewski wants to implement social revolution, which is undesirable to the majority of the nation, and Piłsudski wants to have in the government only those who were directly subordinate to him during the war. They will step back confronted [not] by arguments, but only acts of force.²⁴

Parliamentary elections were held on 26 January 1919. The results were inconclusive. That is why the right wing attempted to seize power in the country by means of behind-the-scenes talks. Ignacy Paderewski met Józef Piłsudski on 4 January 1919. They talked about a new coalition government, consisting of socialists and National Democrats. Piłsudski would not agree to transfer the most important ministries to the National Democrats, which would have simply meant a seizure of power.²⁵

The preparations for the coup

As Stanisław Grabski's offer was rejected by the provisional head of state, the right wing decided to carry out a coup d'état. The idea was not new, it had been suggested earlier to National Democrat activists by some officers. Stanisław Grabski wrote: 'I was visited by a high-ranking officer from the former Wehrmacht, which at that time was the only well-organised and well-equipped force in Warsaw during the existence of the Council of Regency. He said that, for him, the National Committee in Paris was the only legal authority, and requested an order to arrest Piłsudski. I was, and still am, convinced that if I had given the order, it would have been successfully executed.'²⁶ More prominent figures from the National Democratic Party and other rightist organisations then became involved in the matter. Key roles were played by Colonel Marian Januszajtis-Żegota, Prince Eustachy Sapieha, the economists Tadeusz Mściśław Dymowski and Jerzy Zdziechowski, and Witold Zawadzki. Military support for the conspirators was provided by the National Guard (Straż Narodowa), a paramilitary National Democrat formation, the *Rozwój* nationalist Christian Democratic Society (Towarzystwo 'Rozwój'), and some officer-conspirators from the Warsaw garrison, mainly officers from the eastern corps, fierce enemies of socialism and the revolution. The conspirators planned to appoint a Government of National Unity, with Ignacy Paderewski as prime minister, and Józef Haller as commander-in-chief. The preparations went on from 28 December 1918 to 5 January 1919.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., s. 96.

²⁵ JĘDRZEJEWICZ, W.; CISEK, J. Op. cit., s. 49.

²⁶ GRABSKI, S. Op. cit., s. 96.

²⁷ ŻEGOTA-JANUSZAJTIS, Marian. *Życie moje tak burzliwe...: wspomnienia i dokumenty*. Warszawa, 1993, s. 83.

Leading roles in the events were to be played by Colonel Marian Januszajtis-Żegota on the military arena, and Eustachy Sapieha in politics. Januszajtis-Żegota was almost 30 years old, and already had impressive military experience. Before the First World War, he had been commander of the Polish Shooting Teams (Polskie Drużyny Strzeleckie), and he later served in the Second Infantry Brigade of the Legions commanded by Colonel Józef Haller. He replaced Piłsudski in July 1916, and took command of the First Infantry Brigade of the Legions. He was the youngest colonel in the Legions, attaining the rank at the age of 26. In 1917 and 1918, he was chief of staff of the Training Inspectorate of the Polish Armed Forces, and a deputy director of the Military Committee. From 1 November 1918, he served in the Polish army as commander of the Białystok General District in Łapy, and commander of the Łapy Group. In that capacity, he supervised the evacuation of German soldiers to East Prussia. Prince Eustachy Sapieha, a 37-year-old aristocrat, conservative and monarchist, during the First World War was president of the General Protective Council (Rada Główna Opiekuńcza), a charity organisation. Later on, he cooperated with the Provisional Council of State (Tymczasowa Rada Stanu) and the Council of Regency, both of which were created under the auspices of the Germans.

Januszajtis-Żegota claimed that: 'The whole project and idea materialised in the minds of two people, Witold Zawadzki PhD (a lawyer, the son of the well-known activist Aleksander Zawadzki, who was called Father Prokop), and myself. Zawadzki's task was to organise the civil part of the action, and maintain contact with the civilian participants. The plan of action was created by me, many of its details were only known to me and the executor. What is more, nobody knew my actual intentions and aims.'²⁸

In his words, the coup involved:

1. all units of the Warsaw Garrison under Colonel Jaźwiński's command and prepared by him
2. the Cadet School, under Major Kukiel
3. a company from the NCO School, under Captain Wacław Januszajtis
4. a platoon of field gendarmerie ('I don't remember the name of the commander')
5. technical unit and liaison services under Captain Helman
6. an orderly patrol to maintain communications under Sergeant B. Dąbrowski²⁹

It is not known why Colonel Januszajtis presumed that the units of the Warsaw Garrison would side with the conspirators. The garrison was commanded by officers supporting Piłsudski. Januszajtis only managed to draw into the plot a few officers who were known as supporters of national democracy. The participation of the com-

²⁸ Ibid., s. 79–80.

²⁹ Ibid., s. 81.

pany from the NCO School, under his brother Captain Waclaw Januszajtis (another brother, Sergeant Antoni Januszajtis, was also serving in this unit), was far more certain. Two training companies of gendarmerie, commanded by Captain Norbert Okołowicz, and a squadron of lancers stationed in the Royal Castle under Captain Tadeusz Kossak, were also included in the plan. Both officers had been informed about the plan for the coup, while their soldiers, on the whole, did not know what they were participating in. The conspirators could count on members of a few organisations associated with the right wing, such as the Sokół Gymnastics Association (Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne 'Sokół'), the Warsaw Rowing Association (Warszawskie Towarzystwo Wioślarskie), and the Polish Emergency Patriots (Pogotowie Polskich Patriotów). However, only the National Democratic National Guard had access to firearms. The guard (about a thousand men in Warsaw) had been created as a counterbalance to the People's Militia (Milicja Ludowa), associated with the PPS.

The infantry company from the NCO School, led by Captain Wiesław Januszajtis, was to take control of the city headquarters building on Saxon Square. This was to be the coordination and control centre of the coup, and members of the new government were to gather there. There was a telephone exchange in the building, and control of the telephone lines would not only allow the conspirators to paralyse the government, but also to call military units commanded by officers-conspirators. After arriving, the soldiers were to be informed about the coup, and called on to take an oath. The text was already prepared, as was the proclamation to society, which was to be printed immediately and put up on walls in Warsaw.

There was a plan to arrest the most prominent members of the government as quickly as possible: Moraczewski, Thugutt and the foreign minister Leon Wasilewski, as well as some selected socialist activists, such as Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, Feliks Perl, the commander of the People's Militia Ignacy Boerner, and the head of Warsaw's City Militia Jan Jur-Gorzechowski. Armed members of the National Guard were responsible for this task. The imprisoned ministers were to be held at Fort Czerniakowski, and then sent to Poznań. The most hated minister, Stanisław Thugutt, was to be killed. The conspirators also planned to imprison the chief of the General Staff, General Stanisław Szeptycki. It is not clear what the conspirators wanted to do with Piłsudski. Januszajtis claimed that he wanted to 'save Piłsudski and keep him as head of state in isolation from the events, and persuade him by means of arguments or *via facti* to abandon one-party government rule.'³⁰

³⁰ Ibid., s. 83.

The coup step by step

The coup started on the night of 4 and 5 January 1919. Half an hour after midnight, Colonel Januszajtis-Żegota, with a company of infantry from the NCO School, commanded by Wiesław Januszajtis, along with Fr Sapieha, Zdziechowski, Ludomił Czerniewski, the editor of *Nasza Gazeta*, and Tadeusz Dymowski, the president of the Rozwój society, appeared at the city headquarters on Saxon Square. There were a dozen guards on duty in the guardroom, but the conspirators did not take any notice of them. They placed their own guards by the main entrance, took over the telephone exchange room easily, and called Sergeant Kossak's squadron of lancers and Major Kukiel's Cadet School. Meanwhile, armed patrols of National Guard began to arrest the selected figures. They arrested Prime Minister Moraczewski and Foreign Minister Leon Wasilewski easily. 'At three o'clock, Minister Oraczewski and Wasilewski left Belvedere and got into a car. The driver stopped the vehicle on Aleje Ujazdowskie, and started to do something to the engine. He must have been involved in the conspiracy. Just then, two cars arrived. They brought some of the National Guard and soldiers from the 21st Infantry Regiment,³¹ who arrested the ministers. Both politicians were taken to a garage at 75 Aleje Jerozolimskie (opposite Dworzec Kaliski). They were held on the first floor, guarded by six soldiers. Outside, there were numerous guards and a dozen soldiers. At about half-past three, Captain Gorzechowski, the chief of the city police, joined the ministers. He had been badly beaten with rifle butts. Dr Jodka from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Captain Berner, the chief of the People's Militia, and the minister Thugutt were also brought there.³²

It had been planned to assassinate Thugutt in his apartment. At about 3am, several people rang the doorbell. Thugutt opened the door, but kept the door chain on. At that moment, somebody shot him twice through the gap between the door and the doorframe. The bullets missed. Thugutt heard the assassins run down the stairs. He thought it had been an attempted robbery. He did not know that the coup had been going on in Warsaw for three hours. He called a friend, a police officer, for help, and then contacted the headquarters of the gendarmerie. After some time, Mieczysław Skrudlik, an ensign in the gendarmerie, arrived, and informed Thugutt that Colonel Januszajtis was waiting for him at the city headquarters. Next, he drove the minister of internal affairs to Colonel Januszajtis, who told Thugutt about the coup, and then had him taken to the garage on Aleje Jerozolimskie.³³

³¹ It used to be the First Warsaw Territorial Infantry Regiment. On 27 November 1919, it was transformed into the 21st Warsaw Infantry Regiment. See: WIELECKI, Henryk; SIERADZKI, Rudolf. *Wojsko Polskie 1921–1939. Odznaki pamiątkowe piechoty*. Warszawa, 1991, s. 53.

³² MORACZEWSKI, J. Op. cit., s. 144.

³³ THUGUTT, S. Op. cit., s. 124–125.

Their run of good luck ended when the conspirators attempted to arrest General Stanisław Szeptycki, the chief of the General Staff. When taking over the city headquarters on Saxon Square, the conspirators had made a mistake: they did not arrest the commander, Colonel Tadeusz Zawadzki, who was sleeping in his room. Warned by his orderly, Zawadzki sneaked out through a back door with Sergeant Kaminski, and headed for the nearby Bristol Hotel. They knew that General Szeptycki, the chief of the General Staff, was staying there with two adjutants. Colonel Zawadzki woke up the general, and reported what had happened. Hardly had he finished, when seven armed civilians entered the room. They were led by a man who introduced himself as Ensign Jan Tarnawski. He was accompanied by Tadeusz Moszyński, Roman Hyżewicz, Leonard and Henryk Kiciewicz, Jan Brzozowski, and Leonard Nowakowski.³⁴ Tarnawski announced that he had orders to arrest General Szeptycki. He did not know that Sergeant Kamiński, who was downstairs, having seen them enter the hotel, had guessed their intentions. He immediately returned to the city headquarters, where he warned the soldiers in the guardroom who had not been disarmed by the conspirators. He returned to the Bristol Hotel with the guards just when General Szeptycki, Colonel Zawadzki and their escort were leaving the building. Tarnawski showed the corporal commanding the guards the order to arrest the general, but the corporal told Tarnawski to surrender. At the beginning, Tarnawski refused, but the corporal insisted, and was so firm that after a while it was he who led the disarmed conspirators to prison.

After being freed, General Szeptycki went to the city headquarters on Saxon Square. There he encountered the squadron under Captain Kossak, which had been called in earlier by the conspirators. The chief of the general staff ordered Kossak to take his unit back to the garrison. Kossak, who was part of the conspiracy, first went away with his lancers, but instead of returning to the Royal Castle, where it was stationed, he took over the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. Soon after their departure, two companies from the First Warsaw Territorial Infantry Regiment appeared at the city headquarters. Their commanders were conspirators, but the soldiers were unaware of what they were participating in. General Szeptycki took control of both companies easily. Next, he ordered them to surround the building, and he entered it himself.

Colonel Leon Berbeci wrote: 'Januszajtis set up an office on the first floor of the Warsaw city headquarters for a "chief". General Szeptycki, who had just arrived, was directed to a small inspection officer's room [...] He wanted to phone me in order to inform me about the coup, so that I could stop this mess as the inspector of schools and the supervisor of a rebellious company under Wiesław Januszajtis. Later, Szeptycki found out that Captain Helman had run into the Post Office and had cut

³⁴ SKRZYPEK, Józef. *Zamach stanu płk. Januszajtisa i ks. Sapiehy 4–5 stycznia 1919 r.* Warszawa, 1948, s. 29, 46.

the telephone lines between the city headquarters and my apartment himself. Just then, Lieutenant Trabszo arrived breathless, and informed me about the rebellion. I quickly ran to the city headquarters, entered the guardroom, and saw a company with rifles and Lieutenant "Wiesio" Januszajtis, who, trembling with fear, informed me of the change of government, the replacement of Piłsudski, and his brother as commander-in-chief. Then I asked the soldiers standing to attention: "Boys, who accepted your oath?" "You, Sir," they answered in unison. I gave the order, and the company marched to Saxon Square.³⁵

In Belvedere, where the provisional head of state lived, in the early hours of 5 January, it became clear that something unusual was going on. Piłsudski's adjutants overheard a conversation about cutting the connection with Belvedere. In the meantime, numerous members of the National Guard were on Aleje Ujazdowskie, marching towards Belvedere. They were led by Captain Kacper Wężyk, and accompanied by several officers. At 4am, the group drove into the courtyard at Belvedere. When the officers entered the building, they were disarmed by lancers from the platoon on guard under Lieutenant Nostitz-Jackowski and personal bodyguards of the commander-in-chief.

The platoon belonged to the Seventh Regiment of Lancers, which were stationed in barracks on Huzarów Street in Warsaw, close to Łazienkowski Park and Belvedere. The task of the regiment was to protect the provisional head of state and the commander-in-chief. That is why a platoon of guards was sent there on foot with two machine guns every day. In the barracks, there was always a squadron ready for action.³⁶

When the first group of National Guard approached the fence at Belvedere, they found Nostitz-Jackowski's platoon ready for action, with machine guns, waiting for the command to open fire. In this situation, they stopped. They also did not react when the third squadron under Lieutenant Nowakowski marched past them, together with Major Janusz Głuchowski, the commander of the regiment. This was the squadron which was on duty in the barracks, and, after receiving the alarm, rushed towards Belvedere. After a while, the second squadron and a squadron of machine guns also left the barracks. They were led by Captain Rudolf Dreszer, the deputy commander of the regiment.³⁷

After arriving at Belvedere, Major Głuchowski went to Piłsudski, who said: 'A coup is going on, but it is a pathetic show, not a coup. Not only are they making a mockery

³⁵ BERBECKI, Leon. *Pamiętniki generała broni Leona Berbeckiego*. Katowice, 1959, s. 136–137.

³⁶ *Księga dziejów 7 Pułku Ułanów Lubelskich im. generała Kazimierza Sosnkowskiego*: praca zbiorowa. Red. J. SMOLEŃSKI, M. W. ŻEBROWSKI. London, 1969, s. 61–62.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, s. 64.

of themselves, but also of all of Poland to the whole world. Szeptycki is in the Bristol Hotel, he has probably been arrested. Take the regiment to him and put yourself at his disposal.' When the commander of the regiment expressed his fear that Belvedere could be in danger, the commander-in-chief waved his hand: 'Don't worry, they will do nothing here.'³⁸

In accordance with the order, Major Głuchowski marched along Aleje Ujazdowskie with the third squadron towards the city headquarters, walking past confused members of the National Guard again. At Agrykola, the squadron joined a group of lancers on horseback from the regiment. The soldiers headed towards Saxon Square. The third squadron was marching behind the lancers. On the way, they met General Szeptycki, who was driving to the commander-in-chief in order to inform him of the situation. He had earlier taken the units on Saxon Square under his command, and ordered the soldiers to 'arrest the leaders of the conspiracy.'³⁹ Major Głuchowski informed General Szeptycki of the order he had received from the commander-in-chief. He was told to gather the unit on Saxon Square, and await further instructions. After reaching the square, the lancers saw the company of the First Warsaw Territorial Infantry Regiment there with their machine guns aimed at the city headquarters. The lancers dismounted and set up their machine guns. It was rather quiet. After some time, the third squadron also arrived. However, some of the infantry company left, and, led by Captain Dreszer, went to take over the city telephone exchange.

Piłsudski arrived at Saxon Square at about 5am, and went into the city headquarters, surrounded by infantry led by Colonel Berbecki, and lancers led by Major Głuchowski. He ordered the officers in the building to be arrested, and 'reprimanded' the civilians involved in the coup 'as if they were students, but let them go because they swore to Sapieha that they would come at his order. Only Sapieha kept his word, the rest fled.'⁴⁰

By 5am on 5 January 1919, it was clear that the coup had failed, and its leaders were arrested. The last task was to free the members of the government. It turned out to be not so easy, because for a long time it was impossible to find out where they were being held. This was because at 7am they were taken in two cars from the garages at 75 Aleje Ujazdowskie, escorted by the National Guard, to the building of the Rozwój National Democratic Society at 2 Żurawia Street. They were kept there until 3pm, when the place of their detention was discovered by Colonel Berbecki. Stanisław Thugutt wrote: 'At about 3pm, I heard loud soldier's steps coming towards us. After

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ MORACZEWSKI, J. Op. cit., s. 145.

a while, Colonel Berbecki was standing at the door. My friends stood up. I waited to learn the reason why he had come. But my doubts disappeared when I heard Berbecki's first sentence. He shouted at a gendarme: "Soldier? What is he doing here? Who accepted your oath?" The soldier replied: "Captain Okołowicz!" Berbecki shouted louder: "You're an idiot! The country accepted your oath, not any captain! Take these civilians to the guardroom!"⁴¹

Concluding remarks

The coup organised by Colonel Januszajtis-Żegota was a spectacular failure, and made fools of the plotters. Contrary to the expectations of the conspirators, the army stood behind Piłsudski. However, the coup was favourable for the provisional head of state. Although it was more a show than a real rebellion, and turned out to be a defeat, the coup weakened the political position of Jędrzej Moraczewski's government. It was a good pretext to dismiss the cabinet, which finally happened 16 January 1919. One more reason was the opportunity to find a political compromise with the KNP in Paris, regulate relations with it, and, as a result, begin cooperation with the Entente. This could have happened if Ignacy Paderewski had become prime minister. He was a Paris KNP delegate in the USA, and that prevented the National Democrats from acting against him. What is more, he did not belong to the National Democratic Party, and that enabled him to be accepted by the left wing. Piłsudski told off the conspirators severely, but did not dismiss them from the Polish army. Colonel Januszajtis-Żegota was even promoted to major general in 1924. Piłsudski wrote of him: 'A good soldier, very ambitious and courageous. Audacious and determined at work. He knows how to boost morale among soldiers and officers. His mind is unbalanced [...] Good at dangerous and risky tasks, at daring ventures, and at all tasks which require energy and a strong will.'⁴² Another leader of the coup, Prince Eustachy Sapieha, received no punishment. On the contrary, on 16 June 1919, he was appointed a deputy of Poland to Great Britain.

The unsuccessful coup in Warsaw on the night of 4 to 5 January 1919 paved the way for a political compromise between two political factions fighting for power. In the circumstances, it was favourable for the Republic of Poland, which was just starting to lay the foundations for its independence. The leader of the National Democrats was right when he concluded: 'The attempted coup in Warsaw, which made a mockery of Poland, entertained people in politics a lot, because no blood was spilt, and no consequences were paid by anybody. The show proved that forces dissatisfied

⁴¹ THUGUTT, S. Op. cit., s. 126.

⁴² *Polska generalicja w opiniach Marszałka Piłsudskiego*. Red. A. Cz. ŻAK. Warszawa, 2012, s. 147.

with the government acted weakly, but that the government and Piłsudski's supporters were no stronger. In cases like that, it is better not to fight but to make up.⁴³

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⁴³ DMOWSKI, Roman. *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*. T. II. Warszawa, 1988, s. 115.

VALSTYBĖS PERVERSMAS LENKIJoje (1919 METŲ SAUSIS)

Waldemar Rezmer

Santrauka

Nuo 1918 m. lapkričio mėn. pradžios Lenkijoje tęsėsi kova dėl valdžios. Į lapkričio 18 d. sudarytosios Jędrzejaus Moraczewskio vyriausybės sudėtį įėjo vien socialistai, liaudiškojo judėjimo kairiųjų pažiūrų atstovai ir kairiosios intelektualų grupės. Toji vyriausybė buvo be gailės kaltinama tiek kraštutinių kairiųjų, tiek ir dešiniųjų stovyklų dėl jos „buržuazinio reakcingumo“ (komunistų) ar „vienpusiško kairumo“ (dešiniųjų). Vadovaudamasis laikinojo Valstybės Viršininko Józefo Piłsudskio rekomendacijomis, J. Moraczewskio Ministrų Kabinetas vengė „socialinių eksperimentų“, palikdamas svarbiausius sprendimus sutvarkyti Seimui. Ši vyriausybė koncentravosi į esminius nacionalinius siekius, teisinės tvarkos palaikymą šalyje ir būtiniausius visuomeninius bei ekonominius pokyčius, kurie turėjo sušvelninti socialinę įtampą. Kraštutinė kairė traktavo tokią vyriausybės liniją kaip taktinę, esą silpninančią kovą su buržuazija, o tautinių demokratų grupuotės šią liniją laikė patvirtinimu apie „bolševikinį“ J. Moraczewskio vyriausybės pobūdį. Būtent pastaruosiuose sluoksniuose gimė idėja, kad situaciją gali išspręsti tik „tautinė revoliucija“ ir vyriausybės pašalinimas jęga.

Perversmo vadovais tapo plk. Marianas Januszajtis-Żęgota, Lenkijos legionų 1-osios pėstininkų brigados vadas 1916–1917 m., perėmęs šią poziciją iš J. Piłsudskio, kunigaikštis Eustachijus Sapieha bei ekonomistai Tadeusz Mstislav Dymowski ir Jerzy Zdziechowski. Karine parama perversmininkams galėjo tapti Tautinė apsauga (*Straz Narodowa*) – tautinių demokratų paramilitarinė organizacija, nacionalistų krikščionių demokratų draugija „Plętra“ (*Rozwój*) ir šalininkai Varšuvos įguloje – daugiausia buvusių rytinių korpusų, suformuotų 1917 m. Rusijoje, karininkai, aršūs revoliucijos ir socializmo priešai.

Perversmą bandyta surengti 1919 m. sausį, naktį iš 4 į 5 d., remiant Tautinei apsaugai ir negausiems kariniams daliniams. Perversmininkai suėmė ministrą pirmininką J. Moraczewskį ir dar kelis ministrus, tačiau jiems nepavyko areštuoti nei Generalinio Štabo vado gen. Stanisławo Szeptyckiego, nei vyriausiojo ginkluotųjų pajėgų ir kartu Valstybės vado J. Piłsudskio. Prieš perversmininkus sukeltos vyriausybės pajėgos, pirmiausia 7-asis ulonų pulkas, per kelias valandas mėginimą nuversti vyriausybę sužlugdė, išvengdamos kraujo praliejimo. Visa akcija patyrė fiasko ir prajuokino jos vadus. Nepaisant to, vyriausybės pozicija dėl to nesustiprėjo. Atvirkščiai, ji nusilpo, o tai lėmė jos atsistatydinimą 1919 m. sausio 16 d.

Iš tiesų nepavykęs perversmo bandymas atvėrė kelią politiniam kompromisui tarp dviejų konfrontuojančių politinių blokų. Be to, jis prisidėjo prie susitarimo tarp Lenkijos tautinio komiteto Paryžiuje, Antantės šalių ir J. Piłsudskio galimybės. Tuometinėje situacijoje Lenkijos Respublikai, dėjusiai pagrindus savo nepriklausomai egzistencijai, tai išėjo į naudą. Tai suvokė ir J. Piłsudskis: būtent tuo galima paaiškinti jo išskirtinį atlaidumą perversmininkams. Tiesa, bandę nuversti vyriausybę karininkai buvo įkalinti, tačiau labai greitai juos pasiuntė į frontą, o po kurio laiko jie net buvo paaukštinti (M. Januszajtis-Żęgota tapo generolu). Perversmą organizavę civiliai pasekmių išvengė apskritai.