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<p>Summary: Poland (from our special correspondent) - 1. Poland and the Treaty of Versailles. - 2. Conditions in Poland since the Armistice. - 3. The Bolshevik menace. - 4. Polish-Lithuanian questions. - 5. Ukrainians and Poles. - 6. Poland's political program. - 7. Soviet imperialist policy. - 8. The social goals of Bolshevism. - 9. The magnificent Polish counter-offensive.

<p>I do not know which French writer of the 18th century said there is a simple and infallible way to make a falsehood look like truth, but it is repeated hundreds of times. This maxim has been very widely applied during the war years and peace negotiations to bolster so-called propaganda. Also recently a newspaper in Rome, writing about the Pontiff’s plea in favor of Poland, repeated as indisputable truth the idea that an attack by Poland was the cause of the Bolshevik war. Now, before pronouncing a judgment, it is necessary to examine the factual circumstances that gave rise to the Russian-Polish conflict.

<p>1. The Treaty of Versailles recognized a free and independent Poland but did not properly create a Polish State. To create a State it is necessary, first of all, to give it boundaries, and it is even more necessary when, as in the case of Poland, the State does not have natural geographic boundaries.

<p>The Allied Supreme Council failed to determine the boundaries of the Polish State, either in the east, or in the west, or in the north, except for a the small part along the Baltic coast and Pomerania. In the west and south, the decision was turned over to four referendum votes, one of which, for the region of Teschen, posed a choice as against Czechoslovakia, and the other three, Upper Silesia, Marienwerder and Allenstein, posed a choice as against Germany.

<p>Now four referendums represent four vast fields of battle that aggravate exasperations and inflame the contending passions of the opposing peoples. Added to this were the results of the referendums, which were not done in the course of normal conditions in the life of the people, arousing enormous resentment over the changes from one political order to another. Moreover, in the events pertaining to Marienwerder and Allenstein, the referendum took place in the days when the Bolshevik tide swept upon Poland. Then in the east, not only did the Treaty of Versailles fail to determine boundaries, but it established nothing internally within these vast territories of mixed populations.

<p>2. Immediately after the Armistice, Poland found itself in extremely grave circumstances. Already in November 1918, that is in the week preceding the Armistice, its territories became the bridge of passage for the remnants of the stricken armies of Austria and Hungary that were returning from the Italian front in Galicia, as well as Germans being repatriated from the front lines on the Russian Front and Russians who were returning to their country. In the middle of this disorder the Ukrainians on the one hand attacked the Poles around Lvov in eastern Galicia, and on the other hand in the west, the Czechoslovaks were seeking to establish possession of the Teschen part of Silesia.

<p>As if that were not enough, the Bolshevik wave was aiming to break upon Poland. In October 1918 there were still German troops on Polish territory, and there was serious difficulty in disarming them and forcing them to leave Poland. The Polish leadership elements, divided into action committees that worked in full accord with the governments of the Allies, had not yet returned to Poland, but were still in foreign capitals. Thus it could be said without exaggeration that Poland had been the country worst flagellated by the War, but was also the one that received the most harm in the wake of the Armistice, while the population was shattered and exhausted by the sacrifices they were still enduring.

<p>In November 1918 Marshal Pilsudski, who is today the head of the Republic of Poland, had just been released from Magdeburg Prison, where the Germans had confined him in 1917, and by the will of the people he assumed the highest office, which could only be sustained in such serious circumstances by the full strength and energy of such a man.

<p>Meanwhile on all the borders of Poland threats from neighboring peoples were felt, as the Poles had a small army of 50,000 soldiers, short on gear and provisions, in the face of enemies who could put in the field forces of ten to twenty times that size.

<p>At Versailles there were such serious problems to resolve that the Allied Powers could not turn their attention to events developing in Poland and were content to rely on commissions. Finally, starting from Italy, help began to arrive in the form of “medical supplies," weapons and ammunition, in January 1919.

<p>These were the conditions in which Poland began its work of political reconstruction. Its patriotism and concord seemed like a miracle, as everyone who was involved in this work in Poland in 1919 was unanimous in admiring the results attained in an extremely short time by the superhuman accomplishment of an entire people.

<p>3. To liberate eastern Galicia and its capital of Lvov from the Ukrainian menace, the Poles had to provide for their defense in the territories of Grodno, Vilno and Minsk, which have mixed populations, in which however the Catholic Poles were the leading elements, for reason of numbers, culture and economic considerations. The Bolshevik peril was not at all dispelled, though it was rather far off during the first movements of the Polish Army, which advanced and grew larger and organized for this work all the legions that were created and formed as in France and Italy, where volunteers and Polish ex-prisoners of war streamed forth under the banner of the nation.

<p>The Paris Conference, as we have already said, had not defined the boundaries of Poland in the east, but had allowed full freedom to the Poles to develop their own actions in the territories that separated Russia from Poland proper, "expressly reserving the rights of Poland to assess its territories itself." These territories in fact were the cause of all the discord between Poland and Russia...

<p>4. It is noted that Lithuania was united with Poland toward the end of the 14th century to defend against the Teutonic Knights ... This union was maintained up until the dismemberment of Poland...

<p>But Lithuania in the historical sense does not correspond with Lithuania in the ethnographic sense, populated by Lithuanians properly so called (around 2 million), with minorities of Poles and Jews, occupying the northern part of the province of Suwalki, part of the province of Vilno, and the whole province of Kovno, which was entirely Lithuanian in character.

<p>The White Ruthenians, which are divided two groups, western and eastern …

The Poles, in the two years following the Armistice, tried in every way to arrive at an accord with the Lithuanians on a basis of full independence for ethnic Lithuanians. The bone of contention, however, was always the possession of the city of Vilno, the capital of historic Lithuania, which is inhabited however, by an overwhelming majority of Poles, with a minimal percentage of Lithuanians. The same thing can be said of the surrounding district, in which Poles are also the majority. In order to possess Vilno, the Lithuanians concluded an alliance with the Bolsheviks; but the Bolsheviks, after the Polish retreat, occupied Vilno and would not hand it over to the Lithuanians. The goal of the Bolsheviks is obvious: they want to "Bolshevize" Lithuania. Thus, between the two contending parties, Poles and Lithuanians, a third has intervened, who has reaped the harvest of their quarrel. Is it not, therefore, time to put an end to a vain competition, in the interests of both parties, and to join in a united work for the salvation of both countries and of Catholicism menaced by Bolshevism? The Lithuanians should stop hesitating over which state they choose to make an accord with. This is a matter of their very existence, which the Bolsheviks have shown they have no disposition to respect. Despite all the disappointments felt by the Poles in their relations with Lithuania, the Polish Government is always disposed to arrive at an agreement.

<p>5. The conflict between the Poles and the Ukrainians was even more serious. But it is no less true, as events have shown, that it also could be resolved. Indeed it seemed that the problem was in the course of being solved, but the solution itself has been the cause of the recent Bolshevik invasion of Poland. Because, in fact, the Poles, in their professed idea for such a solution, accidentally found themselves coming up against the Russian-Bolshevik program. But let us first look at some facts.

<p>The main area of disagreement between the Poles and Ukrainians is so-called eastern Galicia… The cities of eastern Galicia, in general, are Polish. The Dniester River divides eastern Galicia into two zones: the mixed Polish-Ruthenian, north of the Dniester, where the two ethnic groups are equal in numbers (and where the Poles have their great national center in Lvov) and that of Ruthenian Ukraine south of the Dniester, where the Polish minority approaches 29 percent.

<p>Therefore it cannot be said that Lvov is a Polish island in a Ruthenian sea, or that it is similar to an English Ulster in Catholic Ireland. Rather than a matter of an island, it is an inter-population of ethnic groups living together in free association for centuries.

<p>From the historic point of view, the older Russian historians such as Nestor affirmed that the Polish population of eastern Galicia was native to the area and were not immigrants; from the intellectual and cultural point of view, eastern Galicia owes everything to Poland.

<p>Economically, the Poles, when Galicia was part of Austria, paid taxes in all regions at 81.7 per cent and in eastern Galicia the percentage concerning Poles was 73.8…

<p>In 1918, it must be recalled, the Polish population of eastern Galicia showed itself to have a national consciousness, numerous, strong in energy, without ulterior motive, to defend against the pressures from the Ukrainians coming from Ukraine proper.

<p>The Allied Supreme Council, leaving the administration of the entire zone to the Poles, intended to guarantee autonomy to the Ukrainians on the basis of a special statute. This sort of mandate for the Poles, entrusted by the Council for 25 years, was made by a decision of the same Council on December 25, 1919 and suspended indefinitely in favor of Poland: everything that happened was motivated by the national and economic importance of eastern Galicia for Poland, and also in view of the sacrifices that the Poles had to make in favor of Ukraine, in the territory of Podolia and Ukraine proper, because outside the borders of eastern Galicia, the Polish element is scattered in Ukrainian territory, where it constitutes a small minority, which represents, however, an intellectual and economic force of the first order. Suffice to say that in Ukraine, in addition to owning great properties, the Poles are at the head of important commercial and industrial enterprises, which employ a large number of people and touch upon a number of extremely important interests of incalculable value, embracing not only owners but also industrial specialists, professionals, workers and farmers. Polish properties in Ukraine amount to 25 million square kilometers.

<p>This mixture of one people with another is explained by the facts of five centuries of shared history. The Polish-Ukrainian problem thus cannot be resolved other than by reciprocal sacrifices and concessions. A solution was not possible while Ukrainians and Poles were under Austrian rule, which had every interest in keeping them enemies and adversaries of each other, but once they had become the masters of their own destiny, they had a common interest in coming to an understanding.

<p>In fact, as to the conflict over Lvov, the Polish-Ukrainian negotiations lasted about a year and a half, and three proposals were advanced to establish the borders between Ukraine and the Polish State, and it is clear that two of these, agreed by the Ukrainians, included eastern Galicia within the borders of the Polish State. Thus a Polish-Ukrainian agreement was reached on April 25, 1920, concluded between General Petliura and the Polish Supreme Command. This agreement had as its foundation the assistance that the Poles offered to Petliura's government against the Bolsheviks.

<p>6. Between Poland and Russia a series of independent States arose, masters of their own destiny. To this end, the Poles proposed that these territories be vacated by the armies, Russian and Polish alike, to assure the population the freedom to express their will.

<p>This program was in contrast to the Soviet Government’s program of centralization and absorption, but this should not have offended them if the principles of independence they proclaimed for the people had been sincere.

<p>In addition to that, the Soviet Government itself, after the Brest-Litovsk Agreement and before the victory of the Allies caused the collapse of the Central Powers, officially denounced to Austria and Germany the treaties concerning the partition of Poland. By this denunciation, Russia was automatically brought back to the frontier lines that marked the boundaries of Poland in 1772. What reasons could the resurrected Polish nation have had to feel limited in its right to make agreements with its neighbors!

<p>The Allies, having set Poland’s boundaries only in the west, left it free in its movements and encouraged it with demonstrations of sympathy. Such encouragements coincided with the economic interests of all of Europe, because while the imports that could come from Bolshevik Russia were rather problematic, it would have been more convenient to receive them from an economically restored Ukraine for the benefit of the entire West. Thus it was in Europe’s best interests that these lands, which were subjected to Bolshevik misgovernment, should be liberated and become a source of common good. So it was not a spirit of imperialism that drove the Poles to help neighboring peoples against Bolshevik barbarism, but rather their traditional policy of conciliation and mutual recognition of freedom.

<p>Nevertheless this program was the spark that ignited the explosion of Soviet militaristic policy. It was a miscalculation by the Poles to trust in a mainly idealistic policy, or in the cooperation of the Ukrainian people, because it appears now that Petliura’s prestige among the Ukrainian people was not such as to assure the success of the enterprise, but it cannot be denied that it was a noble effort.

<p>7. On the other hand, the Polish offensive in the Ukraine was related to the military preparations of Bolshevik Russia. The Bolsheviks, as illustrated by events today, did not want to give up their active propaganda for Bolshevism in Poland and in western countries accessed through Poland. That should be strongly emphasized, because it was certainly not the Polish Government’s choice of Borysow as the place of negotiations that caused the Soviets’ refusal to arrive at a peace agreement, but rather the desire to gain time in order to push forward their military preparations and hurl upon Poland the masses summoned up from Asia to impose a Soviet regime. Poland therefore, partly out of the necessity of the historical moment, driven by the Bolshevik menace, and partly also because prompted by the Allies, was forced to pursue war, in order to be placed on a path of alliances with the neighboring nationalities and States situated between Russia and the Polish State, confident of gaining those territories for civilization and for the European economy and at the same time protecting itself from Bolshevism.

<p>This seemed the only way to force Russia to a lasting peace. But once Poland was basically engaged in this policy, Britain changed course and opened peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks to relieve their pressure on India, and France continued to encourage Poland in the undertaking.

<p>Only at the last moment, the French State, taking account of the logistical difficulties and especially the lack of munitions, counseled against the march on Kiev, while the Polish State, informed of the military preparations of the Bolsheviks, was of the opinion that there was no other way to derail the Russian offensive except by a move toward the Ukrainian capital. The Poles responded to criticisms by saying if they had not attacked and if the Bolsheviks had taken the initiative from their original lines, the Bolsheviks would have immediately invaded all of Poland, while by means of the Polish advance, the threat against the Polish ethnic territories was kept at bay for some time. Both theories are debatable, and it is not within our competence to render a judgment. What is certain is that events had taken for some time a disastrous turn for Poland, so that the Western Powers had only two paths to choose from: either impose a peace immediately at the time of the Spa Conference, when the danger was already manifest, or extend immediate and adequate aid to Poland.

<p>Instead the governments of Britain and France were caught up in futile battles of words, with diplomatic notes and telegrams, giving the Bolsheviks time to invade a Poland that was short on munitions. Thus Poland was made a plaything for the Soviets, who could not want anything better. But Poland, abandoned to her own devices, knew how to find in herself enough faith and enough strength to break the iron circle that was trying to choke her.

<p>8. The morals and political methods of the Bolsheviks are well-known today. The negotiations for the Armistice and the peace negotiations placed them again on display. The Bolsheviks had no intention of renouncing active propaganda for Bolshevism in Poland and in the rest of Europe through Poland. Bolshevism pursues two goals, the conquest of political territory and moral conquest. The first is nothing other than the pursuit of the former program of the Czarist schismatics, to gain control of all Slavic territory; the other, even more dangerous, goes beyond racial boundaries and strives to upset the foundations of Christian society and the family, overwhelming European peoples with the darkness of atheism and moral misery. It pretends to take up the defense of the people, and instead, with diabolical artifice, drives them onto the path to perdition of the soul and perdition of material well-being. Where Bolshevism passes by, there remains misery and famine.

<p>This is how the Polish Bishops expressed themselves about Bolshevism in their letter to the Bishops of the entire world, published in the month of July.

<blockquote>We are not fighting against the Russian nation, but against those who have trampled Russia and sucked their blood while dragging souls down in new conquests. Just as locusts, after destroying every sign of life in a place, fly off elsewhere, driven on for further works of destruction, so Bolshevism, having poisoned and plundered Russia, turns its design to Poland. Our spirits do not fail because we know the vitality of our nation, because we trust firmly in Divine Providence, but we feel completely isolated in this grave hour.

<p>Here at this moment we lift our voice to you, our venerable brother bishops, with the strong desire that this letter be disseminated throughout the world.

<p>And the threats of today are not against us alone. For the enemy that fights us, Poland is not in fact the final goal of their conquests: Poland is only the first stage and the bridge for the conquest of the world.

<p>And this is not in fact too strong a word about the conquest of the world that we send to you.

<p>Whoever knows how Bolshevism has also enveloped Nations more distant from Russia with a network of propaganda and intrigues; whoever knows how the Communist International is spread out through the world and even in governments, whoever knows the psychology of the people who direct this entire network of conspiracy, and whoever knows their methods, their teachings and their goals, such persons will understand and appreciate our words.

<p>All that Bolshevism proclaims, speaking of the people, of the destiny of the worker masses, of freedom, and of the dictatorship of the proletariat, all this teaching masks their hidden real goals from the eyes of the uninformed.

<p>Today everything has already been prepared for the conquest of the world. The organized forces in every country are only awaiting the signal to begin the battle; first and foremost, strikes are being continually planned to paralyze the organic life of the nations. The class struggle is being transformed into a paroxysm of hate, and with their international influence they are effectively able to impede any healthy reaction of public opinion and national self-defense.

<p>Poland stands as the last bulwark preventing the triumphal march of Bolshevism, and if this bulwark is breached the destructive waves will sweep over the entire world.

<p>These waves that threaten the world today instill real terror, because Bolshevism is the flowering of all the negative principles that were festering over the last century in the lower level of life and that attack the family, education, the social order and even science, which until recently was idolized.

<p>Bolshevism has only added action to these doctrines: it puts its principles into action by means of murder, bloodshed, dictatorship, and the despotism of a single personality. Along with doctrine and action, Bolshevism bears in its bosom a heart full of hate. Its hatred is directed first of all against Christianity, of which it is the very negation: it is directed against the cross of Christ and against his Church.

<p>We intend to speak in general of Europe and the modern world. For if the world wants to remain indifferent to the fate of the Church, of supernatural life, and of the Christian spirit, it still could not look with indifference upon the annihilation that threatens its own civilization, which was born from Christianity.

<p>That is why we turn to you, our brother bishops, with a plea for help. We are asking you neither for money, nor for munitions, nor for ranks of soldiers. We are not asking for those because we do not want war, but only peace, so long as this peace will not be a new conquering of our country and threat to the world. We want peace, peace is what we implore, and therefore what we ask of you, venerable brothers, is the arm of peace, and that is prayer.

<p>More than once the Catholic world has prayed for our country, but when has the occasion ever been more distressing? Prayer for Poland, venerable brothers, would multiply blessings for every Christian nation. For thanks to prayer, the threatened Catholic world will form ranks in an army that takes up the battle against that terrible and so extraordinarily well organized enemy; prayer will reinforce the Christian spirit that will be manifested in the world by imploring souls, and that will be opposed to the ambitions of those who want to dominate the world.

<p>In truth, Bolshevism is the living incarnation and manifestation on earth of the spirit of the Antichrist. This spirit betrays itself completely as it goes so far in its passionate desires for sacrilege upon the churches, the murder of priests, the merciless massacres of the Catholic population, and bestial torture and cruelty. Raising our voice today for Poland, we raise it for the whole world, and when we speak of ourselves, we speak at the same time for you also, brothers. At the end of the day, prayer carries with it divine mercy, it will awaken the conscience of the nations because this conscience, which had been awakened after the war, died again, and how quickly! The echo has still not died away of the invocations declaring that Bolshevism menaces the peace of the world, that it conquers at the cost of bloodshed, that it is a plague that is destructive of all life, and that no State that wants to survive can establish relationships with it or negotiate with it. The voice has still not died away that solemnly proclaimed this order of the day from governments and diplomats, and yet here Europe is beginning to bow at the feet of its relentless enemy. Whereas until recently Europe rejected any negotiations with Bolshevism, rather isolating it like a district struck by the plague, here today Europe itself is striving to find a way to recognize for the Bolsheviks a right of citizenship among the nations. Until now Europe stigmatized the spirit of Bolshevism as a harmful ferment for the world, and now it proclaims that for grain and for commerce it needs to free its conscience from a supposed hyper-sensibility. At first the nations did not hold back money, nor sacrifices, to stop the Bolsheviks, while today they have become so bold that they dare to offer their gold to the Powers. Until just a short while ago, the nations were sending armies and munitions to conquer the Bolsheviks, yet here today, they look with a cold eye upon Poland, which is bleeding in a terrible struggle, thus giving the impression that certain States, instead of isolating the eastern plague by means of a powerful Poland, want to see it small and weak.

<p>We add these details without any intention of entering into politics: we summarize them only as the real manifestations of moral change in Europe and the world. In truth, Europe of a few months ago, and Europe of today, do not resemble each other. The former, by the principles it espoused, becomes the judge of present-day Europe. May prayer lead souls to a deep remorse and fear: and with the resplendence of truth, may artificial sophistry be destroyed, and may the world be awakened to a new conscience and drawn to new spiritual forces.</blockquote>

<p>9. The appeal of the Polish bishops, and the prayers lifted up to the Lord by all the Church at the invitation of the Pope, did not return void. We have been able to assist this past week in a victory that is truly miraculous and that could surely never have occurred apart from the divine will.

<p>After they retreated more than four hundred kilometers under pressure from Bolshevik hordes advancing under their fluttering red flags; after the tired and nearly hopeless Polish armies were reduced to defending the walls of their capital, deprived of weapons and abandoned by the world; a strength suddenly descended upon them, and these same armies, with a sudden impulse, in the name of Christianity and their fatherland, lunged upon the enemy and put him to flight. All the bells of Warsaw greeted the miraculous victory and in all the churches thanks were returned to the Lord, who willed to save his faithful people and willed to give yet one more time a sign of his omnipotence.

<p>And the joy of the exultant hearts of the faithful was not the fierce joy of those who have taken down an opponent, but the deepest and sweetest joy of those who, though commiserating over the need for such great bloodshed, know that by this human sacrifice on the battlefield, Europe has been saved from the certain engulfment of its society in far more terrible and bloody massacres of civil war and the ruin of all that is healthy and moral in the world.

<p>These sentiments of Christian moderation, which inspired and pervaded Poland, appear now in the peace conditions proposed by Poland, and mainly in the first condition in which Poland proposes that negotiations be conducted on the principle that there be neither victors nor vanquished.

<p>This condition would be enough; it has long been preached and discussed but never put into action by any victorious people, and for this we should pay tribute to Poland, which is really demonstrating that their own political thought is informed by those principles set forth by our Holy Father, Benedict XV, during the long years of the most extreme travail of European life. Poland has paid attention to His word and has promptly received, we are certain, the fruit of their Christian virtue.