

POLAND'S PLACE IN EUROPE

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THE call for a "united Europe" raised by Winston Churchill before the Council of Europe and taken up, in principle, by that body gives rise to the question whether by this term is to be understood the ultimate restoration of European unity as it existed through the ages down to the indecisive conclusion of World War II, or whether the authors of this project have in mind merely the pooling of all available resources of Western Europe, so as to build up a balance of power strong enough to preserve peace for an indefinite period. In the latter case, the free people of Eastern and Central Europe, subjected to Communism against their will, would have to remain deprived of any real independence. The further question to be asked is whether there appears to be any reasonable chance of basing a durable world peace on a disunited Europe, that is to say, on a compromise with militant Communism, or whether the restoration of European unity, embodying a system of peaceful international cooperation in the spirit of the United Nations Charter must be regarded as essential in present world conditions.

The following illustrations taken from the recent and contemporary history of Poland may serve to throw some light on the present situation.

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European unity rests on three solid foundations: Graeco-Latin civilization, Christianity, and the fusion of classical and tribal elements after the disintegration of the Roman Empire. The consciousness of this unity has been alive for more than a thousand years; the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, between the Baltic and the Black Sea, have, from the days of Charlemagne to those of President Wilson, served as natural defences against the impact of disruptive forces from the East.

The pivotal position of Poland in this system of defences is a fact well established in history. From the tenth century of our era, when she accepted Christianity in its Latin form, Poland has been the exponent of overall European interests there where the challenge to them is greatest. Severed from Europe, Poland loses her specific attributes as a component part of an organic whole; on the other hand, Europe, without Poland,

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lacks an essential element of unity and strength. This too, has been conclusively demonstrated in the course of history.

It was not so much justice for Poland (although, undoubtedly, the conscience of the West had never become reconciled to the fact of the Partitions), as concern for the security of Europe and the world at large that prompted President Wilson to replace Poland on the map of Europe. His thirteenth point calling for the "resurrection of an independent Poland with free access to the sea" should, therefore, be read in close juxtaposition to his sixth point, in which he demands "such a settlement of all questions affecting Soviet Russia as will assure the best and freest cooperation with her of the other nations of the world." That is to say, President Wilson saw clearly that a viable Poland, in close contact with the West, would form a strong barrier against Russian expansionism in its new guise of militant Bolshevism.

As a cornerstone of the new Europe, Poland, in 1919, was faced with the crucial task not only of welding together, into a compact whole, her national forces disrupted by the Partitions, but also of building up by her own efforts, a cohesive political structure capable of stemming the tide of revolutionary Communism already threatening to overflow into the heart of the continent; for it will be remembered that Poland's eastern boundaries, extending for a distance of more than a thousand miles, had not been fixed by the Peace Treaties.

Profiting by this opportunity the Bolsheviks, early in 1920, convened a Congress of the Third (Communist) International at Moscow. They declared that this organization would have supreme dictatorial power in all matters relating to the conduct of the world revolution, and they proclaimed that the Russian Army would act as the "official fighting force" of the international proletariat against all enemies of the regime, "including workers" parties, trade unions and groups of organized labour not affiliated with the Communist Party." Sure of victory, the Red columns then proceeded on their westward drive, which, according to the plans of the Soviet High Command, was to be pushed forward through a prostrate Poland, into the German plain, where they were to join up with the Spartacists, who meanwhile had taken the name of German Communist Party.

Polish resistance in this life and death struggle was characterized by the voluntary cooperative effort of all classes—intellectuals, peasants and workers alike—unanimous in their

rejection of Russian communism and in their firm resolve to achieve a form of government patterned on western democratic models. National self-determination was the watchword electrifying the masses into joint action. Despite initial reverses, fresh armies of volunteers, many of them still in their 'teens, were raised in quick succession and sent into the field after a short period of training.¹ Finally, in August 1920, the Russian onslaught was halted at the gates of Warsaw, broken and hurled back by means of a flanking attack executed by five fresh divisions that the Polish Commander in Chief, Pilsudski, had, unknown to the enemy, managed to concentrate south of the capital. One of the decisive battles of world history, in the words of a neutral observer (Lord d'Abernon), had been fought, and the Polish-Soviet frontier, agreed upon in March 1921 under the terms of the Treaty of Riga and subsequently confirmed by the Council of Ambassadors, remained for a period of nearly twenty years, in fact if not in name, the uncontested eastern boundary of Europe.

Henceforth Poland's policy was one of strict adherence to the letter and spirit of the Peace Treaties, to which she owed her revival. She did everything in her power to strengthen the machinery of the League of Nations, for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security. She collaborated actively in the drafting of the Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes (1924), "the most ambitious peace plan that governments have ever discussed." No less significant was her decision to develop and expand her direct maritime connections with western countries. In 1925, Germany started a relentless tariff war against Poland, with the avowed object of ruining her economically. The attempt miscarried. Within the next ten years the value of Poland's maritime trade with the West had risen to ninety per cent of the total value of her imports and exports, and the newly constructed port of Gdynia, notwithstanding a substantial increase of the traffic through Danzig, had become the largest and most modern harbor on the Baltic.

The Locarno Pact of 16 October, 1925, marks a turning point in the history of inter-war Europe. It drove a wedge between Eastern and Western Europe. On the strength of this Pact, Germany could proclaim to the world, through the mouth of Chancellor Luther, that, for her, security in the West meant something quite different from security in the East. His words were borne out by Foreign Minister Dr. Stresemann, who

1. A large contingent of Americans and Canadians of Polish extraction fought in the ranks of General Haller's army, recently arrived from France.

bluntly informed the Reichstag that "the isolation of Poland (and Czechoslovakia) was the primary aim of German policy." And he sounded a note of warning that should not have gone unheeded when he added that Germany had pledged herself "for the time being" not to disturb the peace in the West, but had flatly refused to assume any such obligation in the East.

In point of fact, Locarno had left Eastern and Central Europe open to attack. Poland was directly menaced. Under the so called Rhenish agreement, Germany, France and Belgium had pledged themselves not to resort to war against one another except in the event of an "unprovoked" attack on the part of one of them. If provocation was doubtful, the League Council was to decide. This provision manifestly impaired the effectiveness of the Franco-Polish Treaty of Alliance, for whereas Poland, not being a party to the Rhenish Treaty was bound unconditionally to assist France in the event of a German attack, the corresponding obligation of France with regard to Poland was weakened by the probability of Germany's declaring that her attack on Poland was not unprovoked. In this case, the other signatories of the Rhenish Treaty, including Great Britain and Italy, might prevent France from coming to the aid of Poland until this preliminary question had been settled by the League Council.

In addition, Germany refused to submit her dispute with Poland over the "Corridor" to arbitration or judicial settlement. In other words, she reserved to herself the right to "rectify" her boundary with Poland by any means at her disposal, even by force of arms, in open defiance of the Peace Treaties.

In April 1926, Germany concluded the Treaty of Berlin with Soviet Russia; by its terms each of the contracting parties promised to remain neutral should the other party become involved in an armed conflict with a third power (Poland). To make the isolation of that country still more complete, a Russo-Lithuanian agreement was concluded, in September of the same year, under German auspices. It contained the recognition, by the Soviets, of Lithuania's claim to Vilno, thus opening up afresh a controversy that had been shelved a few years earlier.

Already the stage was set for aggressive war against Poland, to be launched from all sides. There can be little doubt that the maturing of these plans in September 1939 was facilitated by the fact that European unity no longer existed.

It was precisely Poland's exposed position on the perimeter of the European ambit that brought her into direct conflict with Russian expansionism when it turned westward, after having for centuries pursued its eastward course towards the Pacific and the Bering Sea. The "westernizing" movement started by Peter the Great at the beginning of the 18th century was devised to facilitate Russian intrusion into the political system of Europe. Intrinsicly, however, Russia has always remained alien to any Western concept of European unity; she has never made any material contribution to it, even when she had the opportunity of doing so, e.g., when she held the lion's share of a partitioned Poland.

Now that she has been able to establish her supremacy not only over Poland, reconditioned according to her will, but virtually over the whole of Eastern and Central Europe, from the eastern and southern coastline of the Baltic to the narrow strip of Greek and Turkish territory fringing the Mediterranean and the Straits, and from the Curzon line to the Elbe, Weser and Danube, the Russian menace to European unity has become an open challenge. Holding the "inner line" between the Atlantic and Pacific, she can bide her time; she can consolidate her central position from which to direct her defensive or offensive, as the case may be, in West or East.

A glance at the map will show that Poland, controlling the main lines of communication between Berlin, Leningrad and Moscow, forms an essential link between Russia proper and the Soviet zone of Germany. Saddled in 1945, with a "pact of friendship and mutual assistance" with Soviet Russia, she has been subjected ever since to a relentless process of sovietization and russification, which with the introduction, at the beginning of the current year, of the new six-year plan has entered upon its final stage of complete military, political, economic, social and cultural assimilation into the Soviet orbit.

All Polish political parties, including Socialists, Peasants and Democrats (intellectual workers) have been absorbed into the one and only legal party, the P.P.R. (Polish Communist Party). A special Control Commission, with branches spread all over the country, has been called into existence for the purpose of supervising the "orthodoxy" of all member of the Communist Party and weeding out elements suspected of "Titoism" "Nationalism," or other forms of "heresy."

The former administrative system, with all surviving traces of local self-government, in town and country, has been

abolished. In its place, a system of elective "National Councils" or Soviets, each one with its "presidium," the whole overtopped by a "Supreme Council," has been introduced on the well known Russian model. The Parliament, or "Sejm", has still been functioning as an assemblage of yes-men, but its days appear to be numbered.

Poland is being cut off more and more from the West. Regulations governing the issuance of passports and visas by the regime's official representatives abroad have been greatly stiffened. The importation of English books, magazines and papers, which had already assumed large proportions, has now been forbidden. Letters and parcels from abroad are submitted to minute scrutiny. The Polish press has become a one way road for Soviet propaganda.

Private enterprise has been almost completely wiped out. The collectivization of farms, hitherto delayed because of opposition on the part of the peasantry, is now being speeded up with ruthless energy, in accordance with the findings of a Soviet Commission of experts who visited Poland last year. Large numbers of collective farms, called agricultural cooperatives, have been formed recently, in the regained western territories of Poland, where former German holdings are being consolidated for this purpose. Peasants resisting collectivization are ousted from their land and imprisoned. Whatever immovable property is still found in possession of "bourgeois" owners is expropriated without compensation. The network of official "machine and tractor stations", and of "state agencies for the purchase of sale of agricultural products" is expanding rapidly.

The sovietization (Poles call it "stalinization" of the Polish army) has been taken in hand by Marshal Rokossovsky, Moscow appointed Minister of Defence and C.I.C. in Poland, who is also a member of the Warsaw Politbureau. According to reports from Sweden, the reorganization of the Polish armed forces is all-embracing; it comprises ground troops, the air force, anti-aircraft defences, navy, frontier guards and security police. Extensive purges are being carried out in all higher ranks. The recruitment of officers is based on Soviet regulations; only sons of workers and peasants are admitted to officers' training schools; to be eligible for a commission, a candidate must have a thorough knowledge of the Russian language. There have been indications of late, of military movements between

Russia, Eastern Germany and Poland, and also of the presence of Soviet troops at specified strategic points in the latter country. Civilian traffic across the German-Polish and Polish-Russian borders has been severely restricted. The entire Baltic coastline, from Finland to the mouth of the Oder, is being fortified; in this connection claims are being put forward, by those concerned, for a greater extent of territorial waters than that fixed by international law. According to *Jane's Fighting Ships*, published in London, a large fleet of Russian submarines and warships specially equipped for the launching of radio controlled rocket missiles (and also for the transportation of atom bombs) is to be put in commission by the end of 1951.

One more significant fact should be noted: the signing, on 8 July of the current year, of an agreement between the Communist governments of Poland and Eastern Germany, by which they mutually recognize as permanent, the present German-Polish frontier extending along the Oder and Neisse rivers from the Baltic to the Czechoslovak border. Sponsored by Soviet Russia, this agreement is indicative of her desire to fuse Poland, as firmly as possible, into the bloc of satellite states she has been creating in Eastern and Central Europe, even at the cost of having to postpone for the time being, the realization of her original plan of unifying the whole of Germany under her control. But does this mean that Russia has given up this plan altogether? In conjunction with actual developments in Europe and elsewhere, and in the light of such official enunciations, as the "Program of the National Front of the German People's Republic" or the resolutions of the Comintern conference recently held in Berlin, it would appear that the ultimate aims of Soviet policy are inflexibly fixed and that Russia is resolved never to rest until she has attained them.

The issue, therefore, seems to be clear. It has been stated recently by Air-Marshal Lord Tedder and can be summed up as follows: If world order and world peace are to be re-established on a sound basis, Russia must be made to renounce her ill-gotten gains in Europe and to restore to the peoples forcibly subjected to Communism the rights and liberties to which they are entitled under the international Charters of Freedom. European unity is indivisible.