



# Poland

## A MODERN HISTORY

ANITA PRAŻMOWSKA

I.B. TAURIS

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*I dedicate this book to my daughter Miriam who has been my  
companion and a constant source of happiness.*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AK	Armia Krajowa – Home Army
AL	Armia Ludowa – People’s Army
AWS	Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność – Solidarity Electoral Platform
BBWR	Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem – Non-Party Block for Co-operation with the Government
BCh	Bataliony Chłopskie – Peasant Battalions
COP	Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy – Central Industrial Zone
GG	<i>Generalgouvernement</i>
GL	Gwardia Ludowa – People’s Guard
KNP	Komitet Narodowy Polski – Polish National Committee
KOR	Komitet Obrony Robotników – Workers’ Defence Committee
KPN	Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej – Confederation of Independent Poland
KPP	Komunistyczna Partia Polski – Communist Party of Poland
KPRP	Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski – Communist Workers’ Party of Poland
KRN	Krajowa Rada Narodowa – Homeland National Council
LRP	Liga Rodzin Polskich – The League of Polish Families
MW	Młodzież Wszechpolska – All Poland Youth
ND	Narodowa Demokracja – National Democrats (also known as Endecja)
NKN	Naczelny Komitet Narodowy – Supreme National Council
NSZ	Narodowe Siły Zbrojne – National Armed Units
PKWN	Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego – Polish Committee of National Liberation
PO	Platforma Obywatelska – Citizens’ Platform
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – Law and Justice
PSL	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – Polish Peasant Alliance



PPR	Polska Partia Robotnicza – Polish Workers’ Party
PPS	Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – Polish Socialist Party
PPS	Frakcja Rewolucyjna
PPS	Revolutionary Fraction
PPS	Lewica
PPS	Left Wing.
PZL	Polski Związek Ludowy – Polish Peasant Association
PZPR	Zjednoczona Polska Partia Robotnicza – United Polish Workers’ Party
RPPS	Robotnicza Partia Polskich Socialistów – Workers’ Party of Polish Socialists
SD	Stronnictwo Demokratyczne – Democratic Alliance
SDKP	Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego – Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom
SDKPiL	Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy – Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania
SdRP	Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej – Social Democracy of the Polish Republic
SL	Stronnictwo Ludowe – Peasant Alliance
SLD	Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – Democratic Left Alliance
SN	Stronnictwo Narodowe – National Front
TRJN	Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej – Provisional Government of National Unity
UB	Urząd Bezpieczeństwa – Security Bureau
UD	Unia Demokratyczna – Democratic Union
UPA	Ukraińska Armia Powstańcza – Ukrainian Insurrectionist Army
WRiN	Wolność, Równość i Niepodległość – Freedom, Equality and Independence
ZPP	Związek Patriotów Polskich – Union of Polish Patriots
ZSL	Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe – United Peasant Alliance
ZWC	Związek Walki Czynnej – Union of Active Struggle

## PREFACE

The nationalist revolutions of the twentieth century have been driven by peoples' conviction of the uniqueness of their history and destiny and the contribution of that history and destiny to the international commonwealth, followed by a journey to a common destination of weak states and squalid dictatorships unique only in language, geography, and the personnel administering them, and largely unable to face the challenge of building a modern state, let alone contributing positively to international affairs.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist in January 1795. Poland re-emerged onto the European map in November 1918. The two dates span a time of great economic and political changes in Europe, which affected the Polish areas as much as they did the rest of the continent. In Western Europe, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the political power of the landed classes was destroyed. Representative governments were the norm. Economic progress was linked to industrialisation and the growth of the middle class. While areas east of Germany lagged behind, the West European model of governance and economic development was the paradigm according to which Poles would find their way out of poverty and foreign domination.

Poland presents an interesting historic case of progression from a republic of the gentry and nobility to a liberal polity. The self-proclaimed leaders of the Polish nation first fought for independence. When this failed, they were forced to address the question of whether the nationalist agenda and modernisation could be pursued simultaneously. The trauma caused by the two successive failed national uprisings in 1830 and 1863 forced Polish nationalists to look beyond the restoration of the Polish Kingdom. During both, the gentry had played a prominent role in the planning and fighting which ensued. As a class, the gentry carried the consequences of the collective punishments wreaked upon the nation, after Russia re-established control over its Polish territories. The

reappraisal which followed each failure and the exodus of the insurrectionists into exile in Western Europe stimulated the debate on what exactly they had sought to achieve. The inevitable conclusion was that, in order to succeed, the uprising needed broader support among the Polish people. Confronting the partitioning powers, the insurrectionists needed the support of the urban dwellers and of the peasants. The gentry, in spite of seeing themselves as the carriers of the national identity and the epitome of everything they considered to be Polish, had failed. The debate progressed from addressing the iniquities of serfdom to considering the wider impact of industrialisation on poverty, backwardness and economic dependence. Thus, the quest for national self-determination became inextricably linked with the vision of modernity and economic progress.

By the time of the outbreak of the First World War, it was agreed that independence would result in the establishment of some form of representative government. From the French Revolution onwards, the concept of citizenship was debated within the progressive liberal communities. While the brief period of Napoleonic administration of parts of Poland had meant that reformed state and legal systems were introduced into Polish areas, the partitioning powers also determined the pace of political changes in Poland. **In areas under Austrian and Prussian control, the Poles had gained the right to representation and learned to use properly functioning legal systems to challenge state decisions.** Through contacts with West European progressive thinkers, Polish exiles had addressed the issue of Polish independence through the prism of radical and revolutionary ideas. Contacts with Russian revolutionary thinkers, likewise, injected into the debate the conviction that full participation in governance should be the aim of those fighting for Polish independence. Since Polish leaders in exile and those in areas under Austrian, German and Russian control had realised that independence could only be achieved if the international consensus between the three partitioning empires was broken, they were aware of the need to understand the European balance of power. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Polish nationalism was progressive and forward thinking, incorporating most modern concepts on the nature of liberal institutions and on citizen participation. If Poland was to emerge from the collapse of the European political consensus,

it would be governed in accordance with most up to date political models.

The quest for independence dominated and ultimately defined the debate on Poland's restoration. The nationalist revolution in Eastern and Southeastern Europe led to the subordination of debates on the political and economic models to the single most important objective, namely national self-determination. This raised questions about modernisation in accordance with the liberal model, of elected representation and free market principles. In 1918, Poland gained independence because of the collapse of the three partitioning powers, nevertheless, its borders, in particular the eastern, northern and southern, were defined through a series of conflicts with neighboring states. The narrowing down of the debate to the defence of Polish territorial gains had an impact on discussions concerning governance and economic progress. Polish nationalism, from being associated with progressive thinking became exclusive, inward-looking and ultimately provincial. During the interwar period, the debate on Polish right to independence was narrowly perceived as merely the right of Poles to make this decision, while rejecting claims made by other national groups to the same right. Thus, the policies of the newly emerged Polish state towards Ukrainian and Byelorussian desire for statehood were aggressively dismissive, seeing in those hopes a challenge to Polish interests. Polish nationalism shed its earlier association with revolutionary ideals and modernist visions. Although independent Poland ostensibly continued to be ruled in accordance with democratic principles, in reality, by the end of the 1930s, it was ruled by a regime which was no more than a military coterie. Ostensibly democratic in form, the government showed little inclination to protect the right of all citizens equally, focusing instead on a narrow nationalist agenda. In the economic sphere, state intervention and military expenditure remained high. The restriction of citizens' rights and democratic representation was repeatedly justified by the need to defend national interests.

After the Second World War, the communist regime offered a different model of modernisation. Industrialisation, which was to be implemented at a rapid pace, was paralleled by attempts to increase agricultural production through land consolidation and

introduction of technology. Communist social policies likewise aimed at the transformation of backward rural communities into a modern and urban society. Communism provided access to education and employment. But the development of any forms of civil associations was held back. The national assembly's authority was nominal, as the real authority rested entirely with the Communist Party. The paradox of the period of communist rule was its program of rapid modernisation without citizens' participation in governance. The communists were not averse to using nationalist slogans to extend their popular appeal. The party, while unflinching in its determination to maintain its grip on all state functions, maintained that the national interest was of paramount importance.

The fall of communism in Poland and the economic and political transformation which followed, once more opened the debate on the importance of the national interests in the process of democratisation. Post-communist parties were quick to learn that, while they all wanted to see Poland establish closer trading and political links with West European states, their own appeal to the electorate would be strengthened if they could present themselves as staunch defenders of Polish interests. This explains the need to demonise international finance and to exaggerate the impact of communism and foreign ideas on Polish life. Although their commitment to democracy has never been in doubt, the parties which emerged after the fall of communism have faced the dilemma of creating their own identity. Whereas nationalism proved to be a winning slogan, modernisation and progress towards closer integration into Europe have not been easy to present as synonymous with furthering Polish objectives. **The contradictions between nationalism and modernity in Poland remain unresolved.**

# INTRODUCTION

When the First World War came to an end, the map of Eastern and Southeastern Europe was transformed. New states emerged, where they had not existed before the war. While some were new entities, others had historic links with kingdoms that had been earlier absorbed into what had been the Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian Empires. The common feature about all the new states was their national leaders' claim to represent the will of a given national group and with that the right of that group to govern itself. The peace treaties, negotiated and signed during the two years after the cessation of hostilities, confirmed the victorious powers' approval to the break-up of the three European and the Ottoman empires. The assertion that the redrawing of the map of Eastern and South-eastern Europe was the result of these peace treaties is historically incorrect. The emergence of new states was the result of the military collapse of the empires, the loosening of their administrative and political control over areas inhabited by national groups with a strong sense of identity and, finally, the growth of national self-awareness. The peace treaties, most notably the Versailles Treaty of 28 June 1919, reflected in most cases pragmatic acceptance by the British, French and US governments of what had already happened, namely the collapse of the European empires and the emergence of states based on the claims of vocal national groups to independence and the right to self-determination.<sup>1</sup>

Of the Successor States, as they came to be collectively referred to, Poland was the best known. The Polish question had been the subject of international agreements and disagreements in equal measure. It had also attracted the attention of prominent thinkers and campaigners. The destruction of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the eighteenth century came to be perceived as an international injustice.<sup>2</sup> The Poles fought hard to regain independence through national uprisings and by extensive lobbying in European capitals. During the course of the nineteenth century,

the growth of nationalist ideologies made it increasingly difficult for European powers to deny that the Poles had a right to independence. Nevertheless, it was only the military defeat of the powers, which had earlier occupied Polish territories, that made it possible for an independent Polish state to emerge after the war.

To the Polish elites, whose successive generations had through the nineteenth century fought for independence and, when that proved impossible, sought to not merely retain but also to develop Polish language, culture and a distinct identity while under foreign control, the emergence of an independent Polish state appeared to be more than a culmination of their hopes and aspirations. Critically, that emergence was perceived to be a reversal of a great historic injustice. During the second half of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth, progressive thinkers in Europe viewed the Polish question as no less than a touchstone of European morality. The Poles' unwillingness to accept foreign tutelage and the brutality and arbitrariness of the partitioning powers' policies, in particular after the 1863 insurrection, attracted widespread international support and admiration, making it possible for the Polish question to become not merely an internal matter between the three partitioning powers, but an international cause.

Thus, the restoration of the Polish state onto the map of Europe appeared to be a just act ending the war. That single act stands out from among the many decisions made at the end of the war. For the Poles it marked a new era – one in which they had not only to assume responsibility for their own fate but so, in effect, build the foundations of a new state.

The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth had been a multinational and multireligious state in which the concept of citizenship was confined to those of noble rank. Wealthy burghers and traders had no such status. The peasants and the urban poor had at best only an awareness of their belonging to a region, or religious group, rarely, if at all, perceiving themselves to share a common heritage or political objectives with the nobility. The main power struggle within the early modern period was between the nobility and the crown. It was then that the nobility developed a sense of Polish national awareness defined by language and culture, though not by religion.<sup>3</sup> After the partitions, attempts to re-establish the power of

the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and then to shake off foreign tutelage were led by the nobility, with little reference to other social groups or their needs. This situation changed when successive uprisings failed. During the latter part of the nineteenth and the opening years of the twentieth centuries, wider sections of the community were affected by and involved in the debate on independence. The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to be a model for a future state. New concepts of statehood and of citizen participation were debated. The insurrectionist tradition was gradually replaced with a willingness of the wider sections of the community, in particular the male community, to shoulder the responsibility for making pragmatic and difficult decisions to respect and work within the political framework of a state. This, in turn, called for agreements on patterns of economic development and on foreign relations. During the century of foreign tutelage, opposition to the occupation powers had been elevated to being the sole most important indicator of commitment to Polish nationalism. Nevertheless, debates on independence called for an economic vision and political models for the future and, more importantly, for realism. The clash between the strength of nationalist sentiments and the desire to build solid foundations for the evolution of a modern state was inevitable. For Polish thinkers the real test would be that of whether it would be possible to move on from a stance characterised by a negative attitude towards state institutions to that of modern citizenship, in which democracy bestowed on all the right to participate in decision making, but conversely, also demanded allegiances to the state.<sup>4</sup>

The political institutions of the restored Polish state were modelled on democratic principles, which assumed the full participation of citizens of the state in the process of governance. The Poles had to adapt to the new situation, in the first place by accepting that they were no longer subjects of foreign states but citizens within their own state. In the second place, the now citizens of a Polish Republic, had to find a common political language. The state, which emerged from the military conflagration of the First World War, was not only independent, but, more importantly, it was modern. It was administered on the basis of up to date political ideas and encapsulating contemporary concepts of a relationship between the



state and its citizens. The issue of the resurrected Polish state had been the subject of extensive soul-searching which went back to the failed uprisings. Each unsuccessful attempt to throw off foreign occupation invariably led to debates on what had been the cause of disunity, military failure and its inevitability on the way forward. In identifying what had been the reasons for these disasters, questions were raised about the relationship between the fight for independence and social reforms. Thus, even before independent Poland appeared on the map of Europe, generations of Poles had debated, discussed and mulled over the question of just what type of Polish state this would be.<sup>5</sup>

The period between 3 January 1795, when the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist, and 11 November 1918, the accepted Independence Day, was a time when Polish national awareness developed and was tested in adversity. The complexities of that period moulded the characteristic of Polish nationalism.

The destruction of the Commonwealth was in the first place made possible because of Russian, Austrian and Prussian cooperation throughout the eighteenth century. Henceforth, the fate of areas inhabited by Poles was determined by the extent of unity between the three. Thus, the European balance of power had from the outset an impact on the Polish question and, along with that, was naturally a critical issue in Poland's restoration. This was a consideration, which leaders of successive Polish insurrections fully grasped and tried to exploit. While Austrian, German and Russian rulers always weighted carefully the impact of disunity between them on the Polish question, so conversely the Poles tried to exploit differences between the three and between each of the empires and the other European powers to gain support for an independent Poland. Thus, the fate of the Commonwealth and the issue of its restoration were always very closely connected to the European balance of power, either raising hopes for independence or dashing them, when disunity between the partitioning powers proved short-lived. French, British and Turkish wishes to weaken the three partitioning powers were never strong enough to undermine the empires' hold on their Polish lands. Nonetheless, the other European powers' interest in constraining the partitioning empires always held out the prospect of some support for the Poles. Polish political exiles were

a widely observed phenomenon in nineteenth-century Europe, either fleeing persecution in their own lands, or seeking to participate in wars against Poland's enemies. Thus, the Polish question remained in the public eye, attracting compassion, anxiety or support, according to the circumstances. The Poles, likewise, came to appreciate the relevance of the European balance of power to their own cause. At the same time, the exile communities of Poles were exposed to new political ideas and frequently were accidental and, sometimes, intentional participants in revolutionary outbreaks during the turbulent years of the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus, all debates on the subject of the restoration of Poland were invariably linked to an understanding of how the new political ideas generated by the European revolutions would undermine the ruling elites, destroy the reactionary consensus and through that perhaps lead to wars against the three powers which had partitioned Poland. Poland's independence could not be secured without destroying the European balance of power. But at the same time, as leaders of the successive insurrections came to understand, no attempt to overthrow foreign domination would be successful, without the fuller participation of the Polish community in that quest for independence. Thus, the debate moved from advocating national insurrections led by the gentry and national elites, to the realisation that social, political and economic reforms were necessary to build national unity. Thus, radical reforms came to be seen as an integral element of the debate of independence.

### **THE PARTITION OF THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH**

Stanisław August Poniatowski, the last king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was forced to relinquish the throne in 1795. Since 1572, when Zygmunt II August (1548–1572) of the Jagiellonian line died, the nobility of the Commonwealth appropriated the right to choose the new king. Henceforth, each successive king was elected at a gathering of the nobility. These gatherings became events at which international princes, neighbouring monarchs and what would nowadays be described as lobby groups bid for the support

of the nobility, the wealthy magnates and the lesser gentry. Inevitably, with each successive election the power of the nobility was increased, while the role of the crown, and through that of the state, was diminished. This in itself did not have an adverse impact on the internal life of the Commonwealth, for the gentry, through provincial assemblies, took a direct part in local affairs. Furthermore, elected monarchs were constrained in their desire to employ the resources and the armies of the Polish-Commonwealth in order to pursue dynastic ambitions elsewhere, as proved to be the case during the rule of the Vasas, Sigismund III (1587–1632) and Władysław IV (1632–1648). Both, though elected kings, refused to relinquish their claims to the throne of Sweden and involved the Commonwealth in extensive military conflicts in pursuit of objectives in Scandinavia. Subsequently, the Saxon August II (1697–1733) and his successor August III (1733–1763) embroiled the Polish-Lithuanian-Commonwealth in extended wars against Sweden, which led to political dependence on Russia. During these years the gentry fought against the exchequer being depleted in pursuit of foreign ambitions and the deployment of the army in wars that had little to do with the Commonwealth's interests. In the process, powerful magnates pursued their own interests. Internal conflicts thus divided the magnates from the gentry, and the nobility as a social group from the Crown.

During the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century, the Commonwealth was involved in a number of economically and militarily disastrous wars. In 1654, Russia invaded the Ukraine and Lithuania. This emboldened the Swedish king to march on Poland and to destroy the Polish elected Vasa king's claim to the Swedish throne. The main battles between Russia and Sweden were fought on Poland's territories. The Commonwealth survived that crisis. Nevertheless, the regional balance of power was shifting. In the meantime, a Cossack uprising in the Ukraine ravaged whole swathes of Southeastern parts of the Commonwealth. In 1683 the Turkish threat to Western Europe was forestalled by Jan III Sobieski's (1673–1696) defeat of the Turks outside Vienna. The Poles, whose role in that campaign had been of crucial importance, secured little benefit from it. The Commonwealth was increasingly becoming dependent on Russia. In 1698 August II, the Saxon king of Poland,

resumed war with Sweden, this time in alliance with Russia and Denmark. Swedish military victories led to the pillaging of large parts of the Commonwealth. It was never to recover its status and political power, while the neighbouring states did. Russia, in particular, benefited during the Northern Wars, increasingly interfering in the Commonwealth's internal affairs.<sup>6</sup> During the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, the two western neighbours, Austria and Prussia, grew in power.<sup>7</sup> The culmination of that process was the dismemberment of the Commonwealth by the three neighbouring powers, Prussia, Austria and Russia.<sup>8</sup> The final chapter of the history of the Commonwealth was one in which the interests of the Russian empress came in conflict with the reforming zeal of Stanisław August Poniatowski (1764–1795), the newly elected king, hitherto her protégé.

The election of what turned out to be the last Polish king marked a final attempt by the enlightened section of the Polish nobility to reverse the Commonwealth's decline and to strengthen the state through a series of reforms.<sup>9</sup> Poniatowski had though become the king of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth because the Russian Empress Catherine needed to have in Warsaw a monarch who would not disrupt her plans for war against the Turkish Empire. What the empress would not allow her protégé to do was to reaffirm the Commonwealth's independence. This she achieved by blocking reforms and encouraging the anarchic behaviour of sections of the nobility, in particular those distrustful of attempts to limit their liberties. In her desire to keep Poland weak and dependent, she had allies in Prussia and Austria. The Prussian king, Frederick II, accepted that the Commonwealth was in the Russian sphere of influence. The Austrians had a different motive for agreeing with Russian policies in relation to Poland. They remained anxious about Turkey, and therefore supported Catherine's plans for war with the Ottomans.<sup>10</sup>

The Polish and Lithuanian magnates and the gentry were in any case not united. Some supported Poniatowski's reforms. Others saw in his efforts a threat to their rights and, as a result, were willing to support Russian policies, which ostensibly aimed at supporting their freedoms, but in reality were aimed at reducing the impact of the reforms. The three-power agreement signed by Prussia, Austria

and Russia in August 1772 marked the first stage of the destruction of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Over 30 per cent of the territories were taken over and incorporated into the boundaries of the neighbouring states. Poniatowski was allowed to retain the title of the King of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Although he pushed on with reforms, increasingly gaining the support of the enlightened nobility, the Commonwealth was not able to assert itself against its neighbours. In January 1793, Prussia and Russia agreed to the Second Partition of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Of no avail were earlier attempts to implement rapid and wide-ranging political changes. On 3 May 1791, taking advantage of Empress Catherine's preoccupation with the war against Turkey, reformists gathered around the king, who convened the Sejm, the assembly of nobles, to approve a new constitution. The 3 May reforms reflected the substance of the debates, which had been taking place within the intellectual community since the First Partition. Both, the ideas of the Enlightenment and events taking place in France, encouraged a questioning approach to the problems of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Hugo Kołłątaj and Stanisław Staszic, two prominent thinkers of the period, advocated the limiting of the political power of the impoverished gentry and the definition of citizenship and the rights of those citizens. At the background of their recommendations lay the realisation that the power of the state needed to be balanced by the responsible actions of citizens, who would be politically active. Manufacture and trade flourished in the major towns of the Commonwealth, leading to the growth of wealthy strata of townspeople, whose economic influence needed to be recognised. The authors of the 3 May Constitution did not go so far. They, nevertheless, hoped to limit the rights of the impoverished gentry and grant the wealthy town dwellers citizen's rights, though as yet no political power. Although the reformers were successful in gaining the Sejm's approval for the constitution, they were ultimately defeated when Russian troops attacked in May 1792. A number of leading magnates and their clients from within the lesser gentry, unwilling to approve reforms which would have reduced their much cherished privileges, sided with the Russians and condoned Russia's interference in the internal affairs of the Commonwealth. The 3 May Constitution was henceforth

seen as a missed opportunity, nevertheless, one marking a stage in the great debates on the role of the state and the concept of citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

Modern European history has been moulded by the ideas of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. Events in France had an immediate and major impact on political developments of the time. The year 1789 marked the end of the old order in France but, by implication, also the beginning of a new one in which the concept of a citizen replaced that of a subject. Philosophers and political thinkers put forward a new concept of authority, one that was the expression of the will of the people and that challenged political rights and privileges, which until then depended on birth and inheritance. The French Constitution, which defined citizens' right to participate in state decision making, also suggested that there was a political entity defined as the nation. As old institutions were abolished, so the declaration of the rights of individuals suggested that men had not only a say in state matters, but that they had civil rights which were inalienable. In the case of Eastern Europe and in particular in the Polish case, the impact of ideas emanating from France was distinct due to the fact that the Commonwealth was experiencing the trauma caused by the first two partitions. Thus, while the concept of the republic of the nobles was being challenged, constitutional and nationalist ideas generated in equal measure by the French Revolution and the growing power of the middle classes and townspeople, came to be seen as integral elements of the debate on the subject of reforms which would save Poland. The nobility could no longer claim, without fear of contradiction, to be the real representatives of the Polish nation.<sup>12</sup>

Anticipating that the Russians would complete the destruction of the Commonwealth with a final partition, Polish political leaders in exile planned an uprising. On 25 May 1794, Tadeusz Kościuszko led the insurrection, which started in Kraków but quickly spread to other parts of the Commonwealth. The insurrectionists faced a critical dilemma. On the one hand, they needed the support of the gentry; on the other, for the uprising to be successful, it had to involve wider sections of the community, notably the serfs and townspeople. Many, affected by the egalitarian ideals of the French

Revolution, believed that the military campaign against the combined Russian and Prussian forces had to be a national one. From the outset the serfs were active in supporting Kościuszko's insurrection, which in turn led him to call for the abolishment of serfdom. During fighting in Warsaw, poor sections of the town population were fully active in defending the city. As the leadership of the uprising mobilised and came to depend on the support of the serfs and the townspeople, demands for the abolishment of serfdom and for the granting of political rights to the townspeople inevitably followed. Nevertheless, it was the quest for freedom and the rapid growth of nationalism that became the signal feature of political developments in Polish areas. The partitioning powers recognised that Polish nationalism had the capacity to become a revolutionary force, which could impact on the whole region. Thus they were brought together not merely by the desire to suppress Polish attempts to regain independence, but more so, by a realisation that Polish nationalism, increasingly tainted by romantic and revolutionary ideals had to be suppressed in principle, lest it generate similar sentiments among their subjects. **The insurrection failed and on 3 January 1795 the Third Partition spelled the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.** Henceforth, all debates concerning the return of Poland to the map of Europe would inevitably raise the question of the form in which Poland was to be restored. It was doubtful that the borders of the pre-1772 Commonwealth could be secured. Critically, at a time when the political and economic life of Europe was rapidly changing, all debates on the future of Poland raised inevitable questions as to its future political institutions.<sup>13</sup>

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, which affected Europe as a whole, led to the dissemination of the ideals of the French Revolution. **The fact that France was until 1815 waging wars against the three partitioning powers led many Poles to hope that, with France's military victory, an independent Poland would be restored.** Reformers, critics of the political chaos which made the partitions possible, and nationalists, whose emotions found an echo in the principles carried forth by the French armies, all looked to France for deliverance and for political models. To the Poles the Napoleonic Wars appeared to be a time of hope and revolutionary zeal. Polish

exiles in France and those in the Polish lands viewed Napoleon as a potential liberator and a friend of the Polish cause.<sup>14</sup> During the French campaign in Italy, nearly 20,000 Polish exiles, formed into legions, fought with the French army. This unconditional support for Napoleon wavered slightly when he signed peace treaties with Austria and Russia in 1801, but when hostilities were resumed, the Poles in Western Europe and in Polish territories once more rallied to the French side. The Poles took up arms to participate in the forthcoming military confrontation with Russia. Napoleon turned out to be a fickle friend. When he had an upper hand against Poland's enemies, he focused on France's long-term military objectives, rather than supporting the Polish cause. As a result of the Treaty of Tilsit, signed by Napoleon and Prussia on 8 July 1807, the Duchy of Warsaw was created. It comprised most territories earlier incorporated into Prussia during the Second and Third Partitions. These were the Warsaw, Płock, Bydgoszcz, Kalisz and Poznań areas. The port city of Gdańsk was not included within the borders of the Duchy, instead becoming a Free City. The previously Prussian town of Białystok was successfully claimed by Russia. When, after a brief war with Austria, France was victorious, Austrian Galicia, including the towns of Lublin, Zamość and Kraków were added to the Duchy's territory. Napoleon's opportunistic solution of the Polish question fell short of what the Poles hoped for. Nevertheless, although a French puppet state, the Duchy was to be governed along the most up to date political and philosophical lines generated by the French Revolution. A professional and trained administration, backed by a secular educational system, represented a challenge to the power of the old nobility and the church. A legislative system based on the Napoleonic Code aimed to guarantee civil liberties and equality between the sexes. Serfdom was abolished in law. However, so long as the issue of land ownership was not fully resolved, it is doubtful that the peasants felt the benefit of the change in their legal status. Although only 30 per cent of the territories previously comprising the Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth made up the Duchy, these were nevertheless ethnically Polish regions, notably including the two old capitals, Kraków and Warsaw. Impressively, the Duchy was to be governed in accordance with the constitution, which introduced uniformity and consistency throughout the territories.



In 1812 the Franco-Russian War was resumed with disastrous consequences for Napoleon. His army was defeated and retreated from Moscow suffering heavy casualties. In April 1814 Napoleon abdicated and by the Treaty of Vienna Prussia, Austria, Russia and Britain decided the fate of post-Napoleonic Europe. For the Poles this marked the end of their hopes for the restoration of the Commonwealth. The fate of the Duchy was determined as a result of conflicts and compromises between the four main protagonists. Since Britain, Prussia and Austria were intent on blocking Russian ambitions in Europe, so Russian attempts to claim the Duchy were opposed. Prussia re-established control over Poznań, now renamed as the Duchy of Posen. Austria regained areas in Galicia, but agreed to the creation of the City Republic of Kraków. The remaining parts of what had been the Duchy came under Russian control, though they were not incorporated directly into the empire. The Kingdom of Poland, or Congress Poland, as it was better known, was an autonomous state, united with the Russian Empire by the fact that the Tsar of Russia became the King of Poland. Although it had its own assembly, in reality it was entirely dependent on Russia. Many of the reforms introduced during the Napoleonic period remained in place, most notably the Napoleonic Code. Thus Congress Poland retained its distinct national composition and, although within the Russian Empire, it was governed by progressive and modern laws.<sup>15</sup>

Having defeated Napoleon, the European powers were committed to preventing any further challenges to the established order. At the same time, there was no denying the fact that Polish nationalism was a force to be reckoned with. Prussia, Austria and Russia had therefore more in common than the desire to counteract the spread of revolutionary ideas. The Russian tsar claimed control over Congress Poland, but nevertheless was willing to grant the Poles autonomy within the empire, as well as more extensive political rights than those enjoyed by his other subjects. Prussia and Austria likewise accepted that the Poles had a claim to their own language and culture. Nevertheless, the common perception was that any attempts by the Poles to gain independence would not only be a challenge to the authoritarian regimes of the three powers, but would

most likely be motivated by revolutionary nationalism which, if not defeated, could spread to other parts of Europe. The three partitioning powers did not pursue any agreed policies towards territories inhabited by Polish communities. In each case, decisions as to whether to maintain the political institutions introduced during the Napoleonic period were determined by politicians in Vienna, Berlin or St. Petersburg, without reference to each other. Henceforth, **Polish areas incorporated into the three empires developed at a different pace**, as a result of distinct policies determined by the interests of each regime. In spite of this, the Poles increasingly saw themselves as sharing a common destiny.

Polish national leaders in the Polish areas and political exiles abroad varied in their attitudes towards the partitioning powers. Some saw advantages in cooperating with the authorities in the hope that this would lead to increased autonomy. Others viewed Poland's destiny in terms of outright independence and disagreed with efforts to reach any accommodation with the three empires. The latter refused to abandon plans for national uprisings. To succeed, the leadership of military insurrections would have to gain the support of Poles living in the three empires and not just one. As a consequence, even though each national uprising occurred because of issues specific to one area, every insurrection had affected other areas and was always planned to inspire and mobilise Polish-inhabited territories. Military plans were initially considered more important than the preparation of political programmes. While it was assumed that an uprising could be sustained by an appeal to Polish national sentiments, more specific plans for the future Polish state faced the insurrectionists with more complex dilemmas. Polish nationalism was a militant, angry and, at times, desperate quest for the right to national self-expression that focused on fighting for independence, but rarely addressed with equal force the issue of a political programme within the nation state. Only successive failures of national uprisings forced Polish communities and their leaders to assess the degree to which they were able to rally Poles to the call for independence and thus to question those leaders' claim to represent the will of the Polish people. From those reassessments came the realisation that, for any national insurrection to be

successful, its planners and leaders would have to address issues such as serfdom and the political rights of the townspeople and ultimately the working classes.

During the course of the nineteenth century several uprisings occurred in Polish territories. As each failed, the policies of the partitioning powers towards the Polish question became more repressive. The uprisings and their failure not just to overthrow foreign tutelage, but also to appeal to all sections of the Polish community, in turn, led to reflection and debates. Within the growing Polish exile communities in European capitals and in the Polish-inhabited areas, the failed national uprisings and the severity of retribution resulted in a process of national soul-searching, which touched upon political, economic and social issues.

### **THE NOVEMBER UPRISING**

**The November Uprising**, which broke out on **29 November 1830**, started in Warsaw, when a group of conspirators tried, but failed, to assassinate Grand Duke Constantine, the tsar's brother. They had hoped that events in Warsaw would lead to a national uprising. What they lacked was a clear programme as to what would happen next, once the fighting started. Many of the young conspirators had been army officers and had consciously modelled themselves on the revolutionary progressive Italian Carbonari. The Polish generals and the Sejm deputies did not agree with the insurrectionists and would have nothing to do with the young men's plans. Failure to link the call for a national uprising to reforms in the village, most notably abolition of serfdom, meant that the peasants remained distrustful. Although in Warsaw young apprentices joined in street fights with the Russian troops, tradesmen and shopkeepers were cautious. The reality was that the Polish economy had benefited from trade with the Russian Empire and economic stability tempered their willingness to support the call for independence. The Sejm's decision to declare Poland independent led to a full-scale Russian military intervention. In the confrontation with Russian troops, Polish units secured notable victories. Nevertheless, internal conflicts between

the leaders of the uprising and Russian determination meant that by May the uprising was doomed. In September Russian troops occupied Warsaw. Tsar Nicholas I abolished the constitution and the Sejm. In principle, Congress Poland continued to be administered as an independent state, though repression was increased. Polish remained the official language, nevertheless, the University of Warsaw was shut and censorship was imposed.

In their plans for an uprising, the young leaders had been inspired by revolutionary upsurges in Western Europe. The July Revolution in Paris and events in Belgium led them to believe that an uprising in Congress Poland would be followed by similar ones in France, and even possibly would embolden Prussia to take military action against Russia. This did not happen. Neither did the Poles in Austrian- and Prussian-controlled areas rise in support of their co-nationals in Russian areas. Thus, plans built on the assumption that all that was needed was an event which would act as a spark, igniting the fight for Polish independence and possibly even a Europe-wide solidarity campaign, had to be reviewed. Once in exile, the revolutionaries debated and revisited the failures and successes of the uprising. The mood of despair was accentuated by the presence of eminent poets and writers. Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, outstanding examples of the Polish Romantic literary tradition, gave expression to the sense of yearning for the lost fatherland. Frederik Chopin's piano composition, based on Polish folk music, struck a chord with the émigré community. Patriotic and romantic ideas were enhanced by contacts with mystical and Theosophical groups, so fashionable in those days. The notion that suffering and separation from the homeland were a necessary purgatory before Poland could re-emerge, took root among the exiles.

At the same time, leaders of the uprising considered why it had failed. One group, led by Prince Adam Czartoryski, gathered at the Hotel Lambert in Paris. They laid stress on the need for international support for any future uprising. The radicals formed a party known as the Democratic Society and declared themselves to be the Young Poland movement. References were made to Italian revolutionary thinkers while stating that Poland would be reconstructed only when a popular uprising took place in all the partitioning states.

It quickly became apparent that the failure of the November Uprising and the consequences of its defeat could not be easily reversed. Although plans for a new uprising were hatched and agents travelled from exile communities to Polish areas, Poles in the homeland had become more cautious and refused to heed the romantic notion of the call of the nationalist bugle. In areas under Prussian, Austrian and Russian control, the authorities had learned to exploit class hostilities between the Polish gentry and the peasants. Plans hatched in the relative safety of exile had increasingly no relevance to events evolving in Polish-inhabited regions, thus reducing the authority of the émigré organisations. In 1846, in the relatively free Republic of Kraków, a revolutionary government was established. The response of the Austrian authorities was to encourage the peasants to attack the Polish landlords. This they did in Western Galicia, an area of poverty and backwardness. When the last remnants of the insurrection were destroyed, Kraków was incorporated into Austria. Those Polish exile leaders and populist thinkers who had been convinced that a national uprising should start with a peasant revolt had to rethink their tactics.

The Europe-wide revolutionary activities of the 1848–49 period, which are generally referred to as the Spring of Nations, led the émigré leaders and Poles to hope that German and Austrian revolutionaries would support their national aspirations. As it turned out, neither considered the Polish cause so important as to include a commitment to the restoration of an independent Poland in their programme. A Polish uprising in the Poznań region was quelled with the agreement of the German liberals, while the Austrian authorities undermined attempts by the Polish landlords to base an uprising on a radical programme, by issuing a decree abolishing serfdom. The Poles were active in many of the revolutions that swept through Europe during those two years; their hopes were cruelly disappointed though. In spite of continuing attempts to exploit all international conflicts and put the Polish question on the international agenda, accommodation with the authorities became the norm in Poland. Thus, while a sense of national unity prevailed, the Poles increasingly focused on cultural expression rather than on plans for a national uprising. Poles in each of the partitioning states became part of the economic, political and social life of those

empires. Henceforth, their responses and ideas were moulded by what they experienced on a daily basis.

## THE JANUARY UPRISING

On the night of 14/15 January 1863, a new uprising broke out in Congress Poland. It had been preceded by two years of conflict between the Poles and the Russian tsarist authorities. The Russians offered compromises, while at the same time the police and Russian troops in Warsaw acted with extreme brutality against the civilian population. Although sections of the Polish nobility still believed that an accommodation could be reached with the Russian authorities, students, young officers and Warsaw artisans, calling themselves 'The Reds', assumed the initiative. The link between national liberation and political reforms was made explicit from the outset. A political programme was quickly issued in which the abolition of serfdom and emancipation of Jews, two highly contentious issues, were mentioned. At the same time, fraternal support from abroad was sought. For a year, the Poles fought a guerrilla war against Russian troops. Militarily, they had not been successful and, even though the peasant issue had been addressed, in the villages support was patchy. In European capitals liberals proclaimed their support for the Poles. The British, French and Austrian governments protested at the Russians' mistreatment of the Poles, but little was done to aid the Poles. Prussia and Russia had in the meantime signed an agreement to cooperate on the Polish issue. When the uprising collapsed, Russian retaliation was brutal. The remaining signs of Polish autonomy were destroyed. Congress Poland was now integrated into the Russian Empire and renamed Vistula Land. In due course, the use of Polish language was forbidden and the process of Russification was instigated throughout areas under Russian control. Russian became the official language and the language of instruction in schools. The Catholic Church, which was considered to be inextricably linked with the Polish national identity, was repressed. Contacts between Polish bishops and the Vatican were made difficult and church activities in society were monitored. Landowners who had either participated in or assisted the insurgents lost their

estates and thousands were sent into punitive exile in the Russian interior. Thousands of Poles fled to the West, once more forming exile communities where the trauma of the uprising, as on previous occasions, became the subject of endless debates and conflicts.

The January Uprising was the most dramatic of all Polish attempts to regain independence. Its failure led to reflection and with that a further degree of acceptance of the inevitable. If Polish identity was to be retained, then other means of defending it had to be found. The political and cultural importance of the nobility had been reduced. The gentry, who in all insurrections had been the most active section of Polish society, had been made to suffer the consequences of its actions. Through repression the Russians sought to politically destroy that group of the Polish community. At the same time as the gentry was losing its pre-eminence in the political life of areas under Russian control, changes in patterns of production and developments in agriculture were undermining the landed gentry's financial position.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a time of great economic and political transformations in Europe. These, in turn, led to the emergence of new political parties. In Polish-inhabited territories similar changes took place. In Poland, West European ideas and new ideologies fell on fertile ground. At the same time, contacts between Polish nationalists and conspiratorial organisations in the Russian Empire extended the range of debates. Due to the oppressive nature of the tsarist empire all political organisations were banned and this, in turn, led to the development of secret Anarchist and terrorist organisations with which Poles had some contact. Nevertheless, in Polish territories political debates were inextricably linked to the main issue of the fight for independence.

After 1863, Russian policies towards territories of the previous Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth became more determined. Polish presence in Lithuanian areas was reduced by displacing landowners and by forbidding them to purchase land. In their place, Russians were allowed to buy land. **The tsarist authorities' attitude towards the non-Polish communities – Lithuanian, Byelorussian and Ukrainian – was that of encouraging them to separate from Poland and to integrate into Russian culture.** At the same time a growing sense of national awareness within those communities

meant that they no longer saw their future through the prism of the Polish quest for independence. In the same way that Poles debated the issue of national self-expression, Byelorussian and Ukrainian national leaders also came to consider the possibility of establishing their own national state. Polish claims to represent the interests of those who, in the past, had been part of the Commonwealth became irrelevant and were in fact resented. The tsarist authorities viewed the Uniate Church, loyal to the Church of Rome, as a betrayal of the Orthodox Eastern faith. As a result, it was singled out for persecution and was targeted as part of a policy of reducing the Western orientation of the Ukrainian ethnic groups.

In Vistula Land the consequences of Russian policies were very complex. By a ukase of 2 March 1864 serfdom was abolished, freeing peasants from personal servitude and obligation to till the land of the landowner. This destroyed the authority of the gentry and created a free peasantry with an entitlement to land. Thus the last vestiges of feudalism ended. At the same time, encouraged by fiscal policies and the abolishment of tariff barriers between the Russian Empire and the Vistula Land, Polish areas experienced an industrial revolution. During a brief period, a rapid pace of economic change affected whole districts. Warsaw, Łódź, Piotrków, Białystok, and areas of the Dąbrowa Basin became industrial centres. Economically, Polish territories enjoyed the full benefit of having access to the protected markets of the Russian Empire. Industrialisation, in turn, led to the emergence of a working class and with that clandestine socialist organisations critical of the iniquities of the capitalist system.<sup>16</sup>

It was inevitable that the trauma caused by the January Uprising, its failure, the repressions that followed and, finally, the economic developments generated a new mood of despondence. The previously cherished Romantic and messianic ideas, which gloried suffering, death and sacrifice as part of the great national struggle and resurrection, were replaced by ideas in which economic progress and stability were viewed as indicating a constructive way forward. Economic development was considered to be a precondition for national liberation and with that came discussions of the benefits and applicability of the democratic institutional model to the Polish question. Critical of the ideas which had been part of the past



republic of the nobility, and sceptical of the likelihood of the next uprising being successful where the previous had failed, the new thinkers advocated social and economic progress. This current in Polish political thinking came to be known as **Positivism**. Several eminent writers wrote in that vein, focusing on the usefulness of education, scientific development, engineering and medicine. Bolesław Prus and Aleksander Świętochowski are good examples of authors who saw themselves as part of the Positivist trend.

Russian repressions hit the landed gentry particularly severely. Many were either stripped of their estates, sent into exile or chose to go into voluntary exile. This, in turn, increased the importance of the home environment in maintaining knowledge of the Polish language and culture. **Since Polish language, literature and culture were no longer taught at schools and could not be used in public, the duty to teach children Polish fell to the mothers.** In many educated families, usually belonging to the gentry, men were absent. They had either perished during the uprisings, or had been punished for having been directly involved in it or in supporting it. When insurrectionists left for exile in Western Europe, they rarely were accompanied by their families, thus leaving the women to manage the estates and to bring up the next generation. **The role of Polish mothers thus became critical in fostering national self-consciousness.** The myth of a Polish mother became particularly important during this period. She had a sacred responsibility to maintain Polishness and to transmit the knowledge of the language, history and culture to the next generation. This became no less than a woman's national duty. Two of the prominent authors of the period were women who closely associated with the Positivist trend in literature. Maria Konopnicka and Eliza Orzeszkowa both were critical of the gentry's preoccupation with fomenting uprisings while ignoring the social consequences of industrialisation. The social consequences of the failed uprisings, in particular on women, were discussed in literature.

At the same time, the extensive tsarist bureaucracy and army offered employment opportunities for educated Poles. Entry into the ranks of both was regulated by state examinations and progression was defined by clear rules. Whereas in daily life many Poles faced intimidation and discrimination, once they had passed state

examinations, they were assured of state employment and were able to enjoy the same benefits as did the other subjects of the Russian Empire. Thus whereas a strong sense of injustice and anger united the Polish community in Russian areas there were those who accepted the inevitable and made careers for themselves.

In Polish areas under Russian domination, political issues could only be addressed with extreme caution, if at all. In schools, authorities strove to root out any indications of national awareness and of political opposition to Russian domination. Thus, all debates on the issue relating to Poland's past independence, hopes for future sovereignty and of reforms could only be conducted in conspiratorial groups. The tsarist system was the most repressive of the European regimes. In 1905 Tsar Nicolas II was persuaded by his advisors to agree to a number of reforms, the most important of which was the decision to allow for the elections to a State Duma. The limited concessions had been preceded by a war with Japan during which the Russian Empire faced military defeat. In 1905 strikes and street fighting engulfed the industrial towns and centres of European Russia. Initially, reforms promised by the tsar suggested a willingness to build democratic institutions. Russian subjects were allowed to form parties and trade unions. In spite of initial high expectations for change, disappointment set in quickly as the tsarist regime made extensive use of emergency laws to suppress genuine freedom. This naturally had an impact on the nature of debates taking place in Polish areas, radicalising both liberal and socialist groups. The inevitable conclusion was that the tsarist system could not be reformed and would thus have to be destroyed in a forthcoming revolution.

In Polish areas incorporated into Prussia and Austria, political developments took a different course. In both, the establishment of constitutional political systems decreased the Poles' preoccupation with insurrections as the only way of redressing grievances. In both cases, Polish citizens came to enjoy the same rights as did all other citizens, as state organisations worked relatively efficiently and so did the courts. The result was that Poles became fully active in the political life of both empires. This, in turn, meant that the Poles in both became members of legally defined parties and trade unions and gained experience of parliamentary politics.

The fate of Polish territories under Prussian control was determined by two major events: the German unification and Bismarck's policies of extending and consolidating German presence in areas inhabited by Poles. These policies were applied to Pomerania, Silesia and Eastern Prussia, all areas with a high proportion of ethnic Poles. After 1815, Prussia was awarded control of the Grand Duchy of Posen, which in due course was incorporated into Germany. Prussia had supported Russia during the January Uprising and took punitive measures against attempts by Poles from areas under Prussian control, who wanted to support or join the uprising in Congress Poland. When Germany was united in 1871, the Prussian Landtag, the state assembly, made decisions relating to the Polish question. The Prussian attitude towards the Poles was clearly negative and, as a result, a policy of Germanisation was implemented, aimed at either destroying the Polish communities or integrating them fully into German life. Nevertheless the Poles, as citizens of the German state, had the right to participate in the political life of united Germany. Poles had the right to vote to the Landtag and the Reichstag, which made decisions relating to matters of state. Poles sent their own representatives to both assemblies. Cooperation with German parties proved to be minimal and the nationality issue proved an obstacle to unity, even in the case of the socialist parties and trade unions.

In 1873 Chancellor Otto von Bismarck embarked on a confrontation with the Catholic Church. His aim was to break down the independence of the German states and to fuse them more closely. He perceived the Catholic Church to be an obstacle in that process. In Prussia, Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, as it came to be known, had the dual role of reorganisation and of destroying the Catholic Church, which was seen as having a particularly strong bond with the Polish community. From 1872 onwards, Polish language teaching was finally restricted, resulting in the closing of all Polish schools. German became the language of instruction in all elementary schools. By 1876 the same policies were implemented in secondary schools. In 1886, Bismarck established a very generously funded Colonisation Commission. The aim was to buy up land from Polish landlords and to enable German colonists to settle in

the eastern regions. This was done through the use of existing laws and by granting subsidies to enable colonists to buy land. While the Polish communities were affected by the closure of schools and discrimination, the well-functioning legal system allowed them to fight back. This they did by raising funds to prevent land buyouts and even establishing a Land Bank and the Bank of the Association of Workers' Co-operatives, both highly respected financial institutions. The formation of peasant cooperatives and associations of Polish landowners reduced the impact of the Prussian attempts to economically undermine the Polish community.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Polish areas incorporated into the German state developed a distinctly different community response to attempts at destroying Polish national self-awareness from that in the Russian Empire. The Poles fought back by making full use of the Landtag and the Reichstag to voice grievances. Recourse to courts was frequently a successful way of opposing discriminatory policies. However much the Poles felt themselves to be persecuted, they, nevertheless, came to trust democratic institutions and to work within the legal framework.

Austrian responses to the Polish question were determined by the empire's weakening position in Europe, military defeats and, finally, by rivalry with Prussia, which resulted in the creation of a Prussian-dominated united German state. When, in 1866, after military defeat in a war with Prussia the Austrian emperor decided to primarily seek an accommodation with the Hungarians, the Poles benefited from this policy. While Hungary's status within the empire was guaranteed, other national groups were given further rights as autonomous regions. Thus, while in the Russian and Prussian parts of Poland repression was increased after 1863, in Austria direct intervention in Polish-inhabited regions was relaxed. In 1867, Polish Galicia was granted autonomy within the Hapsburg Empire and in due course was allowed to have its own assembly. Austrian rule in Galicia was based on cooperation with the nobility. They, in turn, appreciated that they had a lot to gain from supporting Austrian policies. The close relationship between the Polish nobility and Austrian state was maintained by local administration being made responsible for local matters and support for schools in which Polish

remained the language of instruction. The Jagiellonian University in Kraków and the University in Lwów were reopened. Galicia and Kraków became oases of Polish national self-awareness.

Nevertheless, Polish areas under Austrian control remained economically the most backward regions of the Austrian Empire. In Congress Poland and in Poznań in Prussia, both powers destroyed the power of the nobility. Under Russian rule, the middle classes and those connected with industry and trade benefited. In Prussia, the need to counteract colonisation policies and the fact that agricultural produce commanded high prices led to the introduction of efficient farming methods. Both the landowners and peasants had an incentive to modernise. In areas under Austrian control, the situation was entirely different. These were areas little affected by industrialisation. In villages, a patchwork of dwarf holdings prevailed, in most cases insufficient to support a family. For the peasants, emigration to the USA was the only escape from poverty. For the nobility, there were few incentives to modernise their estates. The Austrian authorities allowed the nobility to retain their old privileges and monopolies and that ensured continuing stagnation in agriculture and the absence of incentives to industrialise. Politically, the Polish community was closely integrated into the life of the empire. Poles had the right to send representatives to the Austrian Reichsrat, where they were very active. Many of the Polish aristocrats so closely associated with Austria that they did not feel obliged to support specifically Polish issues in the assembly.

Repressive policies by the Russian authorities towards areas of the previous Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and the general growth of national self-awareness among all the ethnic groups in East Europe inevitably stimulated extensive debates on exactly how was Polishness defined. Whereas the initial fight was for restoration of the Commonwealth, by the middle of the nineteenth century the debate progressed beyond that aim. In the Polish case, unlike West Europe, there was no Polish state and thus the definition of Poland and of a Pole was more difficult to pin down. And still there was no doubt that Poles shared a strong sense of national awareness, defined by language, culture and a historic past. In the case of the nobility, the educated, and among the growing ranks of the middle class, this awareness of a common identity transcended the boundaries

imposed by the partitioning powers and, although never evenly, continued to develop in all Polish-inhabited areas.

After the failed January Uprising, each of the partitioning powers became more closely involved in drawing up long-term plans for areas under their control. This, accompanied by the sense of despondency which overcame Poles, led to the emergence of trends, which have been described as 'loyalism'. Loyalists were thinkers who pointed to the high human cost of the uprising and cautioned against further military action, which, if failed, could result in the physical destruction of the Polish nation. They were fearful that any further evidence of insubordination could lead to repressive measures. Loyalty was also based on a careful assessment of the international situation. Until the January Uprising, Poles generally assumed that the partition of Poland was viewed in most European states as an injustice. Their hopes that revolutionaries and liberals would be always sympathetic to the Polish cause were dashed after 1848/49, when it appeared that liberals could be every bit as nationalist as their conservative opponents. And still the hopes that with the balance of power change there would be an opportunity to reconstruct the Commonwealth lingered, only to be finally destroyed in the 1870s. Prussian victory in the war with France and the unification of Germany was followed by a relatively long period of international stability. France, a state that Poles always believed to be sympathetic to their cause, was defeated. Austria, the least oppressive of the partitioning powers, had lost out to united Germany. Polish leaders were only too well aware that Germany and Russia were united on the Polish question. Peripheral powers, such as Britain and the Ottoman Empire, no longer mattered. Britain had no interest in the Polish question, while the Ottoman Empire, which had condemned the partition of Poland and where in the past Polish refugees had been welcome, was no longer a player in European politics. The conclusion was that the defence of Polish national identity had to be achieved by accepting the inevitable and by trying to find areas of compromise with the authorities, in the hope of decreasing restrictive policies.

Loyalty was thus not always a sign of weakness, but more a reflection of pragmatism. Connected with trends which rejected insurrections were writers and intellectuals, who defined themselves

as Positivists. These were men and women who chose to focus on cultural and economic developments as a means of defending Polish identity. A strong element in their programme was a focus on establishing schools, cooperatives, self-help circles and model farming. Ideas of organic work and support for work and projects that would lay down the foundations for future national development dominated Positivist thinking. Prominent exponents of Positivist ideas were Aleksander Świętochowski, Piotr Chmielewski and Bolesław Chlebowski. Authors such as Henryk Sienkiewicz, Bolesław Prus and Eliza Orzeszkowa identified themselves as Positivists. By maintaining the teaching and use of the Polish language and by fostering a sense of having a distinct culture and religion, they believed that Polish identity would survive and would be fostered until such a moment when a Polish nation state would emerge.

Loyalists were more strident in their criticism of the nationalist culture based on the gentry and its preoccupation with insurrections. They effectively accepted that the rapid economic transformation of Polish-inhabited territories meant that the middle classes were becoming politically and economically more important. To them, economic stability and economic reforms became a priority. Within Congress areas, which during the 1880s and 1890s were being economically transformed due to Russian policies, the main exponents of loyalism were industrialists, bankers, financiers and members of the wealthy middle class community. Of those, Antoni Wrotnowski, Kazimierz Krzywicki, Włodzimierz Spasowski and Erazm Piltz were the best known. Advocates of the Loyalist theory, in particular the wealthy nobility with strong links with the tsarist administration, and new financial magnates and industrialists were more open about their conviction that Poles should accept their place in the Russian Empire, suggesting that the propertied classes should set an example to other Poles by being loyal to the governments of the partitioning powers.

In Polish areas under Prussian control, Loyalists were able to make full use of the existing democratic organisations to defend Polish interests. Thus Polish deputies to the Prussian Landtag and the Reichstag used both institutions to oppose laws limiting the rights of Poles to buy land and voted against subsidies for the

Colonisation Commission. Acceptance of the state of affairs led to the development of ideas in which the battle to maintain Polish ownership of land and the development of cooperatives and enterprises became a priority. The fight to retain and maintain a sense of Polish national identity was thus conducted through opposing German economic encroachment. The great debates on the survival of the nation without a state, which were conducted in areas of Congress Poland, did not have their equivalent in Prussian-controlled territories.

In Austrian Galicia, Loyalist tendencies were widespread. This was due to the fact that Austria had granted Galicia autonomy and the right to a local assembly. The main debates were, therefore, not focused on the issue of opposition but on the question of how to obtain and secure freedoms, which Vienna was clearly willing to grant the Poles. The dilemma was whether to support the federalist or the centralised model of the empire and which of the two would be most advantageous to the Poles. One example of Galician Loyalism occurred in 1866, when the Galician assembly forwarded to the emperor a letter promising loyalty in return for further freedoms. Far from seeing the Austrian Empire as a 'Prison of Nations', the Galician Conservatives felt that within Austria, Polish national consciousness could be cultivated and developed. After 1869 a group of young conservatives started publishing a series of pamphlets called *Stańczyk's Portfolio (Teki Stańczyka)*, in which they debated the role of the recent uprisings. This led to further debates and, most notably, to the definition of the concept of nation. Stanisław Koźmian developed the concept of a nation being not a political entity but a community of people who are bound by shared customs, language and traditions. Both groups, without condemning the January Uprising, laid less stress on the concept of a state representing the interest of a nation and accepted that several nations could coexist in one state. The effectively suggested that Polish interests would be best served if Polish territories remained within the Austrian Empire. This conclusion was no doubt caused by a growing anxiety about the process of Russification in Congress Poland and an anxiety that if Austria were to be further weakened, she might lose Galicia to Russia. The main focus of the conservatives' activities



was to develop Polish schools and sponsor cultural activities and Polish language publications. These were then easily smuggled into the Russian territories.

The passage of time also took its toll on the debates concerning Poland's fate. At the end of the century, the young generation felt that what had happened after the January Uprising was history as were the Positivist solutions. **Once more a willingness to seek inspiration from the great days of the past manifested itself. It was then that Henryk Sienkiewicz wrote his Trilogy, which harked back to past days of glory, even if not always by giving a historically accurate picture of that past.** Jan Matejko's paintings, likewise, were deeply inspirational to generations which had no personal experience of either the struggle for independence or of the immediate consequences of its failure. Arthur Grottger and Maksymilian Gierymski painted in the same nationalist vein. By the end of the nineteenth century, new ideas emerged challenging earlier attitudes and, in fact, developing more precise political objectives. These changes were not only a reaction to the increasing sterility of the debates conducted after the January Uprising, but reflected the changing social structure of the Polish population, where the working class and the peasants now increasingly sought to speak with their own voices.

The policies of the partitioning powers towards Polish territories had at times unexpected results. The destruction of Polish language teaching in areas under Prussian control and the establishment of high-quality compulsory schooling in German in no way prevented Polish children from learning Polish. Once illiteracy was abolished, learning to read in Polish was the next logical step. In Austrian Galicia, backwardness in the villages was endemic, but the Poles were able to publish Polish language books and newspapers. Censorship in Galicia was least oppressive. Thus, with the borders between the three sections of Polish-inhabited areas being porous, there was a great degree of interchange of ideas. The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries were times which could be described as those of increasing mass participation in social and political life. Moreover, Polish areas were not cut off from the rest of Europe. The development of efficient railways meant that from within Congress Poland it was possible to travel to St. Petersburg and

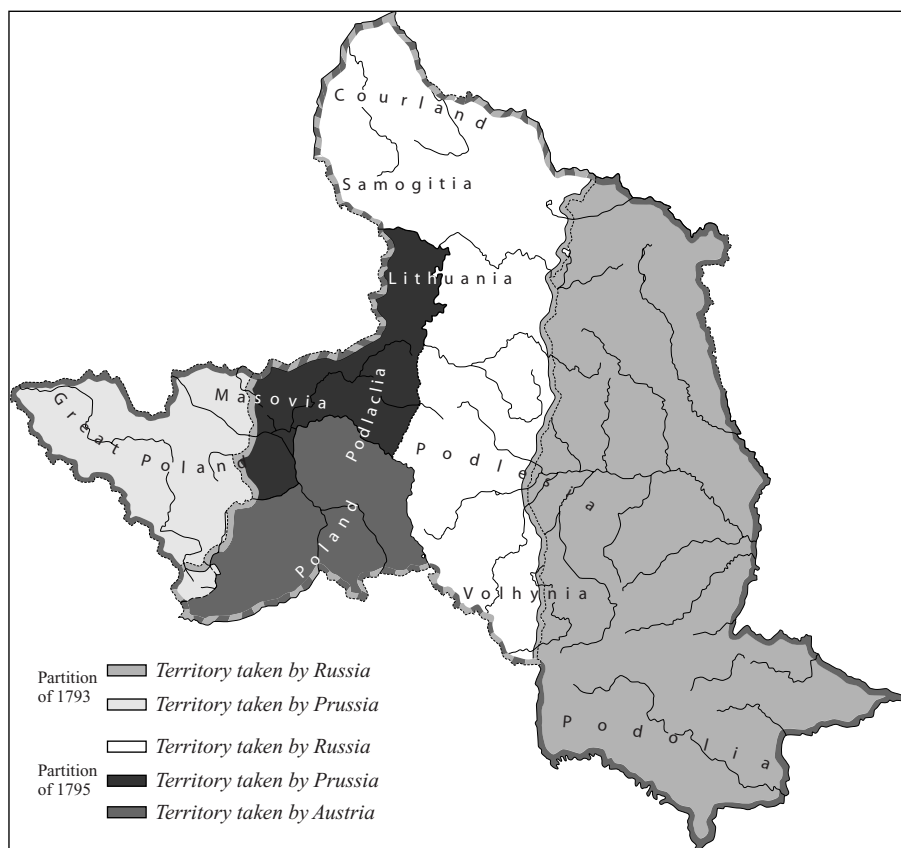
Odessa. From Kraków Poles went to Vienna and from Poznań Berlin was within easy reach. Polish territories were not just the crossroad between the West and East, these were the territories whose inhabitants were as much part of the Russian Empire as being citizens of powerful and economically advanced West European states. They were more so than ever before part of the intellectual and political debates which flourished in East and West Europe.

# 1 Poland on the Eve of the First World War

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century nationalism as a political ideology came to play an increasingly important role in Europe. In the Polish case, the growth of Polish nationalism was not constrained by the boundaries of the three partitioning empires. Poles, who were incorporated in the Russian Empire, believed themselves to be a spiritual and cultural community with Poles in the Austrian and German Empires. More importantly, Polish leaders felt they were addressing the Polish question in its entirety and not merely with reference to specific problems faced by the Poles in one of the three empires, even though they lived in areas ruled by governments of differing political character. Nevertheless, while it is possible to see how the Polish-inhabited regions developed distinct characteristics, a sense of national unity persisted and increased over time.

Polish political thinkers faced two dilemmas. The first was the dilemma of **how Poland was to regain independence**. At the same time, closely linked to that debate was the question of **the form in which Poland was to be restored**. These two issues led to the question of modernisation. The Poles' efforts to modernise the Commonwealth had failed. Henceforth, all political, social and economic decisions would be made by the three partition powers. While implementing their own modernisation programmes they aimed at integrating the Polish areas into their own territories and separating them from other Polish lands. Thus the process of modernisation,

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both economic and political, took place and was paralleled by the attempt to destroy the Polish nation. This led to profound dilemmas within the Polish communities, which came to view state activities with distrust, even if they were economically beneficial to the Poles. Critically, it led to the emergence of the perception that the nationalist question was more important than progress towards modernisation.<sup>1</sup>

If economic and social developments are considered in separation from cultural self-expression, the picture was complex at the beginning of the twentieth century. In common with other East and Southeast European areas, Polish-inhabited regions continued to be generally economically underdeveloped, with a heavy dependence on agriculture. In most cases, agriculture was desperately backward and villages were overpopulated. The most obvious way out was through emigration, mainly to North America, where the Polish communities formed a sizeable diaspora. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the USA restricted the number of immigrants from backward parts of Eastern Europe. This and the growing birth rate increased pressure in the countryside. At the end of the nineteenth century, village life was still dominated by the landowners, who controlled the local economy. In most cases the economic power of the landlords was mirrored by their retaining political control over the villages. When universal franchise was introduced, the landlord had means of ensuring that the peasants would cast their votes as instructed. This was the case in the Austrian and German areas. But the situation was far from uniform or static. An eminent historian has pointed out that at that time Poland was not an 'economic reality'.<sup>2</sup> At the turn of the century, discrepancies between the backward, neglected countryside and areas affected by industrialisation became more pronounced. The process of industrialisation was always patchy and coexisted side by side with the traditional village community economy. At the same time, due to extensive state involvement in encouraging and facilitating industrial development, primitive manufacturing methods continued while modern, up to date, usually foreign-owned industrial plants were introduced into the region. Industrialisation and the development of extensive railway systems had a big impact on Polish areas. In addition, the trade policies of the partitioning powers were of critical importance in determining the speed and pattern of development.

The Russian and German Empires formed extensive markets protected by tariff barriers. Polish areas benefited from being part of those closed economic regions.

In Pomerania and the Poznań regions, which were under Prussian control, agriculture was more advanced than in the Russian or Austrian Empires. In Berlin there was a natural desire to support this region for its high-quality agricultural production, which economically complemented the industrially advanced areas of Germany. Labour mobility was made possible by the development of a railway system and peasants were able to move from the agricultural Poznań region and seek employment in Germany or Silesia. In formulating policies in relation to Polish-inhabited areas, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck followed his predecessors who had aimed at integrating the Polish areas into the Reich. In the first place, he sought to destroy the Polish gentry and the Catholic Church – both of which he saw as carriers of dangerous liberal ideas.<sup>3</sup> The first move was to destroy the Catholic Church's control over education. Thus the process of Germanisation had two purposes.<sup>4</sup> In this policy of denationalisation and integration of the Polish community into the Reich, Bismarck sought to reduce the amount of land held by the Poles. This was done through the state acting as an agent in the process of buying land from Polish landowners and encouraging German colonisation.<sup>5</sup> The result was conflict with the Polish community while only marginally reducing the amount of land held by the Poles. An unexpected result was the development of Polish peasant cooperatives, self-help associations and local banks. Polish peasants had the incentive and means of fighting back, as their property rights were protected by the well-functioning German legal system to which they had recourse. At the same time, they were encouraged to improve production and to modernise. Savings and credit companies and agricultural circles were the by-product of the Poles' attempt to counter German policies.<sup>6</sup> In Polish parts of Prussia agriculture became advanced and productive, with villages prosperous and economically stable. At the same time Poles in the German Empire were well educated and easily assimilated into industry as a skilled workforce.

In Silesia, textile and coal mining formed the basis of the industrial takeoff. At the end of the nineteenth century, coal mining and steel production came to dominate Upper Silesia, which became

one of the most industrially advanced regions in Europe. In Silesia, colonisation and industrialisation led to changes in the population structure. The Polish presence was visible in agricultural areas and in the Katowice coal-mining region. Most industrial production was financed by either German or foreign capital. Most managerial and skilled posts were held by Germans, which from the outset caused ethnic tensions.<sup>7</sup>

The situation in the Polish areas which had been incorporated into the Austrian Empire was very different. In 1860 Polish Galicia was granted autonomy, and although an assembly was constituted to administer the region, it was not until 1865 that the Austrians allowed the Poles to assume full responsibility for local issues. After years of neglect, Agendor Gołuchowski, the imperial governor, implemented policies aimed at, in the first place, reforming the educational system and improving the infrastructure. Although at the turn of the century the provision of elementary education was considerably better than in areas under Russian control, shortage of funds and conflicts among Polish conservatives, who dominated the Galician Sejm and administration, meant that the region continued to be backward. The issue of education had exercised the minds of the conservative landowners, who were unhappy at the prospect of the peasants having access to education, which would provide them with knowledge beyond the basic literacy levels. Conflicts between the landowners and the peasants continued into the twentieth century. At the same time, the economic situation was difficult. Agriculture suffered from years of neglect. In villages poverty was endemic, as was illiteracy. In some areas industry made its mark, but in most cases the local population benefited little from new economic activities in the region.<sup>8</sup> Oil exploration, dominated by foreign capital, was a good example of the way industrial activities bypassed the region. In Austrian Polish areas, small-scale and light industries usually meant food processing. Sugar beet production constituted some agricultural progress. As a direct result, sugar refining developed in the Ukrainian regions.

Even on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War, politics in the Galician Sejm were dominated by groups which firmly believed that the Poles had a lot to benefit from loyally supporting the empire. The main issue of debate was whether to seek a

larger degree of autonomy within the Austrian Empire and not the quest for independence. By then they were united in supporting educational reforms. Since most of the politicians came from landed backgrounds, they did not feel comfortable supporting industrial developments and distrusted those calling for investment, which would encourage the transformation of the local economy.<sup>9</sup>

In Austrian Poland the ethnic composition of the community was very diverse. This was particularly the case in Eastern Galicia, where the Ukrainian population increasingly resented the Poles' domination of local political life and the economy. In addition, 11.5 per cent of the inhabitants of the regions were Jewish. Members of the Jewish communities, unconstrained by discriminatory laws, tended to be fully active in all areas of the economic life of Polish Austria, varying from small-scale retail activities to banking and industrial entrepreneurship. **Before the outbreak of the First World War, up to 75 per cent of local trade was in Jewish hands.** The Jewish community, outside the cultural centre of Kraków, remained unassimilated.<sup>10</sup>

Within areas under Russian control the economic situation was entirely different. The abolishment of serfdom in 1864 reduced the economic and political role of the landed gentry but stimulated the growth of village communities. In Congress Poland, the process of transforming village life was delayed in comparison with other parts of Europe, in particular West Europe. Economic development was nevertheless of great interest to successive Tsarist governments. The first stages of economic modernisation occurred during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century while serfdom was still in place. In the Polish areas, manufacture and trade were advanced in relation to the Russian areas. Customs barriers between Congress Poland and the Russian Empire had been abolished in 1856 and this meant that the Polish areas were then able to take full advantage of the vast markets offered by the empire. This led to the emergence of several important industrial zones in Congress Poland, notably the Dąbrowa Basin, the town and district of Łódź and, finally, the towns of Białystok and Warsaw. The industrial revolution in the Polish areas was made possible by the opening up of the Russian markets to goods produced in Congress Poland, which was protected by the establishment of tariffs between the Russian Empire and the



neighbouring states. The Polish regions benefited economically from the economic changes taking place in the empire. Nevertheless, Russian policy had always been to ensure that the emergence of an industrial and middle class did not pose a challenge to the autocratic Tsarist system. Thus, in addition to maintaining a strong control over economic activities, the Tsarist administration encouraged foreign investment. That way, although Congress Poland was the centre of industrial production and sent over 70 per cent of its goods to the Russian Empire, the Poles did not reap the full financial benefits of trade between the Congress areas and the Russian Empire. Politically, the system remained impervious to change until 1905 when, following defeat at Japan's hands and strikes and riots, which rocked the foundations of the regime, Tsar Nicholas II relented and agreed to political reforms.<sup>11</sup>

The Jewish community in Congress Poland was swelled by an influx of Jews from the empire. This was due to the policy of confining Jews to the Western, European parts of Russia, the so-called Pale of Settlement. The Jewish population made up 14 per cent of those living in Congress Poland. In some cases, particularly in the eastern districts, over 50 per cent of the population of a given town was Jewish. The issue of assimilation was extensively debated by Jews and non-Jews alike. In spite of Jewish life in the Russian Empire being constrained by laws which applied only to that community, Jews played an important role not merely in the economic life of the small towns, but also in trade with the Russian regions.

In spite of the different pace and character of economic changes affecting Polish territories, there were similarities. The rapid and extensive development of railway networks had a dramatic impact on all communities. In all the three cases, the partitioning powers had an interest in financing and supporting the process. Military considerations played an important role in their plans, nevertheless, it was only natural that trade, movement of goods and migration of workers to places of employment was rapidly accelerated. As the three empires financed the expansion of the railway system, they hoped to integrate the Polish areas into the empires. At the time of the outbreak of the First World War, railway lines connected Polish regions with Vienna, Berlin and St. Petersburg, though few cut across the frontiers of the three empires. The Russian railway

gauge was different from that used by the Austrians and Germans, making it impossible to run trains directly and without interruption from the East to the West. This would create problems once an independent Polish state emerged after the First World War, when Polish economists had to grapple with the fact that Poland did not have a railway system, which would serve Poland and its capital.

Before the war it was easier for Poles to travel from Warsaw to Odessa than to Berlin.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the nature of the political debates had gone beyond the debate of the role of the nobility and ways of combating village backwardness. Industrialisation and the emergence of new social groups connected with industry created new political dilemmas. Industrialisation had led to greater disparities in wealth. The political demands of those involved in manufacture and industry were increasingly different from those of the gentry and peasants. Conflicts between the workers and the industrialists led to new forms of political activism, to debates and with that to the formation of different priorities. Polish community leaders and intellectuals were only too well aware of the way industrialisation destroyed traditional societies and led to exploitation of workers and their families. In the Polish case, political debates could not address the workers' question without, at the same time, referring to the fact that there was no Polish state. Thus, the two emerging political trends – the nationalist and the socialist – were initially linked and had in effect the same roots. In each of the partition areas, the political debate and the nature of political organisations which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century continued to be defined by the character of the regime. In the German and Austrian cases, trade unions and political parties were accepted as legal organisations. The introduction of manhood suffrage meant that most working men had an awareness of how the liberal democratic system worked and how it could be used to their advantage. In the Russian Empire all forms of dissent were illegal and there was no right of free association. Only in 1906 did the Tsar allow for the formation of an elected assembly and accepted that political organisations could be formed. These factors determined the character of political movements and had an impact on the programme they put forward.

From the outset, political thinkers and Polish nationalists realised that to be successful they had to appeal to Poles living in all three partition areas. Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century as political organisations and parties emerged and became the accepted way to pursue political objectives either within the parliamentary system or in conspiracy, they not merely sought to build links between the three but they also claimed to represent the aspirations of all Polish communities. Links within the Polish territories were consolidated by the fact that activists frequently had to move from one partition area to another in order to evade arrest. This was in particular the case of politically active Poles in Congress Poland who moved to Kraków, from where they were able to maintain contact with conspirators in the Russian Empire. Polish language publications were likewise disseminated from the Austrian areas where they could be published legally and then were conveyed to regions under Russian control, where censorship was very restrictive.

The Polish communities in exile were a factor in the building of links between activists and organisations. In spite of frequently experiencing economic hardship and being the object of surveillance by the local police forces in various West European capitals where they had sought sanctuary, these men and women continued campaigning for the restoration of a free Poland. By necessity they associated with political exiles from other regimes, which frequently led to a very vibrant exchange of ideas. Thus, exile Poles were exposed to the most up to date political ideas and discussions and from these they derived intellectual stimulation to address Poland's problems which, when looked at from that perspective, were no longer unique. Nevertheless, relations between exile political leaders and those in the Polish territories were never easy. In principle, they shared the same objectives, namely the restoration of an independent Poland. To that aim they supported each other and facilitated the dissemination of new ideas and publications. But in reality relations between the exile communities and Poles were uneven. Some exiles tended to dwell on the past, rehearsing past failures and, on the basis of a limited understanding of what was happening in Polish areas, hoped to spark off another great national insurrection. Others, inspired by socialist and even anarchist ideologies which advocated a revolutionary transformation of the political life of

Europe, tried to apply them to the still industrially backward Polish territories. In Polish territories social inequalities, and the political and economic consequences of industrialisation tended to increasingly dominate the debate on the restoration of Poland.

The national democratic movement emerged from the coming together of a number of organisations, which emerged in exile and in the Polish territories during the second half of the nineteenth century. What they had in common was the rejection of the positivist acceptance of the foreign tutelage and their desire to involve all people in the fight for independence. In Warsaw, a weekly publication *Głos* (The Voice), the first copy of which was published in 1886, led the debate on the subject of an independent Polish state. Its readership was confined to intellectuals and students who came to disagree with what they thought was a preoccupation with economic advancement at the expense of the national agenda. Jan Ludwik Popławski, who with Józef Potocki established the weekly, drew a link between the rural community and the survival of Polish national identity. The peasants (in Polish 'lud', which can also mean 'the people') were extolled for their supposed organic relationship with the land and for having maintained ancient traditions and ways. In his preoccupation with the peasant community, Popławski was also criticising the emerging industrial and middle class strata for having, supposedly, abandoned a commitment to Polish nationalism. The way forward, according to the intellectuals connected with the *Głos*, was to work towards increasing people's national awareness but also to bring the peasants directly into the fight for independence.<sup>13</sup>

In Lwów, *Przegląd Społeczny* (The Social Review) voiced similar dilemmas. Its editor Bolesław Wysłouch also focused on the peasants as the true soul of the Polish nation. The Lwów thinkers shared with their counterparts in Warsaw the conviction that the community as a whole should be politically active in independent Poland. Wysłouch went further in stating that Poland should emerge as a state governed in accordance with modern democratic principles. Both groups made reference to socialist and democratic principles with which they were acquainted.<sup>14</sup>

During his exile, Zygmunt Milkowski published a brochure in 1887, which was widely disseminated in Poland. The author

suggested in it that the aim of the partitioning powers was the destruction of the Polish nation. In the circumstances, the Poles had no option but to fight back, but that battle would require careful and consistent planning. Miłkowski drew attention to the loosening of ties between the three partitioning powers, which he believed would in due course result in conflict. He therefore advocated that young people should prepare themselves for that moment when a national insurrection would result in the defeat of Poland's enemies. These ideas found a ready echo with the university and high school students in Congress areas, who bore the brunt of Russian repressive measures and Russification policies.<sup>15</sup>

In 1887 Zygmunt Balicki, a student activist who had fled Congress territories and who in exile had met Miłkowski, established a youth organisation which set out as its programme the fight for an independent Poland. An interesting feature of this initiative was a desire to bring together youth activists from the three partition areas. The *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej* (Association of Polish Youth, also known as 'Zet'), which was thus established, was committed to social and political justice. Its members were to prepare to fight for independence, but they were to be committed to combat against social and economic injustices in society.<sup>16</sup>

In 1887 a number of Polish exiles in Switzerland established the *Liga Polska (Polish League)*, an organisation whose aim was to co-ordinate the exiles' activities with those in Polish territories. By 1888 Popławski, Balicki and the leadership of the Zet combined forces with the Liga Polska. Henceforth, they would work closely together, focusing on developing a network of organisations, both in Polish territories and in exile. The organisation structure was aimed at training and preparing young people, mainly students, to assume a leadership role not only in the fight for independence but also in linking with the peasants. Great stress was put on educating the masses, developing a sense of national solidarity, and self-help and cooperative organisations.<sup>17</sup>

With time the movement became clearer in its identity, distancing itself from socialist and Marxist egalitarian principles with which it had initially agreed. In 1893, the Polish League assumed the name of the *National League*. The debate on how individual Poles could further the national cause continued and in due course the main

ideological tenets of what came to be known as national democracy were defined. By then the leading light of the movement was Roman Dmowski, a one-time Warsaw student activist.

In May 1897 Dmowski announced the formation of the National Democratic Party, which would encompass all three partition areas. It would be some time before this plan became a reality, nevertheless, this announcement recognised the growing popularity of the movement.<sup>18</sup> In 1903 Dmowski published his first major work, *The Thinking of the Modern Pole*, in which he outlined what were to later become the main themes of his ideology. His analysis of the failed uprisings led him to assert that the nobility, who had organised the national uprisings, were not the true representatives of the Polish nation. Instead, he asserted that it was the common people, the peasants and workers who had a claim to being the nation.<sup>19</sup> The key assertion made by Dmowski was that Poles constituted a nation, defined by a commonality of language, culture and heritage. Dmowski believed that nations were in conflict with each other. The specific problem faced by the Poles was that they did not have a state and that left the Polish nation particularly vulnerable, both because of conflict with Russia and Germany and also because there was a threat that the Poles would lose their own national self-awareness. The aim of the new movement was to defend the interests of the nation, which stood above those of individuals. This was to be done through involvement in youth circles, sport groups, paramilitary organisations and self-education and cooperative circles. During the following years, Dmowski was to develop his ideas further. He advocated cooperation with the Russian Empire, believing that the Poles and the Russians faced in Germany a common enemy. At the same time, Dmowski disagreed with pan-Slavic theories, fearing that the Russian nation would, given an opportunity, overwhelm the Poles. Dmowski's theories were deeply anti-Semitic, suggesting that the Jewish people were a parasite within the Polish nation, likely to destroy its vitality.<sup>20</sup>

In 1897 the national democratic programme was published first in Congress areas but was accepted by the Poles in other partition areas. In the meantime, national democrat activists concentrated on educational programmes, especially among the peasants, whom they identified as the true carriers of the national spirit. Dmowski

was not opposed to capitalism, industrialisation or modern economic developments. On the contrary, his theories addressed the need for a future Poland to be both industrialised and economically and militarily strong. He nevertheless put the well-being of the nation above the profit motives, seeing industrial conflict as a possible source of the nation's weakness. This is where Dmowski and his followers disagreed with socialists. National democrats hoped for a society in which economic conflicts would be overcome and all the nation's resources and potential would be harnessed for the common good. Interestingly, though Dmowski and his followers glorified the alleged national purity of the Polish peasant, they were adamant about the need to defend the dignity of those working in industry, particularly in order to limit exploitation.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the national democratic movement made headway only in Congress Poland, while Poles in Austria and Prussia were less inclined to support a movement that was critical of any accommodation with the partitioning powers.<sup>21</sup> In Prussia this changed when in 1902 Kaiser Wilhelm II initiated an aggressive anti-Polish policy. Further restrictions on the teaching of religion in Polish raised fears about Germanisation policies. The *Endecja*, as the national democrats were referred to, benefited from these developments, as those who had earlier advocated a conciliatory policy towards the German authorities lost ground.<sup>22</sup> In the 1903 and 1905 elections when three Polish national democrats were elected to the Prussian assembly, the party felt that it had secured modest but significant victories. During that time the *Endecja* made few inroads within the Austrian areas where the activities of the conservative, socialist and peasant parties offered the national democrats few openings.

Unlike the gradual emergence and definition of the principles of the national democratic movement, socialism was a creed with which Poles in exile and those in Polish territories were familiar. Throughout the nineteenth century relations between West European revolutionaries and exile Poles had been in most cases very good.<sup>23</sup> West European activists had condemned their own governments for being passive during the January Insurrection and gave material and organisational support to the exiles who fled from Polish territories.<sup>24</sup> Polish exiles had been active in the formation

of the First International. They were also conspicuously present in most revolutionary upsurges during the nineteenth century, from the Hungarian Revolution to the Paris Commune. Polish thinkers in exile were familiar with the teaching of Marx and Engels. Marx's condemnation of the West European governments' indifference to the fate of Poland conveyed an impression that socialists were generally in support of Polish independence. Nevertheless, Polish political émigrés, even those who were involved with the First International, considered the need to fight for an independent Poland to be a priority, more important than the quest for a socialist society. It is known that emissaries from the International travelled to Polish territories trying to build up a Polish section. This leads to suggestions that revolutionary agents introduced Marxist ideas into Polish territories from the West and students enrolled in German universities. The alternative hypothesis is that Polish students at Russian universities were drawn into underground activities, mainly the Russian conspiratorial organisation *Zemlya i Volya*, and through these contacts participated in the debates on the applicability of the Marxist doctrine to Russia, a society which still had not experienced industrialisation and was still a monarchist dictatorship. It can be accepted that Poles travelling to the West and those studying in Warsaw, Vilna, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Odessa would have been aware of the significance of the Marxist doctrine as a theory which sought to explain the rapid economic and political changes taking place in the Russian Empire.<sup>25</sup>

In 1878 a group of young Polish socialists based in Warsaw prepared a *Programme of Polish Socialists*. These were Ludwik Waryński, Kazimierz Hind, Szymon Diksztajn and Stanisław Mendelson, all one-time students and socialist activists. This was sent for comment to a group of Polish socialists in Geneva and finally published in Brussels. The *Programme*, which was based on the Communist Manifesto assumed the inevitability of class conflict, which would, ultimately, lead to a revolution, and the establishment of a socialist order. An interesting point about this first attempt at coordinating the activities of various disparate socialist organisations was that it refused to address the issue of independence for Poland. By 1880 Waryński and a number of young revolutionaries, fleeing the threat of arrest, found themselves in Geneva. Socialist refugees from



various countries were thus brought together and debated further the aims of the Polish socialist programme, which by then came to be known as the Brussels Programme.<sup>26</sup> An issue that divided socialists in Geneva was that of Poland's independence. Whereas Waryński's group believed that the socialist revolution and international solidarity should be the main objective of the Polish socialist movement, his protagonists, led by Bolesław Limanowski, whose political experience had been that of organising workers' organisations in Lwów, believed that in the first place young Polish socialists should fight for the establishment of an independent Poland with democratic institutions which would in due course be replaced by a socialist system.<sup>27</sup> Thus the two main strands, which would persist within the Polish socialist movement, manifested themselves from the outset.

In 1881 Waryński returned to Warsaw, where he sought to build up a centralised socialist movement. In 1882 a programme of the International Social-Revolutionary Party – *The Proletariat* – was announced.<sup>28</sup> The organisation lasted only until 1884, when its leaders were arrested and were either executed or sent into penal exile to Siberia. During its brief period of existence the leadership maintained contact with comrades in Geneva. The Proletariat was a section of the International, but at the same time fraternal links were established with the Russian revolutionary organisation *Narodnaya Volya*. In addition to the unresolved debate on the primacy of the national agenda in relation to the socialist programme, new issues came to divide Polish revolutionaries. Waryński believed that immediate action should be taken to challenge the authorities. Strikes were organised and links were forged with workers. The leadership of the Proletariat considered the use of terror to be a legitimate tactic in fighting the state and individuals associated with it. Some revolutionaries disagreed with this line, claiming that the Proletariat should focus on long-term plans and on building solid links with the working class.<sup>29</sup> Thus the main lines of debate, which would divide socialists in the future, were already outlined at the end of the nineteenth century.

When the Tsarist authorities destroyed the Proletariat, various smaller revolutionary socialist organisations continued to function in Congress Poland, but the issue of a centralised Polish socialist

organisation continued to preoccupy socialist thinkers. A factor which added urgency to their considerations was the economic consequences of the economic crisis of 1890–91, which resulted in strikes and mobilisation of the workers. Workers' activists and socialists in each partition felt that they had to respond to the situation. At the same time it was considered important that Poles should speak with one voice in the Second International. In January 1892, Polish socialists in the Austrian partition came together to form a Galician Social-Democratic Party, whereas in Prussia, with the encouragement of the German social democrats, Poles moved in the same direction. In November 1892, responding to news of these developments, a group of émigré socialists met in Paris to discuss the future programme of a socialist party. It then consulted with comrades in Polish territories and jointly tried to address issues, which emerged specifically in relation to questions of cooperation between Polish and Russian socialists. The result was the formation of **Polska Partia Socjalistyczna** (Polish Socialist Party – PPS) in February 1893. From the outset Polish socialists abroad and those in the areas under Russian control failed to agree on a number of contentious issues. One of the most extensively discussed issues was that of whether the fight for Polish independence should take precedence over the need to secure political concessions. Although that key question was left unresolved, it marked a stage where Polish socialists moved away from the previous internationalist line towards a tacit acceptance that national independence was a priority.<sup>30</sup> During a meeting of the PPS in Vilna, which subsequently came to be known as the party's 1st Congress, a **young activist Józef Piłsudski** was given the task of clarifying the party's relations with Russian revolutionary organisations. His conclusion, accepted by the PPS, was that the Poles should collaborate with the Russians only if support would be given to Polish claims for independence.<sup>31</sup>

The publication of what came to be known as the Paris Programme, and attempts to unite the socialist movement had the opposite effect to that intended and brought to the fore divisions. Of those, the most vocal and theoretically most rigorous was the Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom (**Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego – SDKP**), which emerged in 1894. Its key spokesmen and ideologues were **Róża Luxemburg**, Julian Marchlewski, Leon

Jogiches and Adolf Warski. PPS and SDKP differed on a number of key issues, most notably the importance of the struggle for national independence, cooperation with Russian revolutionaries and on working class solidarity. The PPS was cautious in its response to the Russian revolutionaries' desire for collaboration, putting the fight for an independent Poland at the top of the list of its objectives. SDKP, on the other hand, expressed anxiety about workers being distracted from the fight for political concessions by patriotic slogans. In its closing resolution the 1st Congress of the SDKP declared the party's main aim would be the fight for the destruction of the Tsarist system and the establishment of constitutional democracy. Polish and Russian workers were to jointly strive to those ends, as Polish independence, described as 'an utopia', was a distraction from the proletariat's main objective, which continued to be class war. The SDKP remained a minority party within Congress Poland and when the Tsarist police destroyed the party's underground organisation, the remaining members moved towards the PPS. In 1899 an attempt was made to rebuild the social democratic movement. Feliks Dzierżyński led the initiative in Warsaw. In Vilna, Mieczysław Kozłowski established a workers' organisation. In December 1899 the Warsaw and Vilna social democrats made contact with social democrats Edward Sokołowski and Piotr Suknalewicz in Lithuania. They then contacted the leadership of the SDKP, who were in exile, with a proposal to form a new organisation. When in 1900 these efforts resulted in the formation of the social democracy of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania (Socialdemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy – SDKPiL), the party claimed direct links to the Proletariat. The new party was opposed to placing the Polish national issue in the forefront of its political objectives. Instead, it emphasised the importance of building a constitutional democratic system and, ultimately, a socialist regime. The Polish question, according to the party's programme, would depend on the achievement of the first objective and, in fact, would be of lesser consequence than the fight for socialism. This was the line earlier put forward by Luxemburg in 1895, when she declared that the destruction of capitalism had to come first before the Polish aspirations of the nation could be satisfied. Although the so-called luxemburgist line was adopted by the SDKPiL, its leaders were only too well aware that by putting the

issue of Poland's independence in such terms, they risked losing the working class vote.<sup>32</sup>

Although the PPS was the best organised socialist party in Congress Poland, its influence did not extend to the German and Austrian areas. Earlier relations with the nationalist movement were ended as the socialist movement became more clearly defined, ideologically and organisationally. The main publication of the PPS was the *Robotnik* (The Worker). Periodically, the party's structure and network were depleted by arrests. Nor was it a party which was ideologically united. Within the PPS, a vocal left wing group emerged critical of a number of issues, most notably of the party's stress on the nationality issue, of its uneasy relationship with the Russian revolutionaries and of its continuing references to the reconstruction of Poland on its pre-partition borders. Nor did the issue of terrorism go away. Whereas the Second International had expelled from its ranks the anarchist movement, which favoured terror and assassinations as legitimate means of furthering the workers cause, Polish socialists, in particular those active in Congress Poland, maintained links with revolutionary and terrorist groups within the Russian Empire. The great debates on the role of the peasants and the place of industrialisation in a backward agrarian society, which formed the crux of the debates in the emerging social democratic movement in Russia, had a relevance to the dilemmas faced by Polish socialists.

The primacy of the national question affected relations between Polish and Jewish socialists. Initially, Jews had joined the PPS and the SDKPiL. PPS, in particular, was keen to attract Jews to its ranks. These were Jews who saw themselves as Poles and associated with the Polish quest for independence. In 1897 a Jewish Socialist Party, usually referred to as the Bund, was formed. This was the culmination of a process of separation of the Jewish community from the mainstream socialist movement, which had initially led to the building of the Jewish workers' organisation within Congress Poland. Pilsudski had already noted in 1893 that Russian and Lithuanian Jews were dominating the Jewish movement and through that drove a wedge between Polish and Jewish socialists.<sup>33</sup> Thus, at the turn of the century, the socialist movement faced a number of doctrinaire and organisational problems, all of which combined to weaken the movement, in spite of its apparent numerical strength.

One of the most interesting developments at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries was the emergence of the peasant movement. This section of society, usually associated with backwardness and political ignorance, came to form distinct parties, which not only fully participated in the political life of the empires but, more interestingly, formulated programmes of their own. In each of the partition areas, the peasant movement developed differently, depending on the economic situation, relations with the Polish nobility and, finally, the administrative and legislative structures. In this process two trends can thus be discerned. On the one hand philanthropists, churchmen and enlightened members of the nobility sought to educate and economically support the poor peasants through encouraging self-help organisations. On the other hand, there is evidence that at the end of the nineteenth century, peasants became adept at using courts and appeal procedures as means of redress against the landowners' greed and arbitrariness. A further factor which had an impact on the political maturing of the peasant community was the state of relations between the landed gentry and the village. In this respect, the policies of the partitioning powers towards Polish landowners and attempts to either drive a wedge between them and the peasants or to support them had an impact on the character of the developing peasant movement.<sup>34</sup>

Within Austrian Galicia conflict between the landowners and the peasants was particularly strongly defined. When Galicia was granted autonomy, this further increased the power of the nobility and instances of abuse and exploitation of the poor and backward peasants increased. Since the peasants had the right to vote for representatives to the *Reichsrat*, they came to appreciate the relevance to involvement in the political life of Galicia and Austria. During the period 1861–67, peasant deputies sat in the local assembly. At the same time, enlightened landowners and Catholic clerics independently undertook to try and raise the economic and educational standards in the Galician village. Bolesław Wysłouch and a Jesuit, Stanisław Stojalowski, were the first. They initially focused on improving levels of agriculture and combating backwardness. But they were not solely concerned with the economic situation in the village. Their actions were motivated by the conviction that the

peasants represented the spirit of the nation. They rejected the increasingly obsolete idea that the gentry were the custodians of Polish identity.<sup>35</sup> The first peasant party, the **Stronnictwo Ludowe** (Peasant Alliance – SL), was established in July 1895 in the town of Rzeszów. Its main aim was to prepare for the forthcoming elections to the local assembly. In its programme the SL went beyond campaigning for land reform. The peasant electoral committees clearly had understood the relevance of the local and central political institutions to not merely their daily life, but in resolving many of their problems in the long term. They thus made reference to the need to reform the educational and judiciary systems and to the importance of electoral reforms.<sup>36</sup>

The year 1903 marked the next stage in the development of the peasant movement. During that year the SL changed its name to the **Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe** (Polish Peasant Alliance – PSL) and announced a wider political programme.<sup>37</sup> The new programme staked the party's claim to not merely representing the interests of the poor and middle peasants, but appealed to all working people. Thus, transcending narrow community interests, it demanded that aristocratic privileges should be abolished and that all people should enjoy the same opportunities. The PSL reasoning was that through their labour, whether physical or intellectual, men gained political rights and acquired duties and obligations. While calling for the Polish territories to be accorded the same rights as were enjoyed by the Hungarians, the PSL programme clearly claimed to speak on behalf of the Polish nation. The programme was more precise in what it considered to be the nation. The true representatives of the nation were not the nobility but the 'people', in effect, the toilers. The party programme addressed a number of difficult issues, such as the place of the Jewish community in the Polish state. The PSL saw assimilation or the right to emigration as the only two solutions. The rights of other national groups were recognised as being on par with those demanded by the Poles. Although the PSL was determined to secure electoral victories in Galicia, the 1903 programme appealed to all those who considered themselves to be Polish nationals.<sup>38</sup>

During the period before the outbreak of the war, the PSL came to enjoy electoral successes both in the Galicia and in elections to Vienna. In 1907 the PSL secured 16 seats in the Vienna assembly,

while in 1911 it held 22 seats. After these victories the PSL's development as a political force stalled. This was in many ways inevitable, as parliamentary successes required the party to decide on political tactics and willingness to forge alliances. The key issue was the need for the peasant deputies to vote with other Polish deputies in the Vienna assembly. There they faced the choice of either allying themselves with the conservatives or the much more radical national democrats. It would appear that conflicts on the party's way forward rather than divisions within the peasant community led to the emergence of party factions and with that to the weakening of the party's distinct contribution in the Vienna and Galician assemblies. Though there is no denying the fact that the emergence of a peasant party not only marked a very important stage in the political maturing of that section of the community, but perhaps, even more importantly, laid the foundation of a programme in which the peasants addressed the national issue. Henceforth, the peasant party spoke boldly of being the party of the Polish people.<sup>39</sup>

Within the Prussian and Russian areas, the development of a distinct peasant movement lagged behind or was subordinated to the emergence of other political parties. In Prussian Poland this was due to the fact that Bismarck's attack on the Catholic Church and on all signs of Polish national self-expression drew the gentry and the peasants together. The landowners and the peasants were in equal measure affected by the Prussian colonisation drives and the policies of buying up land from Polish nationals. The response of the community leaders was to focus on economic development and mutual help which brought the two together, reducing the gulf between the landowners and the peasants and focusing attention on ways of reducing and fighting the state's attempts to strip Poles of their land.

In the Poznań district, Mazovia and the coastal areas including Gdańsk, no peasant party emerged. Instead peasant circles, cooperatives, self-help organisations and banks acted as focal points of rural activism, advising the peasants on improved agricultural methods, advantageous trade opportunities and ways of reducing indebtedness and through that fighting the state's attempts to force the peasants to sell their land. These were usually associated with specialist journals and self-help publications. Since Bismarck's policies amounted to a wholesale attack on Polish nationals, the response

of the community was to fight back not merely to retain the right to land but also to remain Polish and to resist the process of Germanisation.

In Congress Poland the peasant movement was late in developing because of the fact that serfdom was abolished only in 1864 and even then the Tsarist authorities had little interest in encouraging the development of an economically stable village economy. The Tsarist regime had always distrusted the Polish gentry, in particular after the two national uprisings, and tried to drive a wedge between it and the peasant community. Although the Act of Emancipation had awarded the peasants the land which they had earlier cultivated, the unresolved issue of communal rights remained a bone of contention between the peasants and the landowners. Emancipation led to the emergence of vast stretches of poor peasants' farmsteads, which were characterised by low production, overpopulation and land hunger. At the same time, the landowners had to adjust to the new reality of not being able to use serf labour. In many cases they failed to adjust, became bankrupt and had to sell their land. The peasants, rarely understanding the complexities of the Tsarist Emancipation Act, distrusted the landowners, believing that they had been cheated out of their land and denied the use of common lands. The landowners, still convinced of their leadership role in the fight against the Tsarist regime, paid little heed to the problems faced by the peasants and indeed contributed to the poverty in the village by retaining disputed lands and rights.

The only bridge between these two communities was education. Progressive sections of the landed gentry that sympathised with the peasants' plight and were anxious about the lack of educational opportunities made efforts to remedy the lack of schooling in Polish, and to that purpose they set up secret literacy groups. In the 1880s these efforts mirrored the activities of Russian revolutionaries who believed in the need to foment revolutions from within the peasant community. The *Narodnik* or Populist movement was relatively weak in Congress Poland, but it did provide one of the few ways those national leaders made contact with the peasants. In the 1890s the newly emerging socialist conspiratorial groups, in addition to analysing the consequences of the growth of a working class in Tsarist Russia, still considered the likely role of the peasants in any future revolution. Thus, while the peasant movement was late



in developing in Congress Poland, it was from the outset aimed at redressing the national divisions caused by the Russian authorities and sought to raise educational levels and national awareness.<sup>40</sup>

In March 1905 in Congress Poland, a group of agronomists and educated people espousing progressive ideas publicised a declaration announcing the formation of a peasant party, which took the name **Polski Związek Ludowy** (Polish Peasant Association – PZL). Its programme was prepared by a committee and as a result was far from coherent, nevertheless, it outlined the basic principles of the new party. In spite of assertions to the contrary, this was not a programme which had been drawn by the peasants themselves. It had more of an appearance of a call to the peasants to take action along lines sketched out by the progressive thinkers. Since the authors had strong links with the PPS and had been exposed to the great revolutionary debates on the relevance of the Marxist doctrine to a predominantly agrarian community, the programme's foundations were socialist. The peasants were to speak with their own voice and to reject the patronage of the national democrats. They were to fight for an independent Poland in which all privileges would be abolished and all would enjoy equal citizens' rights. Although it was assumed that the PZL's aim was the establishment of an elected assembly to which peasants would send their representatives, just what would be the role of the state was left unclear. Perhaps influenced by anarchist ideas, the authors of the declaration referred to self-rule and the formation of producers' cooperatives, but little was said about the relationship between citizens and the state. Until 1906, when the Tsarist regime allowed for the formation of parties and free associations, the PZL could only function as a conspiratorial organisation, always threatened by the police and limited in its ability to link up with those on whose behalf it purported to speak, namely the peasants, who continued to be a central nevertheless elusive element in the party's activities. The PZL's success never matched that of the PSL, which had a sound organisational structure and appeared to present a coherent programme.

The crisis experienced by the Russian regime during the years 1904–1906 marked a watershed in the stages which led to Poland becoming an independent state. Many Polish leaders, seeing the Russian Empire in trouble, believed this to be an opportunity to

either forward the Polish cause or to at least weaken the staunchest enemy of Polish nationalism. The international crisis and the ensuing social and political conflicts raised hopes that Poland could become an autonomous region within the Russian Empire. The possibility of Poland securing independence was also considered. These hopes, invariably, led to heated debates and with that to conflicts on just what form that state would take. The closer Poles came to realising their much cherished hope for independence, the more intense were the debates between various factions and groups which had until then continued to focus on methods of achieving independence, and had only generally discussed theoretical aspects of the future state, without considering its future structure and its ideological objectives.

The Russo-Japanese war broke out when on the night of 8/9 February 1904 the Japanese Navy attacked the Russian-held Port Arthur. By May 1905 Russia was not merely militarily defeated, she was humiliated and on the brink of internal collapse. Under pressure from his advisors who cautioned that the empire would succumb to revolutions, Tsar Nicholas II signed the Portsmouth Peace Treaty with Japan. In Polish areas of the Russian Empire, the war was seen as an opportunity to ally with Russia's enemy. The Japanese legation in Warsaw encouraged this view and two political leaders made the perilous journey to Tokyo to discuss the implications of the war on Polish hopes. Pilsudski, representing the major faction of the PPS, was convinced that the Russo-Japanese conflict was merely an opening salvo of a conflict between the imperial powers. He hoped that the USA and Britain would in due course ally themselves with Japan. He therefore assumed that the Japanese would financially support a national uprising. When in the summer of 1904 Pilsudski arrived in Tokyo, he did not find the Japanese helpful or supportive of his plans. Not only were the Japanese authorities not willing to allow the Polish leader access to Polish prisoners of war but, as it turned out, another Pole prevailed on the Japanese not to aid Pilsudski. Roman Dmowski, the leader of the national democrats, had also made his way to Tokyo and there he discouraged the Japanese from supporting Pilsudski. As Roman Dmowski himself admitted, the main purpose of his journey to Tokyo was to prevent the Japanese from supporting PPS' plans for an uprising. Pilsudski

believed that Russia stood on the brink of defeat, as the regime was facing not merely the threat of a military collapse but also of an internal revolution. Dmowski, on the other hand, was convinced that Russia was far from defeated and that an uprising in Poland would be put down with the usual ruthlessness. Thus, he concluded that the Poles should work on the assumption that the fall of the Tsarist Empire was not imminent and that only with time would it succumb to internal problems and become weak. Only then would it be possible for the Poles to negotiate an autonomous status. To the Japanese High Command, Dmowski put an argument that Poland was of use to them, as the Russian's were obliged to constantly maintain troops in Congress Poland, thus constraining Russia's ability to take action against Japan. As it turned out, Dmowski's stark realism appealed to the Japanese military leader, who decided not to support Pilsudski, and instead gave Dmowski financial support throughout the Russo-Japanese war.<sup>41</sup> Neither political leader fully took into account the extent of disaffection which the war and its consequences engendered within the Polish community. In fact, they, in common with other community and political leaders, underestimated the extent of anger caused by economic dislocation and conscription to the Tsarist army. The extent of working class political maturity and the determination of the urban dwellers to confront the Russian troops was as much a surprise to the Russians as it was to the Polish political leadership.

The first signs of resistance to the Russians emerged when the Poles refused to comply with mobilisation notices. Violent clashes with the police and Cossack units, which were usually deployed against demonstrators, continued throughout the summer of 1904. PPS was the first of the political parties to see in these an opportunity to spark a national uprising. The question was whether this small conspiratorial party could inspire the Polish community to take the critical step of moving from merely spontaneous attacks on Russian troops to a mass insurrection.<sup>42</sup> This seemed dubious, as in 1904 demonstrations were mainly caused by anti-war sentiments. On 13 November, a melee between demonstrators and the police took place on Grzybowski Square, in Warsaw, resulting in fatalities. PPS had in fact intentionally caused the conflict at a time when Catholics were leaving the nearby church. Their hope clearly was to cause a major confrontation and possibly through that trigger

an uprising. This did not happen, even though anti-war demonstrations became more violent.

In 1905 the situation changed. On the Sunday of 22 January in Petrograd, army and Cossack units attacked innocent people who, led by priests, intended to put to the Tsar a letter of supplication. The regime's overreaction, which resulted in over a thousand casualties, became the spark which ignited, first, riots and then, more carefully planned fighting against the army. The Tsar's authority was irreparably destroyed. More dangerously for the regime, major town and industrial areas were engulfed in fighting, during which armed workers combined to form strike committees, the soviets, and fought the army. Russian revolutionaries were caught unprepared by the magnitude of the strikes and fighting. What was noticeable was the degree of organisation and political maturity shown by the workers. The bloody events of 1905 brought together the revolutionary groups and the workers, and had it not been for the loyalty of the army and the Tsar's grudging willingness to make political concessions, the regime's survival would have been doubtful.

News of the Petrograd massacre travelled to Polish towns swiftly. SDKPiL, which opposed the PPS preoccupation with the nationalist question, declared its support for the Russian revolutionaries.<sup>43</sup>

PPS hesitated, not sure whether to call for a national uprising. In the circumstances, neither party determined the course of events. Strikes broke out in Warsaw factories and soon spread to other major industrial towns, most notably Łódź and Lublin. On 28 January, a successful general strike paralysed Warsaw. Unemployment and the economic depression, which had hit the urban population most heavily, was a factor in the events which unfolded in the Polish areas. This, in turn, increased instances of strikes and conflict with the police. By the spring of 1905 tension rose in the industrial town of Łódź, where the workers responded to employers' attempts to bring in new labour by staging occupation strikes. The breakthrough in the political parties' attempts to assume a leadership role in the strikes took place in spring. It has been suggested that this was not so much due to the success of their tactics but because the factory management tried to open negotiations with the workers and agreed to the appointment of factory committees.<sup>44</sup> These, in turn, attracted the attention of both the PPS and the SDKPiL, who saw them as embryonic revolutionary groups. Not merely the socialist

parties noted the workers' organisational successes. Dmowski initially condemned the PPS for fomenting strikes, accusing it of encouraging mass action while having no means of controlling. Nevertheless, the nationalist movement, fearful that the socialists were acting out of loyalty to the Russian socialist movement, tried to counter calls for strikes and demonstrations. Both movements stood to gain from the mobilisation of the disaffected workers.<sup>45</sup>

In Russian territories the regime struggled to regain control. Lack of policies and economic problems meant that the waves of strikes spread, culminating in a **General Strike in October 1905**. The initial spontaneous character of these events was visibly transformed by the growing structure of the soviets, which grew bolder in their demands and clear in their objectives. On 13 October the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies came into being signalling a determination to coordinate strikes and fighting in the streets. Tsar Nicholas II reluctantly and grudgingly bowed to his advisors' suggestions and, on 17 October, published a manifesto promising to introduce civil liberties and the establishment of an elected Duma. **A promise of increased autonomy was made to national groups**, which had been active in the strikes and street fighting throughout 1905. These concessions were followed up by brutal repression. The result was that while strikes and street manifestations continued, culminating in an uprising in Moscow in November, **workers increasingly returned to work**. By the beginning of 1906 the regime was able to re-establish its authority.

In the Congress areas, the workers rather than political parties and organisations took the lead in organising strikes. While Dmowski publicly condemned plans for a national uprising, arguing that it would be unlikely to succeed and would only result in bloodshed, the PPS and its activists met in March and debated whether the striking workers should focus on the fight for independence or on toppling the Tsarist regime, which would in due course lead to Poland gaining independence. It would seem that the workers, unswayed by these dilemmas, continued to mobilise the fight against the regime and against factory owners alike. During May 1905, a wave of strikes engulfed industrialised parts of Congress Poland. In June mass demonstrations against police and army brutality led to street fighting in what has been defined as an uprising

in Łódź. On 10 November martial law was imposed in Polish areas of the Russian Empire, which finally led to the decrease of strikes. Political parties looked back on the recent events considering what had been signs of unexpected working class political maturity. Of equal importance were reflections on their own role in the future fight for an independent Poland.

The Russo-Japanese war and the turbulent events of 1905 led the national democrats to conclude that it was time to form a party, the aim of which would be to prepare for independence. Thus, in the spring of 1905 the **Stronnictwo Demokratyczno-Narodowe** (National-Democratic Party – ND) was constituted in Warsaw. From the outset, Dmowski insisted that the party's initial aim should be **autonomy within the Tsarist Empire**. Having observed the strikes of that year, Dmowski concluded that the socialists had a bad influence on the working class and needed to be stopped. His view was that the two movements – nationalist and socialist – represented two moral stances, one a positive and engaged, while the second he equated with a lack of moral values. While not all national democrats agreed with his analysis, the party ultimately moved towards a head-on confrontation with the socialists. In order to prevent the workers from being ostensibly exploited by socialists, the party sought to build bridges with the workers, to educate them and persuade them of the **primacy of the national agenda**. At the same time nationalist workers organisations were formed and encouraged to confront socialist organisations on the streets. This led to street battles between armed sections of the nationalist and socialist organisations. Elections to the first Duma took place in the April of 1906. Russian and Polish socialists decided to boycott the elections and this gave the national democrats an opportunity to secure 25 seats. Dmowski was disqualified from standing because of a technicality, but he joined the second Duma, when that one was convened in February 1907. In spite of their numerical strength, the national democrats made no impact on decisions made concerning Polish issues. Dmowski was unwilling to seek alliances with Russian deputies and merely addressed issues relating directly to the Polish question, thus failing to forge potentially helpful alliances. Hopes that Poland would, in due course, be granted autonomy were not realised. Dmowski had in particular pinned his plans on the Duma being the starting point

of a dialogue between the loyal Polish deputies and the Tsarist regime. As the likelihood of an international conflict increased, so Dmowski defined his and his party's programme. He took the view that, were Germany and Russia to go to war, the Polish question would naturally divide them. The winner of that military conflict would nevertheless still have to address the Polish problem. Since Dmowski believed that Germany was Poland's principal enemy, he hoped that Russia would win and that would, in turn, lead to Poland benefiting from its earlier support for Russia.<sup>46</sup>

Divisions within the PPS had manifested themselves even before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war and the workers mobilisation, which took place in the industrial centres of Congress Poland. The events of 1904–5 merely accentuated internal conflicts, which primarily focused on the issue of whether the fight for independence should precede or take place parallel with the struggle to establish socialism. A group, which came to be known as the 'Elders', maintained that Polish socialists had little to gain from cooperation with Russian socialists, whom they dismissed as weak. They furthermore believed that once an independent Poland was established, then only would the struggle for socialism have a realistic chance of survival. Younger activists rejected this piecemeal approach and advocated a revolutionary struggle, both for independence and for socialism, for they believed that fraternal cooperation with Russian comrades was advisable. Referring to the Second International's call for socialist unity, they advocated cooperation with the SDKPiL.<sup>47</sup>

The extent of strikes and workers' mobilisation caught both sections of the PPS by surprise and, although they joined and fully participated in strikes and fighting which engulfed the industrial areas, it was clear that the workers had not depended on the leadership of the Socialist Party and had instead organised spontaneously. In the spring of 1905 the 'Young' section of the party took over the leadership, confidently anticipating that the strikes would lead to an empire-wide revolution which would overthrow the Tsarist regime. At the same meeting a decision was made to form a Combat Organisation within the party, which during the coming year embarked on high-profile terrorist acts, blowing up railway bridges, attacking military objects and, on 19 May 1905, attempting to assassinate the newly appointed governor of Warsaw.

By the end of 1905, socialist leaders had to accept that a revolution would not take place. Repression and economic problems reduced, in equal measure, the workers' desire to take to the streets. This did not decrease the virulence of ideological conflicts within the party and indeed the 'Elders' and the 'Young' sections continued to vie for the leadership. The former put Piłsudski in charge of the Combat Organisation, insisting that individual acts of terror still had the potential of sparking an uprising which would lead to national liberation. Leaders of the 'Young' section insisted that the party should instead build links with the masses. The IX Party Congress, which was convened in Vienna in November 1906, formalised the split between the two groups. The 'Elders' who still believed in the primacy of the fight for independence were expelled from the PPS. Refusing to accept that decision, they formed a party which took the name of PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna (PPS-Revolutionary Fraction) while the 'Young' section defined itself as PPS-Lewica (PPS-Left Wing).<sup>48</sup>

Piłsudski became the unquestioned leader of PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna. Initially, he and other leaders still maintained that acts of terror instigated by the Combat Organisation would lead to a national uprising, but by 1907 they had to admit that this was not going to happen. In the circumstances, Piłsudski started to think of a way of preparing for military action against Russia. In these plans, he took into account the international situation, which would allow the Poles to ally themselves with Russia's enemy. In their calculations, the Hapsburg Empire was likely to go to war against Russia. The logical next step was to prepare plans for military action by training riflemen who would be capable of confronting Russian units. Piłsudski increasingly removed himself from the PPS political activists and focused on military issues, in particular after the Combat Organisation collapsed due to arrests. He finally moved to Kraków, where in 1908 the Związek Walki Czynnej (Union of Active Struggle – ZWC) was formed. From 1910 the Austrian authorities allowed the ZWC and associated paramilitary organisations, the so-called riflemen clubs, to register as legal organisations. During the following years, all parties made plans along those lines, though Piłsudski's group was most successful in bringing together disparate paramilitary organisations. The main focus of the ZWC increasingly



was military action to the neglect of more precise debates on the character of the future independent state.<sup>49</sup>

When Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina in October 1908, the scene looked to be set for a conflict from which the Poles could benefit. Piłsudski's vision of the Poles making a direct military contribution which would, in turn, lead to their establishing a civilian administration, though still only in the embryonic stages of planning, looked likely to be realised.

## 2 The First World War and the Emergence of Independent Poland

When the First World War broke out, Polish leaders realised that the European crisis offered them an opportunity to present the Polish question as a matter of international significance. This was an eventuality which had been discussed extensively within the Polish communities in exile and in Polish territories, long before the crisis of 1914 broke out. Initially, it was hoped that the Poles in the three partition areas would be able to press for an increase in the rights to national self-expression. The sense of optimism was generated by the fact that, for the first time since the Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth Kingdom had ceased to exist, the three partitioning powers were at war with each other. By breaking the consensus on the Polish question, they opened the possibility of the Poles either pledging their loyalty to, or conditionally supporting, the war effort of the power which would be most receptive to Polish demands. As it turned out, the duration of the war, the course of military developments and, ultimately, the collapse of the Russian Empire, and then the defeat of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, left a political vacuum in Central Europe. By the end of the war the Poles were able to establish first a civilian authority in Warsaw and then consolidate the borders of the new state.

The war began with the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne by a Serbian terrorist. In response, Austria-Hungary attacked Serbia on 28 July 1914. Within the next few days, in accordance with existing international agreements, Russia,

France and Britain lined up against Germany and Austro-Hungary. Military activities between Russian units, on the one hand, and Austro-Hungarian and German units, on the other, were to rage over Polish-inhabited territories. The offensive was started by the Russian army, which attacked Germany Eastern Prussia. By the end of August the initiative was in German hands. On Polish territories the Russians were not to regain it again. By October the German offensive had consolidated earlier victories and German troops moved towards Warsaw. The industrial town of Łódź was occupied but Warsaw was not captured. The second Russian thrust had been in the direction of Eastern Galicia, scoring victories against the Austrian Imperial Army. German assistance was vital in minimising the scale of the Austrian defeat. General Paul von Hindenburg took command of the Eastern Front and from the spring of 1915 the German and Austrian war effort was coordinated. After a notable victory at Gorlice, German troops occupied Warsaw on 5 August. Earlier, Austria captured Lublin. By the end of that year all of Congress territories were under joint German and Austrian control. Germany nominated Warsaw as the administrative centre of occupied Polish areas, while the Austrian occupation authorities settled in Lublin. There were inevitable consequences of German military victories and of the fact that Austria had suffered at the Russian hands. While, initially, the Austrians had hoped to have the freedom to determine the fate of occupied Polish territories, their dependence of the German war effort meant that they had to accept that the German military authorities would dictate future policies on the Polish question. In reality, even though some plans were considered for post-war Poland, during the war military considerations rather than long-term political objectives were more important in determining responses to the Polish question.

Inevitably, Polish military and political leaders from the outset sought to ascertain whether the belligerent powers could be persuaded to make promises concerning the future of Poland. Since most of ethnic Polish territories had been under Russian control at the outbreak of the war, the Tsarist governments' declarations were initially scrutinised most intensely. On 14 August 1914, Grand Duke Nicholas made a proclamation to the Poles. Its contents were disappointing. For all its references to the 'resurrection of the Polish

nation and its fraternal union with all Russia', Polish leaders could find nothing in the proclamation which could give them hope that the Tsar would reward Polish loyalty with autonomy within the empire.<sup>1</sup> This was a bitter blow to those who had hoped that Polish units could be formed to fight with the Tsarist army. Pro-Russian Polish patriots in the Congress Poland territories were swayed by strong anti-German feelings, which led them to hope that a Russian defeat of Germany would rid the Polish nation of (what they considered to be) its most important foe. But, still, there was an uneasy awareness that Russia could not be counted on to support the Polish cause, while Austria – Germany's ally – had been the least oppressive of the partitioning powers. Nevertheless, and in spite of the modest content of the proclamation, Dmowski and a number of like-minded Polish deputies to the Duma maintained that it would have been unwise at this stage to demand independence for Poland, as that would have only caused irritation. To the national democrats the destruction of Germany remained a priority. If that meant biding their time until Russia achieved this end, they were willing to wait.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, a group of conservatives established a national committee in Warsaw with which Dmowski associated. Local citizens' associations were formed in order to mobilise the community and to channel its efforts towards the war effort. Reluctantly, the Russian military authorities agreed to the formation of the Puławski Legion, which fell short of Dmowski's hope of raising a Polish army of several thousand men. The Russian attitude remained that of not acknowledging Polish gestures of goodwill and support. The Tsarist regime had no intention of making concessions in return for help given during the war.

The result of Russian intransigence was that those who had initially pinned their hopes on Russia assuming a leading role among the Slavonic people were forced to reconsider their ideas. Of those, Roman Dmowski was the most prominent. Polish industrialists, financiers and those who economically benefited from links with the Russian Empire and who supported the national committee had to accept that they would not be successful. In November 1915 Dmowski left Petrograd. He first went to Switzerland and from there travelled to London and Paris. He made London his base and there he focused on making contact with British policymakers. In Western

Europe, Dmowski concentrated on lobbying the French and British governments.<sup>3</sup> He had not abandoned his original commitment to the creation of a Russian-led Slav unity of nations. What he had, nevertheless, come to realise was that the Tsar was unwilling or unable to recognise Poland's key role in Russia's fight against Germany. He therefore changed his tactics and tried to persuade Russia's two powerful allies that they should put pressure on the Tsar to address the Polish question more seriously. He certainly did not want Britain and France to distance themselves from Russia; on the contrary, he wanted the two Western governments to be more active in raising the issue, which he believed was relevant to the conduct of the war against Germany and to Europe's post-war plans.

As the German thrust proceeded East, the Russian authorities decided to remove much of the industrial capacity in Congress Poland and the Baltic areas into the interior of the empire. Workers and their families were forcefully evacuated with the plants in which they had been employed. At the same time, when evacuating territories in advance of the German offensive, the Russian military authorities destroyed everything that might have been of use to the German war effort. During the wanton destruction, which took place in May 1915, not only was the industrial infrastructure dislocated, forests and farms were burned. This precipitated a flight eastwards, as the Polish community succumbed to panic. It is believed that over 3 million Poles ended up in Russia, frequently in tragic circumstances. As German troops occupied territories of the former Polish Kingdom, the economic situation was already dire.

In the Austrian Empire at the time of the outbreak of the war, Poles hoped that the Polish question could be addressed positively. The community was united with Austria in its hatred of Russia and appreciative of the cultural and political privileges which it enjoyed within the empire. The least they hoped to achieve from the new situation was the same status that was enjoyed by Hungary. Had the Austrian war effort been successful and Austria were to extend its control over Congress Poland, this could have resulted in the reconstruction of the Polish Kingdom within the Habsburg Empire. To the discussions which were taking place within the Polish community in Galicia, an entirely new element was added when, on 6 August 1914, Piłsudski led a unit of volunteer riflemen from Kraków

towards the Austrian border with the Russian Empire, crossed it and proceeded to march towards Kielce with the aim of reaching Warsaw within three days. By marching into Congress Poland Pilsudski hoped that the Poles would flock to the riflemen's unit, which from being a cadre structure would swell into a Polish army. His assumption had been that once news spread of a Polish army heading towards Warsaw, a civilian authority would emerge there and naturally bestow on Pilsudski the rank of commander-in-chief. The key to his thinking was the calculation that he could reach Warsaw in advance of the Austrian army arriving there and before the German units entered the city. This would have led to the creation of a *fait accompli* in the form of a Polish civilian authority and through that to the Central Powers' acceptance of the emergence of a Polish state.

The reality turned out to be very different. As the riflemen marched through Polish areas, peasants remained indifferent. Townspeople were equally passive. The vision of a new national uprising, on which Pilsudski had staked his reputation, did not happen. All attempts to stir the Congress Poles to action by declaring that a Polish authority could be established in Warsaw before the Germans entered were to no avail.

Within days the enterprise proved to be a failure. Pilsudski and his men were routed by the Russian army near Kielce.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the fiasco, there were positive consequences. Polish parties in Galicia came together and agreed to speak with one voice. They formed a Supreme National Council (Naczelny Komitet Narodowy – NKN), which was to direct all political and military decisions. At the same time, the Austrian authorities agreed to the formation of Polish legions, but this time under direct Austrian military control. The riflemen's units were thus reorganised and became the 1st Brigade of the Polish Legion. Pilsudski was put in command of that brigade, and this became his power base in future negotiations with the Austrian and later the German authorities.

While the Polish military contribution to the Austrian war effort was small and because the Polish question was not important enough, the Vienna authorities would not risk upsetting the delicate balance between the various national groups. It was questionable whether Austria would invest heavily in extending its political

influence in North and Eastern Europe, at a time when the Adriatic basin and relations with oil-rich Romania were increasingly important elements in Austrian considerations. In these circumstances the Austrians, who in 1915 came to depend on German assistance in the war against Russia, were willing to allow the German military authorities to set the pace in determining both occupation policies and in making long-term plans in relation to Polish territories captured from the Tsarist Empire.

On 5 August 1915 German troops occupied Warsaw. By the end of the year Congress areas, East Prussia, Courland, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine and most of Galicia were under the administration of the Central Powers. The first decisions made by the German occupation authorities inspired Polish leaders with confidence. The university and a polytechnic institute in Warsaw were reopened. The previous policy of Russification was abandoned and the use of Polish language was permitted in schools and state organisations. While under Tsarist control Russian-appointed bureaucrats governed towns and districts, the German authorities encouraged the emergence of local authorities and appeared to be willing to work with civil organisations which the Poles had established during the war. The goodwill which these policies had generated was, nevertheless, quickly squandered when extremely harsh economic delivery quotas were imposed on the Polish areas. All resources which could be of use to the German war effort were confiscated, irrespective of the consequences that this had on the civilian population. This, in turn, made it impossible for factories and enterprises to continue production. Hunger and unemployment quickly followed German occupation. At the same time, it was generally noted that German policies towards the Polish territories went beyond utilisation for military purposes. Under the guise of maximum exploitation for the war, the military authorities were, in fact, making long-term decisions, which would have an impact on the region's economic relations with Germany after the war. By selectively destroying chosen branches of industry in Congress Poland, the occupation administration was making sure they would not compete with German industry and, furthermore, that the latter retained that monopoly once hostilities ended. Textile and steel production, in particular, were identified as likely, in the long term, to compete with German

industry and were therefore dismantled. The result of German occupation of Polish areas was heavy exploitation and wanton destruction, some of which had a lasting impact on the ecology of the area. Employment fell to 30 per cent of pre-war levels. In spite of the introduction of food rationing, hunger became widespread. In 1915 attempts were made to persuade the Poles to work in Germany and when that proved unpopular, they were conscripted. At the beginning of 1916, shortage of manpower became an important factor in German plans for the continuation of the war. This, in turn, determined decisions in relation to the Polish question.

On 5 November 1916, the German and Austrian emperors jointly issued a proclamation in which they declared their intention to establish an independent Polish state once the war was ended. Although the frontiers were to be defined later, the new state's future political system was outlined. Poland was to be a hereditary monarchy with a constitutional government. Crucially, even before the independent state became a reality, a Polish army was to be formed. Somewhat ironically, the proclamation stated:

The glorious tradition of the Polish armies of the past and the memory of the brave Polish comrades in arms in the great wars of our days shall continue to live in your own national army.<sup>5</sup>

In reality, the German High Command, having established control over Polish-inhabited territories, proceeded with their long-term plans. They did not approve of the Austrian solution for a Polish state within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, nor did they intend to return the occupied Polish areas to Russia. By insisting on the emergence of an independent Poland, the German military leaders reduced Austrian influence on the issue and, at the same time, proceeded to make plans for a weak Polish state, which would be economically and politically dependent on Germany. In the meantime, Polish manpower was to be used to fight Russia.<sup>6</sup>

The German and Austrian initiative failed in so far as the Poles heartily distrusted the German authorities and, far from flocking in numbers to the recruiting stations, hung back awaiting further developments. The German authorities realised that there was a need



to reinforce promises made earlier. Pilsudski was invited to Warsaw for talks with the German military commanders, while a Provisional Council of State of the Kingdom of Poland was put together from a number of obliging Poles. Pilsudski was given responsibility of military matters. In spite of these initiatives, the situation remained far from clear. To start with, the precise function of the Council of State remained vague, as were the Central Powers' plans on the Polish question. Sensing their lack of commitment and anxious not be compromised by collaboration with an organisation which might still turn out to be of no significance, Pilsudski maintained a secret military organisation throughout Polish areas, the role of which was to build up units and prepare for military action.<sup>7</sup>

However, by publicizing the promise to establish an independent Polish state, the Central Powers effectively opened what amounted to an international auction. All those who might benefit from the emergence of Poland, or even better, could cause the enemy discomfort by promising support for the Polish cause, entered into the bidding. Britain, France and Italy were anxious that Germany would deploy Polish units on the Western Front. But long-term political considerations also played a part in the British and French leaders' determination to put pressure on the Russian Empire to make a positive declaration on the Polish question. All three were only too well aware that Germany and Austria could, by making similar commitments to other national groups under their military control, make life very difficult for the Entente Powers during the war and also after the war. Their policies until then had been not to be drawn too closely into supporting the national aspirations of the disparate European ethnic people. Naturally, the Russian Empire had a direct interest in events taking place in Warsaw. **The first Russian response to the Central Powers' declaration of 5 November 1916 was a communiqué by the Russian prime minister stating that Polish areas would be united and would be granted autonomy within the Russian Empire.** Considered wholly unsatisfactory by most Poles and the Entente, this commitment was reiterated on 25 December 1916 by Tsar Nicolas II. This position reflected the limits of the Tsarist authorities planning for a post-war Polish state.<sup>8</sup>

These declarations, in turn, obliged Britain, France and the USA likewise to make some pronouncements on the Polish question.

Of those, undoubtedly, the one made by the President of the USA carried most weight.

Amongst all the Polish roving ambassadors – men who toured West European and American capitals, lobbying governments and raising public awareness of the Poles' desire for an independent state – none was more flamboyant than the pianist and composer Ignacy Paderewski. The son of a Pole who had been imprisoned by the Russian authorities for supporting the national cause, Paderewski was brought up in an atmosphere of deep patriotism. Before the war, he had already established a reputation as a romantic piano player. When war broke out, he, together with a number of prominent Pole residents in Switzerland, founded the Polish Victims Relief Fund. In April 1915 Paderewski went to the United States where, during a series of whistle-stop tours, he lobbied for support for the establishment of a Polish independent state at the end of the war. While it is difficult to gauge the extent of his success, he certainly attracted attention through his playing and public speaking. His wild romantic appearance and flamboyant hairstyle, which particularly attracted many women, left a lasting impression. His personality and behaviour conveyed the impression of a passionate Polish patriot, an image he was willing to use to the full. Paderewski was able to mobilise the large Polish community in the United States to lobby their representatives in the Senate and Congress. During a meeting with President Woodrow Wilson, he pressed his case for support for Polish aspirations. A number of charitable organisations were drawn into the campaign in which relief for the starving Polish people was linked to support for an independent Poland.<sup>9</sup>

The battle for American support for the Polish cause was not free from conflict. Paderewski had allied himself with Dmowski and his Polish National Committee. The aim was to gain the support of the Poles in the USA for Dmowski's interpretation of Poland's historic grievances and his vision of Poland's destiny. In the publicity materials prepared during Paderewski's tour, Germany and Austria were demonised and represented as responsible for the Polish Kingdom's tragedy. Furthermore, Paderewski propagated the idea that it was the world leaders' moral duty to reverse the injustice of the partition and to ensure that, at the end of the war, an independent Poland once more emerged. By 1917, although Paderewski's campaign led

to the forging of a temporary unity within the Polish community, few were willing to go along with Dmowski's suggestion that Russia should be considered Poland's most likely ally.<sup>10</sup>

Woodrow Wilson's views on Polish communities in the United States changed throughout his political career. In his *History of the American People*, published in 1902, he described the Poles as uncouth and lacking energy. He subsequently came to regret making these sweeping and derogatory comments, nevertheless, the Polish community never forgave him. During the course of the war, and while the United States was neutral, Wilson came under strong pressure from his friend Colonel Edward Mandell House and from the Secretary of State Robert Lansing to make a declaration on Poland. Both, and in particular House, had been deeply impressed by Paderewski, who used all his wiles and charms, and delivered a number of highly impressionistic memoranda to persuade his influential interlocutors of the need for the USA to take up Poland's cause. His efforts were crowned on 22 January 1917, when President Wilson, in the course of a speech to the Senate, stated that the emergence of an independent Poland should be a war aim of the USA.<sup>11</sup> In April 1917, the USA entered the European war. The Polish case was one of the issues that Britain and France had to address so as not to be at variance with their new and very powerful ally. On 8 January 1918, President Wilson stated in Point 13 that the creation of an independent Poland was one of the Fourteen Points defining the US war aims. This assurance, the only one within Wilson's declaration in which a national group was given a clear promise that it would be guaranteed the right to statehood, was nevertheless imprecise. For the Poles there was ground for optimism, since clearly the tactics of Dmowski and Paderewski had succeeded. But there was also reason for anxiety. No assurance was given as to when Poland would emerge and in what borders. Most obviously, Wilson referred to a Polish state which would include territories inhabited by the Poles, thus clearly making a commitment to borders based on ethnic grounds. This implied that Polish claims to Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Byelorussia territories might not be supported.

The outbreak of the February Revolution in Russia was the turning point in the war and beyond. On 12 March (in Russia, in accordance with the Julian calendar, the date was 27 February) 1917,

strikes and riots led to the collapse of Tsarist authority in Petrograd. Numerous Poles were directly involved in these events, either as soldiers conscripted into the Tsarist army, or as residents and refugees living in the capital. In common with the other national groups, the Poles tried to evaluate the implications of the Tsar's abdication and the emergence of the dual authority of the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet upon their national aspirations. While the Russian revolutionaries regarded the Polish issue as outside their main areas of concern, the Poles tried to elicit from both authorities assurances that the collapse of the autocratic system in Russia meant that the Poles now had freedom to determine their fate.

The outbreak of the war and the support that socialist parties had given to their belligerent governments spelled the end of the Second International. Nevertheless, many socialists were not happy with the failure of international cooperation and tentative efforts were made to build new links. The most important of these efforts was the meeting which took place in the Swiss town of Zimmerwald in September 1915. In exile in Switzerland, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party, made contributions to that and subsequent meetings. The Zimmerwald Conference discussed, among other subjects, the possibility of war leading to civil wars or perhaps revolutions. Although Polish, Karl Radek and Adolf Warski were part of the Bolshevik delegation, while Róża Luxemburg headed the German delegation. The questions of the primacy of the future revolution over that of national independence, and whether nationalism was evidence of state building or merely a cultural expression were central to the debates which took place within the socialist circles before the war and continued to be discussed during the war. The European socialists, who met in these precarious circumstances, discussed nationalism, and Polish participants made their contributions on this subject.

The Russian Revolution, nevertheless, created circumstances wherein these considerations became linked in a much more practical way to the question of the future course of the revolution. The Polish community in Russia had grown during the war. In addition to the Poles who had been part of the Tsarist bureaucracy, army and workforce, workers and their families were evacuated into the

interior as part of the reallocation of factories. When leaving the territories of Kingdom Poland in the face of the German offensive, political prisoners were also evacuated into Russia. They were released after the February Revolution. All this led to the emergence of a highly politicised Polish community in Russia. They were part of the workforce and had been directly involved in strikes and manifestations which overwhelmed Russia in 1917.

The more settled Polish community, scattered throughout the Russian Empire, reacted with excitement to the collapse of the hated Tsarist regime. Some still thought in terms of remaining in Russia until the situation became clearer and the war ended. In any case the German authorities tried to limit the movement of Poles into areas under their control, in particular after the February Revolution. The German authorities feared that the influx of the workers and activists who had been exposed to the revolutionary ideas would exacerbate unrest in areas now under German control. Thus, until 1918, most evacuated Poles were forced to remain in Russia, where heated debates on the future of the revolution and on the possibility of the emergence of an independent Poland continued. Democrats and socialists wanted the Russian Provisional Government to declare that Poland would be free. Left wing Poles disagreed with the idea that freedom was to be granted to the Polish people by a Russian government and proclaimed that freedom should be an expression of the will of the Polish people. Nor was it clear which of the two Petrograd authorities – the Provisional Government or the Petrograd Soviet – should make a declaration on the Polish question.

In the end, it was the Petrograd Soviet which came out with its first statement on the Polish issue by making a dignified Proclamation to the Polish Nation. In it **the Petrograd Soviet declared that the Tsarist regime had oppressed the Poles and Russians alike and that democratic Russia accepts the Poles' right to self-determination.** The proclamation ended with sincere fraternal wishes that the Poles succeed in their fight for an independent republican Poland. The Provisional Government, which had tried to avoid making any commitments about Russia's future borders, had no choice but to follow up the Soviet's proclamation with one of its own. Thus, on 28 March, Pavel Nicolayevich Milyukov, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, called for the Poles to fight against the Central Powers. His declaration

referred to the future free Polish state comprising all areas inhabited by Polish nationals. Milyukov, nevertheless, made changes to the borders of the Russian Empire dependent on the approval of the government which would be formed after free elections had taken place.<sup>12</sup>

The Poles in Russia greeted the two declarations with mixed feelings. Generally, they were welcomed. But since the precise functions of the two authorities in Petrograd remained unclear, various Polish political parties took from them what they thought were the most telling points. The national democrats viewed the Provisional Government's proclamation as indicating that a future constitutional government in Russia would accept a free and independent Poland. SDKPiL and PPS-Lewica activists naturally viewed the Soviet's Proclamation as the more important of the two. Some associated themselves with the Menshevik line in the Petrograd Soviet, while those who took a more radical line supported the Bolshevik policy of non-cooperation with the Provisional Government. Their view was that the revolution was not yet complete. The dilemma was whether, in alliance with the Western democracies, to fight for an independent Poland, or to support the revolution and, in particular, the Bolshevik line of transfer of power to the Soviet. In the latter case, the fight for Polish independence would be subordinate to the success of the revolution. Of all the revolutionary parties in Russia, it was the Bolsheviks who most consistently supported the right of national minorities to break away from Russia, believing that national groups had the right to self-determination and only then would they make a conscious commitment to revolutionary internationalism. In the meantime, the Provisional Government established a special commission to deal with the consequences of Russian control of Polish territories. SDKPiL and PPS-Lewica would have nothing to do with the commission, declaring it to represent the interests of the Russian and Polish bourgeois.<sup>13</sup>

On 17 November (25 October per the Julian calendar) 1917, the Russian Provisional Government was overthrown by a combination of armed workers, Bolshevik revolutionaries and the Red Guards – the military wing of the Petrograd Soviet. Polish revolutionaries and workers, members of the Red Guards, participated in the turbulent events. The Council of People's Commissars, which assumed

authority, as one of its first decisions, issued a Declaration of the Rights of The People of Russia. Article 2 of the Declaration supported the right of the people to self-determination, including the right to secession and the establishment of an independent state. Interestingly, Luxemburg agreed with some of the points made by the radical section of the Polish social democrats, in seeing Lenin's declaration as weakening the revolution by encouraging national groups to seek independence, rather than to stay united, in anticipation of what was believed to be the inevitable attack from the capitalist forces.

In the meantime, developments in Polish territories under German occupation took their own course. What happened there determined both the manner in which the first Polish administration emerged and the way in which the borders of the new state were finally settled. Towards the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, German policies of cooperation with the Poles appeared to be stalling. Although the Provisional Council of State met on 14 January 1917, it remained unclear as to what would be its role. Piłsudski, who initially agreed with the idea of recruiting a Polish army under German command, now demanded that plans for an army should be postponed until a Polish government was established. In reality, Berlin had come to doubt the wisdom of proposals which had been put forward by General Beseler, the German commander of occupied Polish territories. The outbreak of the Russian Revolution and the effective end of fighting reduced the need for a force to fight in the East. German reticence was increased by the realisation that troops raised in Poland would be unwilling to fight on the Western Front.<sup>14</sup> By then, the Entente Powers were showing themselves as adept as the German authorities had been in encouraging the Poles to believe that their interests would be best served by agreements with Britain and France. But if the German authorities had come to doubt the wisdom of granting the Provisional Council of State real power and of expanding Polish military units, Piłsudski had arrived at a similar conclusion. During the spring of 1917, his reservations about cooperation with the Central Powers' war effort increased.

The change in Entente's policies on the Polish question meant that decisions had now to be made on the future of the Polish military units, which had already been raised and trained by the

Central Powers. Whereas, initially, Beseler had agreed to the extensive recruitment in 1917, he now not only decided to limit that recruitment but also assumed direct control over the Polish legions in German-controlled Poland. When Polish soldiers were required to take an oath of loyalty to the Central Powers, Piłsudski objected and insisted that a Polish army could only be formed under his command. The German response was to **arrest Piłsudski** and his close collaborator Kazimierz Sosnkowski. While Piłsudski was held in the **Magdeburg prison**, the German authorities tried to administer Polish areas using the Regency Council. This situation worked to Piłsudski's advantage because during the following critical months when the Council, which consisted of loyal and obliging conservatives, floundered, he increasingly was perceived to be a true patriot and leader of the nation.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, debates on the Polish question could not be suppressed by punitive actions, since discussion on the possibility of Polish independence was no longer confined to specific partition areas. A conviction that the Poles everywhere had a common destiny had taken root. The Poles now held a shared belief that the war would result in the emergence of an independent Polish state, even if in the summer of 1917 it was still far from clear who would win the war and just how Poland would emerge from the still unresolved military situation. Polish leaders were increasingly determined that the Polish question should be placed on the agenda of all and any international talks. Those leaders believed that it was their sacred duty to make sure that the European Powers did not discuss the future of Poland without reference to the Poles. If the European Powers were to make decisions by themselves, the inevitable result would be that the recreated Polish state would be weak and a pawn in the changing European balance of power.

German policies in Congress territories under military occupation, in the summer of 1917, caused Poles in the West to take the initiative in relation to the Entente governments. On 15 August 1917, the **Polish National Committee** (Komitet Narodowy Polski – KNP) was formed in Lausanne to coordinate the work of Polish organisations in the West. Building on already existing relief organisations and encouraged by the entry of the USA into the war, the KNP sought to establish direct contacts with West European



governments, whose support for the Polish cause was considered vital. KNP planned to make a direct military contribution to the war effort and this was a point which it used when it sought the French government's recognition. The first attempts to form Polish units in 1914 had not been entirely successful. Although the French authorities were only too happy to allow for the formation of two units, these were integrated into the French Foreign Legion. In July 1915, this brief initiative had come to an end, due mainly to Russian opposition and heavy casualties. In August 1917, the situation had changed sufficiently for the KNP to renew calls for recruitment of the Poles to fight with the French. In the circumstances, **the KNP hoped to make a direct link between the military contribution which the Poles would be making to the war effort, and requests which were made to the French government to consider the restoration of an independent Poland as one of the Entente's war aims.**<sup>16</sup> In February 1918 the French government and the KNP, by then a recognised official representative of the future Polish state, signed a military agreement. This led to recruitment to a Polish army, which was to fight with the French on the Western Front. **General Stanisław Haller was appointed as commander-in-chief of the Polish Army in France.** To Dmowski and the KNP these were very important achievements, confirming the Entente's commitment to the creation of a Polish state. But Dmowski knew only too well that the real test of strength would come during talks concerning the peace treaties at the end of the war. Nevertheless, the purpose of making a direct military contribution to the fighting was to secure for Poland a place at the negotiating table. In the meantime, Dmowski concentrated on preparing submissions and memoranda in which he expounded his vision for a post-war Poland. Since he dominated the KNP, submissions made to the Entente governments reflected Dmowski's own analysis of the international situation and his plans for the future of Poland.

Throughout the war Dmowski had been consistent in his distrust of Germany. Nevertheless, he altered his view of Russia. Whereas, initially, he felt that the future independent Poland would remain within the Russian sphere of influence, military failures and the outbreak of the February Revolution led him to review his ideas. During 1917 he increasingly spoke of a strong Poland which would act as

a barrier to German expansion to the East and the Black Sea coast. Poland's role in post-war Europe would be pivotal in maintaining a balance between the still powerful German state and a Russia which he believed would succumb to anarchy. In the circumstances, he also changed his views on the future Polish borders. Until the beginning of 1917, he lobbied the French and British governments with requests that they support the restoration of a Poland, the boundaries of which would include the Poznan region, West and East Prussia and Upper Silesia. In the East, he was careful not to make references to areas beyond those which had been part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. By July 1917 Dmowski changed his views and, henceforth, called for an independent Poland within borders which went beyond those defined by history and were not even justified on ethnic principles. Thus, Dmowski claimed that for Poland to act as a guardian of European stability it needed to be strong and economically viable. In addition to areas already mentioned, he asserted that the borders of the new Poland should include Minsk, Wilno, Grodno, Volhynia, as well as the Austrian held Cieszyn Silesia and Galicia.<sup>17</sup>

The first significant diplomatic breakthrough on the road to the establishment of an independent Polish state had been achieved, when on 20 August 1917 the French government recognised the KNP as representing Polish interests. The British and the US governments followed suit within weeks. For the Poles this meant that the objections of the Russian Provisional Government had been ignored and this strengthened their hope that any Polish government they would form in the future would be granted full recognition.<sup>18</sup> The matter, nevertheless, was far from clear because the Entente Powers did not declare that the creation of an independent Polish state with access to the sea was to be one of the war aims until 3 June 1918, even though President Wilson had already given such an assurance on 8 January 1918, as part of the Fourteen Points American declaration of war aims.

On 3 March the Russian revolutionary government, which came to power in the October Revolution, signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Germany. The Bolsheviks, who from the outset dominated the new government, pressed for a swift end to fighting. Lenin, in particular, insisted on the absolute necessity of ending the war.

These had not been circumstances in which the Russians could have insisted on their objectives and, indeed, facing further German military action, they had to accept punitive conditions. As a result of the treaty, Russia relinquished claim to territories which were already under German control, which included all Polish-inhabited areas. Additionally, Russian troops were to evacuate Estonia, Livonia and Finish areas, where in due course, local administrations would be established with German assistance. The Ukraine was to be guaranteed independence. Notably missing from the treaty was any reference to Poland. Indeed, only Article 3 of the treaty could have generally applied to Poland. The article stated that Russia was to refrain from all interference in the internal relations of territories, previously Russian, now held by Germany. Germany and Austria-Hungary were to 'determine the future status of these territories in agreement with their population'. To the Poles this could only mean that Germany would not countenance the emergence of a genuinely independent Polish state.<sup>19</sup> While the signing of the German-Russian Treaty marked a dangerous point in the final months of the war, the Poles benefited from the anxiety of the Entente Powers over the prospect of Germany turning the full force of its military capacity to the Western Front and a German-dominated Eastern Europe. The Entente governments now hastened to make clearer commitments to the restoration of a Polish state.<sup>20</sup>

In 1918, the fight for the restoration of a Polish state was fought on several fronts. The diplomatic battle took place in Paris, where the KNP tried to make the most of the Entente's willingness, at last, to make plans for a post-war balance of power. Nevertheless, the KNP was a narrowly based organisation. Dmowski realised that he had even failed to bring together Polish leaders in the West. Politically, the KNP was entirely dependent on the national democrats. For it to become a provisional government, it needed to link up with the Poles under German occupation and to draw into its ranks the Socialist Party. In this objective Dmowski failed and developments in Congress Poland led many Poles to believe that it was more realistic to base hopes for an independent Poland on the Central Powers.

In the summer of 1918 Dmowski went to the United States. There he reached an accommodation with Paderewski and met President

Wilson. For the first time, Dmowski came face to face with Jewish lobby groups, which drew attention to his anti-Semitic rhetoric and publicly raised doubts as to whether a Poland restored onto the map of Europe under his leadership would respect the rights of the Jewish community. American Jewish groups demanded that the government of the USA should support the KNP only if assurances were given that the Jewish communities as well as other national minorities would not be discriminated against in independent Poland.

After the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, the German authorities were free from the need to maintain a front against Russia and proceeded with their own plans, clearly intending to ignore the Polish committee established in Paris. Popular anger with the way the Central Powers were treating the Polish issue led to strikes and widespread protests in which all political parties and groupings participated. At the same time, radical workers established workers' councils and took over factories and enterprises. This was as much an expression of revolutionary fervour as a reflection of the wish to wrest control over all forms of production from the hated Germans. The desire for independence grew. At this stage, the German and Austrian authorities were still able to retaliate by taking action against the Polish population. Troops which were no longer needed on the Eastern Front were brought into the Polish areas and were deployed against Polish workers. The German population in the Polish areas and in regions which were contested by the Poles and Germans participated in these military actions, which frequently took the form of bloody confrontations between the two communities.

On 21 March, a new German offensive started on the Western Front. At this point, for the first time during the course of the war, Polish politicians in occupied areas turned against the Central Powers and started looking to the Entente governments for support. The idea held by some conservatives, that Germany and Austria would allow for the emergence of a truly independent Polish state, had been discredited. The Regency Council, nevertheless, continued trying to find a way forward by putting together a government while at the same time negotiating with the German authorities. The plan to extend its authority until a fully functioning government was established was unsuccessful because most Poles held the Regency Council in contempt for its excessive subordination to the Germans.

This sharpened the conflicts between political parties already positioning themselves to assume authority in an independent state.

By October 1918 the Poles knew that the Central Powers had been routed and that their withdrawal was merely a matter of time. German troops were being moved out of Polish territories even before the signing of the armistice on 10 November. In areas under Austrian control, self-proclaimed Polish authorities filled the vacuum created by the departure of the imperial administrators. In several cities, attempts were made to put in place a Polish administration. These were often spontaneous and uncoordinated initiatives, frequently gaining momentum from the revolutionary fervour which affected industrial workers and soldiers.

In 1917 the prospect of the end of the war had become a reality. Although the Entente Powers were far from assured of victory, the entry of the USA into the conflict made it more likely that they, rather than the Central Powers, would be victorious. As the end of the conflict came closer, debates on post-war territorial revisions were extended. The issue of Poland's future political structure was one that had not been discussed during the course of war. The restoration of an independent state was a matter of such gravity that it tended to overshadow, if not outright stifle, any debates on the question of Poland's future internal structure. Nevertheless, initially, with the exception of SDKPiL and PPS-Lewica, all other parties generally assumed that Poland would be a monarchy based on an Austrian prince who would begin a new royal line. The last hereditary Polish monarch of the Jagiellonian line had died in 1572. In the years leading up to the destruction of the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, Poland had been ruled by a succession of elected monarchs. But monarchism, in particular a political system based on a strong royal authority, had no historic precedent in Poland. On the contrary, the Polish nobility took pride in the Commonwealth being described as a 'republic of the nobles'. Nevertheless, in all the South European states which emerged from the progressive weakening of the Ottoman rule before the First World War, the establishment of monarchist rule, initially by German lesser princes, was seen as building the foundations of the future state. Thus, while the Poles thought this might still be the

most obvious model, they rarely expressed genuine enthusiasm for Poland emerging as a kingdom. By the end of the war it appeared that monarchism was at best irrelevant, at worst discredited. Nevertheless, as the fighting was coming to an end, various political groups became clearer as to what sort of government they expected to establish.

The Russian Revolution clearly emboldened left-wing parties and gave rise to hopes for a revolutionary government in Poland. SDKPiL and PPS-Lewica started thinking in terms of a dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1909, the main sections of the socialist movement in areas under Russian control had made the decision to abandon the name of PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna and instead simplified its name to **Polska Partia Socjalistyczne** (Polish Socialist Party – PPS). The critical decision was made at a party conference which met in Vienna in September 1909. Distancing themselves from the Russian socialist movement, the leadership of the increasingly reformist PPS declared that if war were to break out between Russia and Austria, Polish socialists would support Austria. The Tsarist government was seen as Poland's main oppressor and this justified future support for its enemy. This formulation indicated the increasing separation from the Russian socialist movement and with that the affirmation of the dominance of the need to focus on establishing an independent Polish state.<sup>21</sup> During the course of the war, PPS had hoped that the Central Powers would support the Polish cause, but when this turned out not to be the case, the party moved more forcefully towards formulating plans for the emergence of an independent Polish state. In 1897, Polish socialists in Austria had broken away from the Austrian organisation and formed the Polska Partia Socjalno-Demokratyczna Galicji i Śląska (Polish Social-Democratic Party of Galicia and Silesia – PPS). In accordance with the instructions of the Second International, PPS and PPSD were supposed to try to form a single Polish party but, until the war, there was no natural unity between the two Polish socialist parties.<sup>22</sup> During the course of the war the two parties increasingly were drawn together through their joint plans to defend the interests of Polish workers. They also distanced themselves from Piłsudski's plans for military cooperation with the German authorities. The Russian Revolution accentuated the reformist elements in both parties and the main focus became that of

securing independence for Poland. Both parties were anxious about the rise of revolutionary activities and Soviet intervention in the Ukrainian and Byelorussian regions. Polish socialists had assumed that, when Poland would be reconstructed, these areas would be incorporated into its borders. They, therefore, had little sympathy for the national aspirations of these ethnic groups which had in the past been part of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>23</sup> In the autumn of 1918, the two socialist parties embraced and declared their support for the establishment of a republican government in which they would form an alliance with the peasant movement. Peasant parties, nevertheless, had made it clear that their minimum programme was for a Polish state in which elections to a national assembly would be on the basis of a universal franchise.

The debate extended to the question of whether an independent Polish state would be economically stable and, in particular, whether it would be able to develop an industrial base. All economic debates invariably addressed the issue of wider regional unity, which, in turn, touched on the dilemma of whether independent Poland would be in a position to withstand economic marginalisation and exploitation by its powerful neighbours. Ideas put forward by Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska were interesting contributions to these debates. The starting point of her thesis, which she developed in 1916, was the assertion that it was not in Poland's interest to continue economic links with the Russian Empire. According to her, this had been an unequal relationship in which Russian industry developed high-quality production which could be exported, while Polish production, in most cases small-scale and underinvested, only supplied the Polish markets. The solution was to form a Central European economic bloc, which would include Germany, Poland, Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey. The key to her thinking was the belief that it would be in Germany's interest to encourage industrial development in Poland and that, far from being Poland's rival, Germany would be an economic ally. In the plans for regional economic expansion, Daszyńska-Golińska and another economist, Klaudiusz Angermann anticipated that Poland would act as a bridge between the West and East, benefiting from trade moving in both directions. Proponents of close cooperation with Austria put forward a slightly less ambitious economic model in

1917. They thought in terms of Poland being an autonomous part of the Hapsburg Empire and through that benefiting from the empire's internal market.

The emergence of Polish administration was not something Polish leaders had been able to either anticipate or prepare for. All depended on the way the occupation forces withdrew and on the authority of the Polish leaders in the key town. In areas under Austrian control during the war, a national committee functioned to consolidate all Polish activities. The main conflict within that committee was between the conservatives, who thought in terms of regional autonomy within Austria, and the alliance between the peasant party and the socialists, who came to distrust the Austrians. By 1917 the peasant movement became active and its leader Wincenty Witos put forward a programme for the establishment of an independent Polish state and for radical economic reforms, critically, land redistribution.<sup>24</sup> In October 1918, the Polish Liquidation Commission was established in Kraków. Its first aim was to secure the loyalty of the Polish soldiers who had been, until then, under Austrian command and, then, to seek the formation of a national government. The second was to prevent the breakdown of law and order and, finally, to indicate to the parties in Warsaw that the peasant movement would be taking a direct interest in the process of state building, which was already taking place in Polish areas from which German troops were withdrawing.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, fighting broke out between the Poles and Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia. In the industrial centres of the Dąbrowa Basin, soviets emerged.

Polish socialists in Austria and in Germany were strongly committed to a democratic path to socialism and did not approve of the much more radical line taken by some of the comrades from Polish areas that had been part of the Russian Empire. Thus, seeking to pre-empt what they believed would be an attempt by the PPS-Lewica and the SDKPiL to stage a revolution and establish a workers' state, moderate socialist leaders first discussed taking power at the end of October. When on 3 November the Austrian Governor of the town of Lublin announced that he was handing all authority to the Regency Council, PPS leaders decided to go into action. The Provisional Government of the Peoples' Republic of Poland, which



they established, functioned for only **four days**. It was, nevertheless, indicative of the determination of sections of the PPS which believed that a workers' government could be established by means of a ballot. Rejecting collaboration with the revolutionary left, the PPS advocated an alliance with the peasant movement. Its programme spoke of nationalisation of key industries, communication and all natural resources. Furthermore, it advocated land reform, but land was to be put into the hands of those who cultivated it. In private enterprises, workers were to be given the right to participate in decision making. The Lublin government's social programme spoke of access to education and the protection of citizens' right to work. Ignacy Daszyński, who acted as the leader of the Lublin government, had hoped to link up with workers who were striking in other parts of German-occupied Polish areas and thus to extend the Lublin government's authority.<sup>26</sup>

Events in Warsaw intervened. **Pilsudski had been incarcerated in the Magdeburg prison for sixteen months.** His authority among Poles remained undiminished and increased. Thus, **when the German authorities agreed to release him from prison, his arrival in Warsaw on 10 November sidelined all earlier attempts to form a Polish provisional government.** The Regency Council had no authority and, frightened by the possibility of a revolution engulfing Polish areas, was only too willing to hand over to Pilsudski the responsibility of forming the first government. **The German military authorities, on receipt of assurances that troops would be given safe conduct out of Poland, allowed the soldiers to be disarmed by the Poles. Pilsudski, with the full approval of all but the SDKPiL and the PPS-Lewica, took the title of Head of State.**<sup>27</sup>

When Pilsudski returned to Warsaw, the military units earlier willing to take orders from the Lublin government now turned their attention to Warsaw, where more important events attracted the attention of most Poles. What had happened in Lublin had not been unusual. Polish civil authorities in other towns had spontaneously assumed responsibility for maintaining law and order, in particular, as it was rapidly becoming clear that German and Austrian soldiers were being withdrawn. The threat and fear of revolution

seemed very real, as workers in several industrial areas of the Kingdom formed workers' councils modelled on the Russian revolutionary example. In reality, as the government in Warsaw appeared to establish its authority, so the councils and local administrations, generally, either dissolved themselves or collaborated with it.

On 11 November 1918 Dmowski was in Washington. There he had been able to secure a critical victory. The Entente Powers had intended to demand, as part of the armistice, that all German and Austrian troops withdraw from occupied territories. Were this to happen, Germany would have abandoned Congress Poland. Dmowski feared that this would have allowed the Red Army to enter into Polish territories. He, therefore, strenuously lobbied the Entente Powers not to require the Germans to withdraw their occupation units from areas East of Germany. Clause 12 of the armistice specified that they were to remain there until the Entente governments decided that they should go home. Thus, Dmowski and the KNP were diplomatically successful in so far as the KNP increasingly was treated as a provisional government. What was less clear was whether it would be able to establish its authority in Polish territories. For that the KNP had to contend, in the first place, with Piłsudski but also with left wing parties which had gained strength and confidence from events taking place in Russia.

When the National Government was formed in Warsaw, it was agreed that the first general elections in the independent Polish state would take place on 26 January 1919. Piłsudski's strong point was not merely his personal authority, as reflected in popular support given to him by the people of Warsaw, but his ability to articulate the wishes of most political leaders. Dmowski and most of the leaders of the national democratic movement were abroad. This allowed Piłsudski to assume authority unchallenged by them. The myth of Piłsudski being a patriot and the father of the nation was one he chose to cultivate from the outset. In November 1918, the Kraków Commission and the Lublin government abdicated their claims to govern and decided to support the National Government being formed in Warsaw, thus reducing the potential for internal conflicts.

At this early stage, the KNP in Paris was the only authority which could still have challenged Piłsudski, in particular because of the importance of the forthcoming international conference to the process of defining Poland's borders. Nevertheless, Piłsudski took action to minimise the Paris groups' influence by sending an official note to the main European governments, informing them of the emergence of an independent Polish state. For the time being, only Germany recognised the authority of the government which was being formed in Warsaw. Washington, Paris and London hesitated, considering the possibility that the KNP might still return to Poland and assert its authority over the administration formed there. Uneasily, as the national democrats continued to stand aloof, Piłsudski gave the task of forming a provisional government first to the socialist Ignacy Daszyński and, when he failed, to another socialist, Jędrzej Moraczewski. Piłsudski retained control of the military forces and appointed himself as Head of State, a function no one was willing to deny him.<sup>28</sup>

The road ahead promised to be very turbulent. Apart from the still unclear issue of the new state's borders, there were many questions which needed to be answered before the romantic idea of Poland could be translated into statehood. Poles from the three partition areas had been part of very distinct political traditions. All socialist parties from the three partitions belonged to the Second International, but little united Polish socialists from the Kingdom area with those who had lived in the German Empire. The peasant movement and the nationalists were equally, if not more divided. At the same time, expectations exceeded true possibilities. It was inevitable that many would find independence a disappointment, as real economic problems bedevilled state building attempts.

### 3 Independent Poland in Interwar Europe

As Pilsudski assumed the role of Head of State, his initial preference was to ignore the KNP in Paris and to establish direct relations with West European governments. Although Britain was not committed to supporting the KNP, the French government was less willing to ignore it. The presence of Polish military units on French soil under the command of General Haller called for reflection. As a result, even though the French government was hesitant in opening talks with Pilsudski, it did not give Dmowski too much encouragement.<sup>1</sup> The two Poles were left to sort things out. In Polish territories, Pilsudski's authority was undisputed, but in Paris and in dealings with European governments, Dmowski was better placed to speak on Poland's behalf. It was to the two men's credit that, although exchanges between them were acrimonious, they realised that the authority of the young state would be undermined and its interests would be ill served if they were to continue their quarrels in public. Uneasily, both compromised. As a result, the KNP recognised the authority of the government in Poland. In return, Dmowski became head of the Polish delegation to the Paris talks. Paderewski, in the meantime, left for Poland, where he became Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs. When a delegation from Poland joined Dmowski, there was a need to clarify precisely what vision of a future Poland was to be put to Britain, France and the USA, the three powers which would have the final say over all matters discussed at the conference. When Pilsudski's instructions were put

to Dmowski, it became clear that the former had a vision of a federated state within the borders of the previous Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Dmowski, on the other hand, believed in the outright incorporation of non-Polish ethnic groups into Poland's borders. This debate specifically related to Poland's eastern borderlands, where the Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Lithuanian communities showed no desire to be included in a new Polish state. The KNP and the delegation from Poland finally decided to submit Poland's case on the basis of Dmowski's programme. While the Polish delegation conducted long-drawn-out discussions throughout the spring in Paris, events in Poland were far from static. In fact, in Poland Pilsudski led military campaigns, which resulted in the consolidation of Poland's eastern borders. This situation gave rise to two parallel policies, one of which was fought on the diplomatic front, the other determined by military action.

The Paris Peace Conference, which opened in January 1919 and ended with the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty on 28 June, ostensibly was meant only to address the German issue. In reality, it became a forum where key issues were thrashed out and to which aspiring and hopeful national leaders and groups presented their claims and memoranda. Decision making was confined to the Council of Ten, which included the leaders of the USA, France, Italy and Britain, together with their foreign ministers and some additional advisors. Two Japanese delegates were also admitted to the Council of Ten. By March the main decision-making body was reduced to the US President Woodrow Wilson, the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, the Italian Foreign Minister Vittorio Orlando and the French Prime Minister Georges Clémenceau. When discussing the future of Germany, only Poland's borders with Germany should have been the subject of the committee's deliberations. But inevitably the discussion extended to consideration of Poland's future place in Europe.

Defining and agreeing to Poland's borders with Germany caused endless problems. When it became apparent that the information on which to base key discussions was lacking, the Council of Ten despatched a fact-finding mission to Poland. In the meantime, Dmowski was asked to put Poland's case. This he did confidently. Although he impressed his listeners with his command of detail,

*The borders of Poland after the First World War*



Poland's expectations concerning its future borders were bound to cause anxiety. The right of national groups to self-determination was accepted as a guiding principle at the conference. Nevertheless, the Paris decision makers were only too well aware that this could not be done without balancing the needs and aspirations of different national groups where these lived in the same areas. Too often, these aspirations proved impossible to reconcile. At the same time, the long-term viability of territorial changes had to be considered. Post-war governments were under pressure to demobilise and to reduce further military commitments outside their borders. Thus, from the outset the Paris negotiators tried to avoid making decisions which would require the further deployments of troops in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

After some deliberations, the Polish case was finally handed over to the specially assembled Polish Commission, which was to feed facts and relevant information to the Council. As it turned out, some matters could not be resolved by the time of the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty and were left to the League of Nations to investigate and to make final recommendations. In the meantime, developments took place in Eastern Europe without regard for decisions being reached in Paris. In reality, Poland was never a major issue for the Paris negotiators. Although, at the end of the war, the USA, Britain and France were committed to the creation of an independent Poland with access to the sea, all decisions relating to the new state's borders depended upon their own long-term European policies. To France the collapse of Russia, the much-needed eastern ally, raised questions of future strategy. This, in turn, hinged on the likelihood of a democratic government emerging in Russia. The calculation made in Paris was that if Russia were to succumb to turmoil, a string of pro-French states East of Germany could substitute for Russia. During the Paris Peace Conference, Russia was engulfed by civil war and this made it impossible for French politicians and military leaders to anticipate what role they might require Poland to play in a possible future eastern front. The British government was more concerned with stability and a viable European balance of power. A large Polish state, incorporating disaffected people of other nationalities and at loggerheads with its neighbours, spelled trouble for years to come. Furthermore, Britain and France were anxious about instability in Germany and would not therefore

unconditionally support Polish demands in East Prussia, Danzig and Silesia. Both British and French governments and their delegations, which led the talks in Paris, considered various options and continued to investigate new ideas throughout the course of the conference. This explains their frequently confused responses to the Polish question.

The US delegation, headed by the President, inevitably carried most weight during the Paris discussions. The Poles were encouraged by Paderewski's earlier success, when he gave a concert at the White House, and Dmowski's recent trip to the USA. As it turned out, in spite of Wilson's 14 Points programme containing an explicit commitment to the establishment of an independent Poland with access to the sea, the issue of the borders had not been considered by the US government. Wilson had only a vague idea as to what the establishment of a Polish state would entail and what would be its impact on regional politics.<sup>3</sup> In March, when Wilson returned to the USA, his aides had not kept up to date on discussions on Poland. The result was that the committee's responses to Polish demands evolved gradually and acrimoniously. Many Poles were, and still are, only too ready to believe that Lloyd George's opposition to the incorporation of Eastern Prussia into Poland and his determination to deny Poland the port city of Danzig can be traced to the malign recommendation of **Lewis Namier**, an academic who acted as an advisor to the Foreign Office. Namier, who was of Polish-Jewish origin, had cautioned against supporting Poland's excessive territorial demands. But other considerations determined British policy on the issue of Poland's borders. Similarly, the US unwillingness to approve Poland's extensive territorial demands in the West and East was attributed to the influence of the Jewish lobby. All these factors played a role in the extensive discussions which took place in Paris. In reality, Poland's western border was discussed as part of the German issue and the question of how to stabilise Germany in Europe, and not as a Polish border issue only. Anxiety about revolutions breaking out in Germany and the still unresolved civil conflict in Russia likewise affected the negotiators' judgement insofar as France took an active interest in both, while Britain and the USA were wary of allowing France to benefit unduly from Germany's moment of weakness.<sup>4</sup>



Polish submissions to the Polish Commission were discussed by the Council in the course of long debates and became the subject of disputes, primarily between the French and British delegations. When the Versailles Treaty was signed on 28 July 1919, it appeared to satisfy the Polish delegation's minimum demands in relation to Germany, but also obliged the Polish delegation to accept the deferral of decisions on a number of unresolved issues.

The borders of the new Polish state were consolidated as a result of complex and frequently contradictory developments. The fall of the three European Empires created the preconditions for the Poles to stake a claim to independence. Nevertheless, just how and where the final border was drawn depended on a number of factors. Poland's border with Germany created problems because of the mixed population in the border areas. As the war drew to a close, German troops were no longer willing to remain on Polish territories as an occupation force, although where both states were likely to lay claim to a given region, the two communities fought to establish their authority.

In the case of Poznań (Posen) and the surrounding district, the Polish and German communities tried to determine the course of events without waiting for instructions from either Berlin or Warsaw. In November 1918, Polish paramilitary organisations were formed. Conflicts between the two communities and the initial unwillingness of German troops to defend the town led to a Polish uprising, which broke out on 27 December. The Poles then formed a council. By then German troops were brought back into the city and district. Their presence led to regular military confrontations with the newly formed Polish units. The result was that the Poles were able to retain control of the town of Poznań and of Pomerania along the lower reaches of the river Wisła. The initiative, as many similar ones in areas of mixed Polish-German population, had not been directed or instigated by the Polish authorities in Warsaw, but, ultimately, by presenting this as a *fait accompli* the Polish delegation in Paris was able to make a forceful case for Poland retaining the areas.

In some cases, decisions made by the Paris negotiators prevented the Poles from claiming disputed areas. Thus, contrary to Polish demands, the ancient Hanseatic port town of Gdańsk (Danzig), with

its majority German inhabitants, became a Free City, the status of which was guaranteed by the League of Nations. Furthermore, because of Lloyd George's refusal to agree to Poland's claim to territories which contained a majority German community, a plebiscite was sanctioned in Kwidzyń (Marienwerder). The plebiscite took place in 1920. The inhabitants opted for the region to remain in Germany. Polish access to the Baltic coast was secured through a strip of land along the river Wisła. Having been denied the port of Gdańsk, the Polish state in due course built a new port of Gdynia. The corridor linking the Polish state to the coast became a symbol of the limitations of Big Power intervention in border settlements. Successive Polish governments resented the League's presence in Gdańsk and clung to the few prerogatives they had there, namely, use of some port facilities, control of the postal system and customs duties. To the Germans, the separation of Eastern Prussia from Pomerania by the so-called Polish Corridor was a constant reminder and symbol of the unfairness of the Versailles Treaty. Only the realisation that the situation could not be altered without a major conflict prevented the Polish and German states from taking military action to reverse what both sides considered to be a series of monumental injustices.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of Upper Silesia, the local Polish community tried everything possible for the areas to be included in the Polish borders. Silesia had distant historic links with the medieval Polish Kingdom, although these claims were not accepted at the Paris Conference. Most Silesian coal mines were owned by German capital. In Paris it was noted that, although many inhabitants defined themselves as Poles, in reality their links with Polish culture were tenuous. France would have preferred to see the areas incorporated into Poland. But British concerns about Germany's ability to pay reparations and anxiety about economic conflicts between Poland and Germany played a role in the final decision.<sup>6</sup> In August 1919 the Silesian Poles staged an uprising. This was brought to an end with the aid of Entente troops. The German administration retained control of the region. In February 1920 the Poles staged a second uprising. Once more peace was restored by negotiations and the presence of British, French and Italian military detachments. The compromise solution of a plebiscite did not resolve the issue. The plebiscite took place

in March 1921. In spite of acrimonious accusations of fraud, the League of Nations upheld the majority decision for Upper Silesia to remain in Germany. The local Polish population then staged a third uprising in May. The strength of Polish feelings against incorporation into Germany and French support for Polish demands led to a compromise solution, whereby the towns of Katowice and Chorzów were granted to Poland.<sup>7</sup>

Poland's eastern border was defined in a series of skirmishes, wars and military campaigns. Only in March 1923 did the Conference of Ambassadors give its approval to the final border. What happened between the German armistice with the Entente Powers and March 1923 had a lasting impact on Poland's relations with the European Powers and with its neighbours and, finally, on the internal politics of the new state. Most Poles, nevertheless, believed that Poland could have claimed more territories, while the Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian communities nursed resentment and a desire for revenge, believing that they had been denied the right to self-determination. Relations with the Soviet Union likewise were affected by these actions throughout the interwar period.

The resolution of Poland's eastern frontier depended on a number of factors. Of those, the fate of Eastern Galicia proved most complex. At the root of the problem lay the diverse ethnic and religious population. The town of Lwów (Lemberg, Lviv) and the area surrounding the town contained a Polish majority, but outside the enclaves the peasant community was Ukrainian. Most Ukrainians belonged to the Uniate Church, a minority were Orthodox Christians, while the Poles were nearly entirely Catholic. The towns contained sizeable Jewish communities. Before the First World War, Eastern Galicia had been ruled by Austria. During the war, Ukrainian nationalist leaders thought of forming a Ukrainian state, to include Western and Eastern Ukraine. By 1918 the situation became very complex indeed. On 20 November 1917, a Ukrainian Central Council (this authority is also variously described by historians as the Rada or the Directorate) based in Kiev proclaimed the establishment of a Ukrainian People's Republic. At Germany's invitation the council sent a delegation to the Brest-Litovsk peace talks, which ended the German-Russian war. In due course, German relations with the

council collapsed and its leaders sought the support of the Entente Powers for Ukrainian aspirations.

In the meantime, in Eastern Galicia a separate Ukrainian authority emerged. This called itself the West Ukrainian People's Republic. Troops led by it captured the city of Lwów on 1 November 1918. The Poles in the city, unprepared for this military action, were able to call on military units from Kraków. Although the Ukrainians were forced out of the city, fighting between the two communities continued with Lwów remaining in Polish hands. In the meantime, the fate of Eastern Galicia became the subject of enquiry by the Polish Commission to the Paris Conference and, after the signing of the Versailles Peace, the Conference of Ambassadors to which the matter was handed over. This inevitably led to attempts by Britain and France viewing the issue from the perspective of their own, arguably, larger interests, to settle the Ukrainian question in accordance with those interests. As long as there was the hope of the civil war in Russia ending with the White forces winning, both governments favoured the Russian claim to Ukraine. The British Foreign Office, partly influenced by Lewis Namier's suggestion that Polish claims to Eastern Galicia were excessive, feared that a Polish state in conflict with Russia would act as Germany's Trojan horse. France, on the other hand, vacillated between supporting the White General Anton Denikin, who they hoped would head a Russian government after he overthrew the Bolshevik government, and strengthening the new Polish and Czechoslovak states as a barrier against the revolutionary government. A factor in French considerations was their growing interest in the oil reserves in Eastern Galicia.<sup>8</sup>

The Polish delegation in Paris repeatedly tried to put the case for the region to be included in Poland. As long as the issue of Poland's western border was not resolved, Piłsudski had to proceed warily. While Britain and France accused and suspected the Poles of trying to pre-empt the decisions of the Polish Commission, the Poles gave the appearance of accepting the arbitration of the Paris negotiators. By November 1919 when the Red Army effectively defeated Denikin, the French sought to find ways of allowing the Poles to retain Eastern Galicia, even if the British continued to oppose Polish demands. In the meantime, Piłsudski authorised an attack

on Eastern Galicia on 14 May 1920. The Poles were successful in their fight against the Ukrainians, but French anger at the use of the Polish units, which had been brought from France to fight against the Bolsheviks, was considerable. Pilsudski consistently claimed that his actions were intended as an attack on the Red Army and not an attempt to consolidate control over Eastern Galicia. This found favour with some of the Western diplomats who saw the advantage of allowing the Poles to capture Ukraine just at the time when the Red Army was poised to move into the region. By then Pilsudski was able to secure a military convention with Semen Petrula, the head of the Directorate of the Ukrainian Peoples' Republic. There was only one issue uniting the two, namely anxiety about Red Army and Soviet aspirations in the Ukraine, which had manifested themselves in the support for a Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Peoples' Republic. On 8 May Polish troops and units loyal to Petrula entered Kiev, expecting that the population would support them. This did not happen. In fact, they were met with hostility. During the brief period when Kiev had been in Soviet hands, the peasants benefited from land reform instigated by the Soviets. Polish control meant the reversal of the land redistribution and the return of Polish landowners. The East Ukrainian population viewed the Poles as enemies and Petrula as a traitor. More worrying was the fact that the Soviet troops had not been defeated, they merely abandoned Kiev and regrouped, posing a danger to the Polish army in Byelorussia. At this point, the future of Eastern Galicia was linked to the Allies' willingness to help the Poles in their negotiations with the Soviet Union. When in July the conditions of the armistice between the two sides were agreed in Spa, the future of Eastern Galica was made dependent on arbitration, though for the time being Poland retained control of areas up to the river Zbrucz.<sup>9</sup> In any case, the future of Eastern Galicia was just one chapter in the evolution of Polish relations with the Soviet Union.

Pilsudski had hoped to extend Polish borders eastward. Driven by a desire to reconstruct the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the Jagiellonian period, he thought of a federal Polish state, included in which would be the eastern ethnic groups, the Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Baltic people. The problem with that reasoning was that, like the Poles, these national groups had hoped for independence.

Federation with Poland was viewed as aggression and an attempt to deny these national groups the right to self-determination.

At the beginning of 1919, Piłsudski's main worry was the possibility of the counter-revolutionary White forces defeating the Soviet government in Russia. The Whites insisted on the restoration of the Russian Empire in its pre-war borders, which threatened Poland's newly established independence. **Not surprisingly, in spite of British pressure, Piłsudski refused to aid the Whites' fight against the Red Army.** First contacts between the Polish and Soviet governments were made through the Red Cross at the beginning of 1919. These, although aimed at the exchange of prisoners of war, also led to a tacit understanding that neither side would take action against each other.<sup>10</sup> By the autumn of that year the situation had changed. In June General Denikin, who had operated in Southeastern Russia, unsuccessfully tried to launch an attack on Moscow. By October his forces were defeated. Admiral Alexander Kolchak, who had established control over Siberia, was likewise losing ground by the end of 1919. General Nikolai Yudenich, who, with British assistance tried to capture Petrograd in October, was routed. This meant that the Red Army stood poised to move West and was likely to confront the Polish forces.

Piłsudski hoped that Polish forces would hold their own in the East. He knew he could count on Polish military units which had emerged in the eastern regions. He was also able to continue the build-up of the Polish army, since the newly elected assembly, the Sejm, was willing to provide finance for his expansionist plan. Poland's thrust eastwards at the end of 1919 and during 1920 was determined not by the government but by the military leadership, primarily by Piłsudski and those close to him. This, in turn, had an impact on Poland's foreign policy. Through the creation of *faits accomplis*, Poland was embarking on a policy of confrontation not only with the Paris negotiators but also with the Soviet regime, as well as Poland's neighbours Lithuania and Czechoslovakia.

**By April 1920 the Soviet authorities had become anxious about the extent of Polish intervention in Ukraine, while the Poles, seeing the collapse of the White offensive, came round to the view that military action against the Red Army was feasible and desirable. On 25 April 1920, the Polish offensive against the Soviet Union started.**

Initial victories in the Ukraine were followed by defeats. The Red Army's victories brought it closer to ethnically Polish territories. In June, Semion Budyonny's Red Cavalry forced the Poles out of Kiev. In July, General Mikail Tukhachevsky defeated the Poles in Byelorussia, forcing them to abandon Minsk, Wilno, Grodno and, finally, Białystok. In Warsaw the government decided to seek the assistance of the heads of the Entente governments, who were attending a meeting in Spa. When the Polish delegation arrived there on 6 July, they were left in no doubt as to what Britain expected in return for undertaking to mediate. The conditions for brokering talks with the Soviet government were clear. The Poles were to commit themselves not to go beyond the Curzon line, which the British considered to be Poland's ethnic border in the East. Furthermore, they were to give up claims to Danzig, Wilno and the coal-mining Teschen region, the subject of disputes with the Czechoslovak state. The Polish delegation appeared to accept these conditions, but the Soviet government rejected British mediation. The Poles had to open direct talks with the revolutionary government.<sup>11</sup>

In Warsaw, the military crisis led to the formation of a new coalition government headed by Witos. Anxious about the consequences of Soviet revolutionary propaganda, the government approved a number of reforms, most notably land reform. The Poles were, nevertheless, united in their opposition to Soviet entry and viewed Soviet attempts to form local revolutionary administrations with hostility. Soviet hopes that the entry of the Red Army would precipitate a revolution proved illusory. Such hopes were really a way of legitimising a war of aggression. The perilous military situation, nevertheless, caused the military leadership to review its tactics and carry out a root and branch reform of the army. In August, the Red Army reached the Wisła and threatened the capital. During the following weeks, the Polish army successfully defended Warsaw. What is known as the Battle of Warsaw, even now, invokes strong passions, with some seeing this as a prophetic victory over the Bolshevik forces and a crucial defence of European civilisation.<sup>12</sup> By October both sides were exhausted and agreed on an armistice. The Riga treaty, signed on 18 March 1921, defined Poland's eastern border beyond the Curzon Line, which irritated the British, but it was a line which the Polish and the Soviet

governments were willing to accept for the time being. Pilsudski's concept of a federal state including Poles, Lithuanians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians could no longer be pursued. The Byelorussian and Ukrainian-inhabited areas were now divided between Poland and Soviet Russia. Lithuania retained independence, deeply resenting Polish claims to reconstitute the previous Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>13</sup>

Nothing better illustrates the processes by which Poland's eastern border was defined than the case of the town of Wilno (Vilnius) and the surrounding countryside. At the root of the problem lay the incompatibility of Polish and Lithuanian aspirations. To Lithuanian leaders Poland was an enemy, likely to stand in the way of their claim to national self-determination. Theirs was a vision of a state based on the extended borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1569, with Wilno as its capital. At the end of the war most Poles refused to accept that Lithuanians had the right to determine their own future. This attitude was variously justified by suggesting that most of the Lithuanian nobility had been Polonised; that Lithuania could not exist as an independent state and would therefore become a satellite of Germany; and finally that Wilno was a centre of Polish culture. Both Dmowski and Pilsudski expressed such views. Dmowski firmly believed that Lithuania, together with Ukraine and Byelorussia, should be incorporated into the Polish state. Pilsudski favoured a federalist approach, in line with progressive thinking on the rights of national groups. While accepting that the Lithuanians might choose to form a separate state, he advocated the inclusion of Wilno into Poland's borders as a precondition for a settlement with an independent Lithuania. In January 1919, as German troops withdrew from Wilno, a Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed with the help of the Red Army. At the same time, German troops stationed in the region, in accordance with the terms of the armistice signed with the Entente Powers, continued to be a factor in determining developments. German interest in the areas was confirmed with the establishment of German militias, the Freikorps, in Lithuania. In the meantime in Paris, Dmowski tried to persuade France and Britain to support Polish claims and his vision to incorporate Lithuania into Poland. During the course of 1919 fighting raged in the



area. Poles fought the Lithuanians, who in any case were divided along political lines, some allying themselves with the revolutionary Russian forces, others hoping to establish a democratic state, separate from Poland and Russia. In April 1919, Polish troops fought the Red Army to take over Wilno and Grodno. Pilsudski visited Wilno and promised its inhabitants that they would be given the right to decide the town's fate.

During the following months, while the Poles held on to Wilno, its future and that of Lithuania was closely linked to the course of the civil war in Russia. British and French views of the desirability or otherwise of allowing the Poles to dominate Lithuania by considerations relating to the future of Russia. The Polish delegation in Paris disagreed on the Wilno case that they were to put to the Commission on Poland, with Ignacy Paderewski voicing his dissent from Dmowski's line. During the summer, Polish and Lithuanian troops confronted each other. The collapse of the Whites only further complicated the issue of Lithuania's future. Britain now became a champion of the Baltic states' independence against Poland. As Poland and the Soviet Union fought each other, the Lithuanians allied with the latter in return for Soviet agreement that Wilno should be incorporated into Lithuania. The Red Army, on arrival in the town, refused to relinquish control. In August 1920, the Poles pushed the Soviet army out of territories previously held by the Poles. The Lithuanians then stepped into the military vacuum and took control over the city. Under the guise of pursuing Soviet troops, Polish units pushed into Lithuania, where in September they confronted the Lithuanian army. British and French condemnation of Polish actions led Pilsudski to change his tactics. In October 1920, the Poles ostensibly agreed to leave Wilno in Lithuanian hands. Nevertheless, on 9 October, General Lucjan Żeligowski led a division of Polish soldiers into the town. Pilsudski pretended that Żeligowski's actions had not been authorised, claiming that the latter and his unit had mutinied. When the elated Sejm agreed to establish a local administration in the town, its future was all but decided. On 8 January 1922, the city's elected assembly voted for the incorporation of Wilno into Poland. Lithuanians broke off diplomatic relations with the Poles, refusing to accept the loss of the city. Diplomatic relations were not restored until 1938.<sup>14</sup>

In the South, Poland found itself the victim of Czechoslovak aggression. When Austrian rule collapsed, the Poles and the Czechs could not agree on the ownership of a coal-rich area of Cieszyn. Although the Polish population was in a majority, the Czechs argued that the Poles were not local but an incoming population attracted to employment in the mines and that the indigenous population had been Czech. The issue was taken by both sides for arbitration in the Paris talks. In January 1919, when the Poles were fully preoccupied with fighting in the Ukraine, the Czechs took over the district. Although the Poles appealed, the question of the ownership of the region became tangled up with France's anxiety about coal supplies, in which the Czechoslovak state appeared as a potentially important economic partner. The result was that the Polish claim was rejected and Czechoslovakia retained the region.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the interwar period, the Poles refused to relinquish their claim to the lost region.

The issue of Poland's borders reflected a complex transition from the previous domination of the area by the three empires to the principle of self-rule and nation states. The definition of borders, which ultimately was based on ethnic and, to a lesser extent, on historic grounds, was particularly difficult for Poland, where there was a visible lack of natural borders and where the borderland had always been inhabited by a mixed population. At the same time, the disregard prevalent among the Poles for the national aspirations of other national groups caused friction and ultimately led to military conflicts. The emergence of an independent Poland inevitably led to local conflicts, which, with the passage of time, were not set aside but acquired a deeply symbolic meaning that had an impact on regional politics and with that on Poland's future foreign policy.

The nationalism of the Polish leaders led them to recreate the multi-ethnic empire like the ones they had fought to destroy; just as that nationalism prevented them from acquiring an understanding of how such an empire might function – an understanding that they might have obtained from a fuller engagement with those empires. Nationalism undermined the multinational empires and, in Poland's case, nationalism led to the recreation of a multinational empire, though in a reconfigured form. The political and economic problems facing the new state were formidable. The new states comprised territories, which for over a hundred years had

been administered by three European Empires, each with distinct political traditions. Although during this period a strong sense of Polish national consciousness developed – one that transcended the frontiers of the three partition powers – the Polish state had to build state institutions, establish a single legal code, a national economy and ultimately foster a consensus which would be a prerequisite for a viable democratic system.

Paradoxically, the new Polish state was anything but a national state. During the interwar period two censuses were conducted in Poland. The first, which took place in 1921, did not include the Wilno and Upper Silesian regions, which were not formally part of Poland. Those conducting the exercise struggled when trying to identify the communities in the eastern borderlands, in accordance with strict national definitions. Where people merely responded by stating that they were 'local', an attempt was made to categorise their nationality in accordance with religious criteria, which at times merely confused rather than clarified the matter. During the 1931 census, an additional question on the mother tongue was introduced. Even then, the figures were unreliable. It is now believed that the Polish government forged returns relating to the eastern borderlands to make it look as if the Ukrainian community was neither compact nor distinct in those areas.

The first census, conducted in 1921, revealed that 69 per cent of Poland's inhabitants defined themselves as Polish nationals. The largest national minority were the Ukrainians (16 per cent); 3.9% of Poland's citizens described themselves as Byelorussian nationals; a similar number as German nationals; and 9.8 per cent as Jewish. Thus, one third of the population were non-Polish nationals. But even this did not convey the full picture, since it can be assumed that there were those who either did not know how to define their nationality or were reluctant to do so because of anxiety about persecution. This has led some historians to suggest that in reality over 40 per cent of Poland's inhabitants belonged to a non-Polish national minority.<sup>15</sup>

The Ukrainian community formed the largest national minority. Nevertheless, in spite of their being defined as Ukrainian, this group was far from uniform. The majority of Ukrainian nationals in East Galicia belonged to the Uniate Church, a section of

the Orthodox Christian Church, which subordinated itself to the Church of Rome. Ukrainians in the Volhynia region usually belonged to the Orthodox Christian Church. The Ukrainians' attitude to the Polish state depended on their past political experiences, the state of the local economy and, finally, the degree of national awareness. Four basic political trends manifested themselves within the community. The Ukrainian National Democratic Party supported the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state. The Ukrainian and Galician communist parties sought unity with the Ukrainian regions incorporated into the Soviet Union. The third group, mainly agrarian parties, accepted incorporation into Poland but campaigned for autonomy within the Polish state. The final group, hailing from the military organisations active during the 1918–19 period, took an ultra-nationalist programme. This group focused on training youth organisations and paramilitary units, which were to be ready to fight for Ukrainian independence. These divisions explain why, in spite of their numerical strength, the Ukrainian community was not successful in parliamentary politics. During the 1921 elections, most Ukrainian parties called for a boycott of the elections. When Ukrainian soldiers took military action against the Poles, the state responded by sending General Haller's units into the Ukrainian-inhabited areas. The pattern was thus set with the Ukrainians boycotting recruitment drives and Polish state organisations, while the state did all in its power to undermine the communities' cohesion. The right to education in the Ukrainian language was restricted. Land reform gave Polish war veterans farmsteads in Ukrainian areas, while denying the local community the right to land. In 1930 the Ukrainian areas were brutally pacified. Police and army units were sent in, arresting and beating up Ukrainians. Ukrainian cooperatives, cultural centres and schools were closed down.

These actions, and the concentration of Ukrainian communities in rural areas, which were severely hit by the economic slump of the early 1930s, led to the radicalisation of the community. Although some sections of the community sought some accommodation with the Polish government in the 1930s, such accommodation proved elusive. Attempts to build bridges between the Polish state and the Ukrainian community, on the basis of a shared

anxiety about the Soviet Union, had limited appeal to nationalists, who increasingly saw the Polish state as the main enemy of Ukrainian nationalism. Poland's mistreatment of the Ukrainian community led to Poland being condemned by the League of Nations in 1934. Colonel Josef Beck, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, responded by declaring that the Minorities Treaty no longer bound Poland. This, in turn, focused the international spotlight on Poland. When the Nazi Party came to power in Germany, it was able to undermine the Polish state by supporting the Ukrainian minority.

If the Ukrainian community was numerically the largest minority, the Jewish community was seen as a matter of utmost gravity, requiring radical solutions. From the outset, national democrats sought to portray Jews as hostile, if not outright dangerous to Polish nationalism. As a result of such reasoning, there were calls for the Jewish threat to be counteracted. The nationalist movement took the view that the Jewish presence in independent Poland should not to be tolerated. This was not an unique view. Some sections of the peasant movement and the Christian parties agreed with this analysis. Since the tactic of the national democrats was to attack political opponents by accusing them of tolerating the Jewish presence within the body politic, debates on the perceived Jewish threat formed the core of arguments used by most political parties during the interwar period. The main differences between the nationalists, on the one hand, and the peasant and Christian parties on the other, amounted to the question of how to counteract that threat. The Endecja advocated the outright expulsion of Jews from Poland, while the moderates' response to the perceived Jewish threat was to suggest limiting the influence of Jews on Poland's economy, education, culture and politics.

Unlike the Ukrainian community, which lived in compact groupings in the eastern borderland, Jews were scattered throughout Poland – only in some areas forming distinct groups, in others co-existing with other national and religious communities. Jews lived nearly entirely in urban areas, with only 1 per cent deriving their income from farming. A minority defined Hebrew as their language, while most stated that Polish was their mother tongue. No other community was divided by such a diversity of political ideas. Jews

were divided on religious, social and cultural lines. Religious observance, likewise, divided the community.<sup>16</sup> While the orthodox community was numerically the strongest, the Zionist parties dominated the political life of Polish Jews. As a result of the 1922 elections, 35 Jewish deputies joined the Sejm. Of them, 25 represented Zionist parties. The Jewish community of the eastern regions was usually extremely poor and belonged to orthodox strands of Judaism. In the big urban areas of what had been Congress Poland, Jews could be found among the intellectual and professional classes. Nevertheless, the majority of Polish Jews derived their income from working as artisans, employment in small-scale production and by working at home. In spite of claims made by anti-Semites that Jews controlled large industry and banking, this was clearly not the case. During the depression in the early 1930s, the Jewish community, due to its concentration in small trade activities and production, suffered pauperisation. This brought to the fore conflicts with the Polish community. The national democrats benefited from the situation, continuing to draw attention to what they alleged was the parasitic presence of Jews within the body of the nation.

Emigration was one way out of poverty and persecution. For Jews, the USA had been the obvious destination, although during the 1930s US immigration restrictions limited the settlement of Jews from Poland. In spite of that, during the interwar period, over 50 per cent of Jews leaving Europe came from Poland. In the late 1930s, Palestine became the main destination for Jews. While some refused to leave, either on religious grounds or because they believed that assimilation was the correct way of responding to the complex economic and political situation in Poland, economic factors played a large role in persuading Jews to migrate. In the mid-1930s, the nationalist movements as well as the Polish Maritime and Colonial League openly spoke of forcing Jews out of Poland and into overseas territories. Symptomatic of such an approach was the **call for Poland to be granted the island of Madagascar, where it was hoped to settle the 'surplus Jews'**.<sup>17</sup>

The Byelorussian community formed the second largest national minority in Poland. It was concentrated entirely in the northeast, the poorest and most backward – economically and culturally – region of Poland. The Byelorussian communities lived in rural areas,

dominated by large estates owned by the Poles. Ethnic conflict was increased by settlement drives, the aim of which was to increase the presence of the Poles in the borderlands. Byelorussian peasants had no way of benefiting from land reform, which transferred land into the hands of the incoming Poles. This, in turn, led to mass protests, to which the government responded by arming Polish settlers and sending in troops. **By ignoring the expectations of the Byelorussian community and making it difficult for legitimate peasant organisations to function as representatives of their grievances, the Polish state made it easy for the communists to gain support in those areas.**

In its treatment of the national minorities, the Polish state was obliged to act in accordance with the Minorities Treaty signed by Poland in June 1919. Representatives of the East European Jewish communities had been instrumental in the formulation of the treaty, a point that was ultimately held against them. The Jews, in common with all minorities, experienced difficulties in the exercise of all rights supposedly guaranteed by Poland's commitment to the Minorities Treaty.<sup>18</sup> The Poles deeply resented the treaty and in due course it became clear that the League had no effective means of compelling a member state to protect and facilitate the cultural life of its national minorities. Although the Polish state was obliged to ensure that minorities had access to schooling in their own language and that state funding was available for these basic educational activities, in reality this always proved difficult to enforce. The intensity of national sentiments generated by the emergence of a Polish state meant that the rights of the minorities were subordinated to the political demands of the Poles. Although the constitution guaranteed the rights of all citizens, in practice the rights of the national minorities were subordinated to the demands of the state, which saw itself as the defender of Polish national interests. Furthermore, successive governments had to balance the needs of various communities against the demands of the national democratic Party, whose rowdy campaigns criticised the government for its supposed laxity in defending Polish interests and the security of the state.

Inevitably, the state of the economy presented the largest single challenge. With the establishment of the independent state, the separation of Polish areas from large, integrated economies caused

long-term disruption. Nevertheless, the main task in the first years was to create a unified infrastructure. The three railway systems needed to be linked. A Polish currency had to replace the pre-war and wartime currencies. Schooling systems, which were meant to integrate the Poles into the empires, had to be replaced by a Polish curriculum. But while these were immediate issues, in the long term the Poles had to build a modern state system which its citizens would uphold through their willingness to pay taxes, their consent to military service, and their participation in its democratic institutions. Their willingness to act in this way would vary, depending on their previous political experience, wartime agreements and their commitment to the national cause.

The biggest obstacle to the building of a modern Polish state was the economy. Inflation hit Poland in several waves, the first in 1919–22 when production was still below pre-war levels. Nevertheless, uneven economic development made it difficult to arrive at a clear picture of what was happening. In 1921 over 75 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, and only 14.5 per cent worked in industry. Employment in small-scale retail, workshops and family production predominated. Levels of development between the three partition areas varied.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, during the war Polish-inhabited areas had been affected by military activities. Russia, Austria and, most of all, Germany had exploited the industrial capacity and the natural resources of the Polish areas under their control. Severe deforestation, among others, was the result of ruthless German exploitation. However, the Russians too had contributed to Poland's economic difficulties by their wartime evacuation of industrial plants, together with the workers employed in them, into the interior. This stripped Congress areas of machinery but also of skilled labour. Before any plans for industrialisation could be considered, a long period of reconstruction was necessary. In agriculture, land reform was the most pressing issue. For it to be successful, the vested interests of the still powerful landed gentry, in areas previously under Austrian and Russian administration, had to be broken. To do so, the first governments had to be bold and determined to modernise both sectors of the economy.

The first elections to the national assembly, the Sejm, took place in January 1919. The so-called Small Constitution, which was



approved on 20 February 1919, outlined the future political profile of the new Polish state. Poland was to be a republic but the precise details of the relationship between the legislature and the executive were still to be agreed by a constitutional commission. Pilsudski remained the Head of State, although, even at this early stage, he was in dispute with the Sejm. While the government focused on the need to build state and regional administrative structures, political parties focused on the constitutional commission, which they hoped to influence so as to ensure control of the future legislature. Pilsudski, in the meantime, was fully preoccupied in reforming and building up the new army, which he was then able to deploy in the eastern borderland. This gave him an aura of a patriot, at the same time elevating the military leadership and the army to an apparent position above politics. While clearly appropriating a critical role in defining Poland's borders, the military leadership was also determined to have a say on future relations between the legislature and the military. In effect, the leadership tried to limit any attempts to restrict military budgets and to control the activities of the new Polish army. During these conflicts the military leaders, usually Pilsudski's close collaborators and fellow legionnaires, established an unchallenged political position, aided by the Sejm's dedication of over 58 per cent of the national budget to military reforms. The military's power during this period was enhanced by its direct control over munitions production and armament industries, to which the government committed extensive funds, in anticipation of the need to defend the new state.

The final draft of the constitution was adopted on 17 March 1921 and was based on the French example. It was the result of extensive manoeuvring between parties dominating the first Sejm. The conflict between Dmowski and Pilsudski had not subsided. On the contrary, their disagreements continued by other means. Thus, the national democrats ensured that the presidency was weak and that the legislature, which they hoped to use as a counterbalance to Pilsudski's presidential ambitions, would be strong.

The emergence of the Polish state and the establishment of proper constitutional procedures were accompanied by the process of forming parties. Before the First World War, each party needed to address specific problems which arose in a given partition zone.

Even though efforts were made to broaden the debates, the character of parties and organisations had been moulded differently. With the emergence of independent Poland, parties needed to form national organisations. This, in turn, opened up debates on ideological and doctrinal issues. Where unity was achieved across former partition borders, it was frequently fragile. The basis of such unity was often just personality or ideology, rather than a political programme.

During the first elections the socialists' showing was very low. They only polled 9 per cent of votes cast in the previous Congress areas, in comparison with the 45 per cent secured by the national democrats. Thus, the unity congress of the socialist parties of the three partition areas had the added importance of not merely consolidating the movement into a national party but also of defining its objectives with reference to the most pressing issues of the time. By then the radical left had largely parted company with the socialist movement and formed a Communist Party. Nevertheless, during the interwar period Polish socialism embraced a wide spectrum of ideas.

The socialist movement fully supported Piłsudski's policies of extending Poland's borders in the East. Having initially formed a provisional administration in Lublin, the socialists accepted Piłsudski's assumption of the role of Head of State. The first person to whom he entrusted the task of forming a government was the socialist Jędrzej Moraczewski. After this auspicious start, relations between Piłsudski and the socialists deteriorated. Instead, Piłsudski sought to sideline the party and, even though Moraczewski supported the Piłsudski coup, no socialist was again to head a government during the interwar period.<sup>20</sup>

During the congress which met between 27 and 28 of April 1919, the socialist movement was dominated by members from the Congress areas. Over one third of the Congress socialists supported the radical left wing call for the destruction of the bourgeois government and establishment of a revolutionary authority in the form of workers' councils. In the course of debates, the left wing was defeated. Most socialists supported a non-revolutionary programme of collaboration with the state. The final programme of the Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party – PPS) was agreed at the XVII party congress, which met in May 1921. In the intervening

period the party moved towards the right, instructing its members to leave the workers' councils which had sprung up in the industrial areas and instead to support the creation of socialist trade unions. In the meantime, the councils either disbanded or were destroyed as part of the government's attempt to break workers' strikes which flared up in industrial areas.<sup>21</sup>

An important factor in the socialists' move towards a parliamentary road was the strength of the national issue. As the new state embarked on what was seen as a fight to defend its independence and define its borders, socialist leaders had to be clear on their and the party's attitude to Poland's relations with its neighbours. Polish unwillingness to accept the wishes of the Ukrainian and Byelorussian communities to independence was in stark contrast with Polish claims to self-determination. Leaders of the PPS uneasily supported Pilsudski's military campaigns but, at the same time, tried to find a formula which would define their own policy on the rights of national minorities forcibly incorporated into the borders of the new Polish state. The national issue became an important topic in party debates, particularly as PPS branches in Upper Silesia and Cieszyn demanded support for the inclusion of these regions into Poland. During the fighting with Russia, as the Red Army advanced towards Warsaw, defence of the state took priority over any doctrinaire debate of the role of the revolutionary state.

The PPS programme developed in a varied and complex way in response to these challenges. On the one hand, Polish socialists rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat as their immediate aim, instead committing themselves to supporting the democratic parliamentary system in Poland. On the other hand, radical social and economic objectives remained important elements of the PPS programme. Thus, the party expressed its hope that the army and police would in due course disband and would be replaced with people's militias. Equality of access to education, to work and state-funded retirement were to be important pillars of a new just society in independent Poland. In the economic sphere, the PPS referred to workers' councils assuming a managerial role in factories and enterprises. Control of economic resources for the common good was an important guiding principle of the PPS. The party programme referred to the socialisation of key industries as well as expropriation

of large landed estates. The party, nevertheless, distinguished from these ultimate goals immediate objectives, defined as the need to gain seats in the Sejm and to enter into electoral arrangements with other parties in order to be able to participate in coalition governments. In the long term, the party would strive towards the establishment of a society based on socialist principles. In its desire to secure its immediate objectives, it was inevitable that the radical aims became a dead letter, with the party leadership moving to the right during the interwar period. During the 1922 elections, the PPS increased the number of deputies in the Sejm from 35 to 41. Together with the PSL and the ND, it dominated the political life of interwar Poland.

From the outset relations between Polish socialists and other European socialist parties were strained. The international socialist movement expressed disapproval of Poland's occupation of Wilno and military action against Russia, which most Polish socialists supported. In 1921, when the Second International was reconstituted, the PPS found itself outmanoeuvred by the German and Czech socialist movements, which dominated the Second International. The question of Poland's claim to Upper Silesia and the Polish-Czechoslovak conflict over Cieszyn soured relations between the PPS and the Second International. In 1921 the Poles left the Second International. In 1923, the PPS rejoined the International. In spite of this, relations between the Poles and the International remained strained throughout the interwar period, even though they approved fully of its move towards an active anti-fascist policy after 1933.<sup>22</sup>

On 16 December 1918, the *Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski* (Communist Workers Party of Poland – KPRP) emerged from the unification of the SDKPiL with the PPS-Lewica. This was not an unexpected development. The emergence of the KPRP was a logical conclusion of debates and divisions which had manifested themselves before the war, and which were intensified during the war by the question of the socialist movement's support for the war effort. The outbreak of the Russian Revolution and, in particular, the Bolshevik seizure of power in October drove the final wedge between the moderate and radical wings of the socialist movement. When militant workers spontaneously formed workers' councils in

industrial parts of Poland, SDKPiL and PPS-Lewica decided to act in unison and to guide the revolutionary workers. They took the Bolshevik line and distanced themselves from the Menshevik belief that capitalist democracy was the inevitable next stage in history. The two left wing parties came together to direct the militant workers towards an immediate objective of a proletarian revolution. In that the KPRP disagreed with Lenin's policy of allowing national groups the right to self-determination. Instead, true to its Luxemburgist roots, the KPRP rejected the call for an independent Poland. The party continued to manifest what Lenin described as an 'infantile left wing disorder', in rejecting cooperation with the peasants and advocating the socialisation of land, rather than its redistribution – the Bolsheviks' policy during the early stages of the Russian revolution.<sup>23</sup> So confident was the KPRP of the inevitability of the revolution in Poland that it decided not to stand in the first elections, because an independent Poland was seen as a transitory stage. During the Polish conflict with the Soviet Union, the KPRP advocated support for the Red Army, which inevitably alienated even the militant workers with whom the KPRP had collaborated in the early stages in the formation of the workers' councils. Nevertheless, when the Red Army entered ethnically Polish areas and formed a revolutionary committee in the town of Białystok, no attempt was made to appoint Polish communists to this or other regional committees, which the Red Army military commanders tried to establish in the wake of their success.<sup>24</sup> Thus, from the outset, relations between the Soviet Union and the Third International (Communtern) on the one hand, and the Polish communists, on the other, were fraught with the Poles taking an ultra-leftist position.

The KPRP, in due course, renamed *Komunistyczna Partia Polski* (Communist Party of Poland – KPP), remained a small party with only limited appeal in a society in which nationalist sentiments were a strong element of political life. The party's unwillingness to associate with the new Polish state and support for the Red Army, as well as the demise of the workers' council, which had briefly offered the Communists a platform for their activism, reduced its membership. Throughout the interwar period, the KPP failed to build a base within the Polish working class. Party calls for general

strikes tended to go unheeded. Even its qualified successes in attracting Jewish membership and its popularity among the Ukrainian communities were of limited value, as this tended to confirm perceptions that the party was an alien political force in Poland. One of the factors contributing to the party's failure to gain support within the working class was its continuing ambiguity on the nationality issue. An expression of this dilemma was the party's support for the German minority's call for the inclusion of the disputed areas in the Corridor, Danzig and Upper Silesia, into Germany. This puzzling policy came about because of the Comintern's view that Germany was more important in plans for a future European revolution. In the circumstances, Polish communists were expected to advocate policies which would increase the German communists' popular appeal, but which undermined their own standing in Polish society.<sup>25</sup>

During the period after 1934, when most European communist parties moved to the popular frontist line of forging anti-fascist collaboration with socialist parties, KPP remained reluctant to commit itself to this policy. Earlier attempts made by the PPS and PSL to build unity on the basis of opposition to the post-May 1926 government were unsuccessful. The leadership of KPP remained wedded to its doctrinaire view that the PPS and the peasant parties were 'social-fascists' and failed to note their efforts in the defence of democracy. The rank and file in many cases did not follow the party line and allied itself with striking workers and peasants, in particular, during the general strike in March 1936.<sup>26</sup>

In August 1937, Stalin authorised the liquidation of all KPP leaders who were in exile in the Soviet Union. This purge was extended to the murder of Polish communists who were taking part in the Spanish Civil War. Sixty-nine per cent of the members of the Central Committee were thus murdered. Those who survived owed this to the fact that they were in Polish prisons and were not able to heed the call to present themselves in Moscow. By September 1938 all KPP cells in Poland were dissolved. The precise reasons for this action still remain unclear. The official accusations levelled against the Polish comrades varied from the suggestion that the party had been infiltrated by the Polish police to statements that the party had succumbed to doctrinaire deviation.<sup>27</sup>

When independence was regained, 76 per cent of Poland's population lived in villages. The pattern of land ownership had both economic and political implications. Sixty-four per cent of farms were described as smallholdings or dwarf holdings. In areas previously under Austrian control, rural poverty was endemic, while the western regions, previously under German control, were most advanced. Considering Poland's agrarian base, the peasant parties should have dominated the Sejm during the interwar period. The singular importance of the key demand from the villages for land reform should have further focused the loyalties of the village community. Unfortunately, the peasants' representatives in the Sejm were divided along economic and regional lines. The two main peasant parties – PSL-Wyzwolenie and PSL-Piast – represented the two main strands of the debate until 1931 when a decision was made to unite. PSL-Wyzwolenie, established in 1915, advocated cooperation with the socialist movement and was generally seen as a left wing party. PSL-Piast, dominated by Witos, preferred to ally itself with the national democrats. During the first elections in 1919, the peasant parties jointly secured 118 deputies, which represented one third of the Sejm. Forty-four deputies represented PSL-Wyzwolenie, while 70 were from PSL-Piast, with an additional four deputies from the Radical Peasant Alliance. All the peasant parties supported land reform, although PSL-Piast, representing landowners and wealthy peasants, spoke of compensation and proper use of land, whereas the other two were more general in advocating that land should belong to those who toil it.<sup>28</sup>

When it came to implementing land reform, successive governments balked at approving wholesale land redistribution. This was not only due to strong opposition from within the community of landowners. Redistribution of land raised the spectre of destruction of large surplus-producing estates and their replacement with small inefficient farms. Thus, the scope of the first Land Reform Act, passed by the Sejm on 10 July 1919, was limited. Only in the borderlands were the authorities robust in expropriating landowners, especially when the landowners belonged to the non-Polish minority. Land thus freed was distributed to Polish colonists, many of whom had been demobilised soldiers. In this way it was hoped to strengthen Polish presence and with that the security of the Polish

state in areas where loyalty to the new state was weak. These solutions did little to alleviate local land hunger, but contributed to the deterioration of relations with the Ukrainian community, which was not allowed to benefit from the land redistribution. On 15 July 1920, as the Red Army moved into Polish territories, the government, fearful that the peasant community might not support the Polish government, approved a seemingly radical land reform package. When the national emergency ceased, the landowners and politicians were unwilling to implement it. The peasant parties increasingly allied themselves with the national democrats, so they too were less willing to champion the cause of poor and landless peasants. During the following years the land reform momentum was lost. Landowners disputed the peasants' right to land, and in many cases called in troops to evict peasants from land they had taken over during the war and the turbulent post-war years. By 1925 a new law extended the rights of the landowners and to all intents and purposes ended any hopes of a future radical land redistribution.<sup>29</sup>

Of the three peasant parties in 1919, the two largest – the PSL-Piast and PSL-Wyzwolenie – were cautious about collaboration. Both parties appreciated the need to overcome their differences and to speak with one voice in the Sejm. Nevertheless, in the politics of interwar Poland, in which parties still defined themselves in terms of their regional origins and were dominated by personality cults, this proved near impossible. Regional particularism played as much a role in the two parties' failure to cooperate, as their different political programmes and specific membership. PSL-Piast clung to its roots in the Austrian Empire and its leader Witos could not overcome his hostility to Pilsudski. PSL-Wyzwolenie emerged during the war in Warsaw and supported Pilsudski. PSL-Wyzwolenie advocated radical land reform and an egalitarian social policy. This was a genuine peasant party, which had an antagonistic attitude towards large landowners.<sup>30</sup> PSL-Piast, on the other hand, supported an evolutionary process of transformation, believing that the village community could cooperate in implementing necessary land reforms and the party emphasised national unity. In 1924 the party was to see a move towards right wing policies, in particular, when Witos advocated the strengthening of the executive against the legislature.



On economic questions he called for the lifting of the ban on export of grain, which he believed would increase peasant income, even though the government feared that this would increase the price of food in Poland.<sup>31</sup> Although many of its members belonged to the middle peasant strata, with agronomists and intellectuals among its members, the party also attracted poorer peasants. In spite of disunity within the peasant movement, the peasant parties played a pivotal role in the coalition governments of the period up until 1926. Witos acted as Prime Minister on three occasions, notably forming the centre-right government on 12 May 1926, which was overthrown by Pilsudski's coup.

During 1926–27 Poland's economic situation had improved because of increased demand for Polish coal caused by the General Strike in Britain and the rising prices of agrarian products. This, in turn, improved the standard of living of middle and wealthy peasants who formed the majority of the PSL-Piast base.

The dominant political grouping of the interwar period was the alliance of national democrats with a number of Christian parties. Dmowski remained the leading figure of the nationalist right. During the latter stages of the Paris Conference, his role had been eclipsed by the arrival of Ignacy Paderewski, who, as Poland's Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs took over the chairmanship of the delegation. When Dmowski returned to Poland in May 1920, he was an aggrieved man. Pilsudski was determined to sideline him and to diminish his contribution to the Paris Peace Talks, while making sure that his own military leadership, in the conflicts that defined Poland's eastern borders, was kept in the public eye.<sup>32</sup> Dmowski and his followers believed that they had been denied their right to form the first government by Pilsudski's alliance with left wing parties. Since the nationalist group was the largest political grouping in the Sejm, their claims were not without foundation. Nevertheless, during the period 1920–22, Dmowski believed the situation was not ripe for the nationalists to challenge Pilsudski. At the same time, the nationalist bloc experienced problems in adjusting to the fact that the main point of its programme, namely the establishment of an independent Polish state, had been achieved. Dmowski, in his conviction that the national democrats had still to gain enough political experience before they could go on the

offensive, appeared to be holding back his followers. That, in turn, irritated the younger generation of nationalists, which increasingly moved towards radical right wing ideas. Dmowski found it difficult to work within the framework of a parliamentary democracy while not understanding the new currents within the nationalist movement. He felt himself to be detached from the new political realities, at times even alienated from the very movement which he had created but which increasingly was now led by new men. During the 1922 general elections, the nationalist camp that assumed the name of Związek Ludowo-Narodowy (National Populist Union – ZLN) secured 98 seats. Although the largest showing by a single party, it was not enough to form a government. The second elections in the newly formed Polish state took place in November 1922. The national democrats, allied with the christian democrats and a number of other small right wing parties, jointly won 169 seats, but was not able to form a government. The right-Christian grouping, which came to be known as Chjena, opened talks with Witos, the leader of the Peasant Party – Piast faction, which had 70 seats. The result was that in May 1923 the national democrats and the Peasant Party – Piast agreed to talks on forming a government. With the success of the talks, they succeeded in achieving their aim in October, though the result was a highly unstable coalition government.<sup>33</sup>

The 1922 the election results signalled the potential importance of the national minorities, which combined to form the Blok Mniejszości Narodowej (Block of National Minorities – BMN). By securing 87 seats in the Sejm and 25 in the Senate, the Block became the second largest parliamentary grouping. Nevertheless, throughout the interwar period, the national minorities failed to arrive at a common programme. This was inevitable as the Ukrainian, Jewish, Byelorussian and German communities were only united in their anxiety about the Polish government's policies on the nationality question.

Political life during the interwar period continued to be characterised by extreme instability, which, in turn, made it difficult to address very real economic problems. The picture was complex, in which lack of political experience and the leading parties' failure to arrive at a working consensus blighted all attempts to achieve

any political aims. The 1921 Constitution, itself a compromise, did not provide for a strong executive. Successive governments, all put together as a result of prolonged negotiations, had little chance of finding solutions to problems which faced them all. A next round of negotiations predictably followed each government's inevitable fall. Pilsudski manoeuvred to reduce the political power of the national democrats, while the latter made sure the presidency was weak. The numerically strong peasant parties, by failing to speak with one voice, reduced their effectiveness on a national level. While PSL-Wyzwolenie and the smaller radical peasant parties hoped to enter into coalition agreements with the PPS, Witos manoeuvred to lead the largest peasant party towards an agreement with the nationalists. With the PSL-Piast playing a pivotal role between the two options, successive governments were unstable. In the meantime, hyperinflation and failure to implement land reform caused economic distress and anger.

The November 1922 elections to the Sejm and the Senate were followed by presidential elections in which Pilsudski refused to stand. While Witos conducted extensive negotiations with a view to forming a government with the national democrats, their candidate to the presidency was defeated. The peasant and left wing parties, joined by parties representing national minorities voting for Gabriel Narutowicz. As a result, the Endecja started a vicious campaign against Narutowicz to become Poland's president. On 16 December 1922, a fanatic belonging to the nationalist movement assassinated the President. The nationalists and their opponents took to the streets. The internal situation was stabilised by the appointment of a military man, General Władysław Sikorski, as Prime Minister and Stanisław Wojciechowski as President. They restored order by means of emergency laws. The peasant parties had jointly supported Wojciechowski's candidacy.

Nevertheless, in 1923, PSL-Piast and the nationalist bloc reached an agreement to form a government. The centre-Christian coalition resulted in some degree of social and economic stability, but at a price. Dmowski briefly took the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs and was able to put into effect his policies of rapprochement with the Soviet Union, which, in any case, he considered to be but a transient phenomenon. Germany continued to be viewed by the

nationalists as the main enemy of the Polish state. Generally judged to have been a failure in parliamentary politics, Dmowski effectively withdrew from active politics and concentrated on developing a long-term strategy for the nationalist bloc.

The Weimar Republic's policies of economic warfare against Poland bode ill for the future. Nevertheless, participation in the centre-Christian coalition discredited PSL-Piast. The army was deployed against striking workers who had been hit by the 1923 inflation. Peasants fared little better as progress was made with land reform, stalled earlier, when landowners challenged the legislation in the courts. The deadlock was broken and compulsory redistribution of land went ahead, although with full compensation for the landowners.

A brief period of stability came with the formation of a government of specialists. Headed by an economist, Władysław Grabski, and supported by parties on the left and right of the political spectrum, it was given the authority to implement long overdue currency reforms and to pass further land reform legislation. The period of economic stabilisation coincided with a tariff war waged by Germany, determined to weaken the Polish state. When Grabski resigned in November 1925, economic and political instability followed.

The instability of successive governments suited Pilsudski, who, in spite of his ostensible retirement to his villa in Sulejówek, was determined to highlight the governments' apparent failure to defend national interests. He and those around him encouraged the emergence of the Pilsudski myth, in which he was portrayed as the father of the new Polish state and a man above party politics. In reality, he strengthened his power base within the army and fought off all attempts to reform it and to reduce his influence within the military organisations. When another government, this time led by Witos, and including the national democrats appeared likely, Pilsudski decided to stage a military coup d'état against the civilian authorities.<sup>34</sup>

At the time parliamentary democracy appeared ill prepared to deal with the growing economic problems. During the latter part of 1925 unemployment increased, prices rose and banks faced liquidity problems. The government appeared unable to put forward

solutions. Other European states had faced similar difficulties and it was not uncommon to point to the way Italy and Spain had replaced weak parliamentary governments with a dictatorship dedicated to what was perceived to be the search for solutions, which would benefit the nation as a whole. Thus the idea of replacing inefficient and corrupt elected governments with either a government of specialists, or a nationally accepted leader was common currency within the political circles. Mussolini's march on Rome in October 1922 and Primo de Rivera's Spanish military coup in September 1923 suggested a way out of the morass in which Poland appeared to find itself. What these two examples had in common with Pilsudski's own plans were assumptions that the army would not remain loyal to the government and that it would support the leader of the coup; that the community as a whole, including most political parties, would tacitly, if not openly, support the overthrow of the weak government; and that finally a process of national regeneration would form the main plank of the post-coup political platform.

The excuse for the coup was provided by the resignation of the government, precipitated by the National Bank refusing to offer further loans to support the budget. After extensive negotiations, the President had to accept the only viable coalition, that of PSL-Piast with the national democrats. In making the decision to overthrow the newly formed government, Pilsudski knew he could count on popular support. Economic problems and the obvious inability of successive governments to assure stability, had led to criticism of party politics. At the same time, the formation of a government based on two controversial parties was something he hoped to turn to his advantage. On 12 May Pilsudski, supported by troops of whose loyalty he was assured, went to Warsaw hoping to confront President Wojciechowski with a statement of a demand by the army that the recently formed Witos government should be dismissed. The two men missed each other and instead troops were massed on the two key bridges. The President was known to be unhappy with the newly formed government. Nevertheless, he refused to accept Pilsudski's demand. Furthermore, not all military units abandoned the government. Several high-ranking military leaders also disapproved of Pilsudski's actions, most notably his colleague, General

Kazimierz Sosnkowski. When in the early evening Piłsudski met the President in a theatrical stand-off on the bridge, conflict was inevitable. While the government and President withdrew from the capital 379 people died during fighting between troops loyal to the government and those under Piłsudski's command.<sup>35</sup> All left wing parties, notably the PPS, but also the peasant parties, with the exception of PSL-Piast, declared their support for Piłsudski's actions. On 14 May the government and President resigned. Piłsudski's successful presentation of the army's actions as above politics and in support of the stability played a decisive role. His own image was that of a man unsullied by the corruption, which supposedly characterised parliamentary politics, and his rhetoric of moral regeneration all played a role in reducing and disarming the opposition. During the months preceding the May coup, a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign had prepared the public for the acceptance of what was presented as a moral crusade.<sup>36</sup> The appearance of legality was completed when in the hastily prepared presidential elections, Piłsudski won an outright majority against the national democrat candidate. He then refused to assume the office of president, nominating instead Ignacy Mościcki, who became a compliant president, not one to challenge either Piłsudski or the army.

Piłsudski's own aspirations appeared to be limited. He neither disbanded the Sejm nor did he establish a personal dictatorship. Initially, repression was minimal and the main focus of official policies was the restoration of economic stability, cleansing of government organisations of corruption and focus on national interests. Even before the coup, and certainly in the years that followed, those associated with Piłsudski sought to portray the coup as an act of moral renewal. The failure of successive governments to deal with pressing economic and political issues was put down to the party leaders' corruption, moral failures and self-interest. In contrast, the image of the army and of Piłsudski was that of men who would selflessly dedicate themselves to rooting out these failures and through that lead to a healing process. Much of the public agreed with the propaganda generated by the Piłsudski camp, feeling that the period since Poland had gained independence had been a time when few politicians showed genuine interest in larger social and political reforms. In the process of renewal it was promised that justice and social

issues would be addressed as well as principles governing political decision making.<sup>37</sup>

Pilsudski's policies were undoubtedly very confusing to party leaders, which explains their failure to anticipate the way the ruling coterie gathered power into its hands. By not dissolving the parliament and supporting the formation of a new government, Pilsudski's coup initially appeared not to challenge the existing party and democratic structures. While the nationalists had good reasons to be anxious, Pilsudski's socialist past led the PPS and peasant party leaders to hope for radical reforms. In reality Pilsudski had no intention of promoting radical reforms. Nor was he clear as to what economic policy to pursue. His own ideas on governance were initially limited to ensuring that legislation was introduced which redressed the relationship between the legislature and executive, in favour of the latter.<sup>38</sup> A Bill for Constitutional Changes approved by the Sejm in July increased the power of the presidency, vesting it with extensive powers. On two occasions, Pilsudski became Prime Minister but even when ostensibly not in office, his authority was unchallenged. His power base remained the army, which was purged of those who disagreed with the coup. Until his death, Pilsudski held the Ministry of Defence portfolio and occupied the newly created post of General Inspector of Military Forces. In 1926, attempts by Sejm deputies to challenge the army were resolved through the use of premeditated brutality. Officers invaded the Sejm, disrupted the meetings and beat up a prominent deputy who criticised attempts to increase the army budget. During the 1928 general elections, Pilsudski and his supporters consolidated their position, first by forming a ruling party and then by extending the army's control over all aspects of civilian life. The Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem (Non-Party Block for Co-operation with the Government – BBWR), in reality no more than a means of consolidating the military's control over the political life of Poland, won a majority in the 1928 elections.<sup>39</sup>

The 1926 coup initially divided the main political parties. PSL-Wyzwolenie approved of the coup, seeing it as a means of preventing the national democrats gaining power. Only when Pilsudski failed to appoint socialists to the new government and when the post-May government approved attacks on strikers, did the party

face up to the full implications of what had happened. By that time PSL-Piast, realising that the main thrust of Piłsudski's attack were the national democrats, shifted from initial condemnation of the coup to a conciliatory line. This shift occurred in 1928. The first moment of reflection came after the general elections in which the peasant parties' representation in the Sejm was reduced to one fifth of the number of deputies. Government policies aimed at limiting the importance of the legislature led to further soul-searching. During that year the peasant parties came to realise that the defence of democracy required them to close ranks. Although anxiety about the Piłsudski regime forging alliances with large landowners and the consequences of the burden of taxation falling onto the rural community were factors in the peasant parties' assessment of the situation, the conviction that democracy was under attack and that it was up to the toiling people to defend it, motivated the peasant leaders to speak out against the government. In 1929, against a background of increased attacks on the Sejm and its deputies, left wing parties combined together with the peasant parties and Christian Democrats to form a centre-left (in Polish – Centrolew) Sejm opposition grouping.<sup>40</sup> In 1930 the economic crisis gripped Poland. The government's response was the launch of an attack on the Centrolew parties, mainly the PPS and PSL-Piast. During the night of 9–10 September, leaders of the opposition were arrested and incarcerated in the fortress of Brześć. In the show trial which was staged during the following year, all were accused of having planned to overthrow the government. Following a disastrous showing in the general elections of September 1930, the peasant parties made the critical decision to unite. The Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe (United Peasant Movement – ZSL) marked a high point in the development of that movement. As its main objective, the new peasant party put forward the defence of democracy and the fight against the dictatorship. During his imprisonment, Witos had had time to reflect on the reasons why Piłsudski had been able to undermine the Sejm. It was a bitter moment for political leaders like him, who had dedicated their lives to the fight for a proper representative political system, to see it challenged on grounds that this had led to establishment of institutions incapable of dealing with real economic problems.<sup>41</sup> While unity within the peasant movement



represented an impressive organisational achievement, the Piłsudski military regime was firmly in control. Witos fled to Czechoslovakia, from where he continued to direct the peasant movement, which organised waves of peasant strikes, most notably in 1937.

During the 1930 elections, which were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, BBWR won a majority, though Centrolew secured 17.7 per cent and the nationalist bloc 7.1 per cent. The Piłsudski camp could consider changing the constitution. By then, what had started with hopes for a process of renewal had become a corrupt military-dominated regime, with no ideology other than a desire to maintain a grip on power. In this Piłsudski was assured of the support of the large landowners, with whom he had sought reconciliation after the May coup. An assurance was given to the landowners that the government would not implement further land reform legislation. The industrialists, too, confident that the government would not support the PPS calls for extending protective legislation, lent their support to the BBWR.

On 23 April 1935, the regime succeeded in changing the constitution. Introducing presidential rule, it reduced the prerogatives of the elected assembly. What should have been a legal framework for Piłsudski's vision of the rule of a strong man came too late. On 12 May Piłsudski died, leaving a coterie of military henchmen to continue governing Poland. The so-called rule of the colonels was characterised by the increased process of militarisation of state and economic institutions.<sup>42</sup>

The Polish economy showed the first signs of emerging out of the depression only in 1933. This late date was due the economy being based on agriculture, which continued to be in recession for longer than the industrial sector. A further factor which influenced the late recovery was dependence on foreign capital, which continued to shun Poland. Nevertheless, 1935 witnessed the first solid signs of recovery. This was a period associated with the policies of Deputy Prime Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, who worked on a wide-ranging national economic programme. His Four Year Plan and the following plan approved in 1938 envisaged the development of an internal economy and an industrial takeoff based on armament industries. Thus his economic vision had two objectives – to lift Poland out of economic backwardness and to establish it as a

regional power. The central plank of his Four Year Plan was the creation of a Central Industrial Zone (Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy – COP) that envisaged the development of mainly munitions- and armament-related industries in the triangle between the rivers Dunajec, Wisła and the San. COP was developed in an area which, it was believed, would be beyond the range of German and Soviet military planes. Assisted by extensive government funds and French loans, COP did indeed promise to form the basis of Poland's industrial takeoff. At the time of the outbreak of the war, Polish economic performance appeared to be improving, even though its basis was not sufficiently solid to assure the army of a victory.<sup>43</sup>

The years 1935–39 were a time when the military regime appears to have degenerated into no more than a gravy train for Piłsudski's coterie of military men. From having initially portrayed itself as a force for regeneration and renewal, the colonels presided over financial mismanagement and oppression. Whereas in 1926 the officer core commanded the nation's respect, in the late 1930s this was no longer the case. Both in the left and the right, as in all other parties, younger leaders, untainted by support for the coup in 1926, voiced disaffection and anger with the government's policies.

Poland, in common with many European states, experienced a deep political polarisation. On the right, the national democrats found that radical elements within the nationalist movement wanted to see action and were weary with parliamentary politics. Of the splinter groups which emerged during this period, the Falanga, modelled on the Italian Fascist Party and led by Bolesław Piasecki, was noted for its violent anti-Semitic action within universities. The national democrats called for a boycott of Jewish businesses, in effect, blaming the Jewish community for Poland's economic difficulties.

The Peasant Parties and the socialists watched the nationalists and the extreme right with deep anxiety. They were in particular fearful that the nationalists would be able to appeal to the peasant community and disaffected workers through their policy of direct action and stage-managed events at universities and against Jewish-owned shops. Thus, briefly in 1937, the two discussed the formation of a peasant left alliance. This came to nothing, although the peasant movement did briefly threaten the government when, in

August 1937, peasant strikes virtually cut off food supplies to the cities. The peasants called for a moratorium on debt repayments and for economic aid to help with high levels of indebtedness caused by payments for land obtained under the land reform acts. The decision to attack the government was the result of a split within the ZSL leadership. Witos called for an all-out attack on the ruling military coterie. Maciej Rataj, the chairman of the ZSL, had doubts about the effectiveness of strikes and was anxious about the likely consequences of relation. In the end, the decision was made to call for a peasant strike, which led to Rataj resigning.<sup>44</sup> The government's response was to send in troops. In battles which followed, 44 peasants were killed and thousands were arrested.

Under the patronage of the pianist Igancy Paderewski, several political leaders in exile met in Switzerland to discuss forming a united opposition to the post-Pilsudski regime. This came to be known as the Front Morges, from the place where Paderewski resided. The leading light of this grouping was General Władysław Sikorski, an opponent of Pilsudski and a bitter critic of his successors. In addition to Witos, who represented the peasant movement, Herman Lieberman, a socialist and a victim of the Brześć trials, took part in the talks in Morges. In the end these meetings, taking place far away and cut off from the reality of what was happening in Poland, were of little more than symbolic importance.

The Pilsudski led coup resulted in confusion within the Socialist Party. Many hoped that he would turn to the PPS. This did not happen and instead Pilsudski established closer relations with leading landowners. The army remained his main power base in the gradual process of reducing the authority of the elected assembly. By 1928, PPS decided to ally itself with a number of centre parties, most notably the two peasant parties. In 1930, when the opposition parties, united in the Centrolew, went into attack, the regime retaliated by arresting all the leaders, including those from the PPS. Norbet Barlicki, Adam Pragier, Herman Lieberman, and Stanisław Dubois were all incarcerated in the notorious Brześć prison, where most were severely beaten and tortured.<sup>45</sup> During the following years the party was in disarray. Some advocated an outright fight against the Sanacja regime, while others suggested a moderate response, remaining within the law. The latter trend dominated the leadership,

though the party rank and file increasingly showed signs of wanting to take the battle against the government to the streets. During the mid-1930s, the PPS agreed to limited cooperation with the KPP, the Jewish Socialist Party, the Bund and with trade unions, mainly in forming a popular front opposed to the post-Pilsudski regime. One of the options considered by the PPS was unity with the peasant parties. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, these ideas found a ready echo within the PPS leadership, nevertheless, there were always those who preferred not to commit the party to any cooperation which would have limited the party's freedom of action.<sup>46</sup> The growth of German threat in 1938 meant that the PPS leadership was reluctant to challenge the government. This, in effect, allowed the government to present its policies as the defence of national interests, a formulation which made it difficult to criticise the government's internal and foreign policies.

## 4 The Outbreak and the Course of the Second World War

The 1930s was dominated by concerns over the rise of the radical right in Europe. In 1933 when the Nazi Party came to power in Germany, feelings of foreboding gripped European capitals. In their propaganda statements, the Nazis made it clear that they would seek the revision of the Versailles Treaty. Their hostility towards Poland and Czechoslovakia was known and was not unique to the Nazi Party. Thus, few European observers doubted that the security situation in Europe would change dramatically. In Poland, the sense of anxious anticipation was compounded by the awareness that throughout the Weimar period successive German governments had consistently refused to accept the loss of previously German territories to the new Polish state. In spite of this, in September 1939 when Poland faced the full might of the German attack, the country was badly prepared for war. Furthermore, in spite of having earlier signed agreements with France and Great Britain, neither state provided military support to Poland.

Following the First World War, France formed the cornerstone of Polish security plans. In spite of the shared anxiety about Germany, relations between the two states proved difficult. On the Polish side, frustrated expectations cast a cloud over dealings with Paris. The Poles had hoped that France would treat Poland as its key eastern ally. The Polish ruling elite and the strata of the landed gentry from which officers in the armed forces were recruited were Francophiles. Indeed, the assumption that a restored Poland would replace Russia

in French military plans was encouraged by French military support for Poland during the war with the Soviet Union. In the years that followed, military contacts between Poland and France remained strong. The Polish military academy was established by the French and most military leaders looked to France for up to date doctrines and equipment.

French governments did not reciprocate these sentiments. The emergence of independent Polish and Czechoslovak states and the establishment of a revolutionary government in Russia at the end of the First World War required the West European Powers, most notably France, to reassess their previous foreign policy. Before and during the war, Russia formed the cornerstone of the military and political concept of an eastern front, the purpose of which was to maintain effective security on two fronts against Germany. Immediately after the war, the future of Russia appeared unclear. While there was some hope that in due course a liberal government would be established there, French foreign policymakers kept that option open, while at the same time investigating the possibility of building up a pro-French bloc based on Poland and Czechoslovakia. Even when it became clear that the revolutionary government in Russia would not collapse swiftly and support for the White Russian forces was reduced, Poland's position in French thinking continued to be subject to a number of contradictory considerations. Most importantly, it was believed that Poland did not have the military and economic capacity to form a durable eastern front. In those circumstances, although throughout the interwar period France was in principle willing to support Poland as a possible barrier to German expansion to the East, French willingness to consider other options, made Polish politicians uncertain as to the extent to which they could count on France's support.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, successive Polish governments were always disappointed with what they considered was limited French support. Initially, Polish leaders had hoped that France would take a direct interest in Poland's economic and military development. When this did not happen, they became frustrated at France's apparent unwillingness to make large-scale commitments to Poland. In February 1921, the Franco-Polish Political and Military Convention was signed. This did not stop France from entering into agreements

with Britain and Germany to secure France's western border. The latter initiatives resulted in the conclusion of the Locarno Treaty, which offered France security in the event of an unprovoked German attack. Nevertheless, France still felt it prudent to reaffirm its agreement with Poland by signing the Treaty of Mutual Guarantee in October 1925. At the same time the French government continued its interest in Russia and the option of a treaty with the Soviet Union was maintained, to the Poles' constant irritation. The fact that Poland was Germany's most likely object of attack decreased French governments' willingness to underwrite Poland's security. In any case, unresolved territorial conflicts between Poland, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia made it impossible for France to bring the three states together to build a regional security bloc. Efforts to strengthen and define France's commitments to Polish security were strained due to Franco-German relations throughout the 1920s. The other element in Polish security calculations was the belief that the Soviet Union was the other most likely aggressor. Attempts were thus made to build up an anti-Soviet bloc.<sup>2</sup>

In 1932 Colonel Josef Beck, one of Pilsudski's trusted wartime comrades, became Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs. Beck had a reputation of being anti-French. Although his foreign policy was a reaction to France's continuing search for agreements with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, he was determined to establish for Poland an independent position in Central Europe. One of his proposals was a regional pact, which would extend from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, his ideas proved to be too ambitious. Although the Scandinavian countries shared Poland's interest in the Baltic region, a closer association with Poland had little to offer them. Beck's efforts to establish a leadership role for Poland in relation to the Baltic States yielded limited results. Although Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, all in varying degrees feared the Soviet Union and Germany, unity between the three had only a narrow foundation. Critically, Poland's conflict with Lithuania over the Wilno region, incorporated into Poland in 1920, precluded the development of a regional pact. Nor was Beck able to impose Poland's authority on Hungary and Romania. Attempts to forge unity between states, equally determined to remain independent of Germany and the Soviet Union, required the resolution of

intractable regional conflicts, of which the Romanian-Hungarian conflict was the most difficult. Relations between Polish and Romanian governments were good, based largely on the shared anxiety about the Soviet Union. Polish relations with Hungary also appeared to be constructive, even though no agreements were signed between the two governments. But neither the Romanian nor the Hungarian government was willing to overlook their own territorial disputes in favour of a Polish-dominated regional bloc. Polish-Czechoslovak relations, always strained throughout the interwar period because of Czechoslovak occupation of Teschen and support for the Ukrainian irredentist movements, deteriorated dramatically with the first signs of German intention to destroy Czechoslovakia in 1937.<sup>3</sup>

In 1934, soon after Hitler came to power, Józef Lipski, the Polish ambassador in Berlin, appeared to have made a critical breakthrough when he secured a German commitment to a non-aggression agreement with Poland. The advantages of this treaty were very obvious. Until then successive German governments refused to accept the post-war border with Poland, thus implying that Germany might take action, including military intervention, to redress this grievance. Conflicting German and Polish claims to the Baltic port city of Danzig, which was granted the status of a Free City under the protection of the League of Nations, risked the possibility of Poland losing its precariously secured access to the sea. Finally, the German tariff war had directly affected the Polish economy, but indirectly had frightened off West European investors from Poland, thus decreasing its governments' hopes for economic recovery and industrial takeoff through securing foreign loans. The signing of the Non-Aggression Agreement in January 1934 indicated that, although none of these problems had been resolved, both sides had made a commitment to their peaceful resolution. At the same time, diplomatic and military links with France were maintained, although these were increasingly strained.

In 1938, Beck played a dangerous game. German aggression towards Czechoslovakia offered the Polish military regime an opportunity for a diplomatic coup, or so it seemed at the time. As the crisis developed with the Nazi regime assuming the role of protector of the allegedly mistreated German community in Czechoslovakia, Beck coordinated Poland's demands for the reopening of the Teschen



issue with the Nazi propaganda campaign. The Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs had calculated that the weakening of Czechoslovakia would allow Poland to regain the Teschen region, but more importantly, also to affirm Poland's authority in the region. He had not, however, anticipated that France and Britain would take the lead and would ultimately take it upon themselves to force Czechoslovakia to accept German demands for the cession of the Sudeten borderlands to Germany. During the Munich Conference, which took place on 30 September 1938, Italy, France, Britain and Germany determined the future of Czechoslovakia. The exclusion of its government from this diplomatic settlement proved to be a bitter blow to Poland. Czechoslovakia lost territories to Germany and suffered the abrogation of the 1924 alliance with France. Although this allowed Poland to claim the Teschen region, it quickly became apparent that Germany's influence in the region of direct interest to Poland was dramatically increased. At the end of 1938, Poland was dangerously exposed, both diplomatically and militarily.<sup>4</sup>

The full extent of Poland's perilous situation should have become apparent when on 24 October Lipski, who hoped that with the removal of the Czechoslovak problem relations between Poland and Germany could be improved, was informed by Ribbentrop that Germany now intended to pursue its demands towards Danzig. Since the Poles saw the issue as a touchstone of German goodwill, an attempt to strengthen German control over the city followed up by an indication that in the long term Germany would seek to reclaim the town indicated a dramatic change in the Nazis attitude towards Poland.<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to be precise about when the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs realised the enormity of the German threat to Poland's security. Nevertheless, in January 1939 he undertook an informal trip to France, clearly aiming to probe French willingness to support Poland. At the same time enquiries were directed towards London, first to mend fences with British politicians, who felt slighted by Poland's earlier pursuit of its territorial claims to Czechoslovakia when Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, was trying to broker an agreement between Germany and Czechoslovakia. Beck's diplomatic initiatives in relation to the Western democracies were unsuccessful until March 1939, when a new crisis forced not only

Britain but also France to assess the long-term implication of the growth of German influence in Eastern Europe.

During the night of 14/15 March German troops marched into Prague. The destruction of Czechoslovakia contradicted the terms of the agreement signed at Munich. Developments elsewhere gave the British and French governments further cause for alarm. Rumours that Romania was being pressurised to grant Germany absolute control over its oil production and anxiety that Germany was planning to attack the Low Countries, all combined to create an atmosphere of anticipation. Although, the Poles refused to divulge any details, British politicians suspected that Germany was putting pressure on the Poles to hand over Danzig. London was faced with a quandary over this particular issue. It was suspected that the Poles would rather fight than succumb to German pressure. This would, it was feared, lead to the outbreak of a Europe-wide war. On the other hand, if the Poles bowed to German pressure, Poland would become a vassal state. German expansion to East would irrevocably destroy the European balance of power and might also, as the British Cabinet reasoned, ultimately cause a European War.<sup>6</sup>

In these circumstances, after inconclusively investigating the possibility of Britain acting as patron to the creation of an East European bloc of states committed to opposing Germany, the British prime minister declared on 31 March 1939 that Britain intended to defend Poland. The guarantee was to operate even if Germany only moved to incorporate Danzig in the Reich. The British gesture was badly thought out and in the course of the following months its hollowness was fully exposed in the course of the British-Polish military talks, the French-Polish political and military talks and most conclusively the British-French military talks. Neither the British nor the French politicians knew what action they might authorise in the event of a German attack on Poland. Militarily, little could be done, unless preparations were put in place beforehand. Most damningly, the role of the Soviet Union in any future war with Germany was not thought out and, in spite of prolonged talks first with Soviet politicians and later with top military leaders, remained so, even as German troops marched into Poland in September.<sup>7</sup>

To the Polish government the German attack was a time of reckoning. The full extent of the lack of military preparedness had not

been addressed. Successive governments, in particular those connected with the Pilsudski regime, exonerated themselves from responsibility for the army's lamentable performance, accusing instead the French and British of failure to support Poland in the face of German aggression. In reality, the Franco-Polish Political Agreement and Military Convention of 1921 and the Treaty of Mutual Guarantee did not provide for unambiguous and automatic military support in the event of a German attack. In April 1939 General Tadeusz Kasprzycki led a Polish delegation to Paris, the aim of which was to secure precise French support for the increasingly likely military German attack on Poland. After nearly a month of negotiations, the Polish general was left in no doubt that France was unlikely to take any military action to relieve Poland. **Behind the facade of supporting Poland, the French government was fast reducing its commitment to fight Germany,** instead preferring to hide behind political pronouncements which had no military backing.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the British guarantee of March 1939 to Poland and the British-Polish Guarantee of Mutual Assistance signed on 25 August 1939 did not state what would be Britain's response in the event of a German-Polish war. Article 1 of the latter indicated that if either party were to find itself under attack, the other party would give 'all support and assistance'. The Secret Protocol made it clear that the agreement only applied in the event of an attack by Germany.<sup>9</sup> Were another European state to be the aggressor, there would be no commitment to assist the victim state. Thus, in reality, Poland had no prior assurance that Britain or France would automatically take any military action in support of Poland. Polish politicians and military leaders also knew that, if the Soviet Union were to take action against Poland, the two Western commitments to defend Poland would not apply.

The situation was, in fact, much worse than the government of colonels was willing to accept. In spite of the conviction that the maintenance of an independent Poland was of critical importance to the European balance of power, French and British chiefs of staff admitted in the course of military talks that, unless Poland could form the basis of a viable eastern front, its fate would depend on the ultimate outcome of the war. Since in 1939 neither Britain nor

France could build up an effective front against Germany, Poland's fall was assumed to be a foregone conclusion. During the final stages of the Franco-British-Soviet talks in August, the Red Army commanders quickly realised that neither side intended to commit resources to fighting Germany in the East, instead hoping that the Soviet Union would do something. It was unclear what that something was to be. The failure of the military talks with the Western democracies drove Stalin and his generals to seek an accommodation with Germany. As a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Non-Aggression Pact signed on 23 August, Germany was assured of Soviet neutrality in the event of an attack on Poland. The Secret Annex to that agreement stated that if Germany were to attack Poland, the Soviet Union would occupy the eastern regions of Poland. The fate of Poland was thus sealed.<sup>10</sup>

The German attack on Poland in the morning of 1 September followed a summer of mounting tension. In the Free City of Danzig the Nazi Senate introduced para-Nuremberg Laws and demanded the removal of Polish customs police. Disputes between the Nazis, determined to see the incorporation of the city into the Third Reich, and the Poles, who insisted on defending their prerogatives in the Free City, led to confrontations between the two communities and attacks on Polish institutions. The Polish government took this as a sign that Berlin, rather than the local Nazis, sought a conflict with Poland. Nevertheless, Beck, to the end, made efforts to reopen a dialogue with the Nazi government but to no avail. Belatedly, it was realised that Poland was ill prepared for the possibility of an outright German military attack. It proved too late to remedy production shortages. Attempts were made to obtain loans from the British and French governments in order to purchase military supplies in the West. Though sympathetic, the French government was reluctant to take on the burden of financing the Polish war effort, while the British Treasury responded with hostility. In the complex evaluation of all possible scenarios in which Germany, Italy and Japan were all likely to take military action against Britain's imperial interests and supply routes, the events unfolding in Poland were not a priority. Thus, even though in London it was realised that once Germany attacked Poland, it would be impossible to supply

Poland with military equipment, the final decision was not to allow the Poles to purchase from Britain supplies which British military forces would need.<sup>11</sup>

The German attack on Poland was relentless. While the German air force bombed bridges, railway lines, strategic points as well as civilian objects, the Wehrmacht attacked from three directions. From the North, West and South German units moved into Polish territory. Within two weeks the Polish war effort was defeated, though in some areas fighting continued until the beginning of October. On 17 September, the Red Army entered into Eastern Poland, thus hastening the already inevitable collapse of the Polish defence. In Poland the sense of isolation and abandonment was absolute. Although Britain and France declared war on Germany on 3 September, no military action was taken to attack Germany in the West or to hinder German progress into Poland. The British and French governments confined their actions to verbal protests, rejecting all Polish requests that they should deploy their air forces over Germany and that they should also declare war against the Soviet Union. Belatedly, Poland's rulers were to realise that, in spite of optimistic evaluations that the Western democracies would have to support Poland's war effort, this was not the case. Beck's faulty reasoning that Hungary and Romania would look to Poland further weakened Poland's position. Hungary allowed the safe passage of Poles through its territory, while Romania initially allowed the fleeing Polish government the right of entry only to intern it for the duration of the war. Nevertheless, both states ultimately sided with Germany.

German occupation of Poland lasted six years. The pre-war government was interned in Romania and had no realistic hope of returning to lead the struggle for liberation. The social and political leadership of the nation was decimated by brutal occupation policies. Nevertheless, the Poles in the occupied territories and in exile always believed that the Polish state would be restored. Thus, from the moment of defeat, supporters of the interwar government and its critics, likewise, anticipated the end of the war and how they would be able to form the first post-war administration. For the political and military elites of the interwar period, the question was how to make sure that the war ended in such a way that would

enable them to return to Poland and to prevent power from falling into the hands of those whom they had sidelined earlier. In the eyes of these men the national democrats, the socialists and the revolutionary workers and peasants, all in equal measure, posed a threat to their plans to rule Poland once it had been liberated.

It could be argued that the battle for authority in post-war Poland started even before the German and Soviet forces established control of Polish occupied territories in September 1939. **On 4 September, the government decided to evacuate Warsaw.** As the German military effort proceeded, the government and the High Command moved closer to the Romanian border where evacuation points were kept open. This precipitated a flight of the civilian population. On 17 September, the final decision was made to cross into Romanian territory. The entry of the Red Army into Polish territory hastened the departure, from Poland, of the President, most of the ministers. The exodus included the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the High Command led by Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły, the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army and, finally, also Cardinal Hlond, the Catholic Primate of All Poland. Military units and government employees were encouraged to depart too.<sup>12</sup>

The next stage of their plan was to reconstruct a government in exile and to establish control over Polish resources abroad. France appeared to be the obvious place from where the fight for the liberation of Poland could be continued. Thus, the Polish Embassy in Paris, under the control of a staunch Piłsudski supporter, Ambassador Łukasiewicz, became the focal point of intrigues and dealings, the purpose of which was the appointment of a Polish government. **The Romanians, acting on German instructions, interned the Polish Government.** None of this allowed politicians from other parties to assert themselves. Demands were made for the formation of a broadly based exile government, rather than a successor to the pre-September government. **The French became party to these decisions, mainly because of their dislike of Beck and a desire to make sure that the Polish government formed in Paris would be pro-French.** Wary of the possibility of the Germans establishing a collaborationist government, the Poles in exile hastened to complete the legal transfer of power to an exile authority. Acting in accordance with the 1935 Constitution, which allowed for the President

to appoint a successor in circumstances of national emergency, the President, interned in Romania, resigned and appointed a successor. That successor, in turn, had the authority to form a government.

The composition of the Polish government in exile was announced on 30 September. In due course, a National Council was appointed to act as a quasi parliament. In forming the government, the Polish leaders, who had managed to make their way to Paris, had arrived at an uneasy compromise. Representatives of the pre-war government reluctantly accepted that they could not hold on to power. Leaders of the parties which had been sidelined during the Pilsudski period were not strong enough to form a government on their own. The military leadership remained committed to the Pilsudski legend. Critically, Władysław Sikorski, the Prime Minister, was acceptable to the French and had the support of all the parties, bar the pre-war loyalists who had sided with President Władysław Raczkiewicz, a Pilsudski man.<sup>13</sup>

Until his death in an air accident off Gibraltar on 4 June 1943, Sikorski was uneasily able to keep the exile politicians together. His main aim was to make a visible Polish military contribution to the war effort and, through that, to secure a place at the anticipated post-war conference, which would discuss the future of Europe. In his determination that the exile government should remain allied to France and Britain, Sikorski faced strong opposition from within the ranks of the officers who had fled from Poland and who had enrolled in military units formed in France. Highly politicised, they refused to accept his pragmatism, insisting on earmarking the Polish exile military units for action on Polish territory only. The socialist, peasant party and national democrat leaders who had also managed to get to France, and who were included in the government and the National Council, continued to distrust supporters of the pre-war regime.<sup>14</sup> Unity between these groupings was always fragile and this, in turn, prevented them from arriving at any agreement concerning post-war Poland. Initially, the obvious problem was that neither France nor Britain was willing to write off the Soviet Union. In spite of Soviet cooperation with Nazi Germany until June 1941, the Western democracies knew that in due course German plans for the defeat of communist Russia would lead to war and with that would come the possibility of the Soviet Union allying itself

with France and Britain. To the Poles this meant that they would have to face the prospect of being allied to a government which had attacked Poland in September 1939, and which refused to relinquish claims to territories occupied during the period of cooperation with Nazi Germany.

At the same time Polish political leaders in France were anxious that no national leaders should emerge in occupied territories to challenge the exile government's monopoly of political decision making after the liberation. Throughout the war the government in exile sought to build up a strong resistance movement in Poland, one that could coordinate its actions with the Western Powers at the moment of Germany's defeat. In that it was important to subordinate that movement to the authority of the exile government. The resistance movement which emerged in the occupied territories, and which came to be known as the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa – AK*), accepted in principle the authority of the exile government. But since most of the underground military leaders of the AK belonged to and supported the old Pilsudski regime, the government in exile was always anxious, lest the underground military leadership seek to establish a post-war administration and with that replicate Pilsudski's success after the First World War.<sup>15</sup>

The German attack on France and France's capitulation dealt a bitter blow to the Poles. When the Polish government in exile moved from France to Britain in June 1940, nearly 28,000 Polish men were evacuated, mainly from the coast of Brittany, and conveyed to military camps in Scotland. A nucleus of a Polish air force had already been established in Britain. Polish naval and merchant ships, which had evaded capture during and after the September campaign, had also made their way to Britain. In addition, nearly 6,000 Polish soldiers formed into a unit known as the Carpathian Brigade. They fought with the French in Syria and then moved to join the British command in the Middle East. Initially, the Polish contribution to the war effort was modest, but distinct. Lack of manpower was the main reason for its modesty. Nevertheless, Sikorski was determined to see the expansion of units in the West. By making a direct and unconditional contribution to the war, he sought to establish a position of influence for the exile



government. For this, he had to balance the need to dedicate all Polish manpower to fighting under British command against the obvious desire to hold some back for the final stages of the war, when he hoped they would establish control over liberated territories and secure it for the return of the government from exile. Sikorski, in his absolute dedication to supporting, first, the French war effort, and then the British one, faced criticism from the President and the officers, who accused him of excessive subordination to British interests.<sup>16</sup>

A critical test of Sikorski's ability to silence his critics while maintaining discipline occurred in June 1941. When Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill committed Britain to supporting the Soviet Union. He believed that Britain, together with the USA, which faced the Japanese threat, had to cooperate with the Soviet Union if they were to survive. This attitude undermined the precariously maintained position of influence which the Polish government-in-exile had built up in Britain, and which it hoped to extend to the USA. Sikorski, nevertheless, reasoned that, without a major injection of manpower, the Polish war effort would decrease and with that his government's insistence on being treated as Britain's major war ally would be undermined. He, therefore, entered into direct negotiations with the Soviet side, even though Stalin refused to make commitments to the restoration of Poland's pre-war eastern border after the war. This was a tactical decision, which Sikorski hoped would enable him to expand the Polish fighting forces in the West by recruiting the Poles trapped in the Soviet Union. These were people who had found themselves in the Soviet-occupied areas after the Soviet advance into Eastern Poland in September 1939.<sup>17</sup>

In July 1941, Sikorski and the Soviet ambassador to London, Ivan Maisky, signed an agreement. As a result, during the following months the Poles released from Soviet camps were incorporated into Polish units formed under the command of General Władysław Anders in Russia. Stalin, nevertheless, changed his mind and by the beginning of 1942 imposed limits on the size of Polish units. Since the British command in the Middle East was short of manpower, Anders agreed to the removal of already formed units, numbering approximately 44,000 men, from the Soviet Union and their

placement under British command in Iran. All Polish civilians who could attach themselves to the evacuation were assisted in leaving the perilous situation in which they lived in the Soviet Union. These units were retrained and reorganised and were deployed in fighting in Italy, where they had, in particular, distinguished themselves in fighting around the monastery of Monte Casino. Polish families who had left the Soviet Union with Anders were settled in camps in British dependencies in Africa and India. After the war they were allowed to come to Britain, where they formed the biggest Polish diaspora outside the USA.

By the time of his death on 4 July 1943 Sikorski had failed in his main objective, which was to create a debt of gratitude, which the British government would discharge by unconditionally supporting the Polish cause after the war. British dependence on the Soviet war effort meant that the Churchill government sought first to persuade and then to intimidate the Polish government into not raising with the Soviet Union the issue of the eastern border and the fate of thousands of Polish officers, who it was known had been held in Soviet camps. Early in 1943 relations between the Sikorski government and the Soviet Union deteriorated. On 13 April German radio broadcast news that mass graves containing bodies of executed Polish officers had been found in the Katyń forest in what had been Eastern Poland. The Soviet government denied responsibility claiming that it was the Germans occupying the region in the autumn of 1941 that were responsible. The Polish government in exile called for the International Red Cross to investigate. Stalin chose to interpret this as a hostile act and broke off relations with the government in exile.<sup>18</sup> The breach was then used as an excuse to foster pro-communist groupings among the Poles in the Soviet Union, with a view to their forming the first post-war government. Soon after, an announcement was made by the Soviet authorities that a unit called the Polish Kościuszko Division was formed to fight with the Red Army.

When Sikorski died, the government in exile fractured. Internal disputes and political intrigues, some dating to the interwar years, reduced the Poles' ability to negotiate with the British government at a time when the importance of the Soviet Union was increasing. In 1944 Churchill effectively blackmailed the then Polish Prime

Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk to accept the creation of a provisional government in liberated Polish territories. This turned out to be a Soviet-sponsored group which had been established in July 1944, in the town of Lublin. The compromise proved unacceptable to most Polish politicians and military leaders in Britain, who refused to return to Poland after the war. In July 1945, Britain, soon followed by other states, recognised the Lublin authority as the provisional government. For the government in exile this spelt the end of its plans to influence events in post-war Poland. The recognition of the Lublin government also ended hopes, which the pre-war politicians had fostered, for a return to Poland and the resumption of political life on the basis of parties which had been active during the interwar period. In Polish areas freed from German occupation, Soviet control was established without reference to the exile government.

Although the government in exile and the resistance movements, which had emerged in occupied territories, tried very hard to maintain unity and to focus on the main objective of liberation, this proved difficult. In principle, throughout the war, all parties except the communists accepted the authority of the government in exile. The reality proved considerably more complex, as the experiences of the underground and the exiled leadership proved to be very different and, as a result, they came to attach importance to different issues. While the government in exile focused its efforts on international diplomacy, in Poland survival under Nazi occupation and then relations with the incoming Soviet authorities had a more dramatic impact on plans for the end of the war. Although the underground resistance remained loyal to the government in exile, the underground leaders were much more aware of what had gone wrong during the interwar period. The exile politicians focused on the need for unity and chose not to dwell on the past. In occupied territories that unity proved more difficult to maintain. Within each of the underground political organisations and parties, the future envisaged for post-war Poland was more radical and, in effect, bolder than the prospect considered by the party leadership ensconced in London. The government in exile, only too aware that references to the interwar period, in particular the Piłsudski period, would prove divisive, was reluctant to publicise a radical programme of reforms, other than making a commitment to the restoration of

Poland to its pre-September 1939 borders and to the establishment of a democratic system. In Poland, the debate went beyond those obvious principles.

German and Soviet entry into Polish territories had opened a deeply tragic chapter in Polish history. Under attack was not only the Polish state and its resources, but the very existence of the Polish nation, its culture and all those forms of national self-expression that had so recently been legitimised. On 28 September 1939 Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union finalised the border between the two occupation zones of Poland. This ran along the lines of the three rivers, the Narew, Bug and San. Each power determined its own occupation policies, with no interference from the other. In June 1941 when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Polish territories previously in Soviet hands were occupied by Germany.

The areas under Soviet control had contained a mixed population of Poles, Lithuanians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians and a high proportion of Jews. Polish nationality policy had been to create military settlements, particularly in the Ukrainian-inhabited regions, with the aim of consolidating Polish control in the disputed borderlands. The result was that when the Polish army was defeated in September 1939, there was in the region little sympathy for its plight. Soviet occupation policies drove a further wedge between the Polish and non-Polish communities. **Soviet propaganda proclaimed the eastern parts of Poland to be 'liberated'.**<sup>19</sup> Polish soldiers and military men were treated as enemy prisoners and incarcerated in military camps, where unsuccessful efforts were made to recruit pro-Soviet elements. Polish community leaders were arrested and transported into the interior. During the winter, the Polish civilian population was forced onto trains at short notice and dispersed throughout the Soviet Union. To the Poles, Soviet actions amounted to no less than an attempt to deny their right to nationality, because they were forced to accept Soviet citizenship.<sup>20</sup> When in July 1941 Sikorski signed an agreement with the Soviet Union, it was from among these Poles that he hoped to be able to recruit the manpower to expand the Polish fighting forces in the West. Not surprisingly, the army recruited in the Soviet Union under the command of General Anders was seen as a lifeline for the Polish civilians, who flocked to the recruitment centres seeking support and shelter. When those units moved to Iran, the Poles who remained in the

Soviet Union had to wait for the end of the war before they were allowed to leave the Soviet Union for Poland. The repatriation of Poles dragged on for years, with some returning to Poland only in the 1950s.

A separate group among the Poles in the Soviet Union was formed by political refugees, ex-members of the Polish Communist Party, which had been disbanded on Soviet instructions in 1938. Many foreign communists in the Soviet Union perished during the purges. Those who survived fully accepted Stalinist policies. Thus, while Stalin's future plans for Poland were unclear, these Polish Communists lingered on the fringes of the organisations of the Communist International, hoping that in due course they would be put in charge of Polish territories liberated by the Red Army.<sup>21</sup>

German policies towards occupied Polish territories were driven by Nazi racial ideology, which defined the Poles as a race capable of working for the superior Germanic race. On 12 October Hitler ordered that no Polish administration should be formed in occupied territories. Some Germanophile Poles, mindful of the way the German authorities had governed Polish areas during the First World War, put themselves forward as willing to form an occupation administration. Nevertheless, since the Polish areas were of military importance to the Germans in their plans for a future war against the Soviet Union, Hitler forbade making use of these offers.<sup>22</sup>

The port city of Gdańsk including surrounding areas, Northeastern Mazovia, Pomerania, Łódź and Silesia were defined as areas having historic links with Germany and were incorporated into the Third Reich. From areas of Central and Southern Poland, which included the cities of Warsaw, Radom, Kraków and Lublin, a Generalgouvernement (GG), under German administration, was formed. The reorganisation of what had previously been Polish territories required the removal of thousands of people. This the Germans did with speed and indifference to the suffering of those being forced from their homes. Germans from the Reich were settled in the Polish territories incorporated into the Third Reich and some further designated districts, from which Poles were expelled to the Generalgouvernement. Other German communities from Hungary, Romania, and the Baltic states were to be settled as colonists on the newly acquired territories.

The fate of the Poles in the GG was tragic. While the occupiers pillaged national libraries, museums, galleries and state buildings, schools and universities were closed. Poland's mineral and economic resources were used to Germany's benefit. Arbitrary acts of brutality were followed by actions intended to cower the population. Public executions and the imposition of laws decreeing collective punishment for acts of sabotage and attacks on Germans were aimed at intimidating the Poles. Delivery quotas imposed on villages led to food shortages and hunger. Underlying these policies was not only an ideologically motivated contempt for the Poles, but also a desire to destroy the nation and its accumulated cultural and intellectual achievements.<sup>23</sup>

In relation to the Jewish communities Nazi racial principles led to genocide. Initially, Jews were forced to wear a cloth badge in the form of the Star of David on their outer clothes and were tormented by restrictive measures. Their property was confiscated. Finally, all Jews were obliged to move to defined ghettos, under threat of death. In the course of 1940 larger ghettos were established. Moved into these were Jews from Germany and Austria as well as local Polish Jews. Life in these ghettos was deeply tragic. In theory, they were administered by the Jews, through Judenrats, and policed by a Jewish police force. Nevertheless, these organisations were forced to implement German decrees. There was no doubt that the Nazis intended the Jews to die of starvation.<sup>24</sup> In July 1941 when German troops occupied what had previously been Polish eastern territories, they faced a large local Jewish population. In a policy of planned genocide, these communities were usually killed and buried in mass graves within days of German entry. In a number of instances the local communities either took action against the Jews or assisted the Germans. The Warsaw Judenrat came to know of this and was only too painfully aware that in due course the same fate would befall the Jews of the GG. From the spring of 1942 mass extermination camps were established and the transport of Jews, first from Polish ghettos and then from all over Europe, commenced. Of those Treblinka, Majdanek and Oświęcim (Auschwitz) were the largest.

On 19 April 1943, during the last stages of the removal of Jews to the extermination camp, young Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto started an uprising. They were doomed as the Germans brought in

reinforcements and foreign troops, mainly Ukrainian units, to put down the uprising. It is difficult to be precise as to how many Jewish people died in extermination camps established in the occupied Polish territories. By the end of the war, possibly no more than 210,000 Polish Jews survived, usually because they had managed to disguise the fact that they were Jewish or because they had been hidden by the Poles out of pity or for payment. The number of survivors is imprecise because many continued to be anxious about their personal security after the war. In a society riven with anti-Semitism, as Poland had been, sheltering of Jews was a dangerous undertaking. Anyone aiding Jews knew that, if caught, they and all those living in the building would be summarily executed. The attitude of the underground resistance to the plight of Jews was ambivalent. Only the extreme nationalist *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* (National Armed Units – NSZ) was actively involved in hunting down and killing Jews. When the Jews tried to fight back they found it difficult to obtain arms, because resistance groups were reluctant to share scarce military equipment and ammunition. When aid was given, this was incidental rather than a policy of helping the Jewish community.<sup>25</sup>

Although the owning and listening to radio broadcasts was an offence punishable by death, information penetrated through to the occupied Polish territories. The government in exile kept in contact with the underground movement by couriers, who at great risk to themselves, moved along various routes to neutral countries from where they could be conveyed to Britain to hand over information and microfilms of documents. By 1942 the flight range of airplanes had increased, enabling flights from Britain to Poland where planes landed at prearranged secret landing strips and picked up information, or dropped off or picked up people. Thus, the government in exile continuously fed the allied governments with intelligence information, including information on the production of the V1 and V2 flying bombs and on German troop deployments and movement of equipment. They also had direct information on the German genocide policy towards the Jewish communities, which was then handed over to the British and US governments.

Contacts between the government in London and the resistance movement in Poland allowed the government to exercise a greater degree of control over the underground resistance movement in

Poland than might be expected in the circumstances. The government in exile had from the outset determined that it would form the first post-war administration and, in anticipation of possible revolutionary activities, had trained a Polish unit which would be parachuted into Poland at a critical stage. To make sure that the resistance movements did not try to usurp the government's role, a delegate was appointed to act as liaison officer with the resistance in the occupied territories. Additionally, a skeleton of the future government was set up in Poland. German brutality and the AK's dependence on the government in exile for supplies ensured that the underground resistance did not seek to establish its own political authority in occupied territories. That is not to suggest that unity between the underground and the exiled government was ever easy. On the contrary, the AK commanders found it difficult to bring all armed resistance groups and political organisations into its fold. Apart from the nationalists who distrusted the ex-army officers dominating the AK, units loyal to the peasant parties also viewed the AK with unease, recalling the officers' role in the destruction of democracy during the interwar period. The PPS splintered. While its main leaders in London and in occupied Poland supported the government in exile and the AK, radical socialists moved to create their own political organisation and to form armed units mainly based on the industrial working class around Warsaw. Throughout the war, while the underground resistance tried to maintain unity at all costs and to reduce sources of tension and fratricidal conflict in the state of lawlessness that prevailed in Poland during the war, debates about post-war reforms and the role of the state threatened that unity.<sup>26</sup>

It had always been the government-in-exile's plan that Poland should be liberated by joint British-US military action, which would be assisted by Polish units coming from the West. In its final stages, this action was to be coordinated with the AK, which was to stage a national uprising, codenamed 'Burza' (Storm). This would allow units loyal to the government in exile to establish control over liberated territories. Unfortunately for the Poles, already at the beginning of 1943 Britain and the USA assumed that the Soviet war effort would be successful in pushing the Germans not only out of Russian territories but also in defeating the Germans in the East. In



London and Washington, this led to the acceptance that the Red Army would liberate Poland. The government in exile, nevertheless, continued to plan for a national uprising, hoping to persuade the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the uprising in occupied Polish territories would make a key contribution to the defeat of Germany. In making those plans, they sought to play down the importance of the Soviet war effort and to ensure that the entry of the Red Army into Polish territories would be forestalled by US and British troops reaching Poland first. Unfortunately, neither the US nor the British governments were interested in these plans.<sup>27</sup>

The purpose behind the planned national uprising in Poland had been to forestall the establishment of a puppet authority by the incoming Soviet army. At the end of 1943 and in 1944, while the Poles in the West continued to lobby for British and US military assistance to the AK, in occupied Poland the various underground resistance movements, realising the implications of the evolving military situation, had to reassess their plans.

The Home Army subordination to the government in exile prevented it from putting forward a political programme of its own and meant that all efforts were focused on planning the uprising. This was not a situation easily accepted even by parties which supported the London government. The peasant movement was always uneasy about its London leadership's degree of cooperation with those whose hostility to the peasants had manifested itself during the interwar period. In occupied territories pre-war hostility between the peasants and the landowners persisted, even if the quest for independence took precedence. The landowners were not averse to asking the commanders of the local AK units to rough up peasants who, they believed, had shown an excessive interest in politics. In some cases, the AK disarmed peasant units. Thus, although the Bataliony Chłopskie (Peasant Battalions – BCh) underground resistance units loyal to the Stronnictwo Ludowe accepted, in principle, the authority of the AK, the fact that so many of AK commanders appeared to be on friendly terms with local landowners caused unease. The peasants' expectation that land reform would be implemented at the end of the war was not something that the government in exile wanted to discuss. This did not stop the debate and, in fact, it was the peasant party leaders who felt it their duty to draw attention to their

party's unblemished commitment to upholding democracy. Their plans for a future, just Poland went beyond demanding land reform and anticipated state control of national resources and equality of opportunity. Although the peasants were unwilling to side with the communist resistance, there were similarities between some progressive elements of their programme and that put forward by the radical sections of the socialist movement and the reconstructed communist Party.<sup>28</sup>

The PPS was disbanded during the September campaign in circumstances which were unclear. Fear of reprisals and anxiety, lest the Germans attempted to create a pro-German Socialist Party, were cited as reasons for this unusual decision. In its place a temporary organisation was formed. Taking the name of *Wolność, Równość i Niepodległość* (Freedom, Equality and Independence – WRiN), it was to function only as a temporary organisation during occupation. Those on the radical wing of the PPS suspected that the leaders of the moderate wing wanted to prevent the left from taking the initiative. The Polish socialist movement was further handicapped by the refusal of the leaders of the organisation, which was created for the duration of the war, to agree in principle to address long-term political issues. While the PPS leaders in exile supported the exile government, those in occupied Poland disagreed over which wing, the moderate or the radical, represented the movement's true direction.<sup>29</sup> The result was that in March 1943 a left wing section broke away forming a new party, which took the name of Workers' Party of Polish Socialists (*Robotnicza Partia Polskich Socialistów – RPPS*). Although its membership was small and nearly entirely confined to the militant workers of the Warsaw factories, the programme they put forward was a direct challenge to the surprisingly moderate one publicised at the same time by the communists. The RPPS programme for the future was one in which the peasants were to be given land for cultivation, the workers would control the means of production and equality of opportunity would be guaranteed to all, including women. What made this programme interesting was the fact that the communists had in the meantime chosen not to lead with a radical revolutionary plan for a post-war future.<sup>30</sup>

In December 1941 a group of Polish communists was parachuted from the Soviet Union into Poland. Acting on strict instructions

from the Comintern, they formed a new organisation, the Polska Partia Robotnicza (Polish Workers' Party – PPR), which dissociated itself from the disbanded, pre-war KPP. Its initial objectives were to be limited to the building of left wing unity.<sup>31</sup> When in June 1942 the PPR leadership tried to prepare an outline of its post-war objectives, it was felt necessary to obtain the Comintern's approval. These were too weighty issues for the newly formed Polish Communist Party to put forward without Soviet agreement. To their surprise, they found that Georgi Dimitrov, the head of the Comintern, forbade them to make any references to the nationalisation of land and workers' control of enterprises. When the final programme was disseminated in November 1943, it advocated only the nationalisation of key industries and mines and merely referred to workers' committees having a say in management decisions. This fell short of the expectations which many of the Polish communists had for the post-war state, nevertheless, they bowed to the Comintern's instructions. As a result, the PPR's main wartime objective remained that of building anti-fascist unity within the underground resistance. In that objective it failed, because the communists did not succeed at building a power base, either within the working class or the peasant communities.<sup>32</sup> Internal conflict within the leadership, caused by the unresolved issue of the disbanding of the KPP and the murder of Polish communists in the Soviet Union, dogged the new party. Further, quarrels between Polish communists in the Soviet Union and those in Poland reduced the party's effectiveness. On publication of its political programme in 1943, the PPR announced the formation of the Krajowa Rada Narodowa (Homeland National Council – KRN), which was to bring together the other parties into the first provisional post-war government. Not surprisingly, none of the other underground parties would have anything to do with this proposal.

The RPPS refused to abandon its critical attitude towards the Soviet Union, maintaining that the Stalinist policies of rapid industrialisation and the bureaucratisation of decision making had been a betrayal of the achievements of the Russian Revolution. Nevertheless, throughout the war, underground resistance units loyal to the PPR and supplied with arms from the Soviet Union operated side by side with the AK. The PPR units, initially called the Gwardia

Ludowa (People's Guard – GL), were later renamed the **Armia Ludowa** (People's Army – AL). Their military effectiveness in fighting the Germans is difficult to evaluate, although they notably refused to accept the AK's policy of avoiding military confrontation with the Germans. The AK's view was that military confrontation could lead to retaliation against the civilian population. In any case, the AK focused its activities on preparing for the national uprising. The more active resistance of the AL and its arms supplies did attract people to its ranks. This in turn led the AL to cooperate with the BCh. In reality the **AL never rivalled the AK's organisational or numerical strength.**<sup>33</sup>

In the spring of 1943 Stalin, in an apparent disregard for the Comintern's attempts to build a new communist organisation in occupied Poland and the PPR's plans within the occupied areas, allowed a number of Moscow-based communists and socialists to form a new organisation. The Związek Patriotów Polskich (Union of Polish Patriots – ZPP) announced its existence through radio broadcasts. It was generally believed that in view of the deterioration in relations and the ultimate diplomatic breach between the Soviet government and the Polish government in exile, this organisation was meant to be a nucleus of a Soviet-sponsored future Polish government.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Stalin appears to have considered several options before finally allowing the Moscow-based communists to take the lead in forming a provisional administration. When the Red Army liberated the first large city in ethnically Polish territories, the **Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego** (Polish Committee of National Liberation – PKWN) was proclaimed. This came to be known as the **Lublin government**, from the city where it was first established. The PKWN was dominated by Polish communists who had spent the war in the Soviet Union, with the addition of a few compliant socialists and peasant party members. Later, on Stalin's insistence, communists from occupied Poland were added, together with a splinter group from the RPPS. This did not change the fact that the **PKWN was no more than a Soviet-imposed administration, with no authority and only limited popular support in Polish territories.**

In the **summer of 1944**, as the Red Army approached Warsaw and as the German withdrawal appeared imminent, the leaders of

the AK in Warsaw decided to launch an uprising. When the idea of a national uprising had been first put forward, during the early stages of the war, it was assumed that its outbreak would be coordinated with the Allied military effort. Although the Allied military leaders were interested in these plans, the final decision was not to support an uprising in Poland because this clearly was going to be a Soviet operational zone. In August 1944 it was known that Britain and the USA were in no position to take military action east of Germany and that the defeat of the German forces on Polish territories was a task left to the Red Army. By then the AK knew that the Red Army would not tolerate the presence of any Polish units within its areas of operation. When the Red Army had first entered previously Polish areas, some degree of cooperation with the AK took place, but once military action was completed, the AK units were disarmed and their leaders were arrested. This happened in the Wilno region. Plans for the uprising were changed and its purpose was altered. In the circumstances, the uprising became an attempt by the AK to establish control over the capital of Poland and to pre-empt the Soviet authorities' design of putting in place a puppet authority. As it turned out, the strategy failed, mainly because the German forces regrouped and decided to hold Warsaw, while the Red Army halted its progress on the banks of the Wisła.

The uprising started on 1 August. The decision was unexpected, even if the city community and the Germans knew something was afoot. The uprising was hastened on by news from London that Prime Minister Mikołajczyk had decided to go to Moscow, with a view to trying to reopen a dialogue with the Soviet Union. At the same time, news had been coming in from areas already under Soviet military control, indicating that the Red Army commanders were disarming AK units and arresting their leaders. When on 1 August the order was given for the uprising to start, many local commanders and fighters were not forewarned. During the fighting which engulfed the city, the civilian population fully supported the insurgents. The Germans had anticipated the uprising and brought units back into Warsaw, including the brutal Ukrainian units, the Vlasov Russian units and battle-hardened German units. Progressively, the insurgents control over the town was narrowed down to the central districts of Śródmieście and Starówka. With no control over the bridges and unable to break the German encirclement, AK

units from outside the city could not aid their comrades in Warsaw. The Warsaw AK commanders had made a critical miscalculation. They had clearly hoped to prevent the Soviet Union from taking control over the capital and bringing in the PKWN. But at the same time the AK leadership had assumed that the Soviet military campaign against the Germans would continue, thus weakening the latter's ability to reclaim Warsaw. What happened instead was that the Red Army came up to the Wisła and then stopped. The official explanation has always been that the Red Army had outrun its supply lines and needed to regroup. But it was obvious that it was in the interest of the Soviet command to allow the Germans to destroy the uprising which would have complicated the situation, both military and political, by establishing AK control over the city. This also explains why the Soviet military authorities refused to allow British planes, flying from the United Kingdom with supplies for the insurgents, to land and refuel on territories under their control. What was the largest urban insurgency of the war continued until 2 October, when the commanders of the AK surrendered. One of the conditions for the end of fighting was that the insurgents should be treated as prisoners of war. Nevertheless, German retribution was brutal and merciless. While fighting was taking place, no distinction had been drawn between combatants and the civilian population and all were treated as criminals. Flame-throwing equipment, aerial bombing and artillery shelling were used to destroy the town. After the AK had capitulated, the remaining civilian population was marched out of the city and the city was to be razed to the ground.

The Warsaw Uprising remains one of the most painful episodes in recent Polish history. Many, including a number of historians in the West, view it as a heroic manifestation of the Poles' will for independence. The subsequent communist regime's wish to play down the uprising's significance has contributed to the general desire to view it as a positive episode in Poland's recent history. Undoubtedly, the Soviet unwillingness to assist the insurgents contradicts the avowed aim of anti-Nazi unity and highlights the premeditated desire to see the AK sidelined and replaced with a puppet pro-Soviet government. Nevertheless, the AK was instrumental in starting the uprising in circumstances where it had little prospect of succeeding. Ultimately, in spite of the heroism and sacrifice made by the

population of Warsaw, the insurgents were badly prepared for the fighting which followed. Nor were the AK commanders swayed in their decision to start the uprising by calculations as to the likely fate of the civilian population trapped amidst the fighting. The Soviet decision to stand by while the uprising was defeated and the city was destroyed does not change the fact that it was the Germans who fought the Poles and who rained fire and explosives upon the city, which resulted in over 200,000 casualties in just 63 days. The responsibility for the savagery and subsequent retribution lies squarely with the Germans and their allies.<sup>35</sup>

For the AK, the Warsaw Uprising spelled more than just the defeat of a hope for a national uprising that would free the city from German occupation and put in place a Polish authority. The uprising meant the end of organised resistance and with that of hopes that the underground state structures would assume authority in post-war Poland. Although in the months following the end of the uprising, attempts were made to rebuild the AK, this proved too difficult and local commanders had to make their own decisions as to how to continue the fight against the Germans and also against the incoming Red Army. For the Soviet leaders the road to Berlin stood open. Although Polish territories were described as liberated areas, to many Poles it seemed as if German occupation had been replaced with Soviet occupation. In January 1945 the Soviet offensive, which in September had stalled on the right bank of the Wisła, was resumed and within the following months the remaining Polish territories and German areas east of the Oder-Neisse line, which were to be incorporated into Poland, were freed from German troops and put under the jurisdiction of the PKWN. Previously, Polish territories east of the river Bug were incorporated into the Soviet Union.

In March 1945 the Soviet Security Services (the NKVD) arranged a meeting with the leadership of the AK, the delegate of the government in exile in Poland and leaders of parties which supported the government in London. All the Poles were arrested and spirited off to the Soviet Union. In June, having in the meantime denied any knowledge of their whereabouts, the Soviet authorities staged a show trial in Moscow during which the arrested underground leaders were accused of having engaged in subversive activities behind the Soviet military lines. All the accused were sentenced to long

spells in prison. The leader of the AK died soon after, while still in Soviet custody.<sup>36</sup> The unmistakable signal was that the Soviet authorities would not tolerate any organisations other than those which supported the Lublin authority. During the coming years military courts, set up to try members of the wartime AK and supporters of the London government, sentenced to death and imprisonment thousands of Poles. While in some cases it was possible to prove that they had indeed attacked representatives of the new government and Red Army units, in reality many, if not most, were punished for having supported the wartime resistance organisations, which were hostile to Soviet control of Poland. Until 1948, in the outlying districts in the borderlands and in dense forests, scattered units continued the fight for an independent Poland.

In the meantime, the battle for post-war Poland had continued on the diplomatic plane, nearly entirely between Churchill and Stalin. Mikołajczyk was increasingly left in no doubt by the British that he had only one alternative, namely to accept the incorporation of previously Polish territories in the East into the Soviet Union. During a joint visit to Moscow on 13–16 October 1944, Churchill forced Mikołajczyk to accept the new borders, which in any case had been decided by the Soviet authorities. This was disputed within the government in exile. As a result, Mikołajczyk resigned. He had earlier hoped that the British government would defend Polish interests in dealings with Stalin and that, even if they did not do so formally, they would undertake to act as custodian of Polish sovereignty. In October this increasingly looked less likely. Reluctantly, and in the full realisation that Churchill would not allow Polish issues to blight British-Soviet relations, Mikołajczyk, with a small group of like-minded émigré politicians accepted the loss of Poland's eastern territories to the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> Within the émigré community opponents of this policy grouped around President Raczkiewicz and General Anders. Rejecting the need for any compromise, they pinned their hopes on a third world war, this time against the Soviet Union. This, they believed, would give Poland a uniquely strong position as a bridgehead to Russia and because they would be able to deploy up to 400,000 battle-hardened troops, which on demobilisation remained in the West. In spite of all the recent painful disappointments, these men still clung to the idea that by making a military contribution to the future war, they



could ensure that Britain and the United States would repay the debt of gratitude by freeing Poland from Soviet control.

Stalin in the meantime determined the course of developments in Polish territories freed from German occupation. Not only were AK units disarmed, all underground resistance was being systematically destroyed. On 31 December 1944 the Soviet Union recognised the Lublin authority as Poland's Provisional Government. Thus, when the three heads of state met at a conference in Yalta in February 1945, many principles concerning the future of Poland had been decided, most notably during the earlier Teheran Conference in November 1943. The Polish question was the most contentious and difficult issue discussed during the course of both conferences. Nevertheless, British and US dependence on the continuing Soviet military contribution to the defeat of Germany and the growing realisation that they were equally reliant on Stalin declaring war on Japan, to assist them in the Pacific war, militated against their defence of Polish interests. The result of the Yalta Conference was that Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin agreed that the Polish provisional government would be enlarged by the inclusion of representatives of democratic parties from the West. Henceforth, until the elections in 1947 it would be called the Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej (Provisional Government of National Unity – TRJN). Poland was guaranteed the right to hold free elections. At the same time, it was decided that the Curzon Line, which the three heads of state accepted represented Poland's eastern ethnic frontier, was to be the future border with the Soviet Union. Although the extension of Poland's territory to the West was accepted in principle, with the incorporation of Eastern and Western Prussia, Gdańsk and Lower Silesia into Poland, the precise border was to be the subject of further post-war discussions. Stalin spoke of Poland being rewarded by being given the Baltic port of Szczecin and a border which would run along the Oder and its upper tributary, the Neisse river. Neither Roosevelt nor Churchill were at this stage prepared to agree to this becoming Poland's permanent border with Germany, since this would have predetermined decisions concerning the future of Germany.<sup>38</sup>

On 30 June 1945 the British and US governments recognised the TRJN as the provisional government of Poland. Recognition

was withdrawn from the exile government and its activities were wound up. In reality, already since the Yalta Conference, the British military authorities and the Foreign Office increasingly restricted the operational independence of the Polish commanders and limited their use of radio communication with Poland. In spite of the apparent lack of gratitude towards the Polish soldiers, Churchill did have some reservations about the course of British relations with the Soviet Union. No Poles were forcibly removed from Britain and areas under British jurisdiction back to Poland. All Polish servicemen who fought with the Allied forces in the West were granted the right to stay in Britain. Following the end of hostilities in Europe, Polish troops were gradually brought from the operational zones in Italy and Germany to Britain, where they were dispersed to areas of employment through the Resettlement Corps. Families and dependants who had left with Polish units when they departed the Soviet Union, and who had been held in camps in Africa and the Middle East were also moved gradually to the British isles, with the right to remain or emigrate to any part of the British Commonwealth.

The British government would have wanted its wartime allies to leave Britain, because post-war economic problems and the demobilisation of British soldiers created preconditions for social conflicts. Nevertheless, only a small percentage of Poles opted to return to Poland. News from Poland had forewarned them of possible political difficulties. At the same time, Polish commanders and political leaders in the West preferred to encourage the ex-combatants to wait for the anticipated war with the Soviet Union, as a result of which they hoped the Yalta decisions would be reversed.

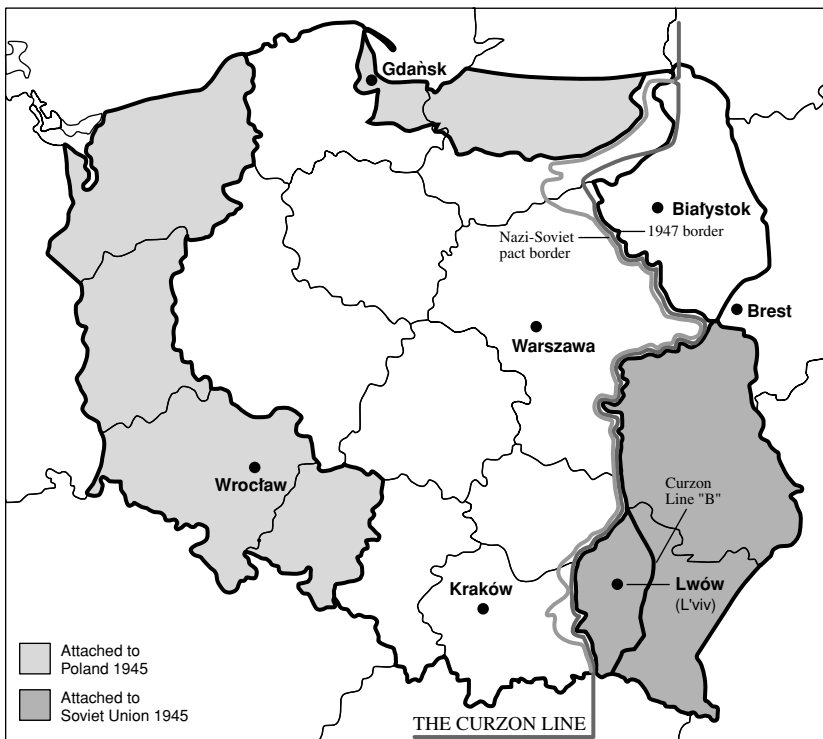
Thus, the community in Poland and that in Western Europe finally separated from Poland. For Poles in the areas devastated by German occupation and war, the struggle to build state structures, the economy, and to survive in extreme circumstances posed very different problems from those confronting their compatriots stranded outside their homeland. The latter faced alienation, loss of status and anxiety about relatives and friends in occupied Poland. Henceforth, they would have no influence on what happened in Poland.

## 5 Post-war Poland, 1945–70

The Polish state which emerged at the end of the Second World War bore little resemblance to the state that had come into being in 1919. The borders had been shifted dramatically to the West. In July 1945 the wartime allies met at a conference in Potsdam. During this meeting Poland's future was discussed extensively. This resulted in the recognition of Poland's western border on the Odra (Oder) and Nysa (Neisse) rivers. During earlier wartime conferences, the Allies had accepted the incorporation of the cities of Lwów and Wilno, both with strong historic links to Polish culture, into the Soviet Union. Polish access to the coast was consolidated by the incorporation of parts of Eastern and Western Prussia. This meant that the ancient Hanseatic city of Gdańsk became Polish. In the West, the previously German cities of Szczecin (Stetin), Kołobrzeg (Kolberg) and Wrocław (Breslau) were within Polish borders.<sup>1</sup>

The population of the new state had likewise dramatically changed. The few survivors of the previously varied Jewish communities, which had always been an integral part of Polish life, were in the horns of a dilemma. The question they would have to face in the first post-war years was whether to remain in Poland or to strike out for Palestine. Most notably, from having been a multicultural, multireligious state, Poland became a national state. The citizens of the new state were nearly exclusively Polish nationals of Catholic faith. At the same time, the community was depleted by fighting which engulfed Polish territories in 1939 and 1945, by Nazi

*The border of Poland after the Second World War,  
indicating territories lost to the Soviet Union and gains  
at Germany's expense*



genocide and Soviet displacement and arrests and, finally by emigration. The first post-war census revealed that the population of post-war Poland was reduced by a quarter in relation to the pre-war figure. Lost were the most productive, educated and active members of the community. Both the Nazi and Soviet authorities had targeted national leaders and the educated elites, including the Catholic hierarchy. The post-war period was a time of great population shifts and migrations. Until the late 1950s, the Polish Red Cross continued its efforts to reunite families scattered during the war.

The Polish economy was devastated. Wartime activities, German exploitation and destruction following German withdrawal, fighting and, finally Soviet exploitation took their toll. The German occupation authorities had confiscated all Jewish property, Polish private property and Polish state enterprises, all resources which were useful to their war effort. Ownership of those workshops and enterprises that survived was difficult to establish in such circumstances. In many cases, it was impossible to reverse changes which had taken place over the past six years. In industrial plants, workers had been active in preventing the Germans from destroying machinery and goods as they were withdrawing. Where production could be restarted, it was frequently done by workers who had defended their place of employment and secured it. Their desire to save Polish property reflected not merely a wish to protect it but was a sign of the growth of worker radicalism. Young workers articulated the wish to have a say in management decision and a greater degree of control over production.

In the months and, arguably, even during the first years after the war, the authority of the government was unclear, at times extending no further than the boundaries of the main cities. What remained were scattered remnants of the underground resistance, varying in character. On the one extreme some maintained discipline and their loyalty to the London government, whereas others degenerated into being no more than armed bands loyal to various leaders. In places, these groupings and armed bands remained very strong as they commanded the loyalty of the population. The incoming government had no power base in Poland and could count on only limited support. From the outset it was seen as a puppet

Soviet organisation. Its members represented rump sections of larger national parties, and there was no disguising the fact that communists were generally distrusted. Only the presence of the Red Army maintained the TRJN in power. Mikołajczyk's inclusion in the TRJN did little to change the perception that this was a Soviet puppet organisation. For the government the real test was how it would establish its authority throughout the country, combat lawlessness and pillaging and, finally, whether it would be able to restart production. The communist-controlled government had only a general idea of how it would establish control. Thus throughout Poland the issue was not only that of lack of resources and manpower but, critically, that of who actually controlled the regions. The TRJN was quickly to learn that while it was able to establish itself in Warsaw, beyond the capital it faced hostility. Agents of the TRJN travelling to the countryside to supervise the implementation of land reform or to inspect factories were frequently ambushed and murdered. While historians disagree on whether this situation amounted to a civil war, there was no doubt that attacks on the government and its agents were frequently politically motivated. This state of affairs continued throughout Poland until 1948, when the government and the newly built up security service and army, finally established their authority. In reality, the community's desire for stability and peace was as much a factor in the establishment of the rule of law as were the government's efforts to combat what was described as 'banditism'.

From the outset the government was only too aware of its weakness. Nevertheless, while the presence of the Red Army and the NKVD gave some protection, it was hoped to build a new army, based on the Polish units which had fought with the Red Army. While the war against Germany continued, compulsory military service was introduced. Nevertheless, in view of the shortage of reliable Polish officers, Soviet officers were appointed to command Polish units. Additionally, political officers were to supervise the education of the conscripts to try and inculcate the army with new ideas. Special military tribunals tried those deemed to be hostile to the government, which in reality meant that anyone who had been a member of the AK, the BCh or the NSZ units was liable to be investigated, imprisoned and, in some cases, executed.

In the period before the elections which took place in 1947, parties which supported the TRJN were allowed to function legally. Critically, this excluded the nationalist movement but enabled the PPS and the PSL to function as legal parties in the immediate post-war period. Both were initially hampered by the fact that many of the pre-war leaders were unwilling to return to Poland and refused to participate in the establishment of parties which were, from the outset, going to cooperate with the communists. Nevertheless, by mid-1945 both parties emerged as key players in Polish politics. Within factories, enterprises and mines, trade unions were legal, although the communists tried to reduce the workers traditional support for the PPS by aggressive tactics and dubious electoral methods. In principle, workers could still join non-communist workplace organisations. In the countryside, the PSL, buoyed by Mikołajczyk's presence in the TRJN, emerged as the largest non-communist party, preparing to play the role of the legal opposition.

The authority of the Catholic Church was much enhanced during the war. The Primate's departure from Poland in 1939 raised doubts about his personal judgement, though the church was not tainted by association with the occupation because of Nazi hostility to the Catholic Church as part of their policy of destroying the spiritual, intellectual and moral leadership of the Polish nation. Hundreds of parish priests and six bishops had been imprisoned, tortured and killed in Nazi concentration camps. Nearly a fifth of the clergy had perished during the war. The bond which existed between Polish national ideas and the Catholic Church was reaffirmed by the common suffering of the time. The end of the war, nevertheless, created new circumstances. Most dramatically, the role of the Catholic Church within Poland was enhanced by the border changes and the extermination of the Jewish communities. In post-war Poland nearly all citizens belonged to the Catholic faith. The TRJN initially pursued a conciliatory policy towards the church, sanctioning the return of property which had been earlier confiscated by the Germans. The Catholic University in Lublin was reopened and Catholic daily and weekly newspapers appeared. Nevertheless, conflict was inevitable. While the church sought to consolidate its spiritual and economic position, the TRJN pursued a policy of secularisation which meant the separation of the state

and church. These policies brought the two into direct conflict and ultimately led to the breakdown of dialogue even before the implementation of draconian Stalinist policies against the church in 1949. Thus, the period of cooperation was very brief, with the church opposing state policies and moving to assume the role of the opposition. Within the PPR strong anticlericalist sentiments were mitigated by the realisation that it would be imprudent to pursue confrontation with an organisation of such authority in Polish society. Attempts to form a Christian party which would cooperate with the communists came to nothing.<sup>2</sup>

The war led to the rise in nationalist sentiments and with that came a desire to rebuild the state on nationalist lines. The extension of borders to the West meant that in 1945 over 2 million German nationals were living within Poland's borders. This number would have been higher had there not been a mass flight of Germans in the wake of the Red Army's push West. Nor does this figure include German prisoners of war employed by the Poles. From the outset it was clear that neither the communist-dominated government nor the Poles generally would tolerate the possibility of any German nationals remaining within the Polish borders. First, due to intimidation and finally through a policy of forced resettlement the German community was made to leave Polish territories by the end of 1947.<sup>3</sup> Poles flooded into ex-German areas incorporated into Polish borders, some in search of land and farms, others to steal property left behind. After the war, previously German territories included in Poland were euphemistically called the Recovered Territories in order to imply that this border rectification had neither been a compensation for the eastern regions lost to the Soviet Union nor a claim on a defeated Germany. Instead, state propaganda throughout the communist period put stress on the historic links between Poland and these territories. Although the government had planned for an orderly settlement by the Poles who had been forced out of areas incorporated into the Soviet Union, in reality the Recovered Territories, like the Wild West of the USA, had squatters taking over farms and forcing the authorities to recognise their claims.

German prisoners of war formed a separate category. The Polish government made use of these men in the coal-mining industry, where there was a shortage of labour in the first post-war years.



Approximately 41,000 German POWs were held in Poland. Although their continuing detention contravened the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs, the Polish government justified their employment by stating that the value of their labour would be set against the reparations, which Poland expected to receive from Germany.

During the interwar period approximately 5 million Ukrainian nationals lived within the borders of the Polish state. Relations between the Polish state and the Ukrainian community deteriorated during the 1920s and 1930s. A general disregard for Ukrainian national aspirations, combined with brutal repression aimed primarily at securing the borderlands, fostered strong anti-Polish sentiments within the Ukrainian communities. During Russian occupation the Soviet authorities favoured the Ukrainians, whereas the Poles were forcefully removed into the interior. In the summer of 1941 the German army occupied these areas. Their policies on the Ukrainian question were more complex. On the one hand, Ukrainian military units were raised to fight on the German side, but neither autonomy nor independence was granted. In 1943, the *Ukraińska Armia Powstańcza* (Ukrainian Insurrectionist Army – UPA) was formed to fight for Ukrainian independence. UPA's brutal attacks on Polish villages, but in particular on military settlements, became legendary. At the end of the war, due the German policy of using Ukrainian units for policing duties, as concentration guards and to round up the Jewish populations, there was a clear desire in Poland to punish the Ukrainians. An agreement was concluded between the Soviet Union and the Lublin authority, whereby Ukrainian families would be forcefully moved to areas under Soviet control, while Polish nationals would be moved to Poland. The Ukrainian community fought back. After the end of the fighting in Germany, Polish troops were deployed in Ukrainian-inhabited regions fighting UPA units and forcefully removing Ukrainians to the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1946 the Soviet Union refused to accept any more Ukrainian nationals and the Polish government decided to disperse the remaining 200,000 throughout the Recovered Territories. In an operation, codenamed 'Wisła', all Ukrainian nationals still living within Polish borders were forcefully removed to Western Poland and settled in scattered communities, with no right to return to

areas where they had previously lived.<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, the existence of a Ukrainian community in Poland was denied.

In accordance with agreements made in Yalta, Poland was guaranteed free elections. As hostilities ended, all the legalised parties focused on what they hoped would be an opportunity to establish a genuinely free Polish government. In the meantime, the TRJN proceeded cautiously. It has been suggested that, in fact, they attempted to disguise their hold on power.<sup>5</sup> Edward Osóbka-Morawski, leader of a radical section of the PPS, became the first post-war Prime Minister. Władysław Gomułka, General Secretary of the PPR and representative of the communist organisation which had been built up in occupied Poland, became the Deputy Prime Minister and Mikołajczyk became the other Deputy Prime Minister. Key portfolios were in the hands of either communists or those who had strong links with the Communists. Critically, the Communists controlled national security, internal security and all economic matters. While declaring their commitment to the creation of broadly based progressive blocs, the communists, nevertheless, made absolutely sure that they were in control of the most important developments. Thus, within trade unions they sought to have communists elected to executive positions, as they did within the national councils which acted as local self-government organisations. The general attitude towards the communists and their endeavours was distrustful and workers in most cases remained loyal to their pre-war trade unions.

Only too well aware that they were not trusted, the PPR wanted to postpone elections. The communists expected that with the stabilisation of the security situation in Poland and the first signs of economic recovery, Poles would be willing to support parties which made up the TRJN and, among them, the communists. Land reform and the repatriation of the Poles from the Soviet Union were all very emotive and popular issues, which could increase support for the government. Thus the PPR's tactic in the first place was to postpone general elections and in the second to try to persuade the PPS and the PSL to combine with the PPR in forming a broadly based electoral bloc.

During the period between 1945 and 19 January 1947 when elections took place, the PPR increasingly conducted an aggressive

campaign. When all attempts to persuade Mikołajczyk to agree that all parties should go to the elections on a joint slate failed, the PPR proceeded to intimidate and destroy his party. Local PSL organisations were attacked and prominent leaders were arrested and charged with a variety of offences. The peasant community became the object of an intense pre-electoral propaganda aimed at persuading them to vote for the PPR.<sup>6</sup>

PPR tactics towards the PPS were different. Unlike the PSL, which believed that it had a real chance of winning a majority of votes and forming a government on its own, many of the PPS leaders had a strong commitment to left wing unity. Some believed that it was time to reverse the divisions, which had appeared within the socialist movement after the Russian Revolution. The interwar period was a time when the left wing movement did not speak with one voice due to doctrinaire conflicts between the communist and the socialist movements. The growth of the radical right and fascist and nazi successes were in part attributed to left wing disunity. This reasoning led many socialists and communists in Europe to seek some form of accommodation if not outright organisational unity. In Poland, even though the PPS managed to rebuild its organisational structure and re-establish its control of trade unions, a shared desire for progressive economic reforms brought the two parties to the negotiating table. The question which was nevertheless not resolved was the degree and precise nature of cooperation. The PPR increasingly called for organisational unity, which the PPS saw as no more than a takeover which many socialists rejected, believing in collaboration and consultation with the communists.<sup>7</sup>

The Soviet Union nevertheless continued to determine policies in Poland. To Stalin, relations with the wartime allies were a priority. In 1946 the first signs of difficulties appeared. Initially, Stalin did not want to authorise action in Poland, which would cause Britain and the USA to doubt his earlier commitment on the Polish question. In a May meeting with Polish communists and socialists he did not give them the green light to destroy the PSL, instead urging them to work with Mikołajczyk. As part of its tactics of weakening the PSL, the communists called for a referendum in which the community was asked three leading questions on whether they supported the incorporation of the Recovered Territories into Poland,

whether they approved of land reform and nationalisation of industry and, finally, whether they approved of the abolition of the Senate. A 'yes' said three times was to be a vote in support of the TRJN and communist tactics. The results of the referendum were a disappointment to the PPR and their allies, even though the results which were released suggested a majority in favour of the 3 X Yes call. It was generally suspected that the official results were falsified.

During the following months Stalin's policies towards Poland underwent a change. His next decision was to agree with the PPR that the PSL had to be destroyed and Poland was to be incorporated more closely into the Soviet sphere of influence. The PPR went onto the offensive. In September 1946 PPR and PPS agreed on an electoral strategy, forming a Democratic Bloc with two other small parties, the Stronnictwo Demokratyczne (Democratic Alliance – SD) and the pro-communist Stronnictwo Ludowe (Peasant Alliance – SL). In the run up to the elections all means were used to decrease the anticipated PSL victory. Mikołajczyk's supporters were barred from voting on grounds that they had cooperated with the Nazis. PSL offices were attacked and its members were intimidated. Electoral committees were scrutinised to ensure that they were controlled either by communists or those sympathetic to them. On 17 January 1947, the day of the general elections, intimidation was rife. When the results were announced, it appeared that the Democratic Bloc had won with a resounding 80.1 per cent of votes cast. No one believed these to be the true results. Mikołajczyk protested, suggesting that if the security situation had been different the PSL could have obtained the expected 60 per cent of the votes. The British and US ambassadors both knew of widespread irregularities and confirmed that the elections had not been genuinely free. Notwithstanding the earlier commitment which Stalin had made to Churchill that elections in Poland would be free, when this turned out not to be the case, both Western powers confined themselves to lodging of official protests. In any case, little could have been done to alter the course of events in Poland or in Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup>

The Sejm met on 4 February and the Democratic Bloc's victory was confirmed. Bolesław Bierut, from the PPR, a man who had spent the war period in the Soviet Union, became President. Józef Cyrankiewicz, from the PPS and a strong supporter of forming one

party out of the PPS and PPR, became the Prime Minister. During the following months the regime moved to complete the destruction of the PSL. In September several of its leaders were put on trial on trumped up charges of having collaborated with the underground opposition. The party's premises were taken over, while PSL members and supporters were purged from government and local authority employment. On 20 October, Mikołajczyk and three other members of the party leadership fled from Poland into exile.<sup>9</sup>

The destruction of what could have become a legitimate opposition was the final act in the process of consolidation of Soviet control over Poland. This coincided with the onset of the Cold War and the collapse of Western collaboration with the Soviet Union over the future of Germany. The Marshall Aid declaration made in June 1947 indicated to the Soviet leadership that the USA intended to use economic recovery as a means of containing the spread of Soviet influence. After the initial announcement, the Soviet leadership took some time to fully absorb the implications of the American announcement. Ultimately, the Soviet response was to consolidate its hold on areas of strategic importance to Soviet security, in which Poland was foremost.

Until the elections, many, including well-informed politicians within the government, still believed that the Poles would be left to make the decision as to whether Poland would exercise genuine independence or would become closely associated with the Soviet Union. Although at the end of hostilities in Europe Poland was within the Soviet sphere of influence, the country's future path of development was a matter which most hoped would be determined once key decisions concerning Germany had been agreed and after the elections. Mikołajczyk and many non-communist leaders in Eastern Europe had hoped that the industrialised West would assist Poland in its programme of reconstruction and future industrialisation. Indeed, the PSL put a lot of stress on the fact that Mikołajczyk's return to Poland had been the result of tripartite agreements, which guaranteed for Poland the right to determine its own political and economic development. These agreements, according to the PSL, indicated that the fate of Poland was of critical importance to the Western democracies, not merely because of the debt of gratitude which they owed to Poland for having fought against

Nazi Germany, but also because the Soviet Union had given an undertaking that Poland would be free.

The destruction of the PSL and the consolidation of Soviet control of Poland was completed within a year of the elections. During this time the PPS was united with or, as many would argue, absorbed by the PPR into a renamed *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (United Polish Workers' Party – PZPR). Civil society in the form of associations, local self-help groups, producers' cooperatives and cultural clubs all lost their independence and were taken over by umbrella organisations controlled by the state. Trade unions were prevented from acting as genuine organisations representing the interests of the workers and were purged of those deemed to be politically unreliable.

The end of the war put the question of economic development firmly in the forefront of all international and national debates. A need for reconstruction also opened the debate on the means of controlling economic development and the extent to which free market forces could be trusted to achieve economic takeoff and guarantee economic stability. Memories of the inflation which followed the First World War and the Great Depression, which started in the late 1920s, led to the conclusion that there would be a need for reassessment of the state's role in the process of economic growth. At the same time, failure to achieve stability during the interwar period meant that these debates were not confined to economic circles, but were conducted within all political parties and organisations.

In Poland, discussion of economic issues had added urgency because of the dismal state of the economy after the end of hostilities. The situation at the end of the war was complex. German occupation had transformed many branches of the pre-war economy, not merely through confiscation and appropriations but also through exploitation for military purposes. Whereas initially German policy went in the direction of reducing the productive capacity of the occupied territories, after the attack on the Soviet Union this policy was partly reversed. Allied bombing of German territories meant that it made sense to disperse war industries. Thus mining and steel production was maintained and even increased in the Silesian regions. Small enterprises and workshops had been closed and investment and reallocation of machinery went in the

direction of increasing large-scale productive capacity. The result was a reduction in production of consumer goods and an increase in production of goods needed for the war effort. Employment patterns likewise changed during the war. Poles were used as forced labour and underutilised capacity was brought into more efficient operation. The fuller exploitation of the occupied regions resulted in the doubling of the numbers of people employed in industry. In 1938 it was estimated that only 808,000 Poles worked in manufacturing. In 1945 this number had increased to 1.5 million.

Polish agriculture had been exploited to its maximum during the period of German occupation. Compulsory supply quotas were imposed on the village community and this, in turn, forced the peasants to increase production. In order to increase output, the occupation administration introduced into the villages better livestock, frequently pillaged from other occupied areas, and encouraged cultivation of crops needed in industry, namely flax, hemp, linen, rapeseed and sugar beet. Improvement in the transport system, both road and rail, aimed at greater military efficiency, also benefited the economy of the occupied Polish territories.

War activities in 1945 affected Polish areas in particular brutally, destroying the existing infrastructure and production. When withdrawing, Germans dismantled and moved production back to the Third Reich and blew up what they could not take with them. Incoming Soviet troops had no direct interest in maintaining production in Polish regions. This led to disputes between the Soviet military administrators, who often took the view that German property should be used as part of the reparation bill to be settled in the future, and Poles, even representatives of the TRJN, who sought to restart production in Poland. Soviet agents were unwilling to make a distinction between genuinely German property, on the one hand, and Polish property which had been confiscated by the Germans, on the other. This dismantling and transportation of plants and machinery from Polish areas to the Soviet Union aroused the opposition of the emerging local Polish administrations, which viewed this as pillaging. Unable to halt what was seen as the despoiling of Polish industrial capacity by the Soviet authorities, the TRJN could only lose authority in the country it claimed to administer. As a

result of these difficulties and continuing military activities, Polish GNP in 1945 was only 38 per cent of pre-war levels.

Dislocation caused by changes of frontiers further delayed recovery. The eastern areas lost to the Soviet Union had contained oilfields, salt, potassium, quartz and coal. But Poland gained areas of high-quality agriculture and the mines and steel plants in Upper and Lower Silesia. In Europe it was generally assumed that coal, as a main source of energy, would be in short supply. Poland stood poised to benefit from the energy shortage, since the coal mines incorporated into Polish borders after the war had been relatively untouched by bombing and war activities.

Discussions and proposals concerning agrarian problems, which had been put forward during the course of the war by parties connected with the government in exile and even the PPR, bore striking similarities. Those prepared in London recognised the need for progressive land reform, distributing land among the peasants from estates owned by the state and organisations which were not involved in agriculture, and property confiscated from traitors and collaborators. It was also assumed that farms of more than 50 hectares would be broken up. The PSL had a major say in preparing this programme and stressed the need to create viable farms, by which they meant those consisting of between 6 and 25 hectares of land. But land reform was contentious because of the question of compensation to those who would lose their estates. Underpinning all debates was the dilemma as to whether land reform would lead to an increase in production. The fear was that land reform, so necessary for political reasons, would increase the number of small and clearly inefficient farms. It was generally assumed that to produce a marketable surplus, farms would have to consist of over 7 hectares of land, though that would still depend on land quality and usage. Thus, a lot of stress was put on industry providing employment for the surplus village population and on high-quality agriculture, which would produce goods and an exportable surplus. This programme was similar to the one put forward by parties in occupied Poland. PPR made no reference to collectivisation and in common with other left wing parties merely referred to the necessity of land reform without compensation.<sup>10</sup>



Nor were there major differences in the various parties' programmes on industry and commerce. Suggestions that the state should take over natural resources and nationalise key industries, such as mining, machine making, and armament industries, had been common currency during the interwar period. Industrialisation and economic advancement with strong state direction were goals with which the Polish people generally agreed, since state involvement was equated with maximum use of resources for the nation's benefit and with modernisation and further industrialisation. The alternative was dependence on foreign capital and this was seen as benefiting non-Poles. Nevertheless, the first aim was to restart production and recovery. In that the government was heavily dependent on factory committees which emerged spontaneously in many enterprises and which led to workers' cooperation with management boards.<sup>11</sup>

The PKWN manifesto of July 1944 announced that all goods and property confiscated by the Germans would be returned to their rightful owners. That included property belonging to peasants, workers, workshop owners, the middle class and finally to churches and ecclesiastical organisations. Only property which had belonged to Germans and Polish state property taken over by the occupation administration was to be nationalised. No mention was made of factories, plants and banks.

To the Lublin authorities land reform was the single most important legislative decision, both because the majority of the population was still connected directly and indirectly with the village and because of the need to stabilise food production. The land decree announced in September 1944 stated that land would be taken from traitors, Germans, and landowners who had farms larger than 50 hectares. After 1946 agricultural land in the Recovered Territories was distributed, although this led to a conflict between the local officials, who wanted to increase the popularity of the TRJN by distributing the land, and government economists and agronomists, who urged that the well run and mechanised ex-German farms be retained in order to raise agricultural productivity. As it turned out, the results of the land reform were disappointing. During the referendum and the general elections the peasant community, even though it had benefited from land reform decrees introduced by

the TRJN, did not vote for the Democratic Bloc parties, remaining loyal instead to the PSL. Already in early 1945 conflicts had arisen between the rump Peasant Alliance, which had collaborated with the TRJN, and the PPR. While the peasant parties viewed land distribution as something which should be implemented by the peasant parties themselves at the local level, the PPR distrusted the idea of peasant spontaneity and instead favoured a strong state role in the process of transformation. In any case, for the PPR, which officially made no reference to collectivisation, land reform was primarily a means of securing the peasant vote.<sup>12</sup> In 1946 as relations between the PPR and the PSL deteriorated, the communists favoured redistributing land to small and landless peasants, even if this reduced agricultural productivity. The PSL's calls for strengthening middle-sized peasants and its support for peasants' cooperatives was portrayed by the PPR as a sign that the party was siding with the large landowners.<sup>13</sup>

Land reform did not resolve the problem of village backwardness. In spite of the redistribution of land, over 61 per cent of land ended up in farms which were described as dwarf or small, in effect, up to around 2 hectares of land. This indicated that problems of food production had not been resolved and that overpopulation and underemployment would still bedevil attempts to modernise agriculture in the future. In 1949 the problem had to be addressed anew, although by that time the communists did not have to take into account the PSL, which had in the meantime been destroyed.

Initially, the provisional government made no references to nationalisation of production. Nevertheless, German policies during the war effectively created natural preconditions for the state to assume responsibility for enterprises. The state, in principle, took over all abandoned property and that which had been administered by the Germans. Re-privatisation was made difficult by confusion over previous ownership. Frequently, previous owners were dead or their fate was unknown. Thus the real conflict over ownership of means of production was not played out between the state and the previous owners but between the state and factory committees. Such committees had in the meantime assumed physical control of factories, mines and enterprises and were organising the resumption of production. Under the leadership of Hilary Minc, a communist

who had spent the war in the Soviet Union, the Ministry of Industry and Trade curtailed the radical aspirations of the workers, who had wanted to retain control over managerial and production decisions. Instead, the state adjudicated on all matters concerning ownership.<sup>14</sup>

In January 1946, through a decree of nationalisation of key branches of industry, state control over economic matters was established. Nevertheless, disputes with factory committees continued, with Minc aiming to confine their role to that of representing workers' interests within the workplace. In that the PPR faced opposition from the PPS, whose economists advocated that factory committees should retain a say in production matters varying from outright control by worker managerial committees to factory committee representatives on the managerial boards. These were short-lived debates and the PPR succeeded in reducing and ultimately destroying the power of the factory committees.<sup>15</sup>

A similar process of the state imposing its policies on workers occurred in private small-scale production, workshops and retail outlets. Workers' cooperatives had a long tradition in Poland and these continued to develop during the period of reconstruction. It was, nevertheless, obvious that the Communists intended to retain control of production and to force a rapid pace of recovery, in which the heavy and extractive industries were a priority. The Three Year Reconstruction Plan announced in 1947 encapsulated the PPR's plan for Poland's economic transformation. Poland was to become an industrial state and, furthermore, one in which economic changes were to be accompanied by radical social and political changes. The pace of transformation was dramatically stepped up in 1947, when the PSL's advocacy of a slow, agrarian-based modernisation programme was defeated. In 1947–48 as the PPR attacked and progressively destroyed all other parties, even those with which it had previously cooperated, all debates on the future economic model came to an end. Economists connected with the PPS, who had put forward a number of innovative economic theories, were singled out for attack. When the party was absorbed into the PPR, these men were publicly pilloried and forced to make an admission that they had been wrong in advocating a slow industrial development and for having overstated the role of workers' control in that process.<sup>16</sup>

The founding meeting of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), which took place in the mountain resort of Szklarska Poręba, in Poland, in September 1947, is usually cited as the starting point of the Cold War. In Poland, the elections and the reassessment of the role of the communists, which occurred earlier in the year, ushered in the period when the Stalinist model was imposed on Polish society. At the same time, Poland was more closely tied into the Soviet bloc through the signing of bilateral trade agreements. Decisions made at Szklarska Poręba led to the communists assuming a leading role in state organisations. Party activists took over managerial positions and key administrative posts. The relationship between the PPR and the state was dramatically changed. Not only did Poland effectively become a single-party state but the communists also took over the state, to the extent that it became not merely the ruling party, but the party which ruled Poland by means of direct involvement in all state decisions. The PSL was destroyed and the PPS disappeared, absorbed into the PZPR. But if the PZPR was to assume a leadership role, the party apparatus as the instrument of policy enforcement also had to be sharpened and disciplined.

The dispute between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, which emerged during 1948, and the need to recast the party so it could become an obedient agent of Soviet policies in Poland led to purges within the PZPR. Initially, the leadership of the PPR consisted of comrades with diverse wartime experiences. Some, like Bierut, had spent the war in the Soviet Union, others, like Gomułka, had survived in occupied Poland. As a result, they had very different ideas as to how the communist system would evolve in Poland. Nor did Stalin expect the PPR to speak with one voice. It was, in fact, Stalin who demanded that the Moscow-based Polish communists include Gomułka in the PKWN. In 1947, with the first signs of the Cold War and a shift in Stalin's assessment of the role of the communists in Poland, ideological diversity was suppressed. After the founding of the Cominform and the Soviet demand that the communist parties in all East European states should establish a single-party rule, communists who had proposed a degree of independence from the Soviet Union came under attack. Gomułka was attacked for having advocated a Polish road to socialism, not dissimilar to Tito's policies

in Yugoslavia. He had also opposed collectivisation, which he felt would go contrary to the Polish peasants' aspirations. In 1948 he was relieved of the post of Deputy Prime Minister. Critically, the party condemned him for 'nationalist deviation', which resulted in his being dismissed from the post of party secretary. In its battle against 'deviationists' the PZPR investigators cast their nets widely. Many of the party rank and file, who were arrested during the purges had been members of the pre-war KPP. Most of the surviving veterans of the Spanish Civil War ended up in prisons. The leadership of the party was taken over by those who had spent the war in Moscow and knew better than to question Stalin's policies. This group included, in addition to Bierut, and Minc, Jakub Berman, a Stalinist ideologist. General Marian Spychalski, the Minister of Defence, who had acted as Chief of Staff of the communist Armia Ludowa underground units during the war, was arrested and his position was taken over by Konstanty Rokossovsky, a Soviet general of Polish background.<sup>17</sup>

The arrests affected all parties which had earlier collaborated with the TRJN. There is strong evidence to suggest that the purges of the communists and their allies were coordinated from Moscow. In formulating accusations against suspected Polish Communists and socialists, links were drawn with Hungarian and Czechoslovak Communists who were under arrest at the same time. Thus, in addition to being vilified for having allegedly conspired with Tito, they were accused of having been in touch with Laszlo Rajk, a Hungarian communist and Minister for Foreign Affairs, arrested during the purges and executed after a show trial. Polish victims of the purges were also accused of having been influenced by the Noel brothers, two US citizens associated with a relief agency based in Austria. Their names figured on accusations levelled against Rajk and the Czech victims of the purges, notably Slánský. The result was not only the destruction of any internal debate within the PZPR, but in the long term also the end of a left wing political discourse in Poland. The lively and varied debate on the role of the state and of workers in the post-war state of 1945–47 ended with the imposition of the Stalinist ideological correctness in 1948.

The Stalinist period affected all aspects of life. In **December 1948 a Six Year Plan** was accepted as the basis of future economic

development. This assumed a rapid pace of industrialisation with particular emphasis on metal and chemical production. When this plan was put into effect in 1950, the Korean War created a demand for munitions and this was added to the plan's objectives. In the long term it was assumed that the initial rapid pace of development would allow for a future improvement in the standard of living. In reality, consumer and light industries were woefully neglected and shortages of everyday goods became the norm. The Six Year Plan was not merely an attempt to overcome backwardness and create preconditions for a rapid industrial takeoff. Inevitably, it also had the political objective of transforming Polish society by altering the balance between the agrarian sector, which dominated Polish life hitherto, and urban/industrial life. With Soviet credit and also demand for Polish goods, stress was put on big projects, of which the Nowa Huta steelworks, near Kraków, was a good example. These modern, mechanised enterprises were to employ what were to be new workers, committed to the building of a communist future. The chemical and machine industries, in turn, would facilitate the transformation of the backward, stagnant agrarian sector by making available chemical fertilizers and agricultural machinery. The plan was also to guarantee that Poland would be in a position to defend its borders. The Soviet model of economic development was thus imposed on Poland, irrespective of its economic feasibility. In 1954, as part of the first debates following Stalin's death, the Central Committee of the PZPR admitted that the standard of living of Polish workers had collapsed since 1947 and that there was a need to review the plan in order to increase production of consumer goods. Anxiety about workers taking industrial action made this reassessment a necessary exercise.<sup>18</sup>

A decision to collectivise agriculture was made in 1948, after the attack on the so-called nationalist groups in the party. Mindful of the peasants' anxiety about the loss of the recently acquired land, the process was publicly described as that of bringing peasants into cooperatives. This presented collectivisation as a voluntary process, in which the peasants would be persuaded of the wisdom of coming together and farming jointly, thus enabling them to purchase and use modern machinery and farming methods. In October 1949 local party groups were instructed to accelerate the process. From

1950 collectivisation of farming became a priority. Coercion and persuasion were used to get the peasants to sign up to collectives. Those who refused were victimised by increased taxation and by threats. Individual farmers found it difficult to obtain seeds, fertilisers and agricultural implements.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in 1955 when it was finally agreed to halt the process, only 9.2 per cent of cultivated land had been collectivised. At the same time state farms were established. They held approximately 12.4 per cent of cultivated land. In both cooperative and state farms output was lower than in private farms. The impact of these policies on the village was considerable. Food production stayed inadequate and Polish agriculture remained backward and underinvested. This state of affairs continued even after 1956 when the decision was made to dissolve the cooperative farms. At the same time, increased opportunities in industry led to a flight of young people from villages to the new industrial complexes which guaranteed them housing, educational opportunities and a higher standard of living.

The onset of the Cold War and the mutual distrust and hostility, which characterised all East-West exchanges, had a profound impact on Europe. Polish territories were treated as a security zone and Soviet troops were stationed close to the border with Germany. Soviet control over Poland was reinforced by a policy of increasing all forms of dependence on the Soviet Union. West European states limited all contacts with Poland, accepting its place within the Soviet bloc. Poland, in common with other states in the Soviet sphere of influence, was henceforth treated as contaminated by Soviet ideology. Economic, social and cultural contacts between Poland and the West were limited. Poland was thus bound with the Soviet Union, with no efforts being made by the West to reverse this state of affairs.

Poland was drawn more closely into the Soviet economic sphere, both through direct economic and financial agreements but also through the **Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON)**. This was an organisation established by the Soviet Union in direct response to Marshall Aid in January 1949. Its aim was to encourage members to specialise in particular branches of industry and through that to decrease duplication and wasteful overlaps. During the Stalinist period trade was conducted in such ways that it was

invariably more advantageous to Soviet economic development. In the impoverished and war-ravaged Poland, the fact that vital raw materials such as coal and sulphur were being sent to the Soviet Union was widely known and caused popular resentment.

From 1949 Soviet control over Poland extended to all aspects of life. Having purged its leadership of those who advocated a measured approach to economic development and collectivisation, the PZPR led by Bierut took a hard line in relation to all those likely to disagree. In these circumstances, the Catholic Church came under scrutiny. In 1949 a Mixed Commission, consisting of representatives of the church and high-ranking ministers, was established to address a number of contentious issues.<sup>20</sup> The Vatican supported the West German opposition to the loss of pre-war territories and this faced the Polish Episcopate with a number of dilemmas. As long as the Vatican viewed the Recovered Territories as German and not Polish, they came under the jurisdiction of German bishops and only they had the right to appoint parish priests. It was obvious that Poles would not attend churches in which German priests officiated, thus an uneasy compromise was found whereby the German bishops accepted the temporary appointment of Polish priests. In the context of the extreme political confrontation created by the Cold War, this situation left the Polish Episcopate open to accusations of collusion with hostile powers.

In November 1948 a new bishop, Stefan Wyszyński, was nominated to become archbishop of Gniezno and Warsaw, succeeding the deceased Cardinal Hlond. His nomination coincided with the rise in tension between the communist state and the church. Wyszyński was not allowed to make the obligatory trip to Rome to receive the confirmation of his nomination to the archbishopric. Initially, the communists wanted to see a Catholic party in the Sejm, a plan that the Episcopate refused to support. Nevertheless, even in these difficult circumstances the dialogue between the two authorities was continued. From 1949 onwards relations deteriorated, with nuns, priests and monks arrested and accused of having collaborated with the Nazis. Show trials and provocations were staged in order to put the church in a bad light.<sup>21</sup> The final straw came in September 1953 when Primate Wyszyński was arrested and put under house arrest. This situation was not changed until 1956.



Attacks on the Catholic Church were not merely a reflection of a very real conflict between two powerful ideologies. The historic association between Polish identity and the Catholic religion was obvious. Any attempt to impose a primary loyalty to the state would entail an attack on that historic association.

During the Stalinist years, Soviet policies towards Poland went beyond subordination of the state to Soviet interests. An integral element of that policy had been attacks on Polish traditions, cultural and social, replacing them with Russian and Soviet symbols. All aspects of life were affected by these policies, from changes to the Polish army uniforms to the use in schools of Soviet textbooks which had been translated from Russian and which had the compulsory poem to Stalin on the first page.

Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 did not in itself change the situation. The regime relaxed its hold on society slowly and unwillingly. To the PZPR leadership this was a time of confusion. Used to receiving clear and precise instructions on policies they were expected to follow, they did not know how to respond to the preoccupation of the Moscow communist leadership with domestic matters. Polish communists were unsure as to what were the implications for their own positions of the battle for succession taking place in the Kremlin. This caused problems, when Moscow's control over domestic Polish affairs had been all pervading. The initial response was to try and continue as they had done before, hence the arrests of those suspected of contacts with the West, purges of 'nationalist deviationists' and 'Titoists' as well as increased attacks on the Catholic hierarchy. No slowing down of the pace of industrial development was authorised, even though it was already known that targets outlined in the Six Year Plan would not be achieved and that the collectivisation drive had failed to deliver increased food supplies.

The first signs of a thaw appeared in March 1954, when during II Party Congress PZPR leadership, closely observed by Nikita Khrushchev, sanctioned the changes. Without making any references to Stalin's incorrect policies, the Soviet leadership wanted to see the separation of the state and party functions. While Bierut henceforth was to hold the party leadership, Józef Cyrankiewicz, previously leader of the PPS, became Prime Minister. This change did not herald a break with the recent Stalinist past, as Cyrankiewicz

had acted as Prime Minister between 1947 and 1952 and Deputy Prime Minister from 1952. No attempt was made to change the top cadre, which continued to be dominated by the triumvirate of Bierut, Minc and Berman. Nevertheless within society, the lower echelons of the party and the influential cultural milieu, changes, however tentative, continued and gradually gained momentum.<sup>22</sup>

Next in line for review was the security apparatus dominated by a much feared and hated Stanisław Radkiewicz. The Ministry for Public Security had during the Stalinist years enjoyed extensive powers. The general perception was that Radkiewicz communicated directly with the Soviet leaders and took his instructions from them. Purges of the PZPR and, in particular, the continuing imprisonment of Gomułka caused resentment even within the party. Once the ministry was abolished and its functions were dispersed, the process of reviewing of past sentences could start. Slowly and without public acknowledgement people were released from prisons. Thousands of Poles, who had been accused of no other crime than that they had belonged to the AK or BCh units during the war, were freed. In 1955 PZPR made an open admission that mistakes had been made in the past and as a result of this statement, party activists tried earlier were granted amnesties. Gomułka was released from prison, though that fact was not made public.

The party leadership's preference would have been for the changes in Moscow and their implications for Poland to remain an internal party matter. This proved impossible. In the first place, by releasing prisoners, their treatment and the accusations levelled against them became the subject of debate. While no newspapers addressed the subject openly, it was common knowledge that something was going to change and that previous policies were being abandoned. The veil of secrecy had been torn aside in September 1954 when Radio Free Europe, a CIA-funded US broadcasting station based in Munich, ran a series of interviews with Józef Światło, a top security agent. In December 1953, Światło had defected to the West. Information revealed by him and beamed over Poland during the coming year discredited not merely the government in the public's eyes, but challenged the whole notion that the PZPR was a ruling party. Światło had been the deputy head of Department X, a section of the Ministry of Public Security to which had been assigned the role of invigilation of party leaders. Thus was revealed the fact

that far from being a ruling party, the PZPR was under the strict surveillance of an internal body, accountable only to the Minister of Public Security. Radio Free Europe continued to be the source of information that most Poles believed to be true. From its broadcasts people found out that party and government leaders enjoyed a better lifestyle than that which any other Poles could have achieved by honest means. The government's claim to be ruling on behalf of the toiling masses was exposed, raising doubts about its own position and about the integrity of its leadership. In the streets, debates and discussions as well as open criticism of the state of affairs could not be controlled or stemmed any longer.<sup>23</sup>

While the PZPR leadership was still reluctant to be either open or forthright in addressing reforms, changes taking place in Moscow made it impossible for them to stall. These forced the Stalinist leadership to also review their policies in Poland. In February 1956 Khrushchev made a clean break with the Stalinist past. In a defining speech made to a closed forum at the XX Party Congress in the Soviet Union, he accused Stalin of having deviated from the true path of socialism. The speech, which was to mark a break with the past, allowed for the new leaders to distance themselves from the mistakes made earlier. By a stroke the position of the 'Little Stalins' who had maintained their grip on power in Eastern Europe was rendered impossible. Fortunately for the Poles, Bierut while attending the congress succumbed to illness and died in Moscow. This cleared the way for reforms in Poland.<sup>24</sup>

By then de-Stalinisation was no longer a matter for the party leadership only. The open Soviet admission of past mistakes raised hopes for the re-opening of a debate on how Poland was to be ruled and on the extent of Polish independence that the Soviet Union would tolerate. The momentum for further change would henceforth come from factories, trade unions and the public at large. The intellectual and university community took a leading role in both opening up and publicising debates on recent events and injustices committed by the regime. *Nowa Kultura* (New Culture), a weekly journal of the Association of Polish Writers, was one of the first to question past policies to the creative and artistic community. It also voiced concerns about the imprisonment of AK members and distortions in recent history. The journal *Po Prostu* (Simply) published articles in which many contentious issues were aired. The

theoretical journal of the PZPR, *Nowe Drogi* (New Ways), likewise entered into the debate. Discussion clubs and debating associations followed, increasingly emboldened by the fact that repression and censorship seemed not to be as restrictive as before. The *Krzywe Koło* (Crooked Circle) club was the most prominent of those.<sup>25</sup>

The text of Khrushchev's speech was quickly made available in Poland. In the first place, those who went to Moscow and had been involved in dealing with Bierut's affairs had official copies. Rumours circulated that illicitly made copies were available on the Warsaw flea market. Finally, the secretariat of the party decided to distribute the text among party activists. At that point the content of the speech became an open secret. The central committee of the PZPR divided into open factions. Although the decision to find a successor to Bierut was made without major disagreements, in reality, since 1954, two factions had emerged in anticipation of an internal battle for the leadership and for or against reforms demanded by the Soviet leadership. The Puławska group reflected the reformist wing, mainly the young technocrats, while the Natolin one held on to the Stalinist dogmas. On 17 April an announcement was made dissolving the Cominform. Khrushchev started courting Tito in a bid for reconciliation. From Moscow came news that the Soviet Union intended to change the basis on which relations had been conducted with the so-called Peoples' Democracies. It was not clear what that would mean in Poland. At the same time, Poles worried about the military implications of the Soviet Union's new willingness to open talks on Germany and to pursue negotiations on the reunification of Austria. On 14 May 1955 a treaty of friendship between the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe was signed. One of its clauses committed the signatories to support each other militarily. This became known as the Warsaw Pact. To the Poles it offered assurances of security against Germany. But it was difficult to overlook the conclusion that the Soviet leadership only decided to create a counterbalance to NATO when the Soviet initiatives aimed at reuniting Germany failed and the German Federal Republic was invited to join NATO.

With changes in Moscow progressing at a rapid pace, the anti-Stalinists in Poland gained an upper hand. Crimes committed during the Stalinist period were discussed in the Sejm at an open session. On 27 April an amnesty for all political prisoners was declared.

Radkiewicz was relieved of his duties and his closest collaborators were arrested and tried for crimes committed during the Stalinist period.<sup>26</sup>

On 28 June 1956 the workers took to the streets. The strikes in Poznań mark a point when the pace of developments eluded the party's control. Workers from the metal and machine factories had earlier tried to resolve disputes concerning new pay rates and taxation. Their representatives as well as the local security services knew that the reasons for workers' disaffection were mainly economic. Standards of living had been stagnating and real wages were lower than they had been a year before. The management's unhelpful responses led to anger and on the morning of 28 June workers spilled out of the workshops and took to the streets. Whereas first slogans shouted by the demonstrators still reflected their anger at being cheated of their pay, as the workers marched towards the city centre political slogans were added to pay demands. The striking workers proceeded to attack the headquarters of the secret service and the heavily armed troops sent against them. In the fighting, over 70 workers were killed, though the figure was never made official. Poznań was a signal for other workers to take action. In factories and enterprises across Poland workers staged meetings, declaring their support for reforms and demanding that the government listen to their grievances.<sup>27</sup>

Most people regarded the current party and government leadership as having compromised their positions and therefore unable to lead the reforms. Gomulka, whose release from prison had become public knowledge, was increasingly seen as an alternative to the inept Edward Ochab, who had replaced Bierut. The party leadership finally accepted the inevitable and Gomulka became First Party Secretary. Minc, whose policy of rapid industrialisation was seen as having caused difficulties in the consumer markets, was criticised by the Central Committee and resigned. At this point the Soviet political and military leadership, including Khrushchev, decided to fly to Warsaw where they arrived on the morning of 19 October. After a stormy confrontation between the Soviet leader and Gomulka, the Poles won the right to conduct their own reforms without Soviet interference. An additional element of the compromise between the two sides was an assurance that Soviet troops stationed in Poland

would return to their bases and that Marshal Rokossovsky would be recalled. Finally, clearly slighted by the Soviet side ignoring Poland's concern over the fate of Germany, the Poles insisted on being consulted on the German talks.

Gomułka aimed to restructure the party leadership and to complete the de-Stalinisation process. He still had to deal with the sections of the working class and the intellectuals that had been inspired and mobilised by the prospect of political freedom, which appeared to affect all Poland. Various groups representing workers and intellectuals put forward proposals for reforms, which would have continued Poland's development on a revolutionary path. No group suggested that the economy should be freed from state control and they made no references to denationalisation. Interestingly, workers in the large steelworks around Warsaw declared their desire to take over management decisions and to establish workers' control over production. Only by means of such reforms did they believe that both their economic and their political right could be protected. They and other striking workers in large enterprises spoke of reforms, which would have reduced the influence of bureaucrats in factories and by the same token decreased the power of the state over the workers – the producers of wealth. With a great degree of clarity, the Association of Polish Writers articulated these ideas and further calls for reforms.

It was not a coincidence that the intellectuals felt it their duty to support the workers and to take a position on the events which were unfolding in Poland. The long historic tradition of intellectuals acting as spokesmen for the disenfranchised gave them a ready model. In any case, writers who had been able to publish during the preceding years invariably were left wing and in varying degrees supported the government of the time. This they did even though many disagreed with Stalinist policies. In discussing the form and extent of future reforms, both the workers and intellectuals looked to Yugoslavia for ready models. They believed that developments taking place there reflected more closely what they hoped would be implemented in Poland, namely legislation which would confirm the role of the workers in the new state by giving them a larger say in economic matters.<sup>28</sup> Tito was the first leader from within the communist bloc to congratulate Gomułka on his becoming party

secretary and advised him to **find a Polish road to socialism** and not to confine himself to choosing either the Soviet or the Yugoslav economic and political models.

The heady atmosphere of the summer of 1956, which generated both debates and discussions on new modes of production and on the relationship between the state and citizens, came to an end once Gomulka was assured of the Poles support. It was fortunate for him that he was also able to secure the church's support for reforms. **Wyszyński was released from house arrest on 28 October.** At the beginning of 1957 Gomulka and Cyrankiewicz held a meeting with Wyszyński during which, in return for a number of concessions, including the restoration of the teaching of religion in schools, the Catholic Episcopate committed itself to supporting the government during the forthcoming elections. The church shared with the new PZPR leadership the wish to avoid fratricidal conflicts and possibly even a Soviet invasion.

From that point onward relations between the state and the church continued, uneasily, nevertheless on the basis of an understanding that both were committed to scaling down internal conflicts. On a public level, relations between the two continued to be strained. In spite of its earlier commitments to maintain the teaching of religion in schools, the regime soon started attacking the church, reducing its activities in the public sphere. In due course the church lost the right to run nurseries, primary schools and to teach religion in state schools.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of constantly harassing Catholic institutions, the communists accepted that a head-on attack could be dangerous. In 1965 Polish bishops addressed a proclamation to German bishops. In it they declared that the two states shared a common Christian heritage, and in view of the forthcoming 1000-year anniversary of Poland becoming Christian they 'forgave and ask for forgiveness'. The regime interpreted it as an initiative into foreign policy. This caused a storm as it was belived that the church had no right to stray into these issues. The celebrations of the millennium of Poland's baptism passed in an atmosphere of hostility and with the government determined to undermine the anniversary.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, behind the scenes the two maintained a dialogue through the earlier established commission. The two authorities

continued to be divided by their differing vision of what a Polish state should be. To the Catholic Church and most of its parishioners who each week filled the pews, Poland could only be a theocratic state, regulated by principles of the Catholic faith, acting in its self-appointed role of defender of the interests of the nation. To the regime, the way forward was the separation of the church from the state. The regime was able to provide people with opportunities for personal advancement and economic stability. I return for not attacking the regime outright, the church accepted certain defined privileges. The Catholic University in Lublin continued to function, a Catholic daily and weekly newspaper appeared regularly and the parish churches, though constrained, were allowed to function. In that respect, **the Polish compromise between the communist regime and the Catholic Church was unique in the Soviet bloc.**

During the two years after 1956 Gomułka consolidated his position. In the first place he had to deal with party leaders and the security service, which had been part of the Stalinist system in Poland. Some were expelled, others lost their positions of influence. The notorious **Urząd Bezpieczeństwa (Security Bureau – UB) was disbanded** and a system of controls was put in place to make sure that the security apparatus never again became so powerful as to act against the party leadership. Polish society as a whole benefited from the process. People were released from prisons, an amnesty and then a process of rehabilitation fully recognised the injustice of past sentences. It became possible to discuss the war and immediate post-war period with a degree of frankness unheard of during the Stalinist years. The role of the AK and the BCh was now analysed as part of the recent historical past and not to implicate people.

Gomułka's reputation was based on the popular perception that, although a communist, he was committed to the Polish road to socialism and on his known opposition to collectivisation. In 1956 it was the radical intellectual groups and the workers who called for his reinstatement and who gave him their unconditional support in the critical October days. Nevertheless, Gomułka's relations with these sections of society were never easy. In the first place, he quickly moved to limit reforms which many sections of society expected would be a natural consequence of the change in party



leadership. The anti-Stalinists in the party leadership treated the elections which took place in January 1957 as a means of confirming their authority. After the elections came a clampdown on the radical elements who expected the government to introduce workers' control in the factories. Then the regime took action against intellectuals and journalists who had believed that the October reforms were a starting point of further radical reforms. A number of journals closely associated with the heady days of 1956 were closed, while workers' claims to having a larger say in enterprise management were blocked by reducing the role of the workers' councils to supporting management decisions. No attempt was made to change the structural or ideological basis on which the PZPR claim to rule had been established after 1947. Elections were held, nevertheless the electoral lists were prepared by an electoral college in such a way that no independent parties or individuals entered the Sejm without prior agreement. Thus two Catholic groups existed within the Sejm, although their powers were always limited. During the years 1956–57 the issue of the role of the state was a subject which was closely connected to debates of political reforms. In left wing circles and in major factories where workers had formed factory councils, it was understood that as long as matters relating to economic development and production were left in the hands of state bureaucrats, the workers' political rights were not guaranteed. Thus, militant workers who called for greater state accountability and for respect for human and citizen rights, automatically, also demanded that workers should have control over the means of production. Gomulka was not prepared to accept these demands and by the time of the elections the factory committees were stripped off the right to interfere in managerial decisions. Inevitably, the workers' right to strike was counteracted by the state's claim to represent the working class. The period of debates of alternative economic and political models was brought to an end.

One of the key issues which the Gomulka team had to address was the Five Year Plan, which was to follow the completed Six Year Plan. Although his predecessors had already outlined new objectives, there was general agreement that consumer and light industries had been neglected and that this had had a serious impact on the workers' morale and standard of living. The result of debates

on the reprioritising of industrial targets was the decision to maintain the pace of development in heavy industry, but at the same time encourage production of consumer goods. The State Planning Commission established after 1956 stressed the need for continuing emphasis on heavy, chemical and electrical industries. Thus by the spring of 1957 Gomułka accepted that production of consumer goods could stand in the way of those priorities. During the following years the consequence of this reasoning was a continuing lack of investment in the production of goods needed for daily life. In effect, private enterprise was allowed to step into the breach, with the state allowing for the emergence of small-scale workshop production and retail outlets. At the same time, producer cooperatives assumed a larger role in supplying services. During the later 1950s, standards of living rose slowly and inconsistently, causing frustration and disappointment. Economic exchanges with countries of the COMECON and West European economies increased during this period. Although it had been hoped that Poland would be able to increase its export to Western Europe, in reality the opposite happened and Poland's balance of trade during the 1960s was negative. Nevertheless, because of internal shortages this was something the Gomułka regime was not able to rectify.

In agriculture, collectivisation was abandoned. Poland was unique in Eastern Europe in allowing the continuation of individual farms. Though, in principle, the issue of collectivisation was occasionally discussed by the Central Committee, in particular when other communist regimes castigated Poland for maintaining capitalist modes of production, in reality peasants were confident that the state was not likely to force collectivisation. Instead, emphasis was put on modernisation and increased use of machinery. For that purpose, farmers were encouraged to join machine circles and to pool resources and production. By these means agricultural output was increased throughout the 1960s.

Stalin's death and the subsequent changes which took place in the Soviet leadership had an impact on Poland's freedom to determine some aspects of its foreign policy. Khrushchev's initial anxiety that Gomułka would not manage to maintain control over the pace of reforms proved unfounded. In due course, although relations between Poland and the Soviet Union appeared to be characterised

by a greater degree of independence. In reality Poland remained a reliable ally of the Soviet Union. Events in Hungary signalled to the PZPR the limits of what the Soviet Union would tolerate. The Poles knew that invasion was an option which, if necessary, would be considered. Western passivity during the Hungarian crisis likewise indicated that the East European states could not count on support in confrontation with the Soviet Union. Gomulka disapproved of the Soviet invasion of Hungary and made small gestures of support for the Hungarians, although never enough to actually challenge the Soviet actions. He also expressed disagreement with the trial and execution of the Hungarian Prime Minister Imre Nagy.

Polish foreign policy during this period was pragmatic and cautious, though it is still not possible to fully explain some of the more interesting initiatives. The fact that the Federal Republic of Germany refused to recognise the Oder-Neisse border remained a matter of concern to the Poles and not just the communists. The spectre of a third world war hung heavily over Poland, so recently a victim of German aggression and occupation. This single fact tended to moderate the desire to shake off Soviet tutelage. Gomulka thus pursued a judicious foreign policy, on the one hand giving the Soviet Union no reason to weaken its support for Poland, while on the other trying to raise Poland's profile in the United Nations and other international organisations.

A number of initiatives concerning the creation of denuclearised zones in Europe were associated with Poland. It is still not possible to ascertain to what extent these were Polish ideas, or if the Soviet Union indicated to the Poles that they should present them as their own, in the belief that it would be more likely to be accorded serious consideration. In any case, on 2 October 1957, Adam Rapacki, the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, put to the XII Session of the United Nations a plan for the creation of a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe. The Rapacki Plan, as it came to be known, met with a degree of approval and was discussed, together with other similar proposals during the following sessions of the United Nations. Nevertheless, it never had a realistic chance of success, as the context of the Cold War prevented the USA and the Soviet Union from genuinely accepting demilitarisation as a way out of the political stalemate.<sup>31</sup>

During the second half of the 1960s the regime faced challenges to its authority. Economic stagnation and shortages caused increased irritation in wider sections of the community. The fact that East Germany and Czechoslovakia appeared to be enjoying a higher standard of living and access to consumer goods underlined the fact that economic planning was failing to deliver what people increasingly expected to see in shops, namely regular supplies of clothes, kitchen equipment, furniture and electrical goods. Children born during the post-war baby boom were coming to a point where they might in the nearest future become independent, but their prospects of securing a flat, however small, were very distant. The older generation, particularly those who had experienced post-war shortages, were no longer willing to accept that twenty years after the end of the war shortages were still the norm. The expectation of some reward for years of sacrifices was growing and when people were fobbed off with trite propaganda statements, their sense of alienation from the state increased. The most basic level on which non-communists were prepared to accept the regime, namely that of economic well-being, was being eroded and with that appeared signs of irritation.

The intellectual and creative community which had supported Gomułka in 1956 felt cheated and marginalised. The next generation of intellectuals, nurtured in the post-war egalitarian ethos, expected the regime to abide by its own stated principles. Thus, within universities, students and young academics led the debate on the regime's visible ideological shortcomings. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski published first a manifesto and then an *Open Letter* in which they criticised the regime for its lack of democratic accountability and commitment to economic reforms. Among the older Marxist intellectuals, many likewise came to doubt the regime's willingness to do anything other than maintain a grip on power. Amongst those, Leszek Kołakowski, Włodzimierz Brus and Zygmund Bauman were the best known in Poland and in the West.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time the party leadership was in turmoil for entirely different reasons. The PPR always accommodated groups which had their own diverse perceptions of the way communism was to be established in Poland. Their debates were always conducted with a degree of caution, and when they erupted into the open, this was

usually due to the Soviet leadership supporting a given faction, as has happened in 1947 and again in 1956. During the 1960s a nationalist group led by wartime communist partisan leader, Mieczysław Moczar, came to prominence. The conflict dated back to the war and the first years of the communist regime. Moczar felt that communists who had spent the war years in the Soviet Union had played down the role of the communists in Poland. He also displayed classic signs of anti-Semitism, believing that Polish Jewish communists had formed a separate group within the PZPR and that they had a distinct agenda, one that was opposed to Polish nationalism. In 1964 he became Minister of Interior, a fact that allowed him and his supporters to take the conflict beyond the narrow confines of PZPR debates. From that point onwards the activities of the wartime communist partisans were enlarged upon in books and films. The aim was to play down the role of communists in the Soviet Union. At the same time, he reached out to the ex-combatants whose achievements had not been acknowledged until then, most obviously the AK and those who fought in the West.<sup>33</sup>

The Israeli-Arab war of 1967 and the ensuing diplomatic breach between the Soviet bloc and Israel, gave Moczar's group an opportunity to launch an attack on Jews in the party, the army and in Polish society. By defining Jews as Zionists and by accusing them of a loyalty to the state of Israel that, he claimed, overrode their commitment to Poland, Moczar at a stroke identified all Jews as potential traitors. Gomulka, who had no track record of anti-Semitism, appears not to have done anything to protect Polish Jews, who were publicly denounced and vilified during meetings held in workplaces. Newspapers carried hostile comments on the role of Jews in post-war Poland and radio programmes repeated accusations of sympathies with Zionism and Israel. Many Jews were expelled from their employment. The result was that a high proportion of the Jews who had stayed in Poland after 1948 felt compelled to emigrate. In a final gesture intended to humiliate them, on leaving Poland they were stripped of Polish nationality, thus becoming stateless.

Student protests at the University of Warsaw in March 1968 gave Moczar an opportunity to suggest that Jews were also active within the universities as leaders of the dissident groups. Student demonstrations were in fact precipitated by heavy-handed censorship and

attempts to stifle debates taking place in the universities. Moczar led an attack on Jewish and dissident academics and students, accusing them of disloyalty to the Polish state. The party purged the universities of dissidents and arrested students and high school pupils involved in demonstrations. During fighting which broke out first at the Warsaw University and later in other universities, troops were sent in to quell the demonstrations with extreme brutality. The regime nevertheless pretended that these were actions taken by the workers justly outraged by the students' lack of commitment to their studies and disrespect for the workers' state. During the following year, educational reforms made it easier for children of workers and peasants to gain places at universities. **Male students were drafted into the army for lengthy military training courses.** Academic staff associated with this wave of protest against the regime were dismissed. There were attempts made by the intellectual community to discuss the difficulties of the communist regime. These were blocked.

Within the party leadership complex battles were fought out, far from the public eyes. Gomulka tried to bring the bloodletting to an end but in reality he did, or could do, nothing to protect Jews, 13,000 of whom were forced to leave Poland. On 19 March 1968 he made a speech to chosen party activists, which was broadcast on radio and TV. His attempts to conduct a debate on the difference between Jews who were loyal Poles and those who were Zionists was interrupted by party members who demanded that he go further. Anti-Semitism united both party and non-party members to the extent that the Party Secretary could not prevent. His weakness was thus publicly exposed and might have given the anti-Semitic drive an added momentum. The bloodletting now affected the party leadership. **Rapacki, under attack for his Jewish origin, resigned his post as Minister for foreign Affairs.** Marian Spychalski, was relieved of his duties. He was the Minister of Defence who had been imprisoned during the Stalinist period and rehabilitated in 1956.<sup>34</sup>

Gomulka lingered on for two more years, his position increasingly compromised. Critically, economic failures, which lay at the root of the social disaffection, and which fuelled both anti-Semitism and dissident activities, were not resolved.

## 6 From Gierek to Solidarity

The post-1956 regime had no desire to isolate Poland from Western Europe as the previous regime had. Academics were occasionally allowed to travel to conferences in the West and in the USA and foreign guests were increasingly made welcome in Poland. The result was that some of the educated young and intellectuals became aware of the political polemics raging in the West. The Paris events of 1968 were analysed with great interest, as were reforms in Czechoslovakia. Poles no longer felt that they were isolated in these matters. More freely than hitherto, students spoke of individual rights, of social justice and of progress. The Catholic Church, although under attack from the regime, could count on public support in all circumstances. In the late 1960s young Catholics became aware of the worker-priest movement in Latin America and the Netherlands. This was a new concept of a church which associated with revolutionary circles. As puzzling as these models were to Poles, they were keen to find out more. It was not a coincidence that dissidents frequently came from privileged backgrounds. Their parents had been directly connected with the post-war regime or else had benefited from the communists' search for support among the intellectual and creative milieu.<sup>1</sup>

The response of the regime to tentative signs of political dissent was disproportionate in relation to its extent. After 1968 in particular, Gomulka strengthened the invigilation of the universities and students and increased sentences for those who publicly criticised

the regime's shortcomings. Kuroń and Modzelewski were once more arrested, as was Adam Michnik, a dissident activist associated with the 1968 demonstrations at the University of Warsaw. Nevertheless, illegal publications appeared with increased regularity, suggesting some degree of organisation. At this stage, the main thrust of the criticism was the gap between the regime's stated principles and its actions, rather than a clearly formulated programme for the establishment of a political and economic system modelled on Western Europe.

What Gomulka failed to note was that within the working class community disaffection with the slow pace of improvement in the standard of living was taking root. No longer content with small achievements and deeply frustrated with increasing shortages of consumer goods and basic foodstuffs, the workers were ready to take action. Gomulka did not understand these aspirations and his modest lifestyle impressed no one. In reality, people became frustrated with queuing and effective rationing of goods which they knew were now freely available in the West. Although the state had made progress in building new housing, the new flats were very small, shabby and with windowless kitchens. The demographic pressure of the post-war generations called for decisive and new economic responses, those that the regime was not prepared to consider.

The situation came to a head on 13 December 1970, when price increases on food were introduced just as families prepared for Christmas. These increases varied, but on average amounted to 15 per cent. Food bills made up to half of a Polish family's household spending, therefore, the increases would have made a big impact on the people's anticipated family budget. Most economists agreed that there was a need for changes in the pricing structures. The method and timing was nevertheless badly thought out. The increases came just as announcements were made about changes in workers' pay, which was meant to stabilise the economy by introducing an element of market forces. The workers response was to take to the streets. On 14 December strikes affected the main coastal cities and ports. The Central Committee of the PZPR made the fateful decision to authorise the sending of troops to quell the strikes. Critically, soldiers were given live ammunition. On 15 December,



in a confrontation between striking workers and troops in Gdańsk, 44 people were killed and many more injured. The police and the secret service extended their action, seeking to identify and punish those involved. Rather than seeing the workers' strikes as a sign of despair and anger, the party chose to portray them as orchestrated by 'criminal elements'.<sup>2</sup>

During the critical few days which followed, the party's leadership was unsure as to the significance of the action taken by the workers and crucially what to do next. One issue became clear, namely that Gomułka had to go. It would appear that the Soviet Ambassador to Warsaw conveyed to the members of the Central Committee a clear warning that Brezhnev wanted to see Gomułka replaced. The Polish party leaders were assured that no invasion was planned. Western reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had been so serious as to preclude a similar decision in Poland's case. The Poles were left in no doubt that they had to remove Gomułka, as he was no longer considered capable of dealing with the escalating crisis. It has been suggested that the Soviet leadership had also identified a successor and discreetly suggested to PZPR leadership who that was to be. This explains why, when the name of Edward Gierek was put forward, his nomination was accepted without any potential rivals raising objections. Gomułka was incapacitated by either a cardiac problem or had simply collapsed with overwork and did not put up a fight. On 20 December Gierek gave his first radio speech. The price increases were withdrawn and assurances were given that wages would be raised. The new party secretary's position was consolidated by his bold decision on 31 December to face the strikers in Gdańsk. Having listened to their grievances, he assured them that he would do his best to deal with the economic problems. In response to Gierek's outright question of whether they would help him, the workers assured him that they would. This widely publicised moment, possibly entirely spontaneous, symbolised the new hope and conviction that the regime recognised the validity of the workers' grievances.<sup>3</sup>

Gierek was not an unknown man. He had held the post of party secretary of the Katowice mining district since 1954. His stepfather and mother had emigrated to France in the 1920s and his working experience had been entirely in French and Belgian mines. It was

there that he joined the communist Party and was active in the communist-dominated miners' trade union movement. Throughout the war Gierek worked in Belgium. After the war, he campaigned for Polish miners to return to Poland to participate in the building of socialism. The campaign resulted in the repatriation of nearly 10,000 Poles, mainly highly skilled miners and their families who were settled in the previously German mining district of Upper Silesia. Gierek was unusual among the leading Polish communists for having extensive trade union and party experience and for having direct knowledge of work in the mines. Unlike the other leaders who either spent extensive periods of their adult life in Polish prisons or in Moscow, Gierek's political activities were confined to the West.<sup>4</sup> During his earlier political career he had not been to Moscow, thus missing out on party schooling. Unlike most of the PZPR leadership and ideologues he had a strong empathy with working men. During his time in Katowice he had earned the reputation of being a loyal champion of the interests of workers and miners in the district. There, Gierek had lifted the status of miners and improved the quality of their daily life. In years to come he was to explain that, when he first took control of the party in the mining district, most underground work was still done by German prisoners of war and later by men defined as politically unreliable, who had been compulsorily drafted to work in the mines. Gierek changed this by stressing that mining was a skilled job. He fought for higher wages and for the regime to recognise its dependence on coal. As the regional party boss, his influence went well beyond that of party affairs. He noted that mines were allowed to retain a proportion of profits by putting them into social funds. These were little used and built up into enormous surpluses. Gierek insisted on freeing these resources and channelled them into the building of model housing estates, recreational and rest facilities. Katowice was known as an area where otherwise scarce goods were available.<sup>5</sup> Once he replaced Gomulka, whose careful economic policies resulted in stagnation, Gierek was determined to replicate his earlier successes in Katowice on a national level. Few in the party leadership were better placed to provide what Poles wanted during the 1970s, namely better quality goods, well supplied shops and an assurance of a higher standard of living.

In his determination to lead Poland out of the shadow of the Soviet Union, Gierek initially benefited from Gomulka's recent foreign policy successes. Gomulka, who distrusted Aleksander Dubček, the Czechoslovak Communist Party secretary, and opposed the reforms taking place in Czechoslovakia during 1968, authorised the use of Polish troops as part of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968. Poland was rewarded for its loyalty by the Soviet Union making the improvement of relations between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany dependent on German acceptance of Poland's western borders. In 1970 Willy Brandt, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, came to Poland and signed a treaty normalising relations with Poland and recognising the post-war border.<sup>6</sup>

Gierek nevertheless went well beyond what any previous party boss had done. Described as a communist without phobias about the West, he responded positively to French attempts to build alliances with East European states. At the same time, he tried to maintain good relations with West Germany and to extend contacts with the USA. In addition to visits which Gierek made to the West, he made sure Western politicians came to Poland. In 1972 President Richard Nixon visited Warsaw. Efforts were made to improve contacts and economic relations with Britain, Italy and Switzerland. Gierek was equally mindful of the need to retain good relations with Moscow.

The impressive list of foreign policy initiatives has to be understood in the context of Poland's rapidly changing economic policy. Gierek had a vision of Poland becoming a modern state, by which he understood one which would enjoy the benefits of rapid growth and of economic contacts with the advanced Western economies. Polish economic and, with that, also political independence, was something the Soviet leadership encouraged. With each visit to Western capitals, Gierek sought to build economic contacts, to secure funds and to agree on licences which would allow for production of Western goods in Poland. Know-how, as well as machinery, was purchased from the West, which became a model for further development.

To this end, Gierek broke with the previous policy of strict economic control of agriculture. For the first time farmers were freed from the duty to supply the market with clearly defined quotas of

produce at prices set by the government. The process of introducing free market forces into agriculture was supposed to encourage the farmers to improve production. Progressively, state control over farmers' activities was abolished. For the first time since the war, farmers were genuinely free to grow what they wanted and in quantities determined by the market and their own inclinations. At the same time farmers were given extensive credits and loans. The more enterprising among them established greenhouses and plastic tunnels in which vegetables could be grown intensively and out of season. Others merely expanded their houses and then took out more loans. The result was not always what the Gierek regime had hoped for. Several successive droughts and lack of state control over food production and pricing of agricultural goods resulted in the decrease of production of food for the markets. At the same time, the state was obliged to increase import of cattle feed.

The changing appearance of Polish streets and shops seemingly testified to Poland's transformation and modernisation on the basis of closer financial and trading links with Western Europe. Berliet buses, Fiat cars and numerous consumer goods produced in Poland under licence agreements suggested that Poland was part of the Western economy. New and bold investments indicated a great degree of optimism, which presupposed that Poland would be able to pay off loans by selling to the West goods produced in Poland. Western banks, flush with money, encouraged Poland to take out further loans. During the first years of the 1970s incomes rose as did the general standard of living. The dingy and drab days of the Gomulka era were ridiculed while Poles persuaded themselves that they would henceforth be part of the Western consumer world.<sup>7</sup>

Gierek's attitude towards the issue of party membership was distinctly different from that of his predecessor. Gomulka had sought to increase working class party membership. In reality, membership of the party had long become a career move for many young and ambitious people, whether on the factory floor or in the management. For young people vying for admission to universities, which were vastly oversubscribed, membership of the youth wing of the communist party was a prudent insurance policy. Gierek broke with that policy. The economy's dependence on the trained, skilled and technically literate workers, as well as on the university-educated

young professionals required a reassessment of the previous policy of distrusting those whose professional positions, origins and aspirations did not define them as working class. Gierek had no such preconceptions. He allowed for wage differentiations, which rewarded the technocrats for their skills without requiring them to make the pretence of political loyalty. This led to the emergence of confident managerial strata in state enterprises. The notable difference between these people and their equivalent in the West was that the state did not test their managerial and technical skills in terms of the enterprise performance or profit. What was required of them was to work within their expertise, in return for which the state provided them with a satisfactory standard of living.<sup>8</sup>

In the middle 1970s, the rocky foundations of Poland's economic miracle became only too obvious. But the situation was not necessarily one which the Poles could have anticipated. By 1975 the debt repayment started rising. In 1975 servicing the foreign debt swallowed 25 per cent of export earnings. In 1976 foreign debts were absorbing 36 per cent of export earnings. Poland was not only falling behind with repayments but the situation in the West had changed dramatically. The Arab-Israeli War in 1973 and the oil-producing states' decision to use oil sales as a diplomatic weapon led to a financial crisis in the West. While inflation in the West rose and short-term loans dried up, Poland, from having been a very good investment proposition, became a debt problem. Short-term loans were recalled. Increases in food prices were inevitable, but the Gierek regime knew only too well what might be the consequences of such decisions. The relationship between the state and the people was based on the unspoken understanding that progress and well-being would be guaranteed in return for political stability. This tenuous equilibrium, described sometimes as consumer Socialism, was destroyed by the threat to what the Poles had come to enjoy, namely a modicum of comfort and access to consumer goods, whose production was unable to keep up with growing wage income. In the summer of 1976, the Sejm approved a package of food price increases. Nothing could disguise the fact that these increases, like the previous ones, were arbitrarily imposed, without proper consultation and without different forms of pay and reward being considered. Strikes broke out immediately. The largest of these took

place in the Ursus tractor factory in Warsaw and the Walter ammunition factory in Radom, though other industrial towns were also affected by street action. Gierek was forced to announce that the new pricing schemes would not be implemented.<sup>9</sup>

The regime's reaction was to hold back on economic decisions, which could create a politically volatile situation, but at the same time severely punish organisers and participants in strikes. During the following months, workers from the two main strike centres were detained, tried and sentenced. They nevertheless found support among the intellectuals, with whom they hitherto had little contact. During the first half of the 1970s writers, intellectuals and progressive thinkers grouped around the universities and Sejm deputies connected with Catholic circles openly criticised the state and its policies. Some were liberals and some were Marxists, and others merely considered themselves to be democrats. What linked them was their increased willingness to openly criticise the regime for its lack of respect for human rights, for visible signs of corruption and venality, as well as its alienation from those it claimed to represent. In 1976 intellectuals offered to support workers on trial for having participated in the June strikes. Such support was initially confined to aiding workers with advice and in practical ways. The first group of intellectuals who participated in this initiative gave the association the name of **Komitet Obrony Robotników** (Workers' Defence Committee – KOR). Thus, **for the first time under communism, dissident intellectual groups and workers came together.**<sup>10</sup>

In defying the regime, the dissident intellectuals were emboldened by the fact that the West showed signs of taking a genuine interest in developments taking place within the countries of the Soviet bloc. Having entered into close economic, cultural and political contacts with the West, the communist regimes of Eastern Europe had tied their hands. Public opinion in Western Europe had an impact on government policies and, in some cases, on the extent of economic contacts with the communist states. One of the consequences of the normalisation of relations between the Soviet Union and the West was that human rights became a factor in relations between the two. Poland, as a co-signatory of the Helsinki Accords in 1975, guaranteed to respect the rights of its citizens. This meant that the dissident organisations were able to not only

make reference to specific government undertakings, but furthermore, and more damagingly, to inform human rights organisations in the West of the communist governments' breaches of these principles. Human rights issues had a larger impact than hitherto on the degree to which Western European states were willing to forge and maintain links with Poland. For Polish dissidents this meant they could be confident that their harassment by the regime would not go unnoticed and could have a negative impact on the eastern governments' willingness to grant Poland further moratoria on the repayments of debts. For the first time dissident groups came into the open. By distributing leaflets, publishing books and being active beyond the narrow confines of their own milieu, the names of many dissidents became well known. Radio Free Europe helped to disseminate their ideas and to familiarise the Polish public of their aims and activities. The names of Moczulski, Kuroń, Michnik and Mazowiecki all became known in the West as much as they were already in Poland.

The party was likewise affected by the debates taking place in Polish society. During this period, attempts were made to challenge the leadership and in particular to introduce some accountability and to develop genuine methods of consultation. The young technocrats and skilled workers, who in those days were likely to have joined the party purely to further their employment prospects, felt stifled by the party hierarchy and the practice of instructions being passed down from the top to the bottom, without any methods for feeding information and decisions from the grass roots to the leadership. Nevertheless, attempts to introduce a degree of accountability and to open the dialogue within the closed party ranks were not successful, in spite of loyal PZPR members warning that the party was becoming remote and out of touch with daily realities.

After 1976, when police action against dissidents became more widespread, the Catholic Church openly defended the persecuted but also built bridges with the dissidents. The Episcopate had associated great hopes with the change which took place in the regime's leadership in 1970. Wyszyński and most bishops thought that Gierek would not be as dogmatic as his predecessor had been and that, with experience of the way Western European governments appeared to work amicably with the various churches, he

would be more willing to negotiate with the Episcopate. The Central Committee likewise assumed that relations with the Vatican and the Episcopate could be normalised and areas of conflict could be reduced. In fact, both operated on very different assumptions.

During the communist period the authority of the Catholic Church, far from being diminished, had increased. To those opposed to Soviet domination and the communist regime it had imposed on Poland, the church had come to epitomise the essence of Polish religious and cultural identity. The situation was very different from that in Western Europe, where, with the exception of Franco's Spain and Portugal under Salazar, the state had successfully reduced the churches' influence and interference in state matters. While occasional conflicts still took place, there was no doubt about the state's role. At best the churches fought to maintain control over their property, schools and charitable facilities. The distinctiveness of the Polish situation was that to Poles the fight to maintain the Catholic Church's influence in all aspects of life, spiritual and secular, was no less than a battle to retain the Polish national identity, if not for the survival of the nation. The Episcopate, in its long-term fight against secularisation, clearly benefited from this prevailing view, knowing that the Poles would always support the church and its policies, in particular because of the nature of the regime in power. To Gierek and his team the struggle to reduce the church's authority was an ongoing objective. Unlike the Gomulka regime, the party leaders of the 1970s sought to achieve this less by confrontation, and more through the use of contacts, negotiations, talks and diplomacy. Ultimately the communist regime, like the Catholic Church, shared the same objective of seeking to maintain social order, even if for different reasons.

The issues which dominated state-church contacts in the early 1970s were questions relating to the ownership of ecclesiastical properties in the Recovered Territories and state objections to the building of new churches. The first was resolved amicably in the first years of the Gierek period by the church being granted ownership of most of the previously German ecclesiastical property. The second matter was much more confrontational, as it had been the regime's policy to make it in principle impossible for churches to be built in new working class estates and towns. During the early 1970s, it



became obvious that this policy was not diminishing people's interest in religious activities. Nevertheless, even when the regime did allow the building of new churches, the Episcopate was still unhappy about the continuation of restrictions. Only half of the official requests resulted in positive decisions. The regime's refusal to be more generous was motivated in part by an anxiety lest a more sympathetic attitude to the Episcopate's requests would lead it to assert itself further. Catholic clergy throughout Poland flouted regulations, often illegally changing the use of buildings and adapting them for use as church premises. In the eastern borderland, the church was unwilling to set aside its historic conflicts with the Orthodox and Uniate Churches and in many instances took over premises vacated by the Ukrainian population which had been expelled during the post-war period. In these illegal actions the church was surprisingly dismissive of the claims of other Christians.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the Gierek regime re-established contacts with the Vatican, which had been virtually broken off after 1968. The unresolved issue of the concordat offered an excuse for meetings and talks. In reality, the regime had a strong ulterior motive for opening talks with the Vatican. It was hoped that the Pope would put pressure on the Polish Episcopate to abandon its policy of confrontation with the communist regime. The ultimate aim was for the Episcopate to cease attacking the communists and to support its social policies. This, Wyszyński was not prepared to do, since he believed this would amount to the church being involved in a process of legitimising what he still viewed as an illegal regime. In any case, the Polish Episcopate was wary of the regime establishing better relations with the Vatican, fearful that Rome might take a softer line on some of the issues which the Episcopate considered to be of crucial importance to its role in communist-ruled Poland. The Vatican was, nevertheless, not willing to become involved in conflicts between the Polish state and church and because of this Gierek's policy towards the Vatican was inconclusive.<sup>12</sup> Generally, while the previous policy of attacking, vilifying and confronting the Catholic Church was discontinued, in the 1970s attempts to diminish the importance of religion in Polish society were continued by different means. The regime started using its extended contacts with the West to encourage larger debates on anticlerical and left wing progressive themes. All these efforts yielded limited

returns. To the majority of Poles, being an observant Catholic was a reaffirmation of their national identity against the communist regime. Few cared to consider any negative aspects of a policy of the church intervention in daily life or even the role of the church in the world.

During the second half of the 1970s, Wyszyński authorised the church to take a more active role in criticising the regime's economic policies. By 1976 the church was open in its condemnation of the consequences of government policies, taking the side of striking workers. The fate of arrested workers, protesters and dissidents became a subject to which the clergy returned frequently in their sermons, while the Episcopate took up their cause in its periodic meetings with the regime's representatives. As the only institution which enjoyed a degree of autonomy, the church made its premises available for dissidents, so they could hold meetings and seek sanctuary against arrest.

On 16 October 1978, an ideological bombshell hit Poland. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, archbishop of Kraków, was elected Pope, taking the name of John Paul II. Once the ruling party leaders came to terms with the enormity of what had happened, they sent to the Vatican their heartfelt congratulations. However, there was no escaping the fact that the balance of power had shifted against the regime, in any case increasingly isolated and unpopular, and in favour of a religious authority which would never be required to prove itself by assuming responsibility for temporal matters. The cards were henceforth stacked in favour of those with spiritual power and against those who claimed temporal right to rule. For most Poles, the election of a Pole to head the Catholic Church was a confirmation of the validity of the Promethian conviction that through suffering the Polish nation would be reborn. As was the custom, the new Pope made a pilgrimage to his homeland. From 2 to 10 June 1979 Poland celebrated the Pope's visit to Poland and the PZPR had no choice but to act as the hosts.<sup>13</sup>

By the summer of 1980 the economic situation in Poland created preconditions for political instability on an unprecedented scale. Strikes broke out in factories and enterprises. In most cases the workers wanted wage increases, but in reality the situation could no longer be assuaged by more money in pay packets. By then the regime's authority had been destroyed and its ineffectiveness had

been exposed, while at the same time the opposition had gone beyond addressing minor and/or local grievances. Shortages, always endemic in Poland, had been exacerbated by the government's attempts to pay off some of Poland's international debts. By then these had spiralled out of control. In 1984 Poland owed \$26.8 billion, in 1985 the figure had increased to \$29.3 billion, and in 1986 it was \$33.5 billion. By 1987 Poland's foreign currency debt was \$41.4 billion. **Poland was not able to even pay the interest on its debts.** Debt repayments exceeded Poland's debt<sup>14</sup> To re-establish equilibrium required an increase in exports and a reduction in imports. Consumer goods, in particular those of daily use and food, increasingly were not sold in the shops but were either channelled through the commercial shops, where higher prices were charged, or went to the black market.

The regime's ability to manage its critics seems to have decreased at the same time. By 1979 opposition groups were well known, with their leaflets, regular publications and programmes being produced and disseminated widely. Dissident movements acquired clearer profiles. Some were anti-Soviet, others nationalist, as was the case with the Young Poland movement on the coast. At the same time workers' strike committees and self-defence groups proliferated. These usually called for the workers to be allowed to form trade unions. The official trade unions were ineffectual, existing only to promote party and state policies. Trade union officers were supposedly elected but in reality the leadership made nominations without consulting with the union members. In the circumstances, the workers wanted to establish their own genuinely free organisations representing their interests. There were similarities with 1956, when workers established factory councils which proceeded to make radical demands for workers' participation in management decisions. Throughout the summer disturbances and strikes took place in many major state enterprises. These lacked coordination and in all cases the management sought to defuse them through direct negotiations and by making partial concessions to workers' demands.<sup>15</sup>

**The strike which broke out in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk on 14 August was initially in no way dissimilar to those which flared up in Poland throughout the summer months.** Disturbances

started when workers found out that Anna Walentynowicz, a crane driver known for being a leading force in the campaign for free trade unions, was dismissed by the management. What started as a protest against the management's arbitrary and vindictive decision quickly became a strike. Lech Wałęsa, a welder who had been earlier sacked from the shipyard, entered the shipyard to join the strikers. A negotiating committee was formed with which the management reluctantly opened talks. By then other enterprises along the coast joined in the strike. The workers' grievances were precise. As a key demand they wanted the right to form their own trade unions. Other points on the list of grievances were no less important, although clearly they were less politically charged. The reinstatement of sacked workers and a call for the erection of a monument dedicated to workers killed in 1970 was added to the list of workers' demands. An interesting aspect of the strike was that it took the form of workers occupying the workplace, thus paralysing production and making it impossible for the management to sideline them. With the Central Committees' reluctant approval, the Gdańsk shipyard managers sat down to the negotiating table with representatives of the strike committee. By 16 August an agreement of sorts had been reached. The management agreed to increase wages and to reinstate sacked workers, although it was unclear whether the issue of free trade unions had been resolved. The strike committee reluctantly undertook to end the occupation of the shipyard. It was at this point that the course of events changed. **As the workers were informed of the compromise, women amongst them refused to accept it and called on the strikers not to support the deal.** This led to a moment of reflection and the strikers decided to resume their action. With the support of thousands of workers along the coast on strike in support of the Gdańsk shipyard workers, the matter had gone beyond being a workplace grievance and became a fight for the right to establish free trade unions. From this point the workers realised that until the managers agreed to this key demand, they would still have the power and no doubt also the will to go back on any compromises agreed.

The next stage of the confrontation took the form of an outright contest between the organised workers and the regime. Workers' representatives from the Gdańsk shipyard were joined by those from

other coastal work enterprises in forming an Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee. In Gdańsk and Szczecin, the strike committees coordinated their actions with each other and with other small enterprises. **The name taken by the strike committees was 'Solidarity'.** In all these cases, the strikers called for free trade unions. The regime's response was to do what it had always done in the circumstances, namely, to mobilise. Known activists were arrested and the party tried to go on the offensive. Neither of these actions succeeded in intimidating the workers. The party was demoralised, and many of its workplace activists were in agreement with the striking workers. Gierek hastily returned from his holiday in the Crimea. An address to the workers to end the confrontation by Prime Minister Edward Babiuch was followed by one made by Gierek. Both were broadcast on television but failed to stem the momentum of events. Strikes spread through the country and paralysed the economy and daily life. The regime had no alternative but to open talks with the strike committees, of which the Gdańsk committee was the most important.

By then the strikers and the various dissident movements, which saw in the events unfolding on the coast the opportunity for which they had been waiting, had assumed the initiative. In spite of police attempts to limit communications between major towns by cutting off telephone links and through roadblocks, the regime had lost the propaganda war. Dissidents in Warsaw contacted Western journalists directly and offered them leaflets, information and updates on the developments in Gdańsk. Representatives of the Western media swarmed into Poland to observe the unique situation of workers challenging the communists' right to rule. Whereas the activities of disaffected groups and dissidents had in the past provided the Western media with an opportunity to attack the communist regimes, events in Polish coastal enterprises promised a much more interesting political conflict. The free trade unions would undisputedly be mass working class organisations. Western journalists of all political persuasions and representing a variety of news agencies arrived in Poland and headed for Gdańsk. On arrival, they were faced with the spectacle of the locked shipyard gates festooned with religious and patriotic images as well as the red and white Polish flag. In the forecourt, a mass was celebrated by Father Jankowski, in whose parish the shipyard lay. The strike committee increased the regime's

discomfort by demanding the right to free trade unions, in accordance with the Conventions of the International Labour Organisation, to which Poland belonged.<sup>16</sup>

The workers' relations with the dissident intellectuals established a new pattern. In the past the two social groups had rarely cooperated and only after the strikes of the early 1970s were relations established between the two, and even then, very tentatively. On 22 August Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek and other members of KOR succeeded in evading road blocks and made their way to the Gdańsk shipyard where the strikers welcomed them. Their reputations preceded them and they were invited to form a panel of experts. Nevertheless, the workers maintained absolute control over decisions relating to the composition of the strike committee and the negotiations. The intellectuals knew better than to overstep the boundaries in the relationship that was still tentative.<sup>17</sup> The government's inability to break the strike caused an internal crisis. In the party leadership Gierek appeared to be incapable of dealing with the situation. In the lead-up to the talks with the strikers, Stanisław Kania took over. A purge of provincial officials and party leaders was instigated. A reshuffle of the Politburo followed. **On 6 September, Gierek was forced to resign in favour of Kania, who secured the support of the Soviet leaders.**<sup>18</sup>

In the last days of August, Gdańsk, and in particular the shipyard, became the centre of the historic conflict between the communist regime and the organised workers. It was there that the government representatives were forced to go to negotiate the end of the strike. In reality, as all Poles knew, the real issue was to force the regime to concede political reforms on the basis of the 21-point agenda presented by the strikers. When on 31 August the two negotiating teams reached an agreement, the workers' victory led to a fundamental revision of the regime's relations with its citizens. Clearly, the right to form free trade unions, the right to strike and guarantees of freedom of expression stood out as distinctly political compared to the latter points of the agreement, which referred to improvements in working conditions and social provisions. In reality, because the ideological underpinning of the regime to rule on behalf of the working people was destroyed, the concessions made in Gdańsk changed the political landscape. The three political

demands not only challenged that claim but put in motion reforms and changes which allowed for the people to determine the course of further developments. The Gdańsk agreement did not destroy the PZPR's monopoly on power but defined the limits of the regime's authority. Henceforth, it could not rule without the full and active cooperation of the workers. At the same time, government negotiators were forced to agree to a number of economic reforms, mainly relating to supply and pricing. They had to concede demands for the dismantling of special facilities and provisions enjoyed by party, security and police functionaries. In retrospect, it can be seen that demands put forward by the strikers indicated concern for equality, justice and transparency. At this stage there was no assumption that a genuinely pluralist political system would emerge as a consequence of the concessions made by the government. Nor was it assumed by the workers that state control of the economy was in itself the source of the economic problems. What they attacked was inefficiency, corruption, waste and bad practices. Free market forces and the restructuring of the economy in favour of the private sector were not policies put forward by the workers. On the contrary; they demanded better provisions for workers, improved maternity leave and a good state health system. Far from realising that they might be initiating a course of events which would destroy the paternalistic, albeit corrupt state system, the workers clearly assumed the survival of the existing political system.

During the weeks following the signing of the Gdańsk agreement, strikes continued in other parts of Poland. Gradually, but decisively, industrial relations in all enterprises were transformed with new free trade unions emerging everywhere. By then, *Solidarność*, the name taken by the coastal strikers, was generally used to describe these new unions, but also the process of political mobilisation which had taken place during the summer of 1980. The intellectual advisors cautioned the strikers against complacency. The government was suspected of wanting to claw back the concessions granted and enterprise managers were prone to bypassing the trade unions. The strength of the working class lay in its ability to organise and to speak with one voice. On 17 September, over 30 of the major strike committees met to agree on the structure of the free trade unions. These described themselves as the Independent

Self-Governing Trade Unions, in contrast to the state-approved trade union. Fearful that the government might try to divide and then sideline them, as had been done in the case of the factory committees in 1956, the new trade unions decided to form a national body with a federated structure. This allowed local trade unions a greater degree of flexibility, while avoiding internal divisions, which occurred when trade unions were established on an industrial basis. Wałęsa, the unchallenged leader of the Gdańsk talks, headed the Solidarity Trade Union movement.

In the months to come, the problems confronting the workers multiplied. The mass mobilisation of workers had occurred due to economic stagnation, a shortage of food and a failure in the production and delivery of basic goods. Solidarity, like the government, knew that these problems would continue. Nevertheless, leaders of Solidarity were unwillingly to be drawn into government decision making, even though they agreed with its desire to stabilise the situation in Poland. But even with indirect power came the responsibility to find a solution. This required the Solidary trade unions to define the extent to which they would become partners in the government's search for a way out of the present situation. The government, on the other hand, knew that for any reforms to succeed, it needed Solidarity's approval. Thus, the scene was set not only for a test of authority between the two, but also for internal conflicts within Solidarity.

An interesting element of the Polish story was the absence of Soviet military intervention. Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, both testified to the Soviet Union's determination and ability to control the pace of changes within its sphere of influence. Events in Poland were observed with glee in the West, but within the Warsaw Pact each member state was anxious about the impact that Solidarity would have on its own internal stability. The Czechoslovak and East German leaders, in particular, wanted to limit the 'contagion' spreading to their countries. They had one advantage, which militated against their citizens following the Polish example, namely economic growth and stability. Ultimately Gustáv Husák and Erich Honecker, the leaders of the Czechoslovak and East German communist parties, respectively, restricted the movement of Poles into both countries, but did not call for joint action against Poland by Warsaw Pact forces. Within the Soviet political and



military leadership, anxiety was expressed about events unfolding in Poland and their wider implications. **Although plans for the invasion of Poland were drawn up, the option was not considered beyond the planning level.** The reasons for the apparent Soviet restraint were many. The international situation limited the Soviet Union's freedom of action. In comparison with 1968, the Soviet Union's relations with the world key players had changed. The disastrous diplomatic and military consequences of involvement in Afghanistan acted as a warning against too hasty action in Poland. The Soviet Union could not afford to get bogged down in another conflict. Soviet economic dependence on the West and the reluctance to assume responsibility for Poland's growing foreign debt reinforced doubts about taking action, which could have serious long-term consequences.

The Soviet Union was not the only world power anxious about the likelihood of civil strife enveloping Poland. In the USA Secretary of State Zbigniew Brzezinski had parents who had migrated from Poland to the United States, when he was a child. He therefore had an interest in developments in his country of origins. In any case, the Carter administration did not propose to take pre-emptive military action against the Soviet Union. Instead, it was made clear to the Soviet leaders that any intervention in Poland would have an impact on the way the USA viewed its economic links with the Soviet Union and the communist bloc countries. In that, the USA was generally in advance of what the Western democracies were signalling.<sup>19</sup> France and Germany, and to some extent also Britain, wanted the problem to go away. While the demands of Polish workers were recognised as valid, no encouragement was given to them to believe that Western governments would directly support them. The matter was an internal Polish problem and, in any case, Western governments had to consider the impact of recent events in Poland on the country's ability to service its debts. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher gave vocal support to Polish trade unionists. That caused some bemusement in the United Kingdom, where her government was in the process of reducing trade union input into policymaking. In reality, statements of support were gestures intended for internal consumption and little was done to offer the Polish government a way out of the economic crisis. It was left to

West European trade unions to offer practical and financial aid to Polish workers. They did throughout the period leading to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe.

The period from August 1980 until the winter of 1981 was a time of mounting crisis, with the economic situation continuing to deteriorate and shortages becoming endemic. The establishment of free trade unions in fact resolved nothing. Confusion reigned within enterprises. On the one hand, managers were uncertain about how to incorporate Solidarity in management decision making. On the other hand, trade union activists tried to carve out a decisive role for the trade union. In the circumstances, it was not possible to draw a clear distinction between economic and political demands. The economic crisis had progressed too far to be resolved by the simple remedy of higher wages and better working conditions. By March 1981 it was apparent that Solidarity was to all intents and purposes becoming an opposition party. One which still refused to accept responsibility for putting forward solutions to the problems created by the regime it criticised. The government, the security forces and industrial managers not only failed in their stated aim of stabilising the situation. They remained paralysed with uncertainty as to how to respond to the new realities. Negotiations between the two sides repeatedly broke down, were resumed and again broke down. Solidarity's response was to call for national strikes, nevertheless these were standoffs, which led to no new solutions.<sup>20</sup> In March the security service brutally attacked a Solidarity meeting in the town of Bydgoszcz. The outrage provoked anger and the government was forced to hold an enquiry. The incident focused attention of the Solidarity movement on its own deep internal divisions. This highlighted the critical question of what was to be the free trade union's role in Poland. Was it to lead a renewal, resulting in a political transformation where workers would be involved in management decisions? Or was it to remain a trade union and resolutely refuse to be drawn into matters of state, merely defending the interests of the workers in places of employment? A key dissident ideologue of the period, Jacek Kuroń, tried to steer Solidarity in the direction of the first. Many within the trade union and the Catholic advisers distrusted him. His main opponent was a Solidarity firebrand, Jan Rulewski, who, while recognising that Solidarity had to accept that

it was no longer a mere trade union, cautioned against becoming involved in managerial decisions. It was his conviction that political reforms had to take place before economic changes could be implemented.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of its inspirational role and the challenge to the communist regime, Solidarity's theoretical legacy was scant. What impressed West European thinkers was the evident political maturity and spontaneity of the working class. Here was an example of the workers, unprompted by political leaders from outside their community, formulating new ideas and showing organisational skill. Their political awareness seemed to be, likewise, impressive. In the context of the still ongoing Cold War, the workers ability to paralyse and bring to its knees a communist regime impressed conservatives and anti-communists. By the same token, left wing critics of the communist regime identified with the Polish workers' attacks on the communists, whose claim to rule rested on the belief that they were doing so on behalf of the workers. If that regime was attacked by the workers, then the falsity of the communist ideology was revealed. In Western Europe 'Solidarity with Solidarity' campaigns proliferated, creating at times strange alliances. In reality the Solidarity movement emerged in so specific circumstances that it could offer no model or theory, which could be applied elsewhere. The two driving forces in the Solidarity's emergence were the inefficiency of the Polish centralised economic system and the distinctiveness of Polish nationalism. Thus Solidarity activists were very clear and vocal in what they opposed and what offended their sense of natural justice. Corruption, low wages, bad work practices all needed eradicating, and free trade unions were the only guarantee of the workers' voice being heard. What Solidarity was not able to offer were suggestions as to how to remedy the very economic problems, which lay at the root of the workers' disaffection.

While Western journalists found it intriguing how pious Polish workers appeared to be, few chose to dwell on the full implications of the nationalism which underpinned Solidarity's apparent clear sense of identity. In reality, Polish workers who fought for free trade unions did so because they identified only with other Polish workers. They had no aspirations either to encourage or to speak on behalf of other workers, not even those in other Communist countries.

Absent was any sense of internationalism, even though the Solidarity movement received support from international trade unions and workers' organisations. This was a very Polish organisation incorporating many of the prejudices of Polish nationalism, namely anti-Semitism and xenophobia. In its eventual social programme the Solidarity movement was unashamedly backward-looking. Women strikers, who had been so important in the formative days of August 1980, were quickly sidelined and none were allowed to assume a position of responsibility. In their attitude towards women's problems, the male trade unionists were paternalistic but also clear in their conviction that a woman's place was at home looking after children and cooking. Thus, while they fought for improved maternity leave and better provisions for mothers, no wider social demands relating specifically to women employees were put forward by Solidarity. Visiting Western trade unionists were frequently surprised to note that while clear in their demands for political rights, Polish trade unionists expressed racist and nationalist sentiments and struck male chauvinistic poses, which some visitors found offensive.

Even before the imposition of martial law Solidarity was transformed. The leadership did not succeed in putting forward alternatives to the government's policies, of which they were so rightly critical. By August 1981, with the economic situation continuing to deteriorate, Solidarity was at a crossroads. The use of strikes as a means of attacking the government for its apparent mismanagement of the economy did nothing to change the situation. At the same time, a refusal to discuss price increases blocked the way for reforms. Nor was the government prepared to change its tactics. The Deputy Prime Minister Mieczysław Rakowski, who led the government team in its talks with the Solidarity leaders in August, made it clear that the aim was not to draw trade unions into consultation, but to obtain their support for policies which the government wanted to implement.<sup>22</sup>

The August talks clearly underlined the limits of cooperation, a point that was further confirmed during the Solidarity Congress, which took place in September and continued until October. Cooperation with the government in its aim to stabilise the economic situation undisputedly was the most pressing topic, though in

addressing this issue, other equally contentious and difficult issues were addressed. The Solidarity leaders were not able to formulate an alternative economic programme. This reduced the movement to only two options: either cooperating with the government's policies, or opposing it. Self-management and the workers' right to choose directors were widely discussed but not accepted as a final policy. Wałęsa was able to steer the trade union away from a direct confrontation with the government.

During this period the Episcopate became more active than hitherto in brokering agreements between the Solidarity movement and the regime. In September 1980 Primate Wyszyński met a Solidarity delegation. Henceforth, constant contact was maintained between the two, undoubtedly facilitated by Wałęsa's piety and the church's desire to avoid a revolution in Poland. The Catholic Church was not a passive observer of events unfolding in Poland. On the contrary, it had its own agenda. The church was suspicious of the influence of left wing intellectuals on workers' organisations. At the root of the Episcopate's involvement in politics lay a fear that political upheavals, which might usher in new forces, could lead to a challenge being posed to the church's spiritual monopoly. This explains the Episcopate's willingness to maintain contact with the regime while at the same time cautioning Solidarity against challenging the authority of the state and causing civil strife. On a local level, parish priests and bishops sided with the strikers and trade unionists. But the Episcopate played a long game and maintained all contacts with the regime.<sup>23</sup> On 28 May 1981 Cardinal Wyszyński died. From Rome news came of an attempt to assassinate the Pope. When in July Józef Glemp was appointed as Primate of All Poland, the Pope's health continued to be a source of anxiety and as a result the Vatican's role in Polish internal affairs was reduced. Glemp nevertheless continued Wyszyński's conciliatory role, though it was only too clear that he did not have his predecessor's authority. Nor did he share his vision of the church's direct involvement in politics. In November, at Glemp's initiative, Jaruzelski and Wałęsa met to discuss the establishment of a Front of National Conciliation. But the Solidarity movement continued its policy of criticising the regime, without resolving its own critical dilemma of the role that it should assume.

By then, Jaruzelski had already decided to impose martial law. The army was thus preparing itself for the new role. The church could do nothing to bridge that gap.<sup>24</sup>

The October Congress of the PZPR had defined the limits to which the government was prepared to go in accommodating Solidarity, which proved to be inflexible. The party leadership feared that Solidarity wanted to see the collapse of the national economy in order to justify an outright conflict with the government. The party leaders showed no willingness to understand the trade union's dilemmas. Solidarity's reluctance to support the government was seen as evidence of hostility and a determination to destroy socialism. The workers' call for joint management decisions in enterprises was likewise seen as an attack on the state, from which the management derived its authority. During the congress, Prime Minister and Defence Minister General Wojciech Jaruzelski replaced Kania as First Party Secretary. While the party's authority was in decline, the army was seen stepping into the vacuum. The militarisation of the state apparatus proceeded. Jaruzelski's assumption of responsibility for Poland at this particularly difficult time was surprising. Although he was a member of the Politburo of the PZPR, he was seen as a military man. He had neither spent time in the Moscow party schools nor in the communist resistance movement. On the contrary, he appeared to be a victim of Soviet policy who, during the war, was deported with his family to the Russian interior, where his parents died. His professional career was entirely linked with the military establishment, although from the late 1960s his profile within the PZPR leadership became more prominent. In 1981 it was difficult to anticipate what his policies would be. He was variously described as a liberal and a conservative. Nevertheless, in his capacity as Minister of Defence, he had been responsible for the decision to send troops to quell workers' strikes in the coastal industrial town in 1970 and 1976.

On 13 December 1981 a State of War was declared. Civil authority was transferred to the army and civil laws were suspended. As Poles woke up in the morning of 13 December, they were to find that the new authority was firmly in place. The Military Council of National Salvation headed by General Jaruzelski now ruled Poland.

The new authority was imposed with military efficiency and aimed at the destruction of all autonomous civic organisations, which had emerged during the past year. Radio and television stopped transmission and telephone lines were cut. Military men and special units of the police patrolled streets. This allowed the military regime to swoop on Solidarity offices, which were closed, and to arrest all leading members of Solidarity as well as those who were deemed to have been involved in or contributed to the collapse of the communist regime's authority. Among those arrested and interned in special camps were thousands of Solidarity activists. Wałęsa was kept in isolation. Jaruzelski aimed to destroy not only all forms of civil mobilisation, but also the grass roots and local communist party structures, which in recent years had lapsed into indiscipline. From within the lower echelons of the party membership came calls for more consultation and accountability. In spite of the crisis caused by the emergence of the Solidarity movement, the party leadership resolutely resisted such reforms, thus further undermining the credibility of the already demoralised party cells. **A purge of the regional party structures restored the balance of authority. Edward Gierek was also interned during this period.** The militarisation of Polish life was complete. In key industries workers and managers were subordinated to military law. Military men took over decision making. Censorship and the imposition of curfew completed the process.<sup>25</sup> In the circumstances, **the Catholic Church became the only organisation which the Jaruzelski regime dared not attack.** Church and ecclesiastical property offered asylum to those threatened with arrest and became the only places where meetings and lectures could take place.

The consequence of the imposition of martial law was the destruction of the organisation structure of the Solidarity movement and similar civil organisations. But the authority of the communist party was also irrevocably undermined. The key feature of this period was the replacement of trusted party hacks in positions of authority with military officials. The army, hitherto kept out of politics, replaced the now increasingly weak PZPR, although, like all organisations within the communist regime, the army was nominally subject to party discipline. It had always enjoyed a degree of political autonomy under the supervision of its

own political officers. Jaruzelski's actions destroyed the myth of a politically neutral army, standing guard over national interests. Not only was the army shown to have political objectives. It also had the discipline and determination to assume the role of guardian of the socialist order in Poland.

The workers' initial response was to fight back. Those who had evaded internment tried to organise a new, underground Solidarity movement that could call on the support of the community. Workers went on strike and people demonstrated in the streets. In response, troops were sent in to disperse the strikers. The most brutal action took place in the 'Wujek' coal mine when nine miners were killed. The Solidarity movement was decimated by arrests. Through the dissemination of pamphlets and even the establishment of a radio transmission station Solidarity remained more than just a memory to Poles. Nevertheless the Jaruzelski regime succeeded at paralysing most forms of opposition. Only by the spring was a structure of underground illegal organisations built up and, even then, it always existed precariously. Underground Solidarity was only able to coordinate and organise one-off events, such as demonstrations and protests. It was impossible to rebuild the trade union organisation. The focus was on rallying the community behind actions that would keep the memory of Solidarity alive. Even though Solidarity was committed to negotiations, it was impossible to define a programme. The two main dissident organisations, the KOR and the *Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej* (Confederation of Independent Poland – KPN), were weakened by arrests, with a number of prominent activists interned, tried and sentenced for having earlier advocated opposition to the regime. In October the regime introduced legislation, which effectively defined Solidarity as an illegal organisation.<sup>26</sup>

In these circumstances, the church tried to mediate. Primate Glemp and Pope John Paul II called on the government to show restraint and to avoid bloodshed. Both nevertheless held back from putting forward clear proposals. In any case, the Jaruzelski regime seemed determined to set the clock back to the period before August 1980. Secularisation policies were once more implemented, without regard for the changed social perception of the role of the church, its increased standing and the political confidence the



population had gained from the brief legal existence of the Solidarity movement.

The State of War was suspended on 19 December 1982. Only in July 1983 was it finally ended. Wałęsa was released from internment in December 1982. Some internees, or to be more precise, political prisoners, were released during 1982. Not until September 1986 did the regime state that the last of those deemed to have committed crimes against the state had been released. These were only gestures, for no attempt was made to restore the freedoms won in August 1980. This situation nevertheless created a problem for the government. If political concessions would not be countenanced and brute repression could only work in the short term, some accommodation had to be found on the basis of shared objectives. The gap between the regime and the population was immense. Only a common desire for economic stability could lead to tentative cooperation.

The decision to declare the State of War could not have been made without Soviet approval. Indeed, the Soviet leadership expected the PZPR to stabilise the situation. Nevertheless, the difference between the Polish and earlier Czechoslovak case lay in the fact that Jaruzelski was told that he could not expect Soviet military support. But it was made clear to him that he was to put a stop to strikes and to challenges to the authority of the communist regime and its Soviet ally. Jaruzelski was also warned that if he were to fail in that task, Brezhnev would back a rival Polish leader, one who could complete the task expected of him. The Soviet leadership was though prepared to help the Poles in stabilising the economic situation and in restoring production, which had been severely affected by the withdrawal of West European loans and assistance. Thus imports of raw materials from the Soviet Union to Poland were increased, as were supplies of food. Economic contacts with countries of the Soviet bloc were increased and credits were extended.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the economic situation in Poland continued to be dire, with little evidence of improvement during the first year of martial law. The Polish economy continued to present a bewildering picture of stagnation, bottlenecks, mismanagement and corruption. The black economy had seemingly replaced the official economy. Only by imposing strict rationing of all vital foodstuffs was the population provided with basic goods. Western relief and charitable organisations sent food, clothes, medicines and sanitary products to

Poland. In 1983 signs of change for the better were noted, which suggested that the economic situation might have stabilised.

Jaruzelski's policy continued to be that of retaining a strong grip on the pace of liberalisation. Since the dialogue with the community had been terminated, the only authority which could represent the interests of the population was the Catholic Church. The regime was nevertheless not willing to concede that there was a need for a dialogue between the regime and representatives of the population. The church found it difficult to speak on behalf of the Solidarity movement, since Jaruzelski intended to reverse the growth of the Catholic influence in public life and particularly in education. One of the biggest areas of conflict during this period turned out to be a quarrel between the regime and the Episcopate concerning the Pope's planned visit to Poland to participate in the celebration of the 600th anniversary of the presence of the icon of the Black Madonna in Poland. The regime feared that the Pope's visit would lead to mass demonstrations. The church's support for Solidarity and the Pope's disapproval of the imposition of the State of War meant that the regime postponed the visit until 1983. The visit took place in June with a strict proviso that the Pope should not meet Wałęsa. Nor was he allowed to go to the coastal towns of Gdańsk and Szczecin. John Paul nevertheless defied the regime in expressing support for the Solidarity movement and by making frequent references to the injustice of internment and state repression. Nevertheless, he failed to persuade Jaruzelski to open a dialogue with the underground opposition.

Jaruzelski appears to have aimed at pursuing a slow, nevertheless identifiable liberal policy. To start with, imperceptibly, then more openly, censorship was relaxed to allow for a broader discussion of the need for economic reforms. Behind closed doors, the party leadership was locked in a confrontation between the hardliners and the liberals, with Jaruzelski increasingly taking the side of the liberals. He, in particular, looked at the way economic reforms were introduced in Hungary. In this internal party conflict, Moscow supported the hardliners, though nothing was done to aid them actively.

On 19 October 1984, an outspoken critic of the regime's abuse of human rights, a Catholic priest, Jerzy Popiełuszko, was murdered. There are indications that Jaruzelski seized on this outrage to

reduce the power of the security services and that of the hardliners. Unusually, the trial of policemen accused of having killed the young priest took place in an open court. The trial was reported widely in the media. The result was that the Ministry of Interior was purged and Czesław Kiszczak, a trusted friend of Jaruzelski, was appointed to head it. Thus by 1986 Jaruzelski had replaced many of the party leaders with his military associates, which gave him a larger degree of control over the party and state apparatus. Party membership collapsed. No attempts were made to return to the earlier discussions on the relationship between the grass roots and the leadership. The regime was only too well aware that it had to uphold the pretence of the party ruling on behalf of the people. In the situation where the party and state were irrevocably alienated from the people, the pretence became more glaring than before, in particular because of the population's visible desire to establish its own representative organisations. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s membership of the party and of its various associated organisations offered a career path, in the 1980s young professionals shunned the party. The leadership of the PZPR grew, while the rank and file decreased in numbers. Worse was to follow, when the parties which had in 1947 been forcefully absorbed into the communist party, now reasserted themselves. Socialists and peasant party activists both openly challenged the PZPR. Within the community a variety of new ideas were openly discussed. On one extreme of the political spectrum the nationalist right, usually associated with ex-combatant associations, became active, staging displays of strength. On the other extreme, youthful anarchists put forward alternative ideas, which varied from outright dissociation from politics to attacking the state. All disseminated pamphlets and illegal publications. In reality, it was increasingly difficult to state confidently which publications were legal and which were banned. The government was unable to control political debates. The only way the party and the regime could redeem themselves in the eyes of the Polish community was to provide economic well-being. For that to happen, there was a need to return to the negotiating table with Western banks, to persuade the USA to abandon economic sanctions imposed after the imposition of the State of War and to maintain Soviet economic support.

By 1986 the Jaruzelski regime accepted that it needed to resume a dialogue with broader representatives of the population. But the

government believed this would have to be done on the regime's terms. In reality, the situation was changing fast. In the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev became the First Party Secretary, and this precluded the use of force in Poland. Even in his attitude towards the Catholic Church, so important in Polish internal politics, Gorbachev stole the march on the Polish communists by making a visit to the Vatican in 1986. In January 1987 Pope John II agreed to see Jaruzelski. In June the Pope visited Poland. The church's intervention aided the thaw. The shift from trying to resolve Poland's economic policies through state reforms, to consulting with sections of the underground opposition required the government to establish an appropriate forum. To that purpose, Jaruzelski created the Consultative Council through which he planned to open talks with chosen representatives of the opposition. The leadership of the underground Solidarity and many dissident intellectuals did not believe that the communist regime would collapse. They confined their plans to hopes that Jaruzelski could be persuaded to liberalise public discussion and allow for a certain percentage of seats to the Sejm to be filled through free elections. The key proponent of this idea was Michnik, who had the support of prominent dissident intellectuals such as Jan Lityński and Jacek Kuroń. When Jaruzelski's initiative fell short of their expectations, Wałęsa responded by announcing the formation of an Interim Council, which was to do the same as the government's Consultative Council, but with a broader social dialogue, including underground and still illegal political organisations.

The demand for the re-legalisation of Solidarity continued to be an obstacle to the opening of talks between the two sides. On 31 August 1988, Wałęsa met Kiszcak to agree to preconditions for the opening of a dialogue, which henceforth were referred to as the Round Table Talks. These first contacts were facilitated by the church, which provided venues and acted as a mediator. During these meetings the main points of the future dialogue were outlined. In return for agreeing to support the government's package of economic reforms, Wałęsa demanded that Solidarity should be legalised and the government should make commitments to the long-term aim of restoring political pluralism in Poland.

Although Jaruzelski's team chose to open talks with Wałęsa, he had no mandate to speak on behalf of either the Solidarity

movement or the dissident groupings. Within Solidarity there were radical elements, which saw the opening of talks as a compromise and disagreed with Wałęsa usurping of the authority of the Solidarity movement. Among those were many of the Solidarity leaders of the 1980–81 period, including Andrzej Gwiazda and Jan Rulewski. Wałęsa nevertheless continued to be seen by most Poles as the spokesman of the Solidarity movement and his authority and standing within the opposition was undisputed. Not only was he the most easily recognisable symbol of the Solidarity movement and the recipient of the 1983 Nobel Prize for Peace. Critically, he was also the person on whom the Episcopate had based its programme for reopening talks with the regime. On 27 January 1989 both sides agreed to an agenda, composition and objectives of the talks, which opened on 6 February. Both sides sat to the table, still unsure as to the possible outcome of the talks. Neither realised that by the time the final agreement would be signed, the clock would be set back to 1947, when a single-party dictatorship had been established.<sup>28</sup>

## 7 Post-communist Poland

The **Round Table Talks** steered Poland on the road to transformation from a communist, single-party regime to a democratic state. Some of the results of the changes, which occurred in the wake of this momentous decision, were neither planned nor anticipated. Nevertheless, once the communist hold on power was broken, inevitably all aspects of life in Poland were affected.

The talks opened on 6 February 1989. They ended with the signing of the final agreement on 5 April. Even before the official inaugural meeting, the outline of the agenda had been agreed and both sides had a strong sense of the direction in which they would try to move the talks. Only during the opening and closing session did all the delegates and their advisors actually meet at the specially built round table. The real negotiations were conducted in smaller groups. Of the official delegates to the talks, 14 were from the ruling party, 6 from the government-supported trade unions, 20 were opposition delegates, 14 represented independent organisations and 2 were Catholic bishops. Once the various advisors were added to the final tally, 452 people participated in the talks. Wałęsa led the opposition team, supported by Zbigniew Bujak and Władysław Frasyniuk from Solidarity. Bronisław Geremek, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik acted as Wałęsa's advisors. Czesław Kiszczak and Stanisław Ciosek led the government side. Aleksander Kwaśniewski, a young member of the PZPR, already made his mark on the course of the negotiations. Missing from the

table were representatives of the radical sections of Solidarity, including some of the prominent leaders of the underground Solidarity who had maintained the memory of the free trade union during the period of the State of War. Those who opposed talks with the communists were sidelined and the church had advised Wałęsa not to seek cooperation with them. Wałęsa chose his own team. The result was that the opposition team was united and spoke with one voice. The government side increasingly became fractured, in particular because the government-supported trade unions distanced themselves from the government delegation and came to represent an independent force.<sup>1</sup>

The key item on the agenda was that of political reforms. Both sides understood that, until they reached an understanding on that issue, they would not be able to proceed with other matters. After extensive talks, it was agreed that general elections would take place and a new government would be formed. The communists were guaranteed 65 per cent of the seats in the Sejm, while 35 per cent would be decided on the basis of free elections. A Senate was to be formed and all seats to that body were to be allocated as a result of free elections. Subsequently, it was agreed to establish the post of President. Both sides tacitly agreed that Jaruzelski would be allowed to assume that responsibility. This completed the package of political reforms. The President's prerogatives were to be wide, including the right to impose a state of emergency. While economic matters were discussed in a special forum, neither the government nor the opposition brought new ideas to the negotiations. Although the economic crisis continued to affect the country, provoking strikes and protests, the government appeared to have run out of steam and had no new initiatives as to how to cope with the problems overwhelming it. The opposition, on the other hand, had no inclination to assume responsibility, while also having nothing new to propose. Index-linking of wages was discussed, as were suggestions for workers' participation in industrial management. In reality, both sides shied away from discussing economic affairs. Privatisation was not a phrase that was used at the Round Table Talks.<sup>2</sup>

The government emerged from the talks convinced that it would be able to secure at least 50 per cent of seats in the Senate and thus guarantee the continuation of communist control over the

legislature. While accepting that the opposition would have an increased role, there was no assumption that the agreements just signed spelled the end of communist control over Poland. On the other side of the political spectrum stood the dissident groups, which had opposed any deal with the communists. Varying from the nationalist KPN to radical youth organisations, they attacked the Solidarity negotiating team, accusing them of complicity in maintaining the communist system, which, they believed, could and should have been destroyed outright. The re-legalisation of Solidarity appeared to them to be merely a concession which the communists were willing to make in order to stay in power.

The Catholic Church had played an important role in the talks. Both sides wanted the bishops at the negotiating table. To the government this was an assurance that this powerful organisation would be party to any agreement made and would thus act as guarantor of decisions made. But the Episcopate had its own agenda. Its involvement in the talks was not a disinterested act of mediation. The church knew that recent developments indicated that Poland stood poised on the threshold of dramatic changes. To secure for the church a role within the new vision was as matter of critical importance. Apart from anxiety about the influence of the radical sections of the Solidarity and youth movements, which the church sought to sideline, there was fear of further secularisation. In its quest to maintain its spiritual influence in Poland, the Catholic Church appreciated the importance of keeping a finger on the political pulse of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

The elections to the Sejm and Senate were scheduled to take place on 4 June. The period between the announcement, which was made in April, and the date of the elections was a time of mass mobilisation. The communist rulers were still confident that they would command the loyalty of sizeable sections of the society. The increasingly differentiated opposition was on a steep learning curve. As it turned out, it was this element of the developments which gave the Solidarity activists and the anti-government forces their advantage. Citizens' committees appeared to organise the electoral campaign of the opposition. These transformed themselves into electoral colleges, selecting candidates and managing electoral campaigns. In some cases, already existing Solidarity structures formed the basis



of the electoral colleges; in others, they came into being on the initiative of local people, activists or parish priests. In all cases, Solidarity tried to retain control over the appointments of candidates. This brought to the fore the unresolved issue of how the anti-government forces were to collaborate. On the one hand, intellectuals and former advisors thought in terms of a broad liberal-democratic front, united in one organisation. Others already envisaged that the opposition would divide into distinct tendencies, defining more clearly their political affinities. For the duration of the pre-election campaign the first model prevailed, although some groups decided not to collaborate with the citizens' committees but to field independent candidates. Moczulski, the leader of KPN, and Solidarity activists who opposed what they saw as the Round Table compromise decided not to throw in their lot with Wałęsa's grouping.<sup>4</sup>

During this period, the atmosphere was conducive to the opening up of blank spots in recent Polish history. The issues of the Katyń forest graves, Soviet appropriation of Poland's pre-war territories and imprisonment of AK fighters and their removal to the Soviet Union after the war were all subjects which were now discussed openly in Polish daily newspapers and the media. One of the results of the Round Table agreement was the emergence of independent newspapers, of which the best known was *Gazeta Wyborcza*, whose editor was the highly respected Adam Michnik. State television and radio were obliged to grant the opposition access to publicise their electoral material. The heady atmosphere of freedom was in no way dampened down by Moscow. On the contrary, the Soviet leaders, conspicuously, kept silent on events unfolding in Poland, thus signalling that the forthcoming elections were viewed as Poland's internal matter.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of the Round Table agreement, the government had the right to appoint deputies to 65 per cent of the seats in the Sejm. Thirty-five per cent of the seats in the Sejm and all the seats in the Senate were to be freely contested. The opposition campaign, conducted expertly and with a high degree of community participation, aimed to mobilise the voters, to inform them of the programmes and to explain the procedures. All were therefore surprised on the day of the first round of voting, when only 72 per cent of those

eligible to vote turned out to cast their votes. The result was a stunning victory for the anti-government forces. Of the 61 seats to the Sejm, which were to be freely contested, 60 went to the Solidarity candidates. Votes to the Senate, likewise, revealed an outright victory for the anti-government opposition. When asked about their views on the subject, the Soviet spokesmen, in line with earlier policy, declared that this was a Polish matter. Thus, the challenge to the post-war communist system came not only from Poland's citizens, but was made possible because the Soviet Union decided Poland was no longer in its security zone. Soviet intervention in Polish internal affairs was no longer considered an option in Moscow.

Since it had been decided that the new government would not be appointed until the final decision was made about the presidency, the composition of the government was not agreed immediately after the June elections. As it turned out, the presidency was a foregone conclusion. It is widely suspected that during the Round Table Talks Wałęsa's team had agreed that Jaruzelski was to become Poland's President. Although there were those within the Solidarity movement who would have wanted to revisit this agreement after the recent electoral victory, neither Wałęsa nor those close to him considered this to be prudent. The opposition's electoral success offered an entirely new possibility, namely of a Solidarity candidate becoming Prime Minister. In the course of talks and discussions concerning the appointment of Jaruzelski to the presidency, the Solidarity movement splintered. Some Solidarity deputies voted for Jaruzelski. Wałęsa did not put himself forward, and it was widely suspected that he hoped to stand for President in the next elections. Nevertheless, many activists not used to political compromises, and whose only political experience was one of relentless struggle against communism, found it difficult to come to terms with Wałęsa's apparent realism. Earlier fissures widened as Wałęsa conducted the negotiations. Until then, he had drawn into his confidence some of the KOR intellectuals from whom he derived most of his strategic ideas. This irritated many of the old Solidarity activists and the young who shared the view that there should be no compromise with the communists.

At the same time, the intellectuals were disunited as to how Solidarity should seek to form a government. Michnik and Geremek

advocated building an alliance with the reformist sections of the PZPR. Mazowiecki, on the other hand, warned against undue haste in reaching for power. His view was that cooperation could lead to the opposition becoming tainted through its association with the hated regime. He warned that, by becoming a member of the coalition government, Solidarity would be held responsible for the unresolved economic problems. As Mazowiecki sagely pointed out, Solidarity, in common with most of the opposition groupings, had not put forward an alternative economic policy to that pursued by the government with such disastrous consequences.

The alternative was to seek alliances with the non-communist ruling parties. These were the Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe (Peasant United Peasant Alliance – ZSL) and the Stronnictwo Demokratyczne (Democratic Alliance – SD). Both were small rump parties, which in 1945 had thrown in their lot with the communists. They had never been genuinely independent and had no influence on policymaking. During 1980 both parties saw an opportunity to emerge from behind the communist party. Their willingness to collaborate with Wałęsa was precipitated by the attempts of General Czesław Kiszczak, the Minister of Interior in the outgoing government, to form a government. On those parties Wałęsa focused in his search for allies to form a government. His decision and the manner in which contacts were made by the ZSL and SD, namely through the two lesser known opposition activists, the Kaczyński brothers, alienated Geremek and Kuroń. To the leaders of the two potential allies Wałęsa put a proposal that Mazowiecki should be the next Prime Minister. This was a compromise choice, guaranteed to meet with the coalitionists' approval and with popular support. Mazowiecki was a highly respected Catholic leader, whom the church would also support. Kuroń and Geremek would not have fitted this role, Geremek because he was Jewish and Kuroń due to his radical past. Wałęsa's arbitrary decision, made with no reference to his Solidarity colleagues, prevailed. A government was formed, headed by Mazowiecki, but with Jaruzelski acting as President. The President's prerogatives were wide and in many respects undefined, while Mazowiecki had no experience of power and more worryingly, his power base in the Solidarity movement was fast fragmenting. What appeared, during the Round Table Talks, as a long-term plan

for broadening the base of governance rapidly changed. Unexpectedly, the opposition had formed the first government. Worryingly, it had no clear programme that would guide in through the first governmental decisions.

In the Mazowiecki government, the PZPR remained in control of the main ministries, notably interior and defence. Solidarity nevertheless was the largest grouping, retaining the Ministry of Finance. Thus, to Leszek Balcerowicz was assigned the main task of the Mazowiecki government, namely the stabilisation of the economy. Growing inflation and budgetary deficits on their own account limited the options to freeing the economy of all constraints. In that, Mazowiecki and Balcerowicz followed closely the neo-liberal monetarist policies advocated by their Western economic advisors and Harvard economists. Nor was it a coincidence that the 'shock therapy', introduced by Balcerowicz, was in line with the Washington Consensus policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that were about to be discredited in the emerging market crisis of the 1990s. The consequences of the rapid transformation were dramatic. From January 1990 all state controls on prices of commodities and food were removed. Wage increases were frozen. In order to balance the budget state investments were reduced, while taxes were increased. Domestic credit was limited and interest rates were increased. It was assumed that free market mechanisms would lead to the reduction of inflation. Initially, Mazowiecki made no reference to privatisation, though in its final form Balcerowicz anticipated an inevitable change in the structure of ownership of means of production. The first reforms were steered through the Sejm and Senate in December 1989. In June 1990 the first privatisation proposals were put to the Sejm. In the spring of the following year, the government faced the political consequences of the economic policies.

The scale of protest and strikes, which followed the implementation of what came to be known as the Balcerowicz Plan, was enormous. This undeniably caused the slowing down of the tempo of transformation, though even at the height of the countrywide protests, the government was determined to proceed regardless of the social and economic consequences. Balcerowicz's policies met with wide approval in the West and, as a result, financial support

was forthcoming for Poland. He himself was only too aware that Poland could no longer count on any assistance from the Soviet Union, increasingly preoccupied with internal instability, while the COMECON market had for all practical purposes collapsed. All of the other previously Soviet satellite states were undergoing a process of rapid liberalisation. Balcerowicz was thus fighting to establish for Poland an independent position in the international markets, in the same way that Mazowiecki and his government sought to defend Poland's interest in the Soviet-German rapprochement, which ultimately led to the reunification of Germany.

Initially, Mazowiecki's government conducted a cautious foreign policy. Thus the Poles sought to assure Gorbachov that they would not seek to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. The initiative for a change of relations between the satellite states and the Soviet Union came from other countries. Poland was not in the forefront of demands for the renegotiation of relations. In November 1989, Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited Poland. The results of what initially looked like a momentous visit were limited though. The attention of the West German leader was on reunification, which he outlined in a ten-point plan soon after returning from Poland. The Polish leaders noted that Kohl made no commitment to respecting Poland's post-war border, an issue which was bound to come up if Germany was reunited. The Soviet Union had been the guarantor of Poland's post-war western border. But at the end of 1989, Poland was not an issue on which the Soviet policymakers could be detained. Much weightier problems faced them in the conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In principle, Gorbachov's attitude towards Poland continued to be helpful. Nevertheless, the Soviet willingness to make an open admission of responsibility for the Katyn massacres went hand in hand with increased unwillingness to support Poland economically. Soviet troops continued to be based on Polish soil, something the Poles accepted as necessary, as long as the issue of the western border was not resolved. All in all, in the face of the scaling down of the Cold War, Poland stood to lose the support of a powerful Soviet ally and faced the prospect of dealing with Germany on its own. Mazowiecki's government had to lobby hard to be included in the '2 + 4' talks on the reunification of Germany. The result of which was that when, on 3 October 1990, a single

German state came into being, Poland obtained a guarantee of the inviolability of its border with Germany.

In the changing international configuration which followed the unification of Germany and the end of the Soviet Union, and which required rapid diplomacy, the Polish government, with little experience of foreign policy, had to address the key question of Poland's place in the new world order. Since the Second World War Poland had not enjoyed the freedom of being able to formulate its own foreign policy. In any case, the fear of German revanchism dominated Poland's relations with the West, thus making the Soviet Union Poland's key ally. In the circumstances, membership of the Warsaw Pact was of critical importance to Poland. Now Polish politicians had to consider the question of Poland's security without the Soviet Union and that inevitably brought them back to the question of Germany's objectives. As long as united Germany remained a member of the NATO, they felt Polish interests would be guaranteed by US reluctance to reopen the question of Germany's borders. In the meantime, Polish foreign policy in the East was aimed at covering all options. Attempts were made to maintain good relations with Moscow. But, at the same time, mindful of the rapid pace of the disintegration of the structure of the Soviet Union, negotiations started with the republics which bordered Poland, namely Ukraine and Byelorussia. In reality, until the situation stabilised, the Poles clung to the security which the Warsaw Pact had offered. But already plans were being formulated for Poland's entry into NATO in the long term. In its relations with Western Europe, the Mazowiecki government merely accelerated progress which had been taking place in recent years. Poland had already established financial and economic relations with West European partners, and the issue of debts bound Poland to West European institutions. In 1990, during his visit to Belgium, Mazowiecki informed Jacques Delors that Poland looked forward to being included in the European Union (EU).

Domestically, the Round Table Talks were followed by the emergence of genuine political pluralism. While the PZPR continued, increasingly devoid of authority and rationale, other parties emerged, both new and not so new. The membership of the PZPR became less interested in supporting the party. What previously had been an

important avenue for professional advancement was now merely a discredited political party. During the XI Congress of the PZPR in January 1990, two options were discussed. Some believed that a new party should emerge, though not entirely cut off from its past. The majority favoured this option. A minority-supported alternative was for a new party to be formed, based on the social democratic traditions of Western Europe. Both factions, nevertheless, accepted the demise of the communist party as it had functioned since the war. In due course, it became apparent that any party claiming allegiance to the PZPR past would fail to make an impact on the new Polish political scene. The final decision was to form a supposedly new party, with the name of **Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej** (Social Democracy of the Polish Republic – SdRP). The party leader, 36-year-old Aleksander Kwaśniewski, consciously espoused a modern European image for the party. By adopting a name that harked back to a pre-communist past and shedding the old, stuffy and dogmatic image of the communism past, Kwaśniewski attracted to the party young radicals and those who still believed in a socialist future for Poland.

For the peasant ZSL, the process of transformation was made easier by the fact that it was able to present itself as a victim of communist policies. **By reclaiming the old name of the PSL the peasant party drew on the Witos legend and the more recent one of Mikołajczyk.** The main weakness of the peasant movement during the interwar period had been the fact that, in spite of its impressive numerical growth, it remained divided. During 1945–47, Mikołajczyk had expected that the PSL would win elections without the need to enter into a coalition agreement with either the communists or the socialists. In 1947, the party was destroyed and all that remained was the rump ZSL that had no genuine commitment to representing the interests of the peasant community, but was a political vehicle for a few peasant leaders who were willing to collaborate with the communists. Thus until 1991, when **Rural Solidarity** emerged as a new force, the peasants in Poland had no political organisation which they could genuinely call their own. After the Stalin years during which forceful collectivisation had been pursued, the peasants were only loosely integrated into the process of political transformation that had affected Poland.

During the 1960s and more so during the 1970s, the peasants were supported by government funding which left many of them in debt but secure in the knowledge that the government would not call in those debts. Attempts to introduce modern crop techniques and advanced animal husbandry foundered on the fact that small-scale farming, which continued to be the norm in Poland, left little scope for mechanisation and modernisation. Under communism, Polish agriculture stagnated. Amply cushioned by state subsidies, peasants had few economic incentives to improve their way of life.

The disintegration of the communist system and the collapse of state support for agriculture, belatedly led to debates on modernisation, in which the question of consolidation of land and introduction of market forces had an impact not only on rural life but also on the politics of peasant parties. The emergence of market gardening and greenhouse farming, encouraged during the Gierek period, had already transformed the production of food. These growers and wealthy farmers would look to the peasant parties for support with mobilisation and for protection against the import of food from the West. Small farmers wanted their political representatives to campaign for increased subsidies and guaranteed high prices, together with assurances that foreigners would not be allowed to buy land in Poland. In May 1990, three peasant organisations came together to form a new party. Those who had belonged to the now defunct ZSL, activists from Rural Solidarity and those seeking to reclaim the PSL of the Mikołajczyk period uneasily decided to cooperate. The fall in real incomes in urban areas and growing imports created a crisis for Polish agriculture.

Mazowiecki's government was unprepared for the ferocity of peasant protests. During the summer of 1989 and again in 1990, the peasants organised mass actions, blockading national roads, stopping the movement of trains and demanding that the government pay high prices for food and reduce the rates of interest for credits paid to the farmers. Confronted by nationwide and well-organised opposition, Mazowiecki bowed to pressure and put more money into agriculture, though it was clear that, until the issue of the backwardness of Polish agriculture was addressed, such measures could only be temporary.



In October 1990, 154 political parties legally registered with the courts. What was so striking was the variety of organisations which laid claim to political leadership. Some were of a quixotic character. Among them, the Beekeepers' and the Beerdrinkers' parties stand out. In reality, the Poles, freed from previous constraints, were still learning how political representation worked. Most new parties did not come into being as a result of grass roots initiatives. The process of party formation in Poland has been described as elite driven, defining it as a process determined by politically minded activists frequently already occupying prominent roles in the process of transformation. Since most of Poland's citizens were unfamiliar with the democratic parliamentary system, voters tended to view parties as civil associations rather than as electoral structures, acting as transmitters of their interests and aspirations to the legislative body. Not until the first genuinely free elections took place were political parties, their supporters and activists able to function as they did in Western democracies. Among the small parties which emerged, investigated and formulated political programmes, many soon withered away.

The most important fallout of these processes of differentiation, and political maturing was the break-up of the leadership of the Solidarity movement. The main conflict occurred between Mazowiecki and his patron Wałęsa. It was no secret that the Solidarity leader pushed forward Mazowiecki's candidacy for the premiership because the former wanted to be free to stand for the presidency. This did not mean that he wanted to keep out of government decision making. On the contrary, he had hoped that Mazowiecki would act as puppet, obediently accepting Wałęsa's instructions. When this did not happen and as Mazowiecki became more confident in his role, his earlier patron appointed his own people as editors of the Solidarity newspaper and then supported Jarosław Kaczyński, a vocal critic of the government's policies. What followed was a process of polarisation, during which Wałęsa distanced himself from his previous intellectual advisors and allied himself with those criticising the government for deliberately slowing down the process of political transformation and of privatisation.

The first free political contest between the post-communist forces took place in the context of the November 1990 presidential

elections. During the electoral campaign, it looked as if the main contest would be between Wałęsa and Mazowiecki. Possibly unwisely, Mazowiecki refused to campaign on the basis of promises for a better future, instead asking that he should be judged on the basis of his achievements while Prime Minister. He spoke of a slow and steady process of reforms and transformation. He defended the Balcerowicz reforms but promised to increase the housing budget and spending on agriculture. Critically, Mazowiecki failed to dispel rumours that he was Jewish. In the Polish context, where anti-Semitism was and still is the norm in nationalist circles, this was an extremely damaging accusation, fanned by the centre right and by Wałęsa's statements that he, unlike his opponent, represented Polish interests and that he was a genuine Pole. Far from condemning his opponent for introducing anti-Semitic undertones into the campaign, Mazowiecki's team responded by publicising evidence of his baptism. Mazowiecki's campaign was lacklustre. Wałęsa, on the other hand, used all his authority as the leader of the Solidarity movement to present himself as the man of the people. He attacked his main opponent's intellectualism, which he contrasted with his own ability to respond to people's needs. He promised to deal with the remnants of the communist system and to implement economic reforms. It was easy for Wałęsa to attack the Balcerowicz reforms, which had caused mass unemployment and reduced real incomes, pensions and allowances. Wałęsa promised to push on with privatisation, which he presented as a process from which all would benefit through the distribution of privatisation bonds.

There were other candidates in this presidential election more colourful than the main contestants. Nevertheless, Wałęsa and Mazowiecki were seen as the key protagonists. It was therefore a shock when the results of the first round of elections were released. Mazowiecki was out, having secured only 19.08 per cent of votes. Wałęsa did not secure the necessary 50 per cent majority. In the second round he faced a man who had no political base in Poland and no programme, but who had conducted a slick campaign and, in effect, appealed to the Poles' desire to improve their dreary daily existence. **Stanisław Tymiński** was a Polish businessman who had emigrated first to Canada and then to Peru. He used personal funds to put together a well-conducted campaign, during which he

assured Poles that they could emulate his achievements. His political base was the supposed party X, of which there seemed to be no obvious membership. His economic programme amounted to solutions the details of which he did not divulge, but which were supposedly locked in his personal computer. In spite of his apparent shortcomings, Tymiński secured 23.1 per cent of the votes. In the second round, 74.25 per cent of those taking part in the elections supported Wałęsa. The route from worker activist to President was thus completed. It nevertheless remained unclear as to whether Wałęsa had the political and personal skills to act as the leader of the new Polish state.

Until the final version of the 1992 Constitution, known as the **Small Constitution**, was agreed, the President still retained extensive powers, including the right to nominate the Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister for Foreign Affairs as well as the head of the national bank, the Narodowy Bank Polski. On being elected President, Wałęsa was faced with the immense task of putting together a team that would govern until the general elections took place. This was made difficult by the disintegration of what had previously been the broad Solidarity movement and the increasingly clear differentiation between various strands of political ideas. In any case, political activists realised that if they were to be associated too closely with the present problems, they might blight their and their parties' electoral chances. The government of Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, formed in January 1991, was the most stable one of that period. Unfortunately, Poland experienced a worsening economic situation, during which Balcerowicz continued in his capacity as Minister of Finance. The devaluation of the Polish currency and an anti-recession package caused a strong reaction from within the Solidarity trade union and from the rural community. The government faced stiff opposition in the Sejm as well as having to contend with Wałęsa's interference. The latter quickly lost popularity. When faced with problems, the previously charismatic trade union leader turned against his advisors and increasingly surrounded himself with people who were of little help to him in his new role as President. **Of those, no doubt, the most unusual was his chauffeur, whose advice Wałęsa sought in preference to that of his government.** Wałęsa was fast becoming an embarrassment. During

meetings with the press and foreign visitors, he appeared to lack the necessary social graces and his personal behaviour was uncouth and aggressive. Modelling himself on Piłsudski, he responded to his critics by claiming that he had been solely responsible for the fall of communism. In reality, the process of political maturing had led the trade union element of the hitherto broad Solidarity movement to more defined organisational structures within the workplace and in relation to its members. Many of the well-known Solidarity activists moved towards national politics forming new parties. What had previously been Wałęsa's power base was no longer there.

The first genuinely free general elections took place on 27 October 1991. The campaign was fought with the full use of all modern methods of persuasion. Political parties paid a lot of attention to presentation and made sure that their leaders were well turned out and attractive. Tymiński's success during the presidential campaign had taught party leaders that the electorate could be manipulated. Long-winded and sophisticated explanations were abandoned and instead catchy and easy-to-understand slogans were offered on billboards and in TV advertisements. All parties spent considerable amounts of money on publicity. Some employed public relations advisors, in particular those from the USA, to give a veneer of excitement to the otherwise earnest campaigns.

The electoral campaign leading up to the general elections of 27 October 1991 was fought with real commitment. There was no doubt that very real issues differentiated the parties. It was therefore a shock, when it was revealed, that only 43.2 per cent of those entitled to vote went to the polls. This figure contrasted sharply with the average 70 per cent electoral participation during the first years of the new Polish state during the interwar period. Subsequent research revealed that the main factor determining people's attitude towards elections was the effect on them of the recent economic transformation. Unskilled workers, the uneducated and those living in small communities affected by the economic restructuring and unemployment were indifferent to the elections. Individuals' economic situation and the loss of economic opportunities led to political apathy. Belatedly, Poles were finding out how the capitalist system worked, and the result was political indifference. Low participation in the elections indicated disappointment with the achievements

of the post-Solidarity period. It is debatable as to whether economic liberalisation had ever been the aim of the Solidarity movement. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, when the paternalistic structures of the previous regime were being dismantled, from guarantees of full employment to medical and social provisions for pensioners, war veterans and invalids, an underclass emerged, economically inactive and outside the scope of politics.

The results of the elections were inconclusive. No electoral grouping secured an outright majority. Thus, the formation of the first truly free government in post-war Poland was delayed by the need to put together a coalition. Nevertheless, the elections led to the emergence of three major political forces. The Unia Demokratyczna (Democratic Union – UD) brought together supporters of the Mazowiecki government. Some of his allies, nevertheless, voted for Bielecki's liberal party, thus weakening the UD's showing in the elections. This grouping secured the votes of those with higher education and people who had benefited from the recent economic changes. The post-communist Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance – SLD) brought together left wing and radical elements, in particular from among white-collar and skilled workers. The PSL was the third largest political grouping within the Sejm. The village population abandoned the post-Solidarity parties and voted nearly entirely for one of the two peasant parties, thereby splitting their vote. The right wing parties had failed to unite before the elections. Nevertheless, the KPN was able to secure 8 per cent of the votes, thus confirming its importance within the new political scene in Poland.

It fell to Wałęsa, in his capacity as President, to form a new government. This proved to be a difficult task, made so much more difficult by Wałęsa's determination to prevent the SLD and the UD from forming a coalition. This meant that he went to great lengths to bring together the other parties, mainly the centre, christian and conservative ones. In the end, a coalition government was put together, but one in which the KPN refused to participate. Led by Jan Olszewski, a well-known dissident from the communist period, it survived until June 1992. The Olszewski government marked a stage in the development of a post-communist Poland, where those who had previously ruled and had been closely connected with the

regime lost power, and where the new politicians took matters into their hands.

A key policy was dismantling the security apparatus. The army likewise was purged and new appointments were made, reflecting the new political reality. Revelations about the extent of civil collaboration with the communist security apparatus led to a search for those who had been tainted by collaboration with communists. This degenerated into a **witch-hunt, where politicians sought to outbid each other in making accusations against all those who had held positions of responsibility during the Communist period.** Furthermore, most of the new deputies and all the new ministers had no political experience. The need to subordinate themselves to party discipline and the necessity of supporting the policies of the government, which they had formed, were new concepts. It was not uncommon to see a minister publicly attack the government in which he or she held a portfolio. Many procedural matters were still unclear because the Small Constitution, which defined the President's prerogatives and the functioning of the executive and legislative organs, was vague on a number of matters. The final version of the constitution was being discussed in a specially appointed forum. But, from the outset, Wałęsa was in conflict with the government and in particular with Olszewski. The President believed that he had the authority to dismiss and appoint the Minister of Defence, whereas the Prime Minister was convinced that he had absolute control over the army. The appointment of Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz – Wałęsa's protégé – to head the Narodowy Bank Polski caused further disputes. Politics appeared to be driven by the President's animosities towards the Sejm and particular personalities, rather than by government policy.

When the Olszewski-led government fell amidst accusations that numerous Sejm deputies and government ministers had collaborated with the communist regime, the next coalition faced the same problems. Waldemar Pawlak, the new prime minister, was the leader of the PSL. In accordance with the Small Constitution he could not appoint the Minister of Interior or the Minister of Foreign Affairs, thus immediately creating scope for disputes with the President. When he was unable to put together a coalition, Pawlak resigned and Hanna Suchocka from the UD formed a new

government. The main supporters of the new government were parties which described themselves as liberal and christian. Considering the new Prime Minister's lack of political experience, the government she put together showed a higher degree of stability than any previous one. A number of important reforms were approved by the Sejm before it fell on 28 May 1993.

The issue of the verification of secret service files for evidence of cooperation with the communist regime did not go away and continued to bedevil the next government. It quickly became apparent that an accusation that a given politician had in the past worked with the communists or **a mere accusation that a file had been created by the security service could be used to destroy any person's political career.** Wałęsa was not immune to these accusations and it was rumoured that he had been an informer. Some of his previous allies within the original Solidarity Free Trade Union were willing to believe that the security service had recruited him. This matter repeatedly and inconclusively returned to the Sejm.

A new feature of Polish political life during the 1990s was the emergence of extra-parliamentary politics. Although Poland made a very successful transition to parliamentary democracy, the economic situation created unemployment and, through that, preconditions whereby sections of Polish society had no, or limited interest in supporting the young democracy. Suchocka's government faced first mass waves of industrial strikes to secure higher pay. Although strikers frequently voiced anti-government slogans, in reality the trade unions had no desire to enter directly into politics. Upper Silesia was the centre of several waves of strikes during 1993. Under communism miners had enjoyed a privileged status. During the 1990s, demand for Polish coal had fallen and the government was no longer interested in supporting unproductive coal mines. Other industries suffered because of Western competition and fall of demand from what was previously the protected East European market. Added to that was anxiety about Western companies buying up Polish enterprises only to close them down, thus reducing competition with their own production. Suchocka's government accelerated the privatisation process and oversaw the transformation of the banking and the financial sector. While many saw this as a step forward and the first sign of Poland emerging out of the

recession, others saw these reforms as a betrayal of their own and the nation's interests. For some workers, particularly in industries which had adapted to modern methods, and those working in enterprises which foreign investors wanted to buy in order to continue production, there was hope of continuing employment. Workers employed in coal mining, steel production and in unprofitable industries faced mass unemployment. Whole areas of previously industrialised Poland were blighted by this hitherto unknown phenomenon. A similar process of differentiation started occurring in agriculture. State farms collapsed. Those previously employed in them had nothing to look forward to and no way of starting a new life. More entrepreneurial farmers looked forward to talks on Poland joining the EU, economic assistance in modernisation and land consolidation. The mobilisation of disaffected communities had occurred because they believed themselves to have been overlooked by the new political leaders. Blue-collar workers and young people from areas blighted by the collapse of previously thriving industries turned to direct action. In the second half of the 1990s some sections of rural communities, likewise, took matters into their own hands, staging protests, roadblocks and disrupting rail freight, in particular when they suspected that cheap food was being imported into Poland. Direct action came to be seen as a justified way of putting pressure on the government and, in some cases, as a way of destroying the social and political consensus, which these groups believed, excluded them. Largely nationalist and no longer constrained by political autocracy, many Poles felt free to hate those they felt were responsible for their plight.

Little united the emerging radical right wing parties of the post-communist period. The defence of the interests of the nation and support for the national economy were principles on which they were all agreed. Anxiety about the loss of national identity was also emphasised. In their pronouncements, the nationalist leaders attacked the World Bank and the European Union, claiming that both organisations would in some way lead to the nation's dissolution through the loss of its economic, cultural and social heritage. These parties and organisations either had strong links with the Catholic Church or, in their claim to represent the interests of the nation, appropriated symbols of that faith.



During the early stages of political transformation, none of the radical nationalist parties were able to secure seats in the Sejm, hence their resort to mass protests and preference for direct action. The lack of unity between the nationalist and neo-fascist organisations in Poland was the key source of their weakness during the 1993 elections. The extreme right wing parties were dominated by leaders who, in fact, perpetuated the divisions within the right wing by firmly adhering to the ideas of one particular past ideologue, usually Dmowski or Piłsudski. The KPN, whose leader Moczulski defined himself as a follower of Piłsudski's ideas, would have nothing to do with the Stronnictwo Narodowe (National Alliance – SN), which revered Dmowski. Although both parties were active, they never recovered from their disastrous showing in the 1993 elections. Internal splits took their toll. During the coming years, the radical nationalist parties were reduced in importance, occasionally emerging as possible partners in the process of building larger coalitions.

Two new forces emerged during the mid-1990s. What distinguished them from the nationalist right wing parties was the fact that they made no pretence of being heirs to past movements. The Polish Nationalist Party, led by Bolesław Tejkowski, was the most virulently anti-Semitic and anti-parliamentarian of these. The structure of the organisation was loose and had undergone several transformations. Nevertheless, the party's constant feature was its association with the newly emerging skinhead culture in Poland. It remains the movement of the young and unemployed. The main focus is on violent street action, which surprisingly, some governments in Warsaw have been willing to tolerate. Identifying Jews as the biological enemies of the Polish nation, Tejkowski's supporters have attacked all those whom they accuse of being Jewish. This includes any organisation, community or person, whose actions are perceived to be damaging to the interests of the Polish people. Unusually, the radical right has been robust in accusing the Catholic Church of having betrayed Poland, thus suggesting that many bishops and Pope John Paul II were Jewish. More recently, the radical right and the skinhead groupings have come together to form a broadly based organisation, which has taken the name of Młodzież Wszechpolska (All Poland Youth – MW). This organisation had lent its support to right wing and nationalist parties, particularly

in attacking left wing political organisations and youth movements. Sexual diversity, in particular homosexuality, has been added to the list of disorders in the Polish nation, which this neo-fascist organisation is determined to cleanse. Their activities have been tolerated and even encouraged by the some centrist and right wing parties.

In January 1992, a new political party brought together disaffected peasants. This was the **Samoobrona** (Self-help) organisation established by **Andrzej Lepper**. It first appeared on the political scene during Olszewski's government, when militant sections of the organisation occupied the Ministry of Agriculture, demanding the cancellation of debts. Lepper had one clear objective, namely to attack the government for its neglect of agriculture and of the peasant interests. From the outset, his followers set out to make their mark through direct action. During the summer of 1992 they organised road blockades, the aim of which was a display of power and the impotence of the authorities. Well-publicised marches onto the capital and hunger strikes followed. Briefly, President Wałęsa endorsed Samoobrona's actions, though this was mainly out of a desire to embarrass the government. Lepper's approach to politics was and remains unhindered by any ideological ballast. According to his early programme, Poland was to follow neither a capitalist nor a socialist path, in effect, there was to be a Polish path. While initially Samoobrona was viewed as a harmless expression of grass roots mobilisation, this has changed in later years. Lepper stood for the presidency in 1995, securing 1.32 per cent of the votes. During the 2001 elections, Samoobrona won 53 seats in the Sejm, improving this performance in the 2005 general elections by gaining 56 seats. The biggest surprise was the organisation's victory in the elections to the European Parliament. Five deputies from Samoobrona sit in the European Parliament, forging an alliance with the European extreme right. The reasons for this electoral breakthrough lay in the increasing public disillusionment with the progress of transition, which disadvantaged large sections of the population, most notably in the villages. There, the PSL is perceived to be the party of the middle and wealthy farmers, likely to benefit from EU subsidies and trading links with Western Europe. Lepper has skilfully manipulated the party's image to embrace extra-parliamentary high-profile escapades, with a vocal defence of the interests of the small peasants

in the Sejm. His focus on national interest and on Christianity as guidelines for Poles has strong appeal to the uneducated.

The 1993, general elections took place in accordance with new electoral laws, the aim of which was to eliminate the instability created by the proliferation of small organisations. To obtain representation in the Sejm, parties had to secure a minimum of 5 per cent of votes cast. In the case of electoral coalitions, these had to secure 8 per cent of the votes. Parties competed for seats in electoral districts and for a share of seats from a national list. In the run-up to the elections, popular opinion swung behind the post-communist SLD and the PSL. The break-up of the Solidarity movement further increased the likelihood of the two succeeding. Some have since blamed Wałęsa's internal manipulations for the weakening of Solidarity. His attempt to form an electoral structure loyal to himself was curiously reminiscent of Piłsudski's efforts during the early 1930s. In his choice of the name, the **Bezpartyjny Blok Wspierania Reform** (Non Party Bloc in Support of Reforms – BBWR), Wałęsa made a direct reference to the BBWR which was not more than a party of the ruling coterie. **Wałęsa's presidential party had no programme beyond supporting its leader.** As the Solidarity movement and then the post-Solidarity parties splintered further, the SLD and the PSL remained steadfast and focused. In a startling reversal of the results of the 1991 elections, the two parties secured one third of the votes cast. The results indicated that voters' were critical of the actions of the post-Solidarity politicians. The economic consequences of the period of transformation had an impact on their choice of representatives. **An interesting observation was made that the Polish voters, at that stage, preferred post-communist parties to the newly emerging post-Solidarity ones.**

The above trend was confirmed with a further seismic change in the Polish political scene when, **in 1995, Aleksander Kwaśniewski was elected to the presidency.** The surprising feature of his victory was the fact that the Poles rejected a number of candidates with impeccable anti-communist credentials in favour of a man who had been **directly linked with the communist regime** and who made no apologies for his past. His victory was partly due the failure of the right wing parties to agree on a candidate, but also to Kwaśniewski's ability to transform the post-communist left into a social

democratic party. By making a clear reference to the West European socialist tradition, he was able to present himself as a man of the future. His support for Poland joining the EU had an appeal to those who wanted to think in terms of Poland becoming a Western developed state, with all the economic advantages this model appeared to offer. Kwaśniewski confirmed his success as a head of the modern European Polish state when he went on to win the next presidential elections. His presence at the helm no doubt helped Poland through a turbulent period during which political parties appeared to again splinter, forecasting a difficult time in national politics.

The fall of communism led to the reversal of the previously aggressively pursued policy of removing the Catholic Church from public life. Indeed, many sections of society saw this as a time to reassert the importance of Polish national identity. Mazowiecki's government quickly bowed to pressure and restored the teaching of religion in schools, by which all understood the teaching of the basics of the Catholic faith. The church and its supporters were equally quick to demand that all confiscated property should be restored. A wild process of grabbing of buildings was only halted when it was revealed that the priests generally saw this as permission for the Catholics to claim all ecclesiastical property, including Protestant and Uniate. The key debates within the Sejm were on the issue of abortion. The church fought for a ban on abortions in all circumstances, while its opponents tried to limit it to cases of danger to a woman's life and to pregnancies that were the result of rape or incest. The latter groups progressively lost out to the Catholic supporters who managed to steer through the Sejm legislation restricting abortion to an extent that makes it virtually unobtainable in Poland. Parish priests, buoyed by the sense of mission and a determination to mould Poland into a confessional state, have used the pulpit to condemn doctors who were willing to perform abortions, dispense contraceptive advice and even to offer antenatal tests to women.

In politics, the Episcopate tried to ensure that only parties which subscribed fully and absolutely to the Catholic programme and teaching were allowed to use the name of Christian. Thus, most Christian parties have strong links with the nationalist and right wing movements, while no progressive Christian movement has

emerged in Poland. Involvement in state politics has had its dangers. The church has generally tried to unite diverse right wing parties. The failure of right wing candidates, therefore, reflected badly on the church. In turn, these setbacks led to internal disagreements as to whether the church should assume a centre stage role in politics, or just offer spiritual advice. The second course of action has always seemed a safer and more prudent option, though on more than one occasion parish priests and the leadership have succumbed to the temptation of the first, only to find that the benefits have been unclear. Poland, after the fall of communism, is a society, which not merely tolerates but expects the church to be present in all aspects of secular life. Thus the fall of communism led to conspicuous displays of the church's presence in all manner of events such as the opening of new buildings, railway stations, bridges, schools and army parades. This, in turn, led to a decrease in the tolerance of the rights of other faiths, notably the Orthodox Church in Eastern Poland.

During the national elections which took place in September 1997, an unusual electoral grouping emerged, which was headed by the Solidarity trade union and included nearly thirty smaller parties and organisations. Taking the name of the **Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność** (Solidarity Electoral Platform – AWS), it made an appeal to the electorate on the basis of a nationalist programme. Family values and support for Christian principles formed the basis of its social programme, which implied advocacy of generous state funding. The SLD, which had ruled in coalition with the PSL, came second. The peasant movement was in disarray. The AWS coalition government was hampered by several major personality disagreements. The most obvious one was the fact that the head of the Solidarity trade union who had brought together the AWS, refused to take a seat in the Sejm. Marian Krzaklewski, the architect of the AWS electoral strategy, was hoping to stand against Kwaśniewski in the 2000 presidential elections. Nevertheless, the conflict of interest which immediately emerged between the trade union's workplace role and that of the AWS, which put the Solidarity trade union at the head of a ruling coalition, effectively discredited Krzaklewski. In forming a government, the AWS allied itself with what had been the UD, now renamed as Unia Wolności (Union of Freedom – UW),

which resulted in the formation of a most unlikely government. Led by a well-intentioned but unknown Jerzy Buzek, a nominee of Krzaklewski's, it included Balcerowicz as the Minister of Finance and Geremek as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In all cases, the AWS tried to form parallel organisations to limit the power of the UW ministers.

After the formation of the AWS-UW government, many of the issues which had been aired earlier returned to the Sejm with a vengeance. The government took an ultra-critical view of the recent past and proceeded to implement legislation, which required those holding public office to declare whether they had collaborated with the security service. To that end, it was agreed to establish the **Institute of National Memory**, where all the relevant files were deposited for use, as required, to verify collaboration. Control of the institute became a political issue. So the matter of the communist past was not only not resolved but also continued to fester and cause further divisions. Although the aim of the verification legislation was to draw a line between the communist past and the evolving new democratic system, the result was the opposite. Accusations and counter-accusations against prominent politicians and state employees continued to undermine public confidence. The President expressed his disagreement with what, at times, looked like a witch-hunt and vetoed attempts to make it a criminal offence to withhold information about collaboration with the communist secret service.

On 2 April 1997 the Sejm approved the new constitution. By a referendum that showed 52.7 per cent in favour, the public gave its verdict on it. The constitution was the object of prolonged inter-party conflicts where two very different concepts of a new Polish state clashed. The model of Poland as a theocratic state was opposed by the liberal and socialist parties, which clearly preferred a secular state. **The result of numerous compromises has been a constitution, which is peppered throughout with reaffirmations of the importance of the Christian faith in Polish life, though in its main outline this is a document confirming the liberal and democratic character of the Polish republic.**

The coalition government survived until 2000. Considering the incompatibility of the AWS and the UD and the instability of the

AWS structure, this was a major achievement. It was no surprise, nevertheless, that the SLD won the next general elections in 2001. The oscillations in the political scene still reflected the search for a stable economic and political model, enabling Poles to come to terms with the consequences of the liberalisation of the economy and the destruction of many of the social provisions, which had been part of the communist system. As unwilling as the Poles were to admit to this, the realities of the free market economy came to many as a surprise. In the 1990s, those who only too well knew the gaps between the communist rhetoric and the realities of what the regime actually provided experienced, for the first time, the advantages and disadvantages of the capitalist system. As it turned out, in spite of many Poles having some contacts with the West, few were prepared for some of the harsher consequences of both democracy and economic freedom. During the initial period of transformation, the extent of unregulated economic activities was startling. On every street corner, traders set up tables and camp beds from which a huge variety of goods were being sold and services provided. In scenes which reminded visiting foreigners of the first post-war months, Poles seemed to be trying to buy, sell, trade, exchange and provide services, which hitherto were controlled by the state. In due course, the local authorities regulated much of this. Whereas, initially, many thought that retail trade was a guaranteed road to enrichment, the first bankruptcies and insolvencies caused many budding entrepreneurs to reflect. Advertisements and political campaigns undoubtedly created an optimistic image. These usually focused on consumption, indicating that flash cars, quality suits and other symbols of success could be easily achieved. The reality was distinctly different. For many workers, Balcerowicz's reforms marked the beginning of the slide into unemployment. Inflation ate into people's savings and reduced the value of their pensions. Only in retrospect was it noted that the communist regime had been generous towards war combatants, invalids and pensioners. The post-communist governments no longer guaranteed the continuation of travel and health allowances, while index-linking of pensions and allowances was disputed between trade unions, the state and organised social groups. Pensioners in particular became a vocal and influential section of the Polish community,

unfailingly blaming all and sundry, and frequently Jews, for the loss of allowances enjoyed during the communist period. In 1990, 4.9 million Poles were drawing old-age or invalidity pensions, whereas in 1999 this number rose to 9.4 million. On the other side of the demographic coin were the young, who increasingly did not use the communist period as a benchmark against which to evaluate their economical, educational and professional opportunities. In these circumstances, the population reacted with pained surprise when faced with rising unemployment. Nothing had prepared Poles for the downside of the freedom they had fought for so valiantly. In 1993, 2.9 million economically active people were registered as unemployed. In 1999, the unemployment figure stood at 2.3 million but, of those, 32.5 per cent were people in the 14–24 age range.

Political life of the period after 1999 was affected by these changes to a larger extent than could have been anticipated. Whereas the initial process of party formation and the emergence of civil society were complex, by the beginning of the 1990s it looked as if the parties were dividing themselves along the obvious axis, from the left to the right. The economic and democratic consequences of the transition period then led to a next round of party divisions and political upheavals. Thus, in the opening years of the twenty-first century, the key parties once more splintered and re-formed, generating new combinations. Of those, the emergence of a new centre party, the **Platforma Obywatelska** (Citizens' Platform – PO), and the centre right **Prawo i Sprawiedliwość** (Law and Justice – PiS) were most noteworthy. The latter benefited from the right wing parties' failure to provide a coherent single political programme, but most obviously from the support of those who felt that they had been neglected by successive governments of the post-communist period. Old-age pensioners, those on disability pensions and those living in small towns and villages voted for PiS in the 2005 general elections. The swing to the nationalist right wing parties was compounded by the formation of a coalition government, which included Samoobrona and the Catholic Liga Rodzin Polskich (The League of Polish Families – LRP). **PiS' grip on power was reinforced by President Jarosław Kaczyński's choice of his twin brother, Lech Kaczyński, as Prime Minister.** The rout of the SLD had been caused by a number of high-profile scandals, of which the Rywin affair,



implicating the party leadership in accusations of collusion in the business affairs of an ex-KGB agent, was most damaging. Many liberals and left wing politicians feel that the PiS-dominated government was reversing Poland's intellectual and cultural union with Western Europe. The result has been that the government was free to implement policies demanded by the nationalists since the fall of communism. The Kaczyński brothers were keen to remould state institutions, in line with their vision of Poland as a Catholic state. Thus, any earlier legislation, which was perceived to have been in conflict with Catholic values, was reversed, most notably that relating to family planning, antenatal care and abortion. **By legally defining that life starts from the moment of conception, abortion has been deemed to be crime against a living person.** The appointment of Andrzej Giertych, from the LRP, to head the ministry of education was seen as a step back in time, in particular because of his insistence on the teaching of religion in schools and his stress on patriotic teaching. Sexual and cultural diversity were opposed by the government. While unable, under European Union legislation, to outright repress homosexuals and those advocating tolerance, the Kaczyński brothers and leaders of the PiS-led government actively encouraged skinhead and nationalist youth groups to attack those taking part in Gay Pride marches. Brawls and standoffs between the Młodzież Wszechpolska and anarchist youth organisations occurred frequently, adding fuel to the already strained relations between the nationalist right government and their opponents. Once more the street, rather than the Sejm, was the arena for political exchanges.

An unexpected consequence of the PiS government's renewed interest in using the communist past to criticise its opponents had been the discrediting of the Catholic Church. On coming to power, PiS, together with LRP, renewed calls for the extension of the verification process, in which those in positions of trust and in state employment are obliged to supply certificates confirming that they had not collaborated with the security services during the communist period. The result of this has been a regular trickle of information from the Institute of National Memory archives. Since the death of John Paul II, the Polish Episcopate has battled to retain its authority. The main difficulties have not been attacks from the left, nor the

emergence of anticlericalism within the community. On the contrary, the left has found it prudent to go along with the progressive interference of the church into secular matters, while the population remains as devout as before. The main difficulty for the Episcopate has been the divisions caused by internal conflicts, which previously the Pope resolved. It is increasingly apparent that the Primate has failed to impose his authority on the various factions within the Polish Catholic Church. The most obvious source of trouble has been the Catholic radio station, **Radio Maryja, led by Father Rydzyk**. The station and its controllers represent a **backward-looking and extreme anti-intellectual strand of Polish Catholic observance**. While many within the Episcopate disagree with the line taken by the radio station, they know better than to dissociate themselves openly from sentiments voiced by Rydzyk, which have found a ready echo in the minds of many Poles from the provinces. The government and some of the more censorious priests have up to now portrayed collaboration with the security services as a sign of moral weakness on the part of those who frequently succumbed to pressure, rather than working with the secret policy voluntarily. Through the winter of 2006/07 **leaks confirmed that members of the clergy had spied on their colleagues during the communist period**. The esteem in which the Catholic Church had been held in Poland was replaced by initial bewilderment and, in some cases, contempt. The full implication of these and similar revelations has still to emerge.

The fall of communism brought into the open a subject which the previous regime considered too thorny to tackle, namely the fact that national minorities and people of different faiths live within Poland's borders. The communist regime used its claim to the defence of Polish national interest as a means of securing support. This policy never worked entirely to their advantage, as all attempts to present communism as a political system which would guarantee national self-expression were contradicted by the ruling party's ideological monopoly. In the attempt to use nationalism to enhance the communists' standing, the existence of national minorities within Poland's borders was conveniently avoided, although lip service was paid to the regimes' supposed guarantees of the right of Polish citizens to national and religious self-expression. In practice, the situation was very different. The Catholic Church, while persecuted, was

strong enough to stave off successfully most attempts to confine its activities to the church. Other faiths were easier to sideline. In the immediate post-communist period, obviously discriminatory legislation was abolished and a number of religious groups, hitherto banned, were allowed to extend their activities to Poland. Nevertheless, it was the minority faiths, which had existed in Poland before the war, that fared worst, both during and after the fall of communism. The largest group of non-Catholics is made up of the **Eastern Rite Christians (561,000)**, followed by **Jehovah Witnesses (123,000)**, **Lutherans (87,000)** and **Jews (1200)**. In present-day Poland, unless supported by powerful lobbies and funds from abroad, these denominations face official discrimination and the hostility of the Catholic Church. John Paul II had gone a long way towards reopening a dialogue with other faiths. He also sought reconciliation with the Orthodox Christians and the Jews. It is debatable whether parish priests and nationalist politicians, in their quest to reaffirm Poland's commitment to Catholicism, have any understanding of the Pope's message of tolerance.

Nearly 1 million people who declare themselves as belonging to different ethnic groups presently inhabit Poland. The largest of those are the Ukrainian and German communities (each approximately 300,000), Byelorussian (250,000), Roma (30,000) and Lithuanian and Slovak people. In addition, Poland is experiencing a new phenomenon of foreigners settling in Poland, opening businesses and becoming naturalised. Apart from the obvious slow influx of West European growers and farmers who see in Poland an opportunity to purchase farms and to become involved in specialist cultivation, there are large Vietnamese trading communities.

It was in relation to the Jewish community that Poland has experienced the most painful problem of social and political maturing. The Jedwabne revelations have highlighted this phenomenon. Anti-Semitism, fanned by extreme Nationalist sentiments and tolerated by most parties and spiritual leaders, remains a seemingly respectable sentiment. This has nevertheless led to a number of crises, which have suggested to the Poles that Western European and US public opinion is repelled by many of the casual anti-Semitic pronouncements. The site of the Nazi concentration camp in Auschwitz was the background for two crises, one involving a group of nuns



who established a convent in close proximity to places associated with Jewish martyrdom. The other crisis occurred when a monk erected a number of high crosses on a gravel pit, where the Nazis had killed Jews. In both cases, Jewish community leaders interceded by pointing out that the erection of Christian symbols amounted to appropriation of the camp and prevented Jews from praying within their vicinity. To Polish nationalists the issue was merely a reaffirmation of Poland's Catholic character. Only the Papacy's intervention led to the closing of the nunnery and the removal of the crosses. The next conflict with the Jews came after the publication of a book by an eminent historian, Jan Gross, on the subject of the killing of Jews in the eastern areas earlier occupied by the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. Gross had revealed that Poles, emboldened by the entry of German units, had massacred the Jewish community around the town of Jedwabne. His accusation against the perpetrators was compounded by his conclusion that the Communists did not want to tackle the crime after the war. The local Catholic priest waded into the debate by supporting those who denied that the crimes had been committed. The Jedwabne scandal divided the Catholic Church, although the Pope, Archbishop Glemp and most of the bishops joined in a mass of expiation, which they hoped would close the matter. This has been far from the case, with academics seeking to make a name and secure publications adding their voices and suggesting that the Jews had been the authors of their misfortunes by supporting Communism. Contemporary anti-Semitism has been given an impetus by fears that Poland will be taken over by foreigners and in particular by international financial interests, supposedly headed by Jews. Poland's entry into the EU has done little to dampen these suspicions. Were one to believe in the arguments put forward by Samoobrona, the LRP and Radio Maryja, Germans stand on Poland's border, poised to buy up land, while Jews are already in Poland, using every known legal loophole to reclaim Jewish property and any other property they can lay their hands on. Although the Polish Constitution and law provide for the prosecution of those responsible for making discriminatory and inflammatory remarks, it is impossible to think of a single case wherein anyone has been punished for making anti-Semitic comments in public. These attitudes have brought some Polish Members

of the European Parliament close to other fascist and racist groupings in the European Parliament.

Although many Poles fondly believe that the challenge posed by the formation of the Solidarity free trade union, or/and the election of a Polish Pope was/were the cause(s) of the collapse of the Soviet Union and with that of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, in reality what had happened in Poland was but an element of a much larger picture. The collapse of communism in Poland was largely facilitated by the changing balance of power in Europe. The end of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the effects of the Gorbachev reforms effectively signalled the end of Soviet intervention in Poland's internal affairs. The establishment of new dialogues with the West and the reunification of Germany changed the basis on which relations between East European states and the capitalist West had evolved earlier. These realities spelled the end of the COMECON and of the Warsaw Pact. Both were abolished in 1991. Poles had hoped that these symbolic acts would be followed by Poland's return to Western Europe, in effect, admission to NATO and the EU.

Whereas the idea of joining NATO was generally supported by the Poles, who saw in it a guarantee of security against the Soviet Union and support in future talks with the government of a united Germany, the issue of joining the EU raised controversies. An important factor in determining NATO's willingness to admit Poland was the attitude of Poland's still powerful eastern neighbour. When in 1991 the Soviet Union was officially dissolved, it was replaced by the Russian Federation, whose leader Boris Yeltsin opposed Polish aspirations. Thus Polish politicians, in particular President Kwaśniewski, who was predisposed to maintain good relations with Russia, were reminded of Poland's weakness in European politics. **As long as the Russian government objected to Poland's admission to NATO, neither West European nor US politicians would defy it.** The first step was taken in 1994, when Poland joined the Partnership for Peace. This was an attempt to placate Russia while opening talks for the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics to NATO. **While negotiations continued, Polish military units were invited to participate in the training with NATO units.** Funds were made available to allow Poland to modernise and standardise military equipment. Further progress was made in 1995, when the US

Congress, now dominated by the Republican Party, voted in favour of extending NATO membership. An important factor in the US decision was the change taking place in Russia. An electoral success achieved by communist and nationalist groupings caused concern and with that reduced the Congress' willingness to work with the Russian government.

During the pre-accession talks, the NATO powers demanded that the Polish government establish control over military matters. This, in turn, led to a conflict between Wałęsa and the SLD. The President insisted that the provisional constitution (the so-called Small Constitution), which gave him the right to appoint the minister responsible for military matters, also gave him direct control over a number of special units which had been established during the Communist and the immediate post-communist period. This led to a clash with the SLD government. By the time Poland joined NATO, the final version of the Constitution had been accepted, thus removing the President's right to make decisions on that subject. **In December 1996, NATO formally announced its intention to enlarge, which was followed by the acceptance of Polish, Hungarian and Czech applications for membership. Full membership was finally granted in 1998.**

Poland has turned out to be a loyal, some would suggest a too obedient, member of NATO. Peacekeeping duties in Yugoslavia have more recently been followed up by a military contribution to the occupation of Iraq and to the policing of Afghanistan. By supporting President Bush's Middle Eastern policies, the Poles have infuriated the French President and the German Chancellor, who opposed involvement in Iraq. These controversies have had little impact on internal politics. Most Poles view the involvement of their troops in international action as a sign that their country is within the hallowed circle of Big Powers, where they generally believe Poland naturally belongs. More controversial has been the willingness of the centre-right government of Prime Minister Kaczyński, in 2006, to allow US airplanes, carrying prisoners to the Guantanamo Bay, to land in Poland. Rumours that this cooperation has even extended to the establishment of US detention and torture camps are being substantiated, with the new US President Barak Obama admitting to the fact that the Bush administration did indeed use Polish bases

for this purpose. Support for US policies has been opposed by small left wing and anarchist youth movements. A recent surprise critic of Poland's unquestioning compliance with President Bush's policies has been the leader of the LRP. Most of those who are aware of these issues view support for the USA either with indifference, or as part of the new global responsibilities which they would like to believe are Poland's lot.

Poland's integration into the EU was fraught with numerous problems. One of the difficulties facing Polish politicians was that while Poles wanted to be part of Western Europe, exactly what this meant was unclear. In 1989, when Poland was finally given the opportunity to redress its exclusion from Europe, few agreed as to what would make Poland belong to Western Europe. In reality, this was frequently no more than a wish to put some distance between Poland and the Soviet Union, and the poverty, backwardness and lack of stable political institutions, which characterised Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. A search for positive models and images of the West yielded few clear answers. The nationalists were not able to offer any positive suggestions as to why Poland should join the EU. They also feared that Poland would not be treated as an equal partner. Successive governments failed to give Poles clear leads, because domestic issues rather than foreign policy initiatives dominated political debates. In March 1994, the SLD-PSL government approved Poland's formal application to join the EU. This turned out to be the easiest part of the process, since all parties were united on this one principle. Extensive disagreements focused on the conditions on which Poland would join. The EU countries had their reasons for anxiety about Poland's admission and set out strict conditions which they expected Poland to comply with.

Talks on Poland's accession to the EU stalled during the four years of the AWS-UW coalition government. The public perception of Western Europe was closely linked to the painful process of economic transformation and privatisation which appeared to benefit foreign companies. In the rural areas, the fear of foreigners buying up Polish land outweighed the supposed advantages of EU agricultural subsidies. It became apparent that there was a need for educational programmes, if only to get away from negative

stereotypes. The AWS was not capable of doing this, mainly because of its complex composition, which made it impossible to agree on so divisive an issue as conditions for Poland joining the EU. UW was a weak partner and its own pro-European programme was opposed by the AWS. The peasant movement remained deeply divided over the EU, seeing in it a rival to Poland's agricultural sector. The PSL never resolved its dilemmas. Its leaders, in principle, supported the common agricultural policy, which would, but only in due course, benefit Polish farmers. Small farmers, in most of Poland, were less convinced of the benefits to them of this policy. Doubts persisted and the militant opponents of the EU joined Lepper's Samoobrona direct action against the import of cheap foodstuffs.

In 2001, when AWS lost the general elections, the SLD was able to form a new government. The socialist politicians accelerated negotiations for Polish entry into the EU. Leszek Miller, the Prime Minister, calculated that, with the disintegration of the right wing and post-Solidarity parties, the Catholic Church was the only organisation which could influence the public. A visit to the Vatican was a particularly astute move, since John Paul II supported the idea of Polish membership of the EU. The next move was to persuade the Episcopate that it had nothing to fear from Poland joining Western Europe. Polish bishops had earlier pronounced themselves against the EU, on grounds that this would lead to increased secularisation and liberalisation of laws on abortion and euthanasia. In a reversal of the previous attitude, Primate Glemp visited Brussels. The result was an official statement read out from pulpits in March 2002, declaring the Episcopate's support for the European Union membership. It was widely suspected that the Social Democratic party-led government had given the bishops an undertaking to drop its avowed policy of liberalising the restrictive abortion law, in return for which the Catholic leaders undertook to support Poland's accession to the EU. Henceforth, the SLD abandoned all references to the need to liberalise the abortion laws, while the bishops resolutely supported Poland's application to join the EU. Fringe groupings continued to voice their opposition, most obviously those connected with Radio Maryja, Samoobrona and the LRP. Their arguments ranged from claims that Poland's commitment to Christianity would be destroyed, to warnings that foreigners would buy up Polish land. A



variation on the first was a call for Poland to join the EU in order to reaffirm Europe's Christian character. The SLD and PSL nevertheless pushed on with negotiations, which were completed at a meeting in Copenhagen in December 2002.

In order for Poland's accession be confirmed, a referendum had to be conducted. This was held in July 2003 and resulted in an overwhelming vote in support of membership. This act in itself finally symbolised Poland's return to the community of Western European states.

## CONCLUSION

Poland's recent history has been a record of the struggle for independence and a search for a model of a state. The national revolution took place at the same time as the structures of a liberal republic were debated. The desire for independence and the need to define the boundaries of the national state were accompanied by a search for a just relationship between citizens and the state, which was to represent their interests. Thus, the interest of the nation became a potent theme, at times conflicting with the increasingly accepted principles of individual rights. Before the First World War, debates on whether Poles would succeed in re-establishing their state were influenced by the liberal and democratic model of representation accepted in Western Europe. To Poles, nevertheless, these political trends would create dilemmas of whether the national question should either dominate or be subordinated to that of democratic representation. In that, the Poles faced the question of whether a state based on democratic principles could serve the interests of the nation. At the root of this debate was the dilemma of whether this model would be strong enough to serve the interests of the nation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, some Polish thinkers questioned the relevance of West European models to the specific Polish circumstances. As a result, modern Polish history has been affected, in equal measure, by these two debates, in which economic and social progress was advocated as a means of both overcoming backwardness and defending the interests of the nation as a whole.

When the Polish Kingdom vanished from the European map, serfdom was still the dominant form of land ownership in the villages. The landed gentry dominated the economic and political life of areas which had previously belonged to the Polish Kingdom. This, in turn, limited the development of commerce, manufacture and, subsequently, held back the industrial takeoff. Progressive thinkers unsuccessfully tackled these issues. Thus, the discourse on the restoration of the Polish Kingdom was closely linked to the need

to reform the economic and political system. Successive national uprisings, emigration and, finally, the policies of the partition powers further undermined the gentry's dominant role in Polish life. This, in turn, had an impact on thinking concerning the restoration of Poland. The landed gentry no longer dominated the struggle for independence and with that could not defend the idea of Poland as the republic of the nobility.

On the eve of the First World War it was widely accepted that if Poland were to emerge as an autonomous, or even an independent, state, its institutions and economy would have to be modelled on new concepts. The interesting question is, from where did Polish national and community leaders derive their ideas? Since their discussions were in the first place dominated by the desire to gain independence, was social, economic and political progress always subsumed into that one overriding desire – the restoration of a Polish state? How much were Poles affected by debates taking place in developed West European states, where the liberal model was the norm? Since most of the ethnically Polish areas were under Russian control, how much did Polish leaders assimilate and respond to the controversies within the clandestine groups in the Tsarist Empire? Finally, did the Poles formulate their own, distinctive ideas?

While it is always difficult to quantify the extent to which political ideas affected debates on the Polish question, it is noteworthy that Poles never felt isolated or sidelined from intellectual and political developments taking place in European capitals and intellectual centres. Polish thinkers were part of the great debates raging both in Western Europe and in Tsarist Russia. Even before an independent Polish state became a practical possibility, discussions on the political institutions of future Poland were far advanced. In Polish territories, a full spectrum of parties and organisations with distinct ideologies had emerged. Although the quest for independence dominated their programmes, they usually went well beyond that obvious objective. As documented in the earlier chapters of this book, these parties and organisations knew independent Poland would have to tackle poverty, either through the development of agriculture or by means of industrialisation. The debate on the future relationship between the new state and its citizens was closely linked to plans for economic advancement. This, in turn, raised the question

as to who was to have the right to vote, the propertied classes or those who, through their work, created wealth. At the same time, the ethnic composition of the future state was a matter of concern. Any desire to reconstruct Poland in its pre-partition borders could not be reconciled with plans for an ethnically homogenous Polish state.

Independent Poland emerged, in equal measure, from Germany's defeat during the First World War, Austria's disintegration, the collapse of the Russian Empire and finally the Polish nationals' desire for statehood. The result was that the first administration had one clear objective, namely the defence of the Polish nation and its right to independence. The borders of the state were defined as a result of conflicts during the formative early period. Ostensibly, it was the Paris Peace Conference that adjudicated on Poland's western border and on its access to the sea. In reality, ethnic conflicts between the Poles and Germans had as much an impact in defining borders in Silesia and in the so-called Corridor. The most obvious territorial and ethnic clashes, nevertheless, occurred in the east and southeast. The character and objectives of the new Polish administration were defined by the military campaigns on those borderlands.

Hence, during the interwar period, the newly emerged Polish state was insecure in its borders. All its neighbours, in varying degrees and with varying determination, sought to review the post-war frontier settlements. In Poland, national minorities were viewed as potentially hostile and likely to make common cause with their co-nationals across the border. The Jewish communities became the object of prejudice, which the establishment of a seemingly modern liberal democratic system did not reduce. Nationalism was a driving force in the new Polish state's internal politics. Thus, despite its founding fathers' aspiration to Poland being a modern European state, the country had more in common with other states in East and Southeast Europe, where the national revolution subordinated the newly espoused liberal state structure to one overriding priority, namely the defence of the nation.

At the same time, Polish politicians, community leaders and professionals sought to outline for Poland a development plan in which economic reforms postulated continuing state involvement. The modern Polish state was one in which neither peasant nor socialist

parties embraced wholeheartedly free market principles. Moreover, a strong sense of responsibility for the development of a modern industrial society went hand in hand with a desire to retain control over the nation's resources. Politically as well as economically, Polish territories, more than ever in the past, looked towards the West, rejecting any cooperation with the revolutionary government in the Soviet Union and distrustful of Lithuania and Czechoslovakia, from which Poland was alienated by territorial conflicts. Poland, in the first place looked to France for military and economic support, and only when disappointed in those hopes, considered establishing good relations with Nazi Germany in 1934. During the Piłsudski period and the period described as the rule of the colonels, military as well as national priorities determined both internal and foreign policy choices. Poland's policies in the run-up to the outbreak of the war were characterised by insecurity but also by adventurism. When Nazi Germany took action to destroy Czechoslovakia, Poland's military rulers sought to increase their popularity by redressing territorial grievances as well as grabbing Czech territories, to which Poland had no previous claim.

The German attack on Poland in September 1939 and Soviet complicity in the destruction of the Polish state did not end the complex debate, which both preceded and accompanied the period of independence. In spite of assertions to the contrary, underground resistance movements addressed the question of the character of the post-war government, as much as they tried to resist and alleviate occupation. In the course of the war, a need for unity prevented open conflicts between the various groupings. Nevertheless, they all prepared plans to capture power during the critical period when occupation would come to an end. Such plans remained high on the agenda discussed during the latter half of the war. It was generally assumed that the end of hostilities would be followed by a civil war and that the first post-war administration would emerge as a result of military confrontation between revolutionary workers, forces loyal to the government in London, nationalist forces and the Western powers. Political programmes prepared during the course of the war were a means of instigating the debate, but also of preparing the ground for the post-war battle for power. Left wing, centre and nationalist movements addressed questions of political

and economic reforms, of future borders and relations with national minorities. The need for economic progress and social justice went hand in hand with a stress on the importance of security, good relations with neighbours and commitment to the post-war European balance of power.

Soviet domination of Polish territories after the Second World War first constrained and, after 1947, cut short all debates on Poland's form. Poland's post-war borders were determined by the simple fact of Poland falling within the Soviet sphere of influence. The Poles had had no say on how these were defined. The eastern border was decided by the Soviet Union, which refused to restore to the Polish state territories captured in September 1939. The border with Germany was determined as a result of the talks between the Soviet Union and Great Britain. After the elections of 1947, when a communist-dominated government was established, all discussion on internal reforms ended and the process whereby Poland was drawn into the Soviet bloc was completed. The Stalinist model was imposed on Poland, penetrating into all aspects of life. This model, nevertheless, assumed the modernizing role of the state, both through the process of economic transformation which would lead to social changes.

To most Poles the Communist period was synonymous with subjugation. Only occasionally were they able to return briefly to open debates on social justice and political representation. The year 1956 marked a time of mass mobilisation during which ideas on workers' control over management decisions went hand in hand with attacks on the Stalinist state. When Gomulka re-established the party's authority, the debate was first adjourned and then ended. Thus, the last attempt to formulate new models of governance came to an end. Henceforth, dissident movements would publicise their criticism of the failings of the communist system but they had no way of bringing the debate into the open and, in particular, to have an input into state policies. In 1980, when once more the Poles challenged the political power of the state, this was not with a desire to replace it but only to secure representation within the existing political system. The unexpected result of the establishment of the free trade union movement was the collapse of the authority of the party and with that of the state, which had appropriated for itself

the right to determine the course of change. By then, the path to reforms led in one direction only, namely the establishment of a democratic elected assembly and the introduction of a free market economy.

Poland's acceptance of the criteria for admission to the European Union consolidated the economic and political system, which had evolved in Poland since the fall of communism. The establishment of a free market economy and acceptance of the democratic model of representation were the two most important conditions for Poland being included in the community of the developed European states. While admission to the EU has acted as a guarantee of Poland's continuing political and economic transformation, it has defined the model, thereby ending the nationalist dream of self-determination.

# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

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**Figure 1. Rejtan in the Sejm 1773 painted by Jan Matejko in 1866.**

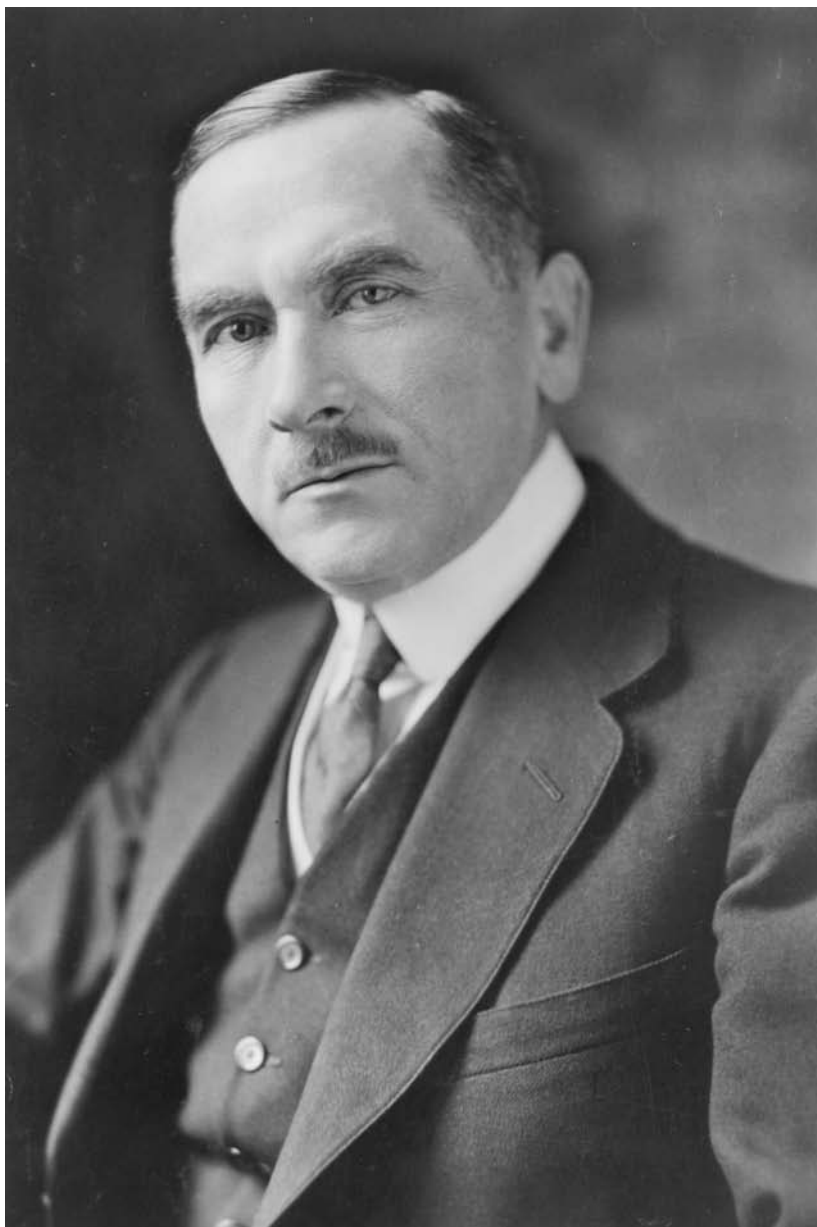
The painting shows the moment when the speaker of the Sejm approved the First Partition of Poland. Rejtan, portrayed in the dramatic pose of barring the traitors way to the room where the partition agreement was to be signed, did indeed try to prevent the act from being concluded. Matejko clearly indicates Poles bore some responsibility for the partition. Note the way in which he portrays the scheming nobility, the distracted ladies and the shrewd churchman.





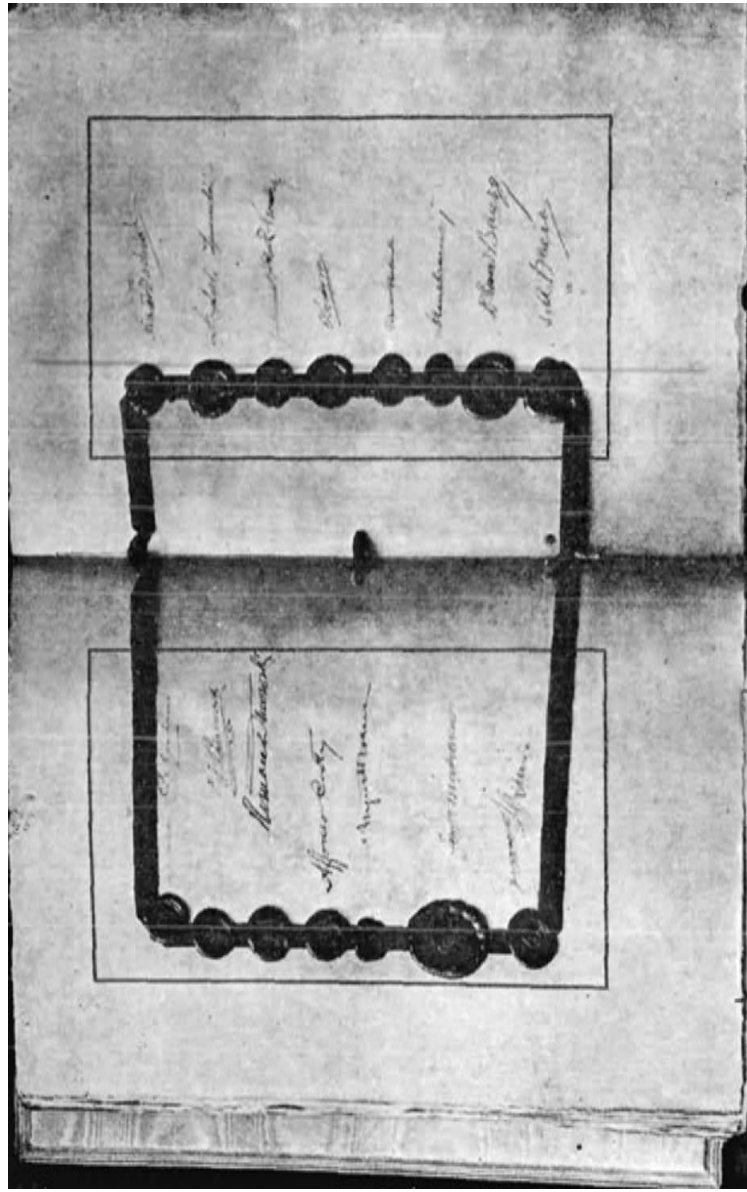
**Figure 2. Battlefield in the Forest. Artur Grottger 1863.**

Grottger became famous for his painting and drawings which were inspired by the failure of the January Uprising. The image thus conveyed is romantic and full of pathos. Only later would more perceptive questions be asked as to whether independence could be restored through insurrections led by the nobility. At the same time women authors would speak of the suffering endured by women while the men had perhaps recklessly focused entirely on conflicts which had little chance of success. © Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.



**Figure 3. Roman Dmowski (1864–1939) a politician and ideologue.**

In his numerous publications Dmowski elaborated his programme of National Democracy in which he defined the Polish quest for independence in quasi-Darwinist terms, namely the fight for survival against the German and the Jewish races.



**Figure 4. Signatures of the Polish delegation to the Paris Peace Talks.**

Jan Paderewski and Roman Dmowski, the two towering personalities which steered the talks on the subject of Poland's border, saw their involvement at the negotiations as the culmination of their life's achievements.



**Figure 5. Józef Piłsudski on the Poniatowski bridge on the day of the May coup in 1926.**  
This was the strategic point to the town centre where Piłsudski met the President.



**Figure 6. General Władysław Sikorski, Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile in the United Kingdom during the Second World War (second from the left) photographed with Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Charles de Gaulle, leader of the Free French.**

Sikorski was very much in agreement with Churchill's vision of the need to cooperate with the Soviet Union. He nevertheless cultivated all exile governments and administrations in London in order to establish for Poland an independent role after the war. © Bettmann/CORBIS.

**Figure 7. Communist leaders celebrating Walter Ulbricht's 70th Birthday, East Berlin, June 1963.**

Władysław Gomułka Polish party Secretary third from the left with Khrushchev next to him at the table. A year later, when Khrushchev was removed from power after the Cuban Crisis, Gomułka would complain to Brezhnev that Khrushchev had exploited Poland economically; had not been frank about his plans for German reunification and had risked a third world war over an issue as small as Cuba.







**Figure 8. Lech Wałęsa, the charismatic leader of the free trade union Solidarity speaking to fellow workers in August 1980.**

The establishment of a genuinely free workers' organization marked the first stage in, what became the gradual process of the dismantling of the Communist regime in Poland. © Bettmann/CORBIS.