



23.02.1917

February and October (Bolshevik) Revolutions in Russia

Given massive wartime losses on the Russian side as well as a tense economic situation, further riots took place in Russia in March 1917, known as the ‘February Revolution.’ [Under the Julian calendar used in Russia until 1918, the events of the ‘February Revolution’ took place in February 1917, yet under the Gregorian calendar, thirteen days ‘removed’ from the Julian one, it was already in March.]

That time around, however, the army declined to pacify the strikes and protests. Tsar Nicholas II was forced to sign an abdication act and power in Russia was taken over by a provisional government headed by Georgy Lvov as well as the Councils of Delegates. The division of competences between them was unclear and generated further tensions. The former émigrés Lenin and Trotsky returned to Russia. As the war still continued, Russia started to fall into ever-increasing revolutionary chaos and civil war. In November (according to the Julian calendar it was October), power was taken over by the Bolshevik Party.



Initially, the Bolsheviks issued the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, promising the possibility of creating their own states. In practice, however, Bolshevik propaganda urged a global revolution of workers, disregarding the interests of nations. The Bolsheviks decided to end wartime operations in the First World War and sign a peace treaty with the Central Powers in Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. A totalitarian communist state was developing in Russia, governed by the Bolshevik party by means of a terror apparatus. Under the Brest treaty, Polish territories became a German bounty to which Russia did not pursue any claims. The government of Jan Kucharzewski appointed by the Regency Council was not allowed to take part in the negotiations.

The Poles protested in a symbolic manner with Kucharzewski stepping down and the battle of Kaniów taking place, where the Polish units, fighting on the opposite sides before, joined forces to face the German army. With the battle lost, some Polish soldiers with General Haller, fleeing from death at the Bolshevik hands, managed to get through Russia all the way to the north to Murmansk supported by the Allies, and then to France, reinforcing Polish units there.

On Polish territories, workers and peasants shared the revolutionary sentiment and revolutionary propaganda was fuelled by the SDKPiL (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania). On the other hand, much popularity was enjoyed by the pro-independence Left, championing Socialist ideas

but within a sovereign Polish state. With the Russian Empire falling apart, pro-independence movements became active in nations previously too weak to oppose the tsar. Consequently, the independent republics of Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia appeared on the map of Europe.



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References:

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