

WHY TROUBLE
ABOUT
POLAND?

by

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An open letter to
JOHN CITIZEN

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Dear John,

You ask me in your letter if I can give you a straight and simple explanation of the Polish frontier dispute, without too great a use of terms you don't understand and names you can't pronounce. I will do my best, and I am glad of the opportunity to do so not only because the people of Poland have shown themselves gallant allies in the struggle against Hitlerism, but because the principles underlying this dispute are of paramount importance to every man who understands that justice like peace is indivisible and that the rule of law and order cannot be upset *anywhere* without eventually doing harm *everywhere*. "He who would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from oppression," said the great Democrat Thomas Paine, "for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself." How true this is, how many evidences of it we have seen in our own lifetime! A few short years ago there were in this country people who thought that it mattered little what occurred in other lands, as long as we in our peace-loving island were secure. Spain? Abyssinia? Czechoslovakia? What had we to do with "far away countries of which we know nothing"? But the monster which had struck down these countries grew in size. He became swollen with ambition and cast covetous eyes at our possessions, and in 1940 only 20 miles

of water stood between us and the fate that had overtaken our heroic allies on the Continent. Our brave Prime Minister, Mr Churchill, had seen the coming disaster when it was afar off, and his warning words should never be forgotten for they apply to every situation of a similar kind: "Such a settlement cannot bring peace. Not Czechoslovakia alone is threatened, but the liberties of all peoples." Mr Churchill knew, even if others didn't, that a wrong done to one is a wrong done to all.

No understanding of the position of Poland in the world to-day is possible, without an appreciation of the historical background. Poland, every history book will tell you, has been partitioned three times (four, if we include her experiences during the present war). What do historians mean by this? They mean that on three occasions powerful nations acting in concert, without a shadow of justification, and motivated only by their greed of territory, have fallen ruthlessly upon the Polish nation and dismembered it. The first partition occurred in 1772 when Russia, Prussia and Austria, acting in unison, divided 82,000 square miles of Polish territory between them. The second partition occurred in 1793. On this occasion Russia and Prussia helped themselves to 118,000 square miles of Poland's territory. The third partition occurred in 1795 when Russia, Prussia and Austria divided a further 82,000 square miles of Polish territory between them. A final re-arrangement of the stolen territory was decided on at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, when the Robber states agreed upon the following division:—

Russia,	220,500	square miles—	16,000,000	population.
Prussia,	26,000	„	— 3,000,000	„
Austria,	35,500	„	— 5,000,000	„

(*Chambers's Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 8.)

A great nation had disappeared from the map and three powerful states were gorged with loot.

These shameless acts of banditry were condemned by humane

people everywhere, and the restoration of Poland became one of the principal aims of international Socialism. At the founding of the First International (1864) the intimation of the British Workers' Committee to their French, Italian and Polish comrades stressed the cause of Poland—"A cause made sacred by the devotion, truthfulness, self-sacrificing heroism of a people whose righteous struggles for freedom have won for them the sympathy and admiration of all the wise and good, whether in high or low station in Christendom. . . . Our first united effort must be to secure the freedom of Poland, because the justice of her cause demands it, while treaty obligations make it imperative and duty points that way." And it was widely agreed that the reborn Poland was to be (in the words of Karl Marx in 1848) "not just any Poland, weak and helpless, which would be independent only on paper, but a strong state really fit for independent existence, and built on sound foundations. Poland must at least be given the territories she had before 1772." In other words Poland was to be restored in whole and not in part. "Anybody who does not sympathise with the Poles, and does not feel hatred and loathing for their murderers," said the great German Socialist, William Liebknecht, "is either a fool or a false and despicable hypocrite." Such was the general feeling amongst progressive people everywhere in Europe about these shameless acts of banditry, and none were louder in their denunciations than the followers of Lenin.

It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the first acts of the Bolsheviks on attaining power in Russia was to acknowledge the right of Poland to a free and independent existence. By a declaration of August 29th, 1918, the Soviet Government annulled all the treaties partitioning Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795. "All acts and treaties," says this decree, "concluded between the former Imperial Russian Government and the Government of the Austrian and Hungarian Empires and the Kingdom of Prussia are cancelled by the present, once and for all, because they are

contrary to the principle of the self-determination of nations, and are in contradiction to the Revolutionary ideals of the Russian nation, which has acknowledged the right of the Polish nation to unity and independence." Nothing could be clearer than this, and in making this decree the Bolsheviks were acting in the only way possible, having regard to their frequent denunciations of the partitions as acts of banditry. Anyone who denounces the robbery of another and afterwards finds himself in possession of the stolen property is under a moral obligation to restore it to the rightful owner. By their decree of August 29th, 1918, the Soviet Government recognised the new-born Polish State as the rightful heir to the historic territories of Poland.

And now we come to a phase of this dispute that demands our most careful attention, for here we are dealing with matters of the utmost importance which have been distorted by the enemies of Poland out of all resemblance to the truth. In the chaotic state of affairs that prevailed in the times immediately following the Revolution, when two neighbouring states were being reborn, it was perhaps inevitable that a clash of arms should take place in spite of all that might be done to prevent it. Russia and Poland went to war, and the struggle, coming as it did on top of all they had suffered previously, taxed the strength of both of them. For a time the Russians were victorious and 1920 saw them at the gates of Warsaw, success within their grasp. Three White armies, which had caused the Russians to divide their forces, had already been disposed of, and Russia could give her whole attention to the Polish army. In the light of what is now being said about the "persecution" to which the Russians were subjected it is interesting to recall the words of the Soviet Commander as he contemplated the destruction of the new-born Polish State which then seemed imminent: "The doctrine of world revolution will be settled in the West. Our way to world-wide conflagration passes over the corpse of Poland."

But it was not to be. By a miracle of military skill and

courage the Poles won a resounding victory over the Bolshevik forces and drove them back in disorder. The corpse of Poland had shown itself to be very much alive, but both sides had suffered grievous losses in the struggle, and peace was brought about by the Treaty of Riga in 1921. And here we come to the most thorny part of the whole question. The Treaty of Riga was never questioned by the Russians until 1939 when they invaded Poland and took half the country into their possession. For nearly 20 years not a single suggestion that it was unjust to them was heard. Only when, in alliance with the Nazis, they invaded Poland, and found it necessary to have a justification for their action, did they speak. It was then asserted that the Riga line was forced upon them by a victorious Poland and that the "Curzon Line" (which considerably reduced the area of Poland and was much more favourable to Russia) was the proper boundary. Let us examine this argument and show its utter falsity and the maze of lies and misrepresentations in which the truth has become obscured.

The first thing you should understand about the Curzon Line is that it was never intended as a permanent boundary but only as a temporary line of demarcation beyond which, pending permanent peace, the Soviet and the Polish armies should not advance. "In order to avoid a clash between the Polish and Russian Armies, Lord Curzon suggested a temporary line beyond which neither should advance" (Bernard Newman, *The Story of Poland*). The Curzon Line was "only a provisional minimum frontier, including in Poland all that was certainly Polish without prejudice to the ultimate allotment of territory further east" (*A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, Vol. 6). The actual wording of the Allied Note (forwarded by Lord Curzon) itself makes it clear that only a temporary boundary was suggested: "The eventual rights of Poland to territories situated to the east of the above-mentioned line are expressly reserved." The second thing to understand is that it was rejected by Russians

and Poles alike, the Russians describing it as unfair to Poland and actually offering more. This should never be forgotten, because it blows sky-high the assertions now being made by ignorant people that the "Curzon Line" was a just frontier and that the Riga Treaty (which we shall deal with presently and which was much more favourable to Poland) was imposed on Russia by force. Lord Curzon's proposal, says Bernard Newman, "was forcibly rejected by both sides, and in the subsequent discussions at Riga the Curzon Line was never even considered as a basis for a frontier. Lenin, indeed, dismissed it abruptly as 'unfair to the Poles'" (*The Story of Poland*). In a note of July 17th, 1920, sent to the British Government, the Soviet Government rejected the Curzon Line and expressed its desire for direct negotiations with the Poles: "The Soviet Government" (says the note, referring to the Curzon proposals) "expresses its willingness to a territorial frontier more favourable for the Polish people than the frontiers indicated in December last and proposed once more by the British Government in its ultimatum of 12th July. The Soviet Government cannot ignore the fact that this frontier was laid down by the Supreme Council partly under the pressure of counter-revolutionary elements, adherents of the Russian capitalists and landed class." (The Soviet Government, it should be explained, were at this time imbued with the generous spirit of the Revolution, while anti-Soviet refugees—the "Capitalists" and "Landlords" referred to in this note—were not disposed to see "Russian" territory handed over to the new-born Polish State.) On July 21st, 1920, Mr Lloyd George, speaking in the House of Commons, referred to the Soviet note in the following terms:—

"So far as I can understand . . . they say they are willing to negotiate directly with Poland. . . . Far from complaining of the boundaries which we fixed for Poland, they say we have treated Poland very badly. They want to give more to Poland than we have indicated and they are prepared to consider an

armistice in a friendly spirit." In spite of this exchange of views the war continued with varying fortunes for some months longer. First (as we have already seen) the Russians were victorious, and then at the great Battle of Warsaw, when all seemed lost for Poland, the Russians were driven back and the war-torn nations agreed on peace at Riga. By the terms of the Treaty of Riga, Poland's frontier was moved approximately 100 miles east of the Curzon Line, and you may think this was a large chunk of land to obtain at Russia's expense. It was, but you must never forget two things: First that, large though this addition was, it was historically Polish territory and was only a portion of the land that Poland was deprived of during the Partitions. Second, that on January 28th, 1920, the Council of People's Commissars had offered Poland a frontier 50 miles to the east of that agreed upon at Riga (150 miles further east than the Curzon Line). And all this took place *before* the Russian defeat at Warsaw when the Poles were in no position to enforce their own terms.

But the Communist plea that Riga was imposed upon a defeated Russia can be shown to be false from the testimony of Lenin's representative at the Conference (M. Joffe, leader of the Russian-Ukrainian Deputation): "We have signed a peace which satisfies the vital, just and indispensable interests of the Polish people." The treaty, he said, "leaves no questions unsettled, nor does it settle any questions by unilateral dictation, as was so often the case in former times, when treaties so drawn up were only a source of harm to the countries with which they were conducted. The nations themselves, having been granted all their demands, will take good care that such a peace is a lasting one." In the face of these words, showing the complete agreement that existed between both parties, how pitifully weak is the present Communist contention (intended as a desperate attempt to justify the Russian seizure of Poland's territories in 1939) that the Riga frontier of 1921 was imposed on the U.S.S.R. by force! The falsity of this contention can be shown also by

official Soviet publications which never questioned the frontier during a period of nearly 20 years (from 1921 to 1939), and actually claimed the terms of the Treaty as a triumph of Russia over Poland. Volume 46 of *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, an official publication of the Soviet State Institute, issued in 1940, contains an article on the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, which states that at Riga the Soviet Union was prepared to grant Poland a frontier much more favourable than that finally decided upon. "On March 18th, 1921," the *Encyclopaedia* states, "the Treaty of Riga was signed. In accordance with its provisions Poland kept Galicia and a part of White Ruthenia. However, the new Polish-Soviet frontier was far less advantageous for the Poles than the one which was proposed to Poland by the Soviet Government in April 1920; the frontier determined after the Polish-Soviet War runs 50 to 100 kilometres to the west of the line which was suggested at the beginning of the war. This means that Soviet Russia emerged victorious even from this struggle against the forces of counter-revolution." In *The History of the All-Soviet Communist Party*, which is the Bible of all political education in Russia, the following description is given of the concluding phase of the Polish-Russian War of 1920: "After some days the offensive of the Polish forces was checked and the Soviet armies began to prepare for a new counter-attack against the Poles. But Poland, not having the strength to continue the war, and expecting with alarm the counter-attack of the Red forces, was forced to renounce its claims and chose to conclude peace with Russia." Thus we see that even Soviet publications issued under the direct auspices of the Soviet Government, never suggested for a single moment that Poland had forced an unjust peace on Russia at Riga. On the contrary it is clear that they considered the Riga frontier a good bargain for the Soviet Union, since it gave to Poland less than Russia had originally, and without compulsion, offered her and far less than many of the Poles considered her entitled to, having regard

to the manner in which she had been despoiled of territory in the Partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795. Poland in 1772 was a country of nearly 300,000 square miles. Her area before the present war was no more than 150,000 square miles. Thus she never recovered more than half the territory of which she was deprived during the partition periods, and if dispossessed of that which she has to-day on the ground that Riga was unfair and the Curzon Line the proper boundary, she will emerge as a tiny state with about a quarter of the territory that was historically hers. Well may Poland ask if this is justice and in accordance with the principles of the Atlantic Charter, the adherents of which (including Russia) "seek no territorial aggrandisement."

Poland, we have seen, never recovered more than half the territory that originally belonged to her and that Socialists and Democrats everywhere (including Karl Marx) recognised as hers, and in accepting the terms of the Riga Treaty she was in effect giving up her title to 50 per cent. of the territory she might have claimed. For remember that most of the territory stolen during the Partitions went to Russia and the Bolsheviks, I repeat, had denounced the Partitions as acts of banditry. We have examined practically all the arguments put forward by Communist apologists to justify the seizure of Polish territory in 1939, and we have seen that not one of them is based on fact. The Curzon Line was a temporary not a permanent one. It was rejected by the Russians and the Poles alike. The Russians described it as unfair to the Poles and offered more. This offer was made before the Russian defeat at Warsaw and was the freely expressed will of the Russian Government. At Riga Poland voluntarily accepted less than she was offered. So far from considering themselves defeated over Riga the Russians in their official publications congratulated themselves on winning a great victory. One by one we have examined the Communist pleas and shown their falsity. There remain, however, one or two more points to deal with before we have hammered the last nail into the Communist coffin. Supposing the Communist argument

had been true instead of false and that the Riga Treaty had been forced upon a weakened Russia—what would we have expected Russia to do? We should have expected Russia to do as other nations did and at least protest against the injustice she had suffered. But from 1921 till 1939 not a solitary complaint about the Riga frontier came out of Russia. Not until it was necessary to find an excuse for something already done was it said that nearly 20 years before, the Russians had been wronged. Suppose again that Riga was unjust and that a weakened Russia had no alternative to accepting it—was there any reason why Russia should have voluntarily renewed her pledges when the State had grown strong? Not only did Russia sign the Riga Treaty on March 18th, 1921, but she signed a Pact of Non-Aggression with Poland on July 25th, 1932, and this was based upon the Riga Treaty. It constituted a pledge to respect the Polish frontier as defined by that Treaty. On May 5th, 1934, Russia signed a further Agreement with Poland by the terms of which the non-aggression Treaty was extended till December 31st, 1945. And finally on July 30th, 1941, a Treaty was signed in London between Russia and Poland by the terms of which Russia gave up her right to the territory she had taken from Poland under the Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement of September 29th, 1939 (when Poland was divided between Germany and Russia). Article 1 of this Treaty reads as follows:—

“The Government of the U.S.S.R. recognises the Soviet-German Treaties of 1939 as to territorial changes in Poland as having lost their validity.” In other words Poland was back to her 1939 frontiers, founded upon the Treaty of Riga. No one compelled Russia to enter into those later treaties. Even if the absurd Communist contention that the Riga frontier was forced upon her were true nothing could justify her breaking of later agreements voluntarily entered into when she had become as strong as any other nation, and all of which upheld the Treaty she had made with Poland in 1921.

We are at war with Germany for a purpose, and many forget the reason for our declaration of war. In a broadcast address on September 3rd, 1939, His Majesty the King defined our aims as follows :—

“ We are called with our Allies, to meet the challenge of a principle which, if it were to prevail, would be fatal to any civilised order in the world. It is the principle which permits a State, in the selfish pursuit of power, to disregard its treaties and its solemn pledges ; which sanctions the use of force, or threat of force, against the sovereignty and independence of other States. Such a principle, stripped of all disguise, is surely the mere primitive doctrine that might is right ; and if this principle were established throughout the world the freedom of our country and of the whole British Commonwealth of Nations would be in danger. But far more than this—the peoples of the world would be kept in the bondage of fear, and all hopes of settled peace and of the security of justice and liberty among nations would be ended. This is the ultimate issue which confronts us.”

The King was once again affirming the truth that justice, like peace, is indivisible, and that a wrong done to one is a wrong to all. Once we admit an evil principle it is only a matter of time before it reaches to ourselves.

Many who have little knowledge of the subject speak glibly about “ the minorities question,” and point to the fact that all the people who reside in Poland are not Poles. Neither are all the people who reside in Russia Russians. The Treaty of Riga¹ left 1½ million Poles in Russia, and there are nearly 40 million Ukrainians there to-day, many of whom are favourable to, but dare not openly advocate, an independent State. It is interesting to note, however, that in the territories taken from Poland by Russia in the 1939 invasion, and now claimed by the latter power, the Poles constitute by far the largest national group, numbering more than 5 million (or nearly 40 per cent. of the total), while

the Russians number little more than 100,000 (or less than 1 per cent of the total).

The Russian invasion of 1939 led to the deportation of nearly 2 million Poles (including women and children) to the depths of Russia, the majority of whom will never see their homes again, since those who have survived are claimed by Russia as Russian citizens, in defiance of the treaty of 1941. Nor (if no protest is made against this outrage upon an Allied nation that refused all Hitler's offers to join in an attack on Russia and was the first to draw the sword against the common enemy) are they ever likely to be seen by gallant Polish soldiers, sailors and airmen fighting loyally in the Allied cause. Put yourself in their position and see how they must feel. The burdens of this terrible conflict are hard enough. Must men who defended our island in the Battle of Britain be compelled to endure this burden too? (Let it never be forgotten that in the critical month of September, 1940, when Poland's present slanderers were denouncing the Democracies as "warmongers" and praising Hitler's efforts after "peace," an average of 15 per cent. of the 'planes that sought to smash our island home were brought down by Polish airmen. Most of them have long ago given their lives in the common cause and cannot speak for their martyred people. Shall we not, in gratitude, speak for them?)

Sitting in this island, far from the war-torn frontiers of the Continent, it is easy indeed to put forward a simple solution to the problem. Why, we ask, should the Poles not move over another 100 miles or so to the west and, as Russia has suggested, compensate themselves, for territories lost, at the expense of Prussia? The suggestion thus put forward, glibly and unthinkingly, is of such an amazing character that it is difficult to believe that sane and law-abiding people can mean it seriously. In the first place treaties solemnly entered into and endorsed and re-endorsed over a period of 20 years cannot thus be lightly broken without doing tremendous damage to the whole moral

fabric of international relationships and bringing law and order into contempt. Secondly, neither Russia nor any other nation has a right to give Prussia or any part of Prussia, in advance, to another Allied Power in compensation for the seizure of that Power's territory. Questions of frontiers can only be dealt with by the United Nations in conference, and any attempt at unilateral action of this kind is an affront to the other Powers concerned. Thirdly (and to many this will seem the most important point of all), do the people who say that Poland should accept the Curzon Line realise that to the Poles it is not just a question of abandoning territory that confronts them, but a question of giving up, absolutely and without any hope of recovery, to an alien people, with an alien way of life, and an alien religious (or anti-religious) system, millions of their kith and kin, bound to them by the strongest ties of blood and social relationship, who would be lost to them for ever? Let those who advocate this policy imagine Great Britain cut in two and a similar catastrophe befalling them, with the knowledge that once the line of demarcation has been drawn, they will never have another opportunity of seeing those who are near and dear to them. (It is treason for a Soviet citizen to leave the U.S.S.R. without permission, and such permission is seldom given.) They will then have a faint idea of why the Poles are horrified at some of those suggestions. And let us cease to speak about "an exchange of populations" until we learn a little more about the problem we are dealing with. Nearly 2 million Poles have already been transferred to Soviet Russia, and as already stated, those who are still alive are now classed as Russians. If the Curzon Line were to be finally accepted, millions more would suffer a similar fate and, robbed of more than half of her territory and population, Poland would become a shadow of her former self. Listen to the moving words of Stanislaw Grabski, Professor of Political Economy at the University of Lwow, and it will be seen that the problem is not so simple as many of our arm-chair

philosophers imagine : " The practice of the Soviet Government in the area of Eastern Poland, which it occupied from the end of October 1939 to July 1941, leaves no room for doubt that if the present territorial demands of the U.S.S.R. were to be fulfilled, it would be equivalent to surrendering the more than 4 million Poles, who were left in the eastern voidvodships (provinces) of Poland after the deportations, to the most ruthless extermination. If the Polish nation agreed to that, in truth it would not deserve to survive. There are people who think that the modification of the frontiers of a State is nothing more than moving a line a few millimetres on a map. Whereas in truth it is a question of the most fundamental importance to millions of people. I ask those of our British friends who advise us, with the best intentions, to give up to Soviet Russia our eastern territories to put to themselves the question whether it is right and just to condemn millions of people who in Poland had their private property protected by the State, freedom of speech, of association and of political opinion, and the assurance of religious education for their children at school, to the loss of all these rights by handing them over to a totalitarian State which does not recognise the right to hold private property, in which all political parties except the Communists are prohibited, where a man may be sent without trial (as I was) by mere administrative order, to eight years' compulsory labour camp, and where atheism is taught in the schools. I repeat once more, good neighbourly relations between Poland and Russia are required, not only by the two countries' true interests, but also in the interests of permanent European peace. But the only possible basis for such relations lies in the principle put forward by the Polish delegation at Riga, namely, that of equal respect for the vital interests of both sides, and not the injury of the weaker by the stronger, or the unilateral breach of obligations voluntarily undertaken." Even if Poland were to surrender half her territory and population by going back to the Curzon Line, what guarantee would she have that even what

was left would long remain to her? There is no guarantee at all. The Russian Government has refused to deal with the Polish Government in London, which alone represents the Polish people and is recognised by all the Allied Powers but Russia. The so-called Polish Patriots (a Communist group in Moscow who represent nobody but themselves) are brought forward by the Soviet authorities as a body of Poles acceptable to them. Once installed in Warsaw what guarantee would there be that "plebiscites" on the usual model would not be organised, with the customary "99 per cent." majority in favour of "incorporation" in the Soviet Union? The peril that confronts not *half* of Poland but *all* Poland is clear to all but the most blind and bigoted, and demands the utmost vigilance from all who value liberty. Those who hold up their hands in despair and say we cannot do anything about it are the enemies of freedom. We can at least refuse to countenance that of which we disapprove. His Majesty's Government has made it clear on two occasions, in July 1941 and in January 1944, that they "recognise no territorial changes brought about since August 1939." Those who say that people who protest against injustice to an Allied Nation are "warmongers" are true to the Munich tradition which made this war inevitable. From 1933 to 1939 all who protested at Hitler's atrocities were "warmongers" to the politically blind.

Poland's attitude is clear and unmistakable and has won the sympathy of many who were formerly indifferent to her cause. In spite of the wrongs she has endured she is willing to sit down at the Conference table and seek a solution to the problems that confront her. She has invited Britain and America to take part in the discussions. Russia refuses and has rejected the suggestion that Britain and America should help. In these circumstances no great power of discernment is required to discover where responsibility lies for a continuance of the present breach, which is of use to no one but the common enemy—Germany.