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BAKU FROM STEFAN ŻEROMSKI'S NOVEL *PRZEDWIOŚNIE*

*Przedwiośnie* is perhaps quite rightly considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of the Polish literature<sup>1</sup>. And it is amazing that the first chapters of this novel, the action of which takes place in distant Azerbaijan, are among those most suggestively written. As it is known Żeromski never visited the Caucasus. According to the information provided by Stanisław Strumph-Wojtkiewicz — well acquainted with Baku's environment — the most important informants for Żeromski were supposed to be two „doctors' wives” from Baku, who returned to Poland later on, namely Mrs. Czerniecka and Mrs. Przedborska<sup>2</sup>. It is difficult to ascertain whether this was really so. While conducting my investigations on the Poles living in Baku at the beginning of 20th century, I did not manage to find the name of doctor Przedborski. On the other hand, as regards the other name, it appeared that at that time (1915) there lived in Baku Stanisław Aleksandrowicz Czarniecki or Czarnecki, who was not a doctor but an apothecary. Thus, it is possible that the apothecary's wife on return to Poland as a widow pretended to be a doctor's wife. This does not have any influence on the significance of her information for Żeromski, who in a way wanted to assimilate any information about the events that occurred in this town during the First World War.

<sup>1</sup> R. Matuszewski, *Od Homera do Gombrowicza*, „Polityka” 1978, No. 13, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> As S. Strumph-Wojtkiewicz, who had spent his youth in Baku, wrote (*O własnych siłach, Kartki z prywatnego archiwum*, Warszawa 1967, p. 89—90) Żeromski had obtained his information about Baku society „from two Polish matrons, who lived in Baku for a long time. These ladies were a doctor's wife — Mrs. Przedborska [...] and another doctor's wife Mrs. Czarnocka or Czarniecka. Both these ladies were visiting the Żeromski family at Konstancin. Sitting long hours on the verandah they would be telling him with a great zeal about the life of the Polish colony in Baku”.

A well-known historian of literature and at the same time a literary man — Wacław Kubacki, while describing already at the time of the People's Poland his sojourn in Baku pointed at artificiality of Żeromski's information about this town („he did not know the capital of Azerbaijan, and that is why his description of the town does not have characteristics of authenticity”)<sup>3</sup>. In fact, the magnificent novelist avoided giving more detailed descriptions of Baku making only very general mentions e.g. that Cezary Baryka „was rushing from place to place [...] on the ruins of Gvebriyan temples”<sup>4</sup>, and there had never been too many such temples in Baku. Moreover, also other minor details concerning that town<sup>5</sup> were not always precisely described but for us more important is the problem of complex nationality, social and political relations in Baku, which were mentioned by Żeromski in *Przedwiośnie*.

The action of *Przedwiośnie* takes place in Baku at the beginning of 20th century, and more specifically in 1917 and 1918. Azerbaijan had been witnessing very significant economic and social changes since the seventies of 19th century. In Azerbaijan villages, more or less the area of the then Baku and Jelizawietpol Guberniyas (Jelizawietpol, former Gyandija, today Kirovabad), major transformations in the agrarian structure were taking place, feudal relations were disappearing, and new relations resembling, to a growing extent, capitalist relations were becoming increasingly more common<sup>6</sup>. Previously used agricultural

<sup>3</sup> W. Kubacki, *Malwy na Kaukazie*, Warszawa 1959, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> S. Żeromski, *Przedwiośnie*, chap. I, Warszawa 1967.

<sup>5</sup> N. M. Filippov, *Opisanie Baku i ego buchy*, „Morskij Sbornik” 1856, vol. 24, p. 146–164; V. M. Sysojev, *Kratkij putevoditel po drevnostjam goroda Baku i ego rajonov*, Baku 1925, p. 5–10; J. P. Ščablykin, *Kratkij očerk istorii dvorca širvanšachov v Baku*, Baku 1939, p. 7–43; S. B. Ašurbejli, *Očerk istorii srednevekovogo Baku (VII— načalo XIX vv.)*, Baku 1964, p. 70–344.

<sup>6</sup> V. K. Aštuni, *K voprosu o putjach razvitija kapitalizma v selskom chozjajstve v Zakavkaze*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Armjanskoj SSR” 1947, Serija obščestvennych nauk, No. 5, p. 3–26; A. S. Sumbat-zade, *K voprosu o charaktere tovarnogo proizvedenija v selskom chozjajstve Azerbajdžana vo vtoroj polovine XIX veka*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR” 1954, No. 3, p. 117–130; G. P. Agajan, *Krestjanskaja reforma v Azerbajdžane v 1870 godu*, Baku 1956, p. 97–383; A. S. Sumbat-zade, *Eksploatacija torgovo-rostovščičeskim kapitalom trudovogo krestjansiva Azerbajdžana vo vtoroj polovine XIX veka*, „Učenyje zapiski Azerbajdžanskogo Universiteta” 1957, No. 2, p. 124–130; A. S. Sumbat-zade, *Rost torgovogo zemledelija v Azerbajdžane vo vtoroj polovine XIX veka*, „Voprosy Istorii” 1958, No. 4, p. 114–126; M. A. Ismailov, *O reformach zemelnoj sobstvennosti i zemlepolzovaniju v Azerbajdžane v konce XIX— načale XX vv.*, „Trudy Instituta Istorii Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR” 1958, No. 13, p. 199–200; V. D. Močalov, *Krestjanskoe chozjajstvo v Zakavkaze u konca XIX v.*, Moskva 1958, p. 81–121; M. A. Ismailov, *Primenenija najemnogo*

tools were disappearing<sup>7</sup> replaced by new ones. It was accompanied by changes in the entire social and political structure of the country<sup>8</sup>.

Baku was a big industrial centre. Apart from its oil industries (extraction and processing), other industries were developing there as well such as textile, engineering, food-processing, etc.<sup>9</sup> The number of workers employed in this town was also increasing. For their most part, they were Azerbaijanis, mountaineers from the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan, Armenians, Georgians, as well as Russians, Ukrainians, and sometimes even Poles. Revolutionary slogans were spreading among this multi-national proletariat. Very strong revolutionary propaganda was conducted in Baku already in the years 1905–1907, and protests of the proletariat of Baku were also taking place. After

*truda vo vladelčeskich chozjajstvach Azerbajdžana v konce XIX-načale XX v.*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR” 1959, Serija obščestvennyh nauk, No. 2, p. 53–64; M. A. Ismailov, *Najemnyj trud v selskom chozjajstve Azerbajdžana v konce XIX-načale XX v.*, „Istorija SSSR” 1960, No. 4, p. 138–142; V. D. Močalov, *Selskaja obščina v Zakavkaze v poreformennyj period*, „Istoričeskie Zapiski” 1960, No. 67, p. 145–186; M. A. Ismailov, *Kapitalizm v selskom chozjajstve Azerbajdžana na ischode XIX-načale XX v.*, Baku 1964; L. G. Alieva, *O primenenii ženskogo i dietskogo truda v selskom chozjajstve Azerbajdžana vo vtoroj polovine XIX veka*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR” 1965, Serija obščestvennyh nauk, No. 4, p. 44–53.

<sup>7</sup> G. D. Džavadov, *O narodnyh sposobach obrabotki počvy v severo-vostočnyh rajonach dorevolucionnogo Azerbajdžana*, [in:] *Materialy pervoj naučnoj konferencii aspirantov Instituta Istorii Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR*, Baku 1965; G. D. Džavadov, *Nekotorye zemledelčeskie orudija severo-vostočnogo Azerbajdžana*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR” 1966, Serija istorii, filozofii i prava, No. 2; G. D. Džavadov, *Nekotorye literaturnye materialy o pachotnyh orudijach Azerbajdžana v XIX v.*, [in:] *Azerbajdžanskij etnografičeskij sbornik*, No. 2, Baku 1967; G. D. Džavadov, *Zemledelčeskie orudija Azerbajdžana v XIX-načale XX vv. (Etnografičeskie issledovanija po materialam severo-vostočnyh rajonov)*, Baku 1967, p. 3–26.

<sup>8</sup> A. Š. Milman, *Političeskij stroj Azerbajdžana v XIX-načale XX vekov*, Baku 1968.

<sup>9</sup> A. S. Sumbat-zade, *Šolkotkackie zavedenija Azerbajdžana v XIX veke*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR” 1958, Serija obščestvennyh nauk, No. 6, p. 17–25; G. G. Ter-Ovanesov, *Nekotorye osobennosti razvitiija rybnnoj promyšlennosti Azerbajdžana v XIX i načale XX veka*, „Trudy Instituta Ekonomii Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR” 1958, No. 4, p. 87–129; G. L. Joŕe, *Šolkovodstvo i pererobka šolka v Zakavkaze k 90-m godam XIX veka*, „Taškentskij Tekstilnyj institut. Sbornik Naučnyh Rabot” 1964, No. 16, p. 165–180; M. D. Ibrahimov, *K voprosu o vlijanii pervoj mirovoj vojny na neftjanoe proizvodstvo bakinskogo rajona (1914–1917 gody)*, „Azerbajdžanskij Universitet. Učenyje Zapiski” 1968, Serija istorii i filozofii, No. 1, p. 62–69; L. M. Alieva, *Raboče-tekstilščiki Baku v načale XX v.*, Baku 1969, p. 15–35.

a short period of calm, the class struggle was intensified again between 1910 and 1914<sup>10</sup>. The hard times of the First World War were to follow<sup>11</sup>.

The events of Piotrograd in 1917 echoed strongly in Baku. The news about the February Revolution and abolition of tsarism were welcomed with a common joy in Baku. Spontaneous demonstrations were organized in the streets of Baku and on premises of different industrial plants in the first days of March.

At the beginning, the power in the Caucasus was assumed by committees composed for their most part of moderate groups, the so-called cadets, social revolutionaries, Mensheviks and representatives of the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijan bourgeoisie. Simultaneously, however, in many towns of the Transcaucasus, and especially in Baku, Bolsheviks intensified their activity.

The news about the October events in Piotrograd found their repercussions in Baku. On 27th October (9th November) 1917, an enlarged council of workers' representatives, with participation of about four

<sup>10</sup> Z. I. A. Ibragimov, *Revolucija 1905—1907 gg. v Azerbajdžane*, Baku 1954, p. 188—264; A. A. Abdurrachmanov, *Pervyj bakinskij sovet rabočich deputatov (1905—1906 gg.)*, „Trudy Instituta Istorii Partii pri CK KP Azerbajdžana" 1955, No. 12, p. 122—147; N. K. Sarkisov, *Rabočye dvizhenie v Baku v period obščerossijskoj oktjabskoj političeskoj stački 1905 g.*, „Učenie Zapiski Azerbajdžanskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta" 1955, No. 10, p. 35—43; I. V. Strigunov, *Iz istorii formirovanija bakinskogo proletariata (70—90 gody XIX v.)*, Baku 1960, p. 77—271; G. S. Kasimov, *Borba bakinskich rabočich pod rukovodstvom bolševitskoj organizacii za kollektivnyj dogovor i ego osuščestvlenie (1904—1907 gg.)*, Baku 1961, p. 7—30; I. V. Strigunov, *Zarabotnaja plata bakinskich rabočich v konce XIX v.*, „Trudy Instituta Istorii Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR" 1961, No. 15, p. 60—121; N. A. Šachramanova, *Vseobščaja zabastovka morjakov Kaspijskogo torgovogo flota 1907 g.*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR" 1961, No. 12, p. 3—17; N. K. Sarkisov, *Borba bakinskogo proletariata v period pervoj russkoj revolucii*, Baku 1965, p. 45—184; I. M. Gasanov, *Čarizm dusit' krestjanskogo dvizhenija*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR" 1968, Serija istorii, filozofii i prava, No. 1, p. 23—29; B. J. Stelnik, *Bakinskij proletariat v gody reakcii (1907—1910)*, Baku 1969, p. 98—189; M. I. Pašae v, *Revolucionnoe dvizhenie železnodorožnych rabočich Azerbajdžana v 1905—1907 gg.*, Baku 1970, p. 7—23.

<sup>11</sup> G. Dallakjan, *Iz istorii klassovoj borby bakinskogo proletariata*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Armjanskoj SSR" 1956, Obščestvennyje nauki, No. 6, p. 3—16; N. A. Šachramanova, *Vlijanie pervoj mirovoj vojny na ekonomiku Azerbajdžana*, „Azerbajdžanskij Universitet. Učenie Zapiski" 1964, No. 7, p. 37—46; Dž. Ch. Guseinov, *Položenie i klassovaja borba krestjan Azerbajdžana v period pervoj mirovoj vojny*, Baku 1967, p. 7—27; S. I. Basilaja, *Zakavkaze v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny*, Suchumi 1968, p. 88—344; G. S. Alijasov, *Internacionalnyj sostav i edinstvo proletariata Azerbajdžana (kanun i period I mirovoj vojny)*, „Učenie Zapiski Azerbajdžanskogo Universiteta" 1973, Serija istoričeskich i filosofičeskich nauk, No. 6, p. 105—114.



hundred persons, met there. Representatives of moderate socialist groups or even of petty bourgeoisie sitting on this council attempted to stop Bolsheviks from seizing the power. Despite this, under a strong pressure of working masses and soldiers from a local garrison supporting the revolution, the council established the Soviet authorities in Baku on 31st October (13th November)<sup>12</sup>.

Baku was a town, in which three population groups predominated: Azerbaijanians (the so-called Transcaucasian Tartars, called Tartars in *Przedwiośnie*), Armenians and Russians. For a long time, there had existed a conflict between the Moslem Azerbaijan population and the Christian Armenian population. These antagonisms were additionally excited by the tsarist gendarmerie, and still in the years 1905–1907 they had been causing mutual conflicts assuming a form of true pogroms at times. In 1907 and early 1908, these mutual Azerbaijan-Armenian antagonisms continued to occur with an intensified force. It was at that time that pogroms would occur in which many persons on both sides lost their lives.

Żeromski's informants gave him quite a good insight into the atmosphere prevailing in Baku at that moment. It is worth quoting here the words of a later writer Stanisław Strumph-Wojtkiewicz, who was completing his grammar school in Baku then. Many years later, he recollected the hopes set „by the Polish youth on the Russian revolution”<sup>13</sup>. This can be referred, anyway, to a predominant part of young people living in that region. In fact, the role of young people in the revolutionary events in the Transcaucasus in 1917 and 1918 was very big<sup>14</sup>.

Short information can be also found in *Przedwiośnie* about mutual conflicts between Azerbaijanians and Armenians taking place in those months. Anyway, it is very difficult to find out whether Żeromski wrote about those events in a truthful way or whether he tended to magnify them. On the other hand, he made a certain seemingly small mistake, hardly noticeable for the modern Polish reader, which caused, however, that the Soviet public opinion accepted with a big dose of disgust the description of the events in Baku as presented by the Polish novelist. The point is that Żeromski claims that Shaumian was

<sup>12</sup> S. Bielenkij, A. Mavielov, *Revoljucija 1917 goda v Azerbajdzane*, Baku 1927, p. 9–243; S. Efendieva, *Sentjabrskie zabastovki bakinskogo proletariata v 1917 godu*, „Trudy Azerbajdzanskogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogičeskogo Instituta im. V. I. Lenina” 1953, No. 6, p. 137–138; N. N. Kolesnikova, *Iz istorii borby za sovelskuju vlast v Baku*, Baku 1954, p. 6–117.

<sup>13</sup> Strumph-Wojtkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>14</sup> G. Avetisjan, *Oktjabskaja revoljucija i molodež Zakavkazja*, „Kommunist”, 22 X 1967, p. 3.

a leading representative of the Armenian nationalists, who was supposed to be collaborating with the British interveners in Baku<sup>15</sup>.

In this place, it is necessary to mention, at least, briefly about Stepan Shaumian's activities<sup>16</sup>. He was undoubtedly one of the greatest heroes of the revolutionary movement in the Caucasus. An Armenian by birth, he was far from any nationalistic prejudices. Both in Baku and in other Transcaucasian regions, he fought with all his energy for the proletariat's rights. Betrayed by counter-revolutionists and handed over to the British interventionist troops together with a group of the so-called Baku commissars including Azerbaijanis, Ormians, Russians and others he was murdered by them in Turkmenia, where they had been removed. The memory of heroic deeds of Shaumian as a commissar continues to be very vivid in the entire Transcaucasus. Several towns have been called after this first name or surname (e.g. the capital of the so-called Upper-Karabakhskiy autonomous region in Azerbaijan — Stepanakert carries his first name). Almost in every town of the Transcaucasus, one can find a street or a square named after him, and monuments of Shaumian have been erected in numerous towns belonging to that region. His memory is surrounded with a remarkable reverence and respect.

<sup>15</sup> „In March 1918, one part of the inhabitants i.e. Armenians led by Shaumiantz managed to convince the commander of the English troops that he should locate his artillery, infantry and cavalry in the centre of a stretched out settlement of Baku [...] On the strength of a treaty concluded by the commander Shaumiantz with the English, the town of Baku was to raise something like troops or levy in mass". See: Żeromski, *op. cit.*, chap. 6.

<sup>16</sup> A. Karinjan, *Šaumjan i nacionalističeskie tečenie na Kavkaze*, Baku 1928, p. 7–41; G. Guseinov, *Ob odnoj filosofskoj rabotie Stepana Šaumjana*, „Doklady Akademii Nauk Azerbajdžanskoj SSR" 1948, No. 1, p. 32–34; A. L. Dymšic, *S. G. Šaumjan o literature*, „Učenyje Zapiski Leningradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogičeskogo Instituta im. A. I. Gercena" 1955, No. 107, p. 361–369; Ch. A. Barsegjan, *Stepan Šaumjan. Očerki žurnalistiko-publicističeskoj dejatel'nosti*, Erevan 1955, p. 48–204; G. S. Agadžanjan, *Nekotoryje problemy teorii istoričeskogo materializma v trudach Stepana Šaumjana*, „Učenyje Zapiski Erevanskogo Russkogo Pedagogičeskogo Instituta im. A. A. Ždanova" 1956, No. 6, p. 65–97; G. S. Akonjan, *Perepiska V. I. Lenina i S. G. Šaumjana po nacionalnom voprosu*, „Voprosy Istorii" 1956, No. 8, p. 3–14; Ja. I. Chačikjan, *Borba S. G. Šaumjana za marksistiko-leninskoje ponimanie roli narodnych mass v istorii*, Erevan 1956, p. 33–141; S. T. Kaltachčjan, *Borba S. G. Šaumjana za teoriju i taktiku leninizma*, Moskva 1956, p. 99–203; G. S. Agadžanjan, *Voprosy marksistiko-leninskoj teorii v trudach Stepana Šaumjana*, Erevan 1958, p. 57–214; A. Voskerčjan, *Stepan Šaumjan i voprosy literatury*, Moskva 1959, p. 45–207; Ch. A. Barsegjan, *Stepan Šaumjan. Očerki žurnalistiko-publicističeskoj dejatel'nosti, zvestnye raboty S. G. Šaumjana*, „Izvestija Akademii Nauk Armjanskoj SSR" 1962, Serija obščestvennyh nauk, No. 10, p. 51–60.

It can be supposed that Żeromski had no intention to present the person of Shaumian in a false way. He simply relied on not too precise relations of his informants, who had mistaken Shaumian with some other leader of Armenian nationalists, and without verifying their reliability, which he could have done without any bigger effort in Warsaw libraries in those years, the Polish writer included into his novel such information irritating the Transcaucasian public opinion. As a result, this book which might have aroused most certainly the interest of Soviet readers, and especially those from the Transcaucasus, after its short-term successes<sup>17</sup> has remained almost completely unknown for them. Meanwhile, there is a certain piquant detail, which could be mentioned here. It appears that some Azerbaijan nationalists, very hostile towards all Armenians, recollect with fond memories Stefan Żeromski — a Polish author very little known to them, who according to them „properly” evaluated Shaumian.

Żeromski wrote with his greatest passion these fragments of *Przedwiośnie* which concern gruesome massacres committed by the Turkish troops in Baku within the last few weeks of the First World War. As it is known still in autumn 1914 under a strong pressure of the German diplomatic service, Turkey commenced war operations against Russia. Already on 29th and 30th of October, the German warships on the Black Sea, assisted by the Turkish navy, started shelling Russian ports on the Black Sea. A day later, substantial Turkish forces, composed of the best armed and trained divisions, crossed the Russian borders and entered Georgia and Armenia. At the same time, Turkish secret agents began their diversionary activities on areas inhabited by Muslim population, including Azerbaijan. Chairi Efendi, a dignitary of the Muslim clergy in Turkey, proclaimed a „holy war” of Islam against „infidels” on 11th November 1914. And, simultaneously, the chief commander of the Turkish troops on the Caucasian front Enver pasha in his proclamation to soldiers promised them huge trophies in the Caucasus and encouraged them rather explicitly to robberies and violations on Christian population<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Initial successes of *Przedwiośnie* in the Soviet Union were tremendous (W. Broniewski, *Co myślą bolszewicy o literaturze polskiej?*, „Wiadomości Literackie” 1925, No. 39, p. 2). However, in later years the Soviet public opinion began to assume an increasingly more critical attitude to this book (E. Z. Cybenko, *Tworчество Żeromskiego v Rossii i Sovetskomo Sojuze*, [in:] *Iz istorii polsko-russkich literaturnych svjazej XIX—XX v.*, Moskva 1978, p. 213—236; E. Z. Cybenko, *Polskaja literatura rubieža XIX i XX vekov v Rossii*, [in:] *Russkaja i polskaja literatura konca XIX-načala XX veka*, Moskva 1981, p. 237—263).

<sup>18</sup> E. K. Sarkisjan, *Ekspansionistskaja politika osmanskoj imperii v Zakavkazje na kanune i v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny*, Erevan 1962, p. 124—459.

The first weeks of fighting seemed to be auguring significant successes for the Ottoman army, which took over control. The Turks attacked not only in Georgia and Armenia, but they also violated neutrality of Iran and moved into this country in order to get into Azerbaijan and capture such an important economic and strategic centre as Baku. However, extremely tough battles fought on the Russian-Turkish front from the beginning of December 1914 till early January 1915 caused that the Turkish offensive was checked and the initiative passed to the Russian troops. The Ottoman troops were pushed out of Iran, and in the Turkish Armenia, the Russian forces captured a number of very important strategic points.

Disintegration of the Russian army on the Caucasian front, which took place in the late 1917 and early 1918, allowed the Turks to assume initiative again. In Georgia, the Turkish troops captured Batum and several other regions situated to the north and east of this town. Simultaneously, the Ottoman troops proceeded deep inside Armenia and started approaching Azerbaijan's borders. At the invitation of Menshevik Georgian authorities, the Caucasus was entered from the North-West by quite small German troops, which moved, however, into the most important towns in Georgia. In Baku, the British agents succeeded in assembling a joint front of counter-revolutionary forces in July 1918 composed of both social revolutionaries and Russian Mensheviks and Azerbaijan and Armenian nationalists. On 31st July 1918, the Soviet authorities in Baku were overthrown. Several days later, and namely on 4th August, the British landing troops<sup>19</sup>, which had left the Iranian port — Enzeli on the Caspian Sea occupied by Great Britain, landed in Baku<sup>20</sup>.

It is perhaps worth adding here one piquant detail. Namely, in this landing operation a leading role was played by a former Russian battleship named „Priezident Hrugier” in honour of the heroic president of Transvaal famed for his stubborn defence of a tiny South-African state against the British aggressors, with Krüger's portrait displayed prominently inside the ship.

The British forces, which landed in Baku were not too numerous. They consisted of several hundred soldiers at the beginning, and later on of a thousand and a few hundred solidiers. Their operations begun with deporting to Turkmen and murdering there 26 Soviet commissars with foremost of them being Shaumian.

<sup>19</sup> I. V. Gadžiev, *An'isovestkaja in'ervencija Anglii na Kavkaze (1918—1920 gg.)*, Machačkala 1958, p. 6—7.

<sup>20</sup> L. I. Mirošnikov, *Anglijskaja ekspansija v Irane (1914—1920)*, Moskva 1961, p. 57—217.



Meanwhile, benefitting from a general chaos, relatively small Turkish forces unexpectedly approached Baku<sup>21</sup>. At first, they were driven back, but in the first half of September, the Turks managed in gathering much bigger armed troops near the town. The British perturbed by these developments embarked on 14th September 1918 and sailed off to Enzeli leaving their yesterday's allies to themselves. The death scene of eight hundred Britishers killed by the Turks described in *Przedwiośnie* was largely exaggerated by Żeromski as according to the data of the British commanding staff, the total British losses in the course of fights in Baku reached only 180 persons<sup>22</sup>.

On 15th September 1918, the Turks captured Baku<sup>23</sup>, which marked a beginning of one of the most tragic events of those times. Within a few days, the Turks performed a terrible massacre of the Christian population and, first of all, of Armenians. The information presented in *Przedwiośnie* saying that „during four days [...] there were murdered seventy thousand Armenians, Russians and all others, who happened to be nearby and were suspected of sympathizing with Armenians”<sup>24</sup> is a little exaggerated. By comparison, the present Soviet historiography estimates the number of victims killed in the September massacre at ca. 30–35 thousand persons<sup>25</sup>. Nonetheless, in some districts inhabited by the Armenian population only a few persons managed to save their lives.

It should be admitted that although Żeromski did not witness these gruesome scenes himself, he managed to grasp quite faithfully the situation in Baku at that time. Anyway, it is hard to determine whether a credit for this should go to the great Polish novelist or the ladies who informed him about it. However, when we read the scenes from *Przedwiośnie* written so suggestively and compare them with relations of eye witnesses or later historians analyzing those events, we cannot find any inaccuracies.

Incidentally, it could be added that in the second part of September and in October 1918, the Turks managed to win control not only

<sup>21</sup> A. B. Kadišev, *Intervencija i graždanskaja vojna v Zakavkaze*, Moskwa 1960, p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> General major Dentervil', *Britanskij imperializm v Baku i Persii 1917–1918. Vospominanija*, Tiflis 1925, p. 270–278.

<sup>23</sup> D. Enukidze, *Krach imperialističeskoj intervencii v Zakavkaze*, Tbilisi 1954, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Żeromski, *op. cit.*, chap. 6.

<sup>25</sup> E. A. Tokaržewskij, *Iz istorii inostrannoju intervencii i graždanskoj vojny v Azerbajdžane*, Baku 1957, p. 160; L. M. Lifšic, *Geroičeskij podvig bakinskih bolševikov (Iz istorii borby za pobiedu socialističeskoj revolucii v Azerbajdžane v 1917–1918 gg.)*, Baku 1964, p. 255.

over a big part of Azerbaijan but also many important centres in Dagestan. They were even getting ready to send their forces to Turkestan. However, in the first days of November 1918, the Turks were forced to withdraw from the Transcaucasus by the Entente. It could be mentioned here that completely demoralized Ottoman troops leaving Azerbaijan and Armenia committed many robberies and murders, the victims of which were not only Armenians but also Russians or even Muslim inhabitants of the Transcaucasus. The British landed in Baku deserted by the Turks on 17th November 1918<sup>26</sup>.

Finally, evaluating all fragments of *Przedwiośnie* located in Baku by Żeromski, it must be admitted that they generally conform to the historical truth. And it was only the very unpleasant blunder concerning Stiepan Shaumian — a person so greatly respected in the tradition of the Transcaucasus — which caused that this novel after its brief success in the Soviet Union fell into oblivion. Meanwhile, in the Transcaucasus, there has been consolidated a view that it is a novel giving an unfair and false description of the events from the years 1917–1918, which took place in Baku.

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#### BAKU Z PRZEDWIOŚNIA STEFANA ŻEROMSKIEGO

Za jedno z największych arcydzieł literatury polskiej uważa się powieść Stefana Żeromskiego *Przedwiośnie*. Najbardziej sugestywnie są napisane z pewnością pierwsze rozdziały tej powieści, których akcja została umiejscowiona w Baku, leżącym w Azerbejdżanie, w okresie rewolucji, a mianowicie w 1917 i 1918 r. Żeromski nigdy nie był w Baku i nie znał terenów Kaukazu. Prawdopodobnie jego informatorami były dwie panie ze środowiska polskiej kolonii w tym mieście, które go informowały o wydarzeniach mających miejsce na zachodnich wybrzeżach Morza Kaspijskiego.

Żeromski w najzupełniej wierny sposób przedstawił rozwój gospodarczy tamtego miasta, jego złożoną strukturę narodowościową, rewolucyjne tendencje proletariatu i młodzieży tego miasta w 1917 i 1918 r. W sposób nie wzbudzający poważniejszych zastrzeżeń Żeromski przedstawił wydarzenia polityczne, jakie miały miejsce w tym mieście, a szczególnie wkroczenie do Baku we wrześniu 1918 r.

<sup>26</sup> Tokarżevskij, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

wojsk tureckich i dokonaną tam rzeź ludności armeńskiej. Z pewnością jednak dane liczbowe zostały trochę przesadzone (Żeromski pisał, że Turcy wymordowali siedemdziesiąt kilka tysięcy osób, nowsze badania historyczne szacują liczbę na 30–35 tysięcy).

Żeromski popełnił jednak pozornie drobny błąd, który spowodował, że jego książka spotkała się z negatywną oceną czytelników z terenów Zakaukazia. Otóż bohaterem działań rewolucyjnych na terenie Baku był znany działacz bolszewicki, armeńskiego pochodzenia, Stefan Szaumian rozstrzelany później, wraz z innymi działaczami rewolucyjnymi z Baku, z polecenia angielskich okupantów na terenie Turkmenii. Otóż źle poinformowany Żeromski pisał o Szaumianie jako o przywódcy nacjonalistów armeńskich, który sprowadził Anglików do Baku. Z tych też przyczyn na terenie Zakaukazia utarł się pogląd, że powieść Żeromskiego podaje w fałszywy sposób opis wydarzeń z lat 1917–1918 na terenie Baku.

The development of the revolutionary movement was one of more significant phenomena in the socio-political life of Russia at the end of 19th century. In the late eighties and early nineties of 19th century, there were formed Social-Democratic circles in different centres of the empire. It was also at that time that Karl Marx's ideas began to find their way to Azerbaijan. Initially, these ideas were spread mainly by representatives of the local intelligentsia. For such activity they would be frequently imprisoned and next sent into exile for at least some 4 years. Despite severe punishments and repressions the number of people involved in the revolutionary activity tended to grow all the time. Workers were joining the Social-Democratic movement as well and already in the twenties most movements of Social-Democratic groups were composed of intelligentsia and workers. The organizations and tasks of the intelligentsia members included organising activities of organisations, propaganda and agitation among workers, their contact and a close co-operation, editorial work and distribution of illegal papers. On the other hand, the workers acted as a link between intellectual circles and the circles of workers.

The most favourable conditions for development of revolutionary ideas in Azerbaijan could be found in Baku. This was, however, an extremely complex and difficult task for the following reasons:

- 1) a strong impact of Islam, which sharply opposed any changes in the social, economic and political life;
- 2) two strong patriarchal family traditions;

Ż. Żeromski, *Przedwiośnie*, wydanie pierwsze, Warszawa 1917, s. 10 i 11.