

JOINT COMMISSION ON THE PROBLEMS
OF THE INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT

Memoranda on
Some Crucial Questions

III

POLAND

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PRICE TWOPENCE

FIRST MEMORANDUM :

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND
II. ALSACE-LORRAINE.

NOTE.

These memoranda deal with some of the crucial questions which must arise in any attempt to solve the problems of the settlement, in the light of an organized Community of Nations. The acceptance of a world organization, following the war, is assumed as a basis of argument. And, further, the view is taken by the Commission that the adoption of the policy of disarmament is essential to a satisfactory settlement, and alone supplies a possibility for the satisfactory treatment of minority nationalities.

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III. Poland.

(a) POLITICAL

History.

Poland, during the Middle Ages, existed as a powerful independent state. The Poles were Slovenic in race, Roman Catholic in religion, and, in the fifteenth century, formed one of the most highly civilized nations in Europe. During the seventeenth century, the position of Poland rapidly declined, and eventually, by the three infamous partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795, the kingdom was divided in the most cynical way among Prussia, Austria, and Russia—the latter securing by far the largest share.

In 1807, Napoleon formed a part of the old kingdom into a semi-independent state under the title of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and endowed it with a very liberal constitution, but in 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, this was undone, and Poland was re-partitioned among Prussia, Austria, and Russia. Ever since then, the Polish people have been a race without a country, a soul without a body, torch-bearers of Revolution, a perpetual and righteous menace to the old established tyrannies of the world.

Treatment of Poles by Prussia, Russia, and Austria.

It is not necessary here to compare in detail the treatment of the Poles under their rule by Prussia, Russia, and Austria respectively, nor to do more than mention the illusive promises held out to the Poles at the beginning of the war by the Grand Duke Nicholas, and by the Prussian Government.

It is sufficient to say that both *Prussia and Russia* treated their Poles tyrannically. Both prohibited the use of the Polish language in the schools, the law courts, and the administration, and whilst in Prussian Poland the machinery of local government was gerrymandered in such a way as to give the majority of representatives to Germans, even in towns and districts where the Poles predominated, Russian Poland was governed practically by martial law, the Governor-General of

Warsaw having the power even of putting people to death without trial.

Austria, on the other hand, has treated the Poles well. The Poles in Galicia have enjoyed the advantages of Home Rule. They have a Polish Viceroy, a Polish Diet, and a Polish administration. They have their own schools and universities. The Polish language is officially recognized. Moreover, the Poles send their own representatives to the Austrian Parliament.

Poland and the War.

The position of Poland after three-and a half years of war is tragic and difficult. Countless battles have taken place, in which Austrian and Prussian Poles have been forced to fight hand to hand with Poles embodied in the Russian armies. Russian Poland in particular has been ravaged and beaten down by the advancing and retreating armies. According to M. Paderewski, "over 20,500 villages have been levelled to the ground. More than 200 towns have completely disappeared; 16,000 churches are in ruins; £500,000,000 of property has been destroyed. Millions of Poles, *including all the children under seven years of age*, have been wiped out of existence." At the present time (1917), the whole of what is generally known as Poland—certainly the whole of those districts in which the Poles are in a majority of the population—are in the military occupation of the Central powers, and various schemes have been mooted at Berlin and Vienna, most of which seem to point in the direction of a union between Russian and Austrian Poland, this state to have wide powers of self-government, but to be a constituent part of the Austrian Empire.

An Independent Poland.

In spite of these things, however, it is probable that most Poles still cling to the ideal, voiced shortly after the Russian Revolution, by the then Russian Provisional Government, in the following words:

"The Provisional Government regards the creation of an independent Polish State, formed of all the territories of which the majority of the population is Polish, as a pledge of a durable peace in the remodelled Europe of the future . . . The Polish Nation liberated and unified, will settle for itself the nature of its own Government, expressing its will by means of a Constituent Assembly, convoked on the basis of universal suffrage, in the Capital of Poland."

This plan involves no humiliation for the German and Austrian peoples, although if carried out, it is improbable that it will prove very gratifying to the personal pride of the two Emperors. It means simply that Russia, Austria and Germany would each surrender a province according to the wishes of the majority of the inhabitants of that province. It is not therefore a proposal of conquest.

Unfortunately, however, these territorial re-arrangements are not—in the absence of some over-mastering force, such as the simultaneous uprising of the democracies of Europe—to be made so easily as this, and whether the above proposal can be carried out to its full extent at present is doubtful. Amongst Poles themselves there are many who feel that it is not a practical thing to press for the union of “all the territories of which the majority of the population is Polish” at the present time. These would be content with a more moderate solution. It is necessary therefore to examine in some detail what precisely this phrase implies.

The Position Examined.

The nucleus of any new independent state of Poland would be the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, or, roughly speaking, what is generally marked on the maps as Russian Poland.

Formerly the attitude of the Government of the Tsar presented a serious obstacle to the liberation of these Polish lands. Owing to the Russian Revolution and the declaration of the Russian Government in favour of the self-determination of peoples, this obstacle at any rate has now been removed.

These are the latest available figures relating to this territory :

Extent in square miles.	Population.	Number of Poles.	Percentage of Poles.
49,000	11,900,000	9,000,000	76 per cent.

Certainly a most determined effort must be made by all who care for the good government of the future Europe to secure independence for this section of Poland at least. It would include the cities of Warsaw, Lodz, Kalisz, Wielun, Radom, Plock, Lomza, Bielostok and Suwalki, and Dubienka.

Along the north of Russian Poland runs East Prussia and the southern districts of this province, that is, just across the frontier, are inhabited by Poles to the extent of about 63 per cent. of the population. This strip of country includes the Masurian lakes which have featured so vitally in the strategy of the war. It also includes the town of Allenstein. The district is comparatively sparsely populated, but if added to

Poland it would add some 270,000 Poles to the new state. It has however belonged to Prussia from early days.

Proceeding westward we come to that southern district of West Prussia which is sometimes called West Cumberland. Here the proportion of Poles is about 60 per cent. (in some places it is as much as 80 per cent.), and it is said that this proportion is increasing owing to the constant draining away of the Germans to the industrial districts of the west of Germany. The district is an agricultural one, and includes the ancient fortress of Thorn. It was annexed by Prussia at the first partition (1772).

North lies a very important area, the northern district of West Prussia, which runs up the Vistula to Danzig and the sea. The Poles here are about 55 per cent of the population. It was annexed by Prussia in 1772 ; Danzig itself was not annexed until 1793.

This district is coveted by the supporters of the extremer demands of the Poles for the reason that it would give Poland direct access to the sea.

On the other hand, from the German point of view, the cession of this district would cut off East Prussia and isolate her from the rest of Germany.

Still proceeding westward we arrive at the Grand Duchy of Posen, the greater part of which was annexed at the second partition (1793), although a small portion towards the north was seized by Prussia twenty-one years before.

Here are the figures for this important district :

Square miles.	Population.	Poles.	Percentage.
11,000	2,000,000	1,200,000	61 per cent.

It is said that the percentage of Poles in Posen is increasing owing to the constant emigration of the Germans. Violent efforts have been made to Prussianize the province, but have met with little success. It is extremely doubtful, however, whether the German Government will ever surrender this province without a prolonged military conflict.

Further south we come to that part of Upper Silesia which lies between the Oder and Russian Poland, and the chief town of which is Gleiwitz. This district became separated from Poland in the Middle Ages, and has never been united to her since. Nevertheless the Poles form the majority of the population. The figures are :

Square miles.	Population.	Poles.	Percentage.
5,000	2,200,000	1,200,000	57 per cent.

Other figures give the percentage of Poles as 64 per cent. and 69 per cent. The district is an important mining centre.

Crossing the frontier of Austria we come first to the Teschin district of Austrian Silesia and then to Galicia.

The population of the Teschin district is about 360,000, of which 218,000 are Poles, or 60 per cent. It is a densely populated mining centre. Most of the important positions are held by Bohemians, whilst the landowning class is German. The Poles belong almost entirely to the lower classes.

In western Galicia we come to a province which is almost entirely Polish, the Poles representing about 90 per cent. of the population. Galicia was annexed at the time of the first partition, but in 1815, the district of Cracow was constituted an independent republic, and remained such until 1835, when it was annexed by Austria, despite a guarantee of neutrality by Prussia, Austria, and Russia.

There are also large numbers of Poles in eastern Galicia, and particularly around Lemberg (Poles 85 per cent.), and near Tarnopol (Poles 52 per cent.), but in this part of the province, the Ruthenians predominate, the Poles only amounting to about 35 per cent.

Taking Galicia as a whole—east and west—the figures are :

Square miles.	Population.	Poles.	Percentage.
30,000	8,000,000	4,600,000	58 per cent.

Conclusions.

With these facts in mind, we are now in a position to make certain suggestions.

We suggest that a beginning might be made by setting up an independent Poland consisting of what was formerly Russian Poland.

A strong effort should be made with the consent of the inhabitants to add to this state,

1. The strip of land consisting of the southern districts of east and west Prussia ;
2. Western Galicia and the Polish districts of eastern Galicia.

The addition of (2) is especially desirable inasmuch as it would bring into the new state a body of educated Poles already experienced in methods of self-government and local administration.

It is probably impracticable to press for the inclusion, at the present time, of Posen. This might well be left to the future development of sane national and international ideas during the years to come.

The same applies to the proposal to include the strip of land running down to the sea at Danzig. It is true that the

inclusion of this territory would give to Poland direct access to the sea, but practically the same result could be obtained (without severing east Prussia from the rest of Germany) by an agreement ensuring to Poland the free navigation of the Vistula and the use of Danzig as a free port.

Finally, clauses should be inserted in the constitution of the new state ensuring respect for the rights of minorities, Germans, Letts, Ruthenes and Jews. Poland should enjoy the rights and incur the obligations of a member of the Society of Nations.

(b) ECONOMIC

In the statement of General Principles that should govern the peace settlement it was contended that efforts should be made to remove existing restrictions on trade in countries where no change in government is contemplated; and that where changes in national status take place no new restrictions likely to cause friction should be imposed. Of proposals relating to countries whose national status is not changed two however apply to Poland, and if an international agreement is come to should be observed by the new state.

1. Any arrangement that was come to by the Peace Conference to secure universal Free Trade in necessary foodstuffs or any other international obligation would have to be applied.

2. As Polish trade depends to such a large extent on the navigation of the Vistula for access to the sea, international guarantees must be provided for freedom of navigation to the new State. Poland should also observe the engagements demanded for preventing the creation of new restrictions to trade and for preventing injustice to the taxpayers of those lands to which she has, up till now, been subject.

3. If the whole or part of Poland became independent or were transferred from one Government to another under international authority, that authority would be justified in insisting on certain special reservations limiting Poland's new rulers in the framing of any tariff.

(a) These reservations should veto any tariff arrangement which would destroy established trade connections between the new State and the Empires of which it formerly formed part. Russia, Austria, and Germany should therefore have the right to protest against any Polish tariff impost that was likely to have such an effect.

(b) Poland or its new rulers should agree not to construct a Protective Tariff, and should be confined to an equal Tariff on all imports like that of Turkey, which by international agreement was fixed at 11 per cent. Necessary foodstuffs should, however, be excepted. Alternatively, Poland might undertake to counter-balance any special duty imposed on an import with an equal excise duty on the same commodity when made at home.

4. Poland or its new rulers would have to become responsible for agreed proportions of the National Debts of the countries losing the Polish taxpayers.

5. On the other hand, Poland has suffered terrible destruction of property during the war at the hands of Russia and Germany, and seems clearly entitled to the restoration of the property thus destroyed. This claim might be set off against the duty of taking over part of the debts, and Poland starting debt free would then have no difficulty in raising a loan to reinstate her own industries.

(c) CULTURAL

The first thing to bear in mind is perhaps the tremendous tenacity the Polish people have displayed with regard to their nationality. Like the Jews, they are much dispersed among other nations (out of twenty-three million Poles at the beginning of the twentieth century, only eighteen millions lived on purely Polish territory), yet, wherever they are, they preserve the feeling of their own nationality, and ever aspire to see the kingdom of Poland re-established.

As a people, they have not succumbed to the century long repressive measures exercised by both Russia and Prussia, over the portions of Poland possessed by these States. Though Poland was definitely divided up at the Congress of Vienna (1815), Poles will still seize any possible opportunity of asserting their identity as a separate and particular nationality.

The measures which have been taken by Prussia to crush out Polish nationality in "the province of Posen," are probably the most scientifically planned and systematically executed of any such measures ever taken by any government to crush out and annihilate the national spirit of a subject race. Yet Prussians have had to admit that their progress in "colonizing" the land and subjugating their Polish subjects has been extremely slow and only effected at great cost. Indeed, the Polish peasantry have of late asserted themselves in an astonishing way.

(Between 1897 and 1900 the Germans bought 32,000 hectares, against 63,000 bought by Poles).

And in Austria, where the competition between the two races for trade and social authority is carried out under measures of equality, where the national development of the Poles is unhampered by oppressive, bureaucratic action, Galicia has become the rallying ground for Polish culture generally, and all kinds of national institutions from the Polish Diet to Polish universities and Polish trade unions flourish exceedingly.

A second consideration is the early development of Polish culture on modern Western lines. Poles may be described as the poor gentlemen of Europe. The Polish University of Cracow was inaugurated in 1400. The influence of Humanism was spread abroad in Poland before it was felt in Germany. Largely owing to the great influence exercised by the Jesuits in spreading the traditions of renaissance culture amongst the Poles, a very highly developed state of society existed in Poland through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so that the social life of the kingdom of Poland was far in advance of the neighbouring states of Germany or Russia. No amount of political and social humiliation since then has had any effect in lowering the self estimation of the Poles, or in smothering their sense of cultural superiority. They might be exiled, they might be poor, but in their self-estimation they were at least well educated as compared with the backward Russian, at least gentlemanly as compared with the ill-mannered Prussian. A second brilliant period inspired chiefly by French Classicism lasted from 1764 to 1815, during the first thirty years of which King Stanislaw Roniatowski was the enthusiastic patron of learning and the arts.*

A third consideration is the staunch adherence of the Poles to Roman Catholicism. This form of Christianity was adopted by the then Polish king as early as 964 and in consequence Polish culture evolved on western lines henceforward. Although the doctrines of the Reformation spread rapidly in Poland at the end of the sixteenth century, they were soon rooted out, and, as a race, the vast majority of the Poles have remained devout Catholics ever since, resisting the Protestantism of Germany, and the Eastern Orthodoxy of Russia.

It should be mentioned that there are a relatively large

* In 1774 the Zaluski Public Library in Warsaw was among the largest in Europe. It was founded in 1747. The Polish Commission of Education is claimed to be the first Board of Education in Europe. See *Intellectual Poland*, by Leon Litwinski, p. 13 (George Allen and Unwin).

number of Jews in Poland, so that Jewish problems will need special consideration in the settlement.

As a people the Poles may be said to be blessed—or cursed—with a very full share of the artistic temperament. It is not only that they have produced great artists in music, in painting, in literature, but they possess, as national characteristics, quick imaginations, changeful moods, now very gay, now deeply sorrowful, great capacity for passionate emotionalism. They love and hate, they enjoy and suffer with a fervour which has added to the difficulty of their position as a subject race, living, as so many of them have lived, under the domination of nations who are naturally more calculating or outwardly more imperturbable than they are.

It has been a terrible fate for these eager, original, passionate people, to live divided up between big neighbouring Powers, subjected on the one hand to the clumsy moulding processes of Prussia, and on the other to the irresponsible tyranny of autocratic Russia.*

The fact that they have preserved their national character and qualifications in spite of all this repression, furnishes the hope that if a free Poland is set up, it will have sufficient racial, social and temperamental strength to maintain itself as a fully developed, distinctive state.

Indeed, it may be hoped that if real freedom can be secured to the Poles, they may develop their national talents and add thereto the qualities born of a regained liberty. And if they may become in fact a free people, they will still have abundant gifts and much wide culture to contribute from the riches of their special racial attributes to the Community of Nations at large.

* As an example of such tyranny may be cited the appropriation and the removal of the above-mentioned Zaluski Library by the Russians in 1795. It became the nucleus of the present Imperial Public Library at Petrograd. This was only one of several Polish Libraries which were carried away and added to Russian collections. Also the suppression of the ancient and celebrated University of Vilna in 1831; other seats of learning suffered the same fate right through the history of this unfortunate country.