

## INDEPENDENCE REGAINED

The history of Poland in the modern era has been characterised by salient vicissitudes: outstanding victories and tragic defeats, soaring optimism and the deepest despair, heroic sacrifice and craven subservience. Underpinning all of these experiences and emotions, however, are the interrelated themes of national freedom, independence and sovereignty, which were sometimes lost, then regained, but never forgotten or abandoned. They, more than anything else, shaped Poland's destiny in the modern era. And if there is one single, fundamental point of reference, then it is unquestionably the Partitions of the eighteenth century which resulted in Poland's disappearance from the map of Europe for well over a century.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as the Polish State was constituted since the mid-sixteenth century, was for the next two hundred years one of the largest and most powerful in Europe, occupying a huge swathe of territory stretching from the area around Poznań in the west to far-off Muscovy in the east, and from Livonia in the north to the edge of the Ottoman Empire in the south. Famous kings, such as Stefan Batory (1575–86) and Jan Sobieski III (1674–96), and great landowning families, the Lubomirskis, Radziwiłłs, Zamoyskis, Czartoryskis and the like, played a leading role in moulding the economic, political and social life of the country and bringing it unprecedented international prestige. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the first unmistakable signs of decline appeared, and were accentuated by the emergence of ambitious and expansionist neighbours in Russia, Prussia and Austria. The balance of power in Central Europe swung towards these increasingly powerful empires, while the Polish Republic grew progressively and conspicuously weaker, culminating in her partition in 1772, 1793 and 1795. Thereafter, the so-called 'Polish Question' became an important item of European diplomacy, at least in the first half of the nineteenth century, only to be resurrected during the course of the First World War.

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The reasons for Poland's collapse at the end of the eighteenth century may be explained with reference not merely to the rapacity of her neighbours, but also to her long-standing, but growing and unresolved, internal weaknesses. For a start, the Commonwealth was rather more of an unwieldy federation than a unified, cohesive state. It is very doubtful whether King Jan Sobieski's successors, the Saxons Augustus II (1697–1733) and Augustus III (1733–63), had Polish interests at heart. They were increasingly subservient to Russia, who had been behind their election in the first place, and who came to regard Poland as her rightful sphere of influence, if not domination. A Russian protectorate was *de facto* established over Poland as early as 1717. Under the Saxon kings, Poland became a byword throughout Europe for economic decline and political disorder – in fact, the 'Republic of Anarchy'. Poland was a major battleground for wars, including the War of Polish Succession (1733–5) and later the Seven Years' War (1756–63), and suffered widespread devastation. The towns fell into serious decline, while the peasantry, constituting the bulk of the population, led a miserable existence.

The Polish monarchy had always been elected by the nobility, so that instead of a smooth transition from one king to another, royal elections were occasions for endless and corrupting intrigue. Above all, this system permitted foreign powers, notably Russia, to intervene on behalf of a favoured candidate, as occurred in 1697, 1733 and 1764. The outcome was a series of weak kings ultimately beholden to Russia and her interests. Moreover, the Polish parliament (*Sejm*) was prevented from playing a constructive role in the affairs of state, not only because of Russian interference, but also, to a large extent, because of the exercise of the *Liberum Veto*. In practice, this meant that every member of parliament had the right of veto. Thus, it required only one, lone voice of dissent to kill off any piece of legislation. As there was no middle ground between total harmony and total disagreement, parliament was frequently paralysed and ineffective. Between 1697 and 1762, for example, only 12 out of 37 parliamentary sessions enacted legislation. Naturally, Russia was one of the staunchest defenders of the *Liberum Veto*, as was also the nobility (*szlachta*), who selfishly wanted to keep royal power at the centre to a minimum. As a result, control of government in the provinces lay in the hands of the most powerful magnates. Unfortunately, they, with a well-deserved reputation for being incorrigibly disputatious, were hardly a stabilising influence, so that the country as a whole was often plunged into turmoil. Compounding this dismal situation was the practice of confederacy, by which a noble who had a grievance of any kind could assert his case by force. This right allowed, in effect, a legalised form of civil war. It was invoked on a number of occasions, most notably in

the Confederacy of the Bar (1768–72), causing lengthy periods of wasteful conflict. All the time, of course, Poland's enemies were eager for their own ends to encourage the continuation of these deleterious practices.

It is not surprising that, thanks to calculated foreign interference and internal weakness, by the time the Saxon era of kingship was brought to an ignominious close by the election in 1764 of Stanisław-August Poniatowski (1732–98) as king, Poland had already lost much of her independence and integrity as a state. Most contemporary observers were convinced at first that Poland's fall from grace would proceed further, particularly as Poniatowski owed his elevation to Catherine the Great of Russia (1729–96), whose lover he had once been. However, although his reign did indeed result in the disaster of partition, the king aided an attempt by some Poles such as Stanisław Konarski (1700–73) who were influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment to implement a programme of reform in the Polish State with the eventual aim of restoring its full sovereignty. A Commission for National Education, the first embryonic ministry of education in Europe, was created in 1773 to oversee the establishment of a new school and university system. Public services and agencies, including the army, police, judiciary, press, local government and the post, were modernised to an extent, while encouragement was given to the arts, principally music, painting and architecture.

Above all, plans were laid for constitutional reform and these were designed to restore political stability. However, this is where the ubiquitous Russians drew the line. They were simply not prepared to tolerate any reform that might threaten their hold over Poland, a view vigorously shared by Prussia and Austria. All three self-styled but spurious 'Enlightened Despots' used the prospect of this constitutional reform as a pretext for carrying out the First Partition, by which Poland was deprived of about 30 per cent of her territory and 35 per cent of her population of about 14 million. The episode underlined the severe constraints on Poland's capacity for independent action, and simultaneously the vulnerability of her position *vis-à-vis* rapacious neighbours, especially when they acted in consort.

Very limited reforms of a non-political nature continued in Poland after 1772, and there were still a small number of Poles who, acutely resentful of external meddling in their affairs, were on the alert for circumstances more propitious to bolder measures. That type of situation did not arise, in fact, until the later 1780s, when Russia was distracted by her conflict with Turkey in 1787–92 and Sweden in 1788–90, and when Poland began to savour something of the revolutionary atmosphere emanating from France. For there is no doubt that reform-minded circles in Poland were

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greatly encouraged by the developments that resulted in the Fall of the Bastille and the eruption of the French Revolution. Many Poles, led by their flawed but patriotic king, immediately looked upon republican, particularly Jacobin, ideas as a means of reversing the decline and humiliations of the previous decades and of re-establishing Poland as a truly independent and liberal country once more.

The major achievement of the Polish reformers, building on the limited advances of the 1770s and 1780s and emboldened by the French Revolution, was the constitution of 3 May 1791, the first written constitution in Europe. It was a noticeably liberal document by contemporary standards, promising a raft of political, legal, educational and administrative measures that would benefit all sections of society. The constitution also upheld the long-standing Polish tradition of religious toleration, above all towards the Jews, who had originally found a welcome home in Poland in the Middle Ages. The overall aim of the constitution was to lay the basis for bringing Poland into a new era of hope and recovery as a hereditary but progressive constitutional monarchy. Both the destructive *Liberum Veto* and the right of confederacy were abolished. A reconstituted parliament with voting by majority and ministerial responsibility was to be the prime source of authority. Civil rights were extended to the peasantry and townspeople, a Polish army was to be set up for defence, and local government was to be streamlined.

These lofty if understandable ideas duly attracted the disapproval and alarm of the conservative partitionist powers, who regarded this sequence of developments in Poland as an intolerable revolutionary challenge to the entire old order in Europe. They acted accordingly. Russia took the lead in declaring war, with the avowed aim of destroying the 1791 constitution and everything that had helped pave the way for its introduction. Confronted once again by overwhelming odds, the Poles could not prevent the inevitable outcome: a Second Partition in 1793 which took yet another substantial amount of territory and population from Poland. Outraged and still inspired by the ongoing radicalisation of the revolution in France, marked by the execution of the king, Louis XVI, the Poles made in the following year a final, desperate effort in a national rising under the leadership of Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817). Proclaiming the slogan 'Liberty, Equality, Independence', this patriotic *levée en masse* in the classic French revolutionary fashion came close to realising its objectives of national independence and social revolution, by which the peasantry was to be freed from serfdom. The political price of glorious military failure was catastrophic: a Third Partition in 1795 which erased Poland from the map of Europe altogether, while the Russian, Prussian and Austrian empires expanded still further at her expense.

Even if much of the aristocracy became resigned and fatalistic, many other Poles never lost the vision and aspiration of national independence. In the short term, this found expression in the many Polish soldiers who enlisted in Napoleon's armies across the continent, fighting for the freedom of others as well as their own. They established a reputation for being the bravest of the brave, personified by Prince Józef Poniatowski (1763–1813), and another of them, General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski (1755–1818), even composed a lilting *mazurka*, with defiant lyrics written by Józef Wybicki (1747–1822), which was later to become the national anthem. Poles made up the largest foreign contingent of the *Grande Armée* which marched into Russia in 1812, despite the fact that Napoleon had not fulfilled Polish hopes with the creation under his control of the small Duchy of Warsaw in 1807. His disastrous Russian campaign and subsequent defeat at Waterloo also signalled the end, for the time being at least, of Polish hopes for independence, a fate emphasised by the decisions of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 to re-establish much of the *ancien régime* across Europe. As a mere token gesture, the congress allowed the so-called Kingdom of Poland, which was a fraction of the size of pre-partition Poland, to be set up under Russian tutelage, as well as the even more insignificant Republic of Kraków. The tsar was king of Poland, and a large Russian army was stationed in Poland. The other partitionist powers retained, of course, a strong presence in the Polish lands.

Poland provides a clear example of a European country which responded enthusiastically to the clarion call of the French Revolution for liberation from oppressive, reactionary subjugation to foreign states but which also ultimately had to acknowledge superior military power and admit defeat. The romantic-insurrectionary tradition of the 1790s in Poland, which had been sustained by a growing national consciousness, may have been defeated but it was by no means extinguished. On the contrary, it continued after 1815 to inspire successive generations of Poles to explore all possible means of reclaiming their freedom and sovereignty. At the same time, the 'Polish Question' assumed its place on the agenda of international diplomacy throughout the long nineteenth century, though with varying degrees of importance, until a solution was finally located in 1918.

The road towards that *dénouement* was complex and often discouraging for Poles, not least because the movement for independence spawned various groups and personalities both within and outside Poland with their own particular approaches. Consequently, internecine squabbling emerged as a distinctive feature which was eagerly exploited by Poland's enemies. However, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a certain strand of Polish opinion, encouraged by the growth of Romantic nationalism in Europe, still supported the idea and practice of an armed uprising,

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especially against Russia, as the way forward. This view was strengthened when the relatively liberal reforms introduced by Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) after 1815 in the congress kingdom were increasingly replaced in the late 1820s by reactionary measures by his successor, Tsar Nicholas I (1796–1855).

The principal and most famous episodes within the insurrectionist tradition, the November Rising in 1830, the Galician *jacquerie* in 1846, and the January Rising in 1863, all ended in failure, triggering the emigration abroad, invariably to France, as with the ‘Great Emigration’ of 1831, of many of the most active and talented Poles. Oppression in Poland intensified. The insurrectionist strategy, it then seemed to most Poles, was no longer a viable option, and in any event, the Polish cause ceased attracting official sympathy from European governments and peoples. *Realpolitik* dictated that as a united Germany emerged under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–98) after 1871, as the Habsburgs settled on a new, apparently more stable constitutional basis following the 1867 *Ausgleich*, and as Russia remained powerful, the Poles would have to find other, as yet untried, means of regaining their independence in a new era.

In the face of the inexorable processes of Russification and Germanisation from the 1860s and 1870s, Poles generally sought to sustain their hopes through a more pronounced emphasis on what had already emerged in the 1840s as a programme of ‘Organic Work’. Overtly non-political, influenced philosophically by the rationalist empiricism of Warsaw Positivism, and inspired by a messianic vision of Poland as the ‘Christ of Nations’, the programme stressed the need to cherish and develop the Polish language, literature, education, social norms and economy as far as was possible within the restrictive framework of partition. The ultimate goal was an inclusive, modernised, anti-obscurantist Poland. It involved necessarily the concept and reality of ‘tri-loyalism’, a temporary and expedient acceptance of, even collaboration with, the partitionist powers.

During the twenty years or so after the 1863 Rising, therefore, impressive advances were recorded in the main spheres of ‘Organic Work’, so that a genuine sense of Polishness was kept alive and even extended to more and more of the peasantry. The Catholic Church, to which the mass of Poles owed allegiance, played a pivotal role, especially as almost all other Polish institutions and organisations had been forbidden in Russian Poland. The Church, particularly in the face of the *Kulturkampf* and colonisation initiatives in the Polish-populated eastern provinces of the German Reich, provided the essential ingredient of spiritual and moral leadership to the Polish nation, though was criticised by some as being too willing to accept the political status quo in the Russian partition.

As a whole, however, there can be little doubt that ‘Organic Work’ was a multifaceted phenomenon which contributed significantly to the longer-term aim of achieving independence for Poland. It sustained a sense of optimism during a period when national morale was very low, and it also allowed the creative energies of Poles to be channelled in a constructive manner. It also gave rise to a new leadership class, an urban, bourgeois intelligentsia dedicated to perpetuating the values of the *szlachta*. None the less, ‘Organic Work’ could not last forever in a Polish and European environment that was rapidly changing in response to industrialisation, urbanisation, and the emergence of fresh ideas and militant ideologies in the last quarter of the century. Of the latter, nationalism and socialism, in particular, exerted, in their different ways, a profound influence on the development of the Polish movement for independence.

The foremost exponent of modern Polish nationalism was the political movement that started life in 1893 as the National League and which four years later was remodelled as the National Democratic Movement, soon to be popularly referred to as the *Endecja*, with Roman Dmowski (1864–1939) as its leader and main ideologue. Dmowski, helped by a number of other right-wing, nationalist thinkers such as Zygmunt Balicki (1858–1916) and Jan Ludwik Popławski (1854–1908), sought to define the philosophical and political ideology of the nationalists in numerous writings and publications, of which Dmowski’s ‘Thoughts of a Modern Pole’ (1903) is perhaps the best known. They felt it was important to clarify who should be considered Polish and what was the physical extent of ‘Poland’, and to establish precisely what their movement stood for.

The National Democrats asserted the right to have a ‘Poland for the Poles’ in which non-Polish peoples would play a subordinate role, though some of them, such as Ukrainians and Byelorussians, but not Germans or Jews, could be assimilated over time into Polish society. Poland was to have a conservative, Catholic ethos in deference to predominant Polish attitudes, and Poland was to aspire to the status of a Great Power, as she had been in earlier centuries. In political terms, the stridently anti-German *Endecja* believed that as the insurrectionist tradition was now obsolete, the most feasible option was to secure as much autonomy as possible from Russia as an essential preliminary stepping-stone to full independence in the longer term. Its representatives in the Duma after 1905 promoted, therefore, a policy of loyal co-operation with the tsar. In addition, in view of the prominence allotted by the nationalists to the role of the Jews in Polish society, anti-Semitism was widely and rightly perceived to be a major characteristic of the *Endecja*, as its boycott in 1912 of Jewish businesses in Warsaw as part of an electoral wrangle underlined. On this basis, the nationalists attracted a broad spectrum of support from across

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the three partitions, from middle-class professionals, artisans, better-off peasants, patriotic youths, to many Catholic clergy.

Alternatives to the nationalists existed, of course, on the left, with particular reference to the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), which was established in 1892 and whose most notable leader was to be Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), and more radical groups, such as, from 1898, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL). These disparate groups at least subscribed to one fundamental point: they were vehemently anti-tsarist. For Piłsudski, his sense of Polish patriotism transcended his socialism, and he firmly believed in the need to engage in armed conflict to overthrow tsardom and realise the goal of an independent, socialist Poland. He was the heir of the insurrectionist tradition and invited all Poles, including Polish Jews, to answer his rallying call. Consequently, quite a few of his comrades and even his closest associates in the PPS were of Jewish background, which only served to deepen the *Endecja*'s hostility towards him personally and the socialist movement as a whole. Piłsudski's banishment to Siberia from 1887 to 1892 for his political activity only hardened his resolve to effect radical change in Poland's position.

If Dmowski and Piłsudski and their respective parties largely constituted the new and most visible face of Polish politics by the turn of the century, neither seemed likely to succeed, such was the tight grip still of the partitionist powers over Poland, while only the most modest of gains and concessions for Poles had been recorded by Polish deputies in the Duma, the German Reichstag and the Austrian Reichsrat. Moreover, both the nationalist and socialist movements, bitter enemies that they were, were confronted, despite a growing sense of Polish national identity and heightened cultural and paramilitary activity in Galicia, by the apathy towards politics of a majority of Poles, who were far more concerned with everyday matters in an atmosphere of continuing, if somewhat modified, repression. The reality that partitioned Poland was a mosaic of variegated and often divisive economic, social, political, ideological, ethnic and religious elements, according to local and regional circumstances, created what seemed like an intractable impasse over the question of independence. That stalemate was broken, not from within Poland, but only from the events that culminated in the outbreak of the First World War.

Piłsudski, who had been predicting for several years that a major conflict would engulf the leading states of Europe and that this would at last create an opportunity for Poles to seize their independence, responded in the best way he knew how – by forming the Polish legions to fight the Russians on the side of the Central Powers, and thereby demonstrate a military capability on the part of Poles which would mark an indispensable step

towards their independence. For the nationalists, the military option was simply not a serious consideration. Instead, Dmowski pinned his hopes on diplomatic manoeuvring to secure his more limited goal of autonomy from Russia, which meant, at least initially, supporting Russia and the Western Powers against Germany and the Habsburgs.

The political and military complexities of the war inevitably brought about changes to the paths chosen initially by Piłsudski and Dmowski. For the former, the military option proved to be of very limited value and, of course, he was imprisoned by the Germans during the last year of the war. For Dmowski, his Polish National Committee, which was set up in 1917, was able to gather a certain but hardly conclusive degree of support in the corridors of Allied power in Paris, London and Washington. Meanwhile, the partitionist powers had from the beginning of the conflict sought the support of their respective Polish subjects by making vague, hastily conceived promises of autonomy or quasi-independence. A striking example was the German and Austrian emperors' proclamation of 1916 restoring a semi-independent Kingdom of Poland in union with them. Later, in Warsaw, the German occupation authorities made strenuous efforts to enlist Polish support by setting up a number of governmental bodies, including a Council of State and a Regency Council. Both of these proved to be singularly ineffectual.

The decisive breakthrough as far as the cause of Polish independence was concerned came with the collapse of the tsarist autocracy in early 1917 and the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution six months later, and as a result of the actions of the United States and its President, Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924). His conversion to the Polish cause was motivated primarily by American interests, of course, but also owed much to his high-principled personal sense of justice and humanity, from which evolved the notion of national self-determination, as well as to the more pragmatic influence of the renowned international pianist and staunch Polish patriot, Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941). Paderewski's celebrity status had allowed him to move in the most exclusive social and political circles in the United States, and through friends such as the presidential confidant Colonel Edward House, he managed to establish a close and friendly relationship with the President. Wilson first gave public intimation of his support for an independent Poland in January 1917, which was then firmed up a year later when he issued his Fourteen Points as the foundation for a lasting peace in Europe: Point Thirteen referred explicitly to Poland.

Less than six months later, the Western Allies recognised Poland as 'an Allied belligerent nation' and endorsed Wilson's commitment to an independent Poland. The collapse in November 1918 of the remaining former partitionist powers, Germany and the Habsburg Empire, removed

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the last major obstacle to long-nurtured Polish dreams being fulfilled. The Poles themselves were now ready and eager to seize the opportunity for a momentous change in their fortunes. The Paris Peace Conference in 1919 provided the political and diplomatic framework within which the 'Polish Question' could be finally and satisfactorily resolved.

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### Document 1

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*From a manifesto of the National League to the people of Russia, Warsaw, 1894:*

One hundred years of oppression have not weakened our strength, have not made us doubt our faith in the manifestation of the ideals of truth, justice, liberty, equality, and brotherhood of nations. With or without you, in accordance with or against your intentions, we will continue to conduct our struggle for our freedom and yours. The moment will come when the enslaved nations will arise in unison, an uprising of all the oppressed and exploited. And there will be no more strong or weak, slaves or masters, nationalities without rights or states artificially held together . . . The struggle for an independent Poland is a struggle for a free Russia.

**Source: W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Narodowa Demokracja, 1887–1918: fakty i dokumenty* (Warsaw: Zjednoczona Polska, 1933), pp. 101–2**

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### Document 2

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*Józef Piłsudski on the Catholic Church's attitude to Polish independence, May 1895:*

The higher Catholic clergy take part in a dinner given by Hurko [Russian Governor of Warsaw] . . . the Archbishop [Wincenty] Popiel [of Warsaw] confirms in Russian the oath of fidelity to the new tsar, and Father Dudkiewicz in Dąbrowa [a major industrial district] implores his parishioners from the pulpit not to learn to read, because they would then be able to get to know the contents of socialist pamphlets . . . This is the Polish clergy, the ally of tsarist rule in our country, and the loyal defender of our exploiters. It might have been thought that a despotic government, especially a foreign one, would have been met with decisive opposition . . . But where?

**Source: From the socialist paper *Robotnik*, May 1895**

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**Document 3**

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*Józef Piłsudski on his political ideals:*

The People's Republic, which we will build after casting off the Muscovite yoke, will be a republic of brotherhood and community, where the door to happiness and freedom will be fully open for all and where the welfare of its citizens will take precedence. Instead of the right of property, we will introduce another right – 'all is for all'. Instead of a government, we will declare unrestricted freedom for everyone . . . Instead of a multitude of duties which are presently imposed by the state, we will acknowledge only one duty, that of brotherhood and mutual help. The achievement of this kind of republic is the ultimate aim and major task of the working class. It is our leading principle, our ideal.

**Source: From the socialist paper *Robotnik*, April 1897**

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**Document 4**

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*Roman Dmowski defines a Pole and Poland:*

We are a nation, a single, indivisible nation, because we have a feeling of our unity, we have a common, collective consciousness, a common national spirit. That national spirit has been nurtured through centuries of common state existence, and is a feeling of unity in the fight for a common existence, in success and collective failure, in the aspiration to collective aims, a feeling of distinctiveness from the alien traditions of neighbours. That national spirit, created through a long process of history, finds in history the justification for its existence and its hopes. Clearly, 'historical rights' is not an empty phrase, not an empty formula without meaning. Yes, we are one nation, because we are united by a common feeling, a common national thought, and finally a common will directed towards one national aim that every Pole, even if only poorly educated, is aware of.

*And further:*

For us, Poland is above all the Polish nation, with its culture and tradition, with a separate soul and separate civilising needs; it is a living, organic union of people having common needs and interests in a certain area, a

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union demanding specific duties, including personal sacrifice, and work for collective needs and struggle in defence of common interests. The nation is a loose collection of individuals, groups, or strata, having nothing more in common than the fact that they live on one land, that they speak one language. They are not bound by deeper moral ties, they do not have common needs, nor common duties above the needs of justice . . . We demand of everyone that in relations between their nation and foreign nations, they feel above all that they are Poles.

**Source: R. Dmowski in the journal *Przegląd Wszechpolski*,  
March 1892 and November 1902**

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### Document 5

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*Roman Dmowski in 1902 on the Jews:*

. . . In the character of this race so many different values, strange to our moral constitution and harmful to our life, have accumulated that assimilation with a larger number of [them] would destroy us, replacing with decadent elements those young creative foundations upon which we are building the future.

*And further, in 1913:*

There has not been anything so contrary to conservative principles, so hostile to them, as the programme of the assimilation of Jews, of bringing them into the midst of Polish society . . . A Jew cannot be a conservative in European society, even if for some reason he should decide to be one. The whole tradition of European society is alien to him, contrary to all that the Jewish soul has absorbed during countless generations. He treats the entire past of European peoples with disgust, harbours hatred towards their religion, looks upon every hierarchy . . . as usurping the place of the 'chosen people'.

Instinctively, the Jew seeks to destroy in his European environment respect for tradition, attachment to religion, recognition of hierarchy; he besmirches and ridicules all that which for every honest conservative is sacred . . . The incursion of a large wave of Jews into our life has resulted, in those social circles which have become connected with them, in such destruction of all preservative characteristics, such rebellion against one's own national tradition, such decay in religious feelings and even basic respect for religion . . . that it has in a sense threatened us with

barbarisation. If all of society were to succumb to this influence, we would actually lose our capacity for societal life.

**Source: R. Dmowski, *Myśli Nowoczesnego Polska* (London: Koło Młodych Stronnictwa Narodowego, 1953, 7th edn), p. 91;  
R. Dmowski, *Upadek Myśli Konserwatywnej*, in *Pisma* (Częstochowa: Antoni Gmachowski, 1938), pp. 118–19**

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## Document 6

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*The Polish Socialist Party on anti-Semitism:*

Comrades!

The understanding and solidarity of the workers are – without regard to divisions among them or to differences of origin and religion – the best means for ensuring the victory of our cause and for liberating the working masses from all kinds of coercion. The tsarist government is well aware of this, and tries to weaken our unity by inciting racial and religious hatreds . . . This appalling tactic has been applied in Poland for many years. But our proletariat is too experienced to fall for such a trick . . . However, the government's policy is also supported by all those for whom the class struggle is a permanent affront . . . Catholic priests, Jesuits and National Democrats are all spreading hatred of the Jews. It is perfectly understandable, of course, that they should be angry at the role Jews are playing in all revolutionary movements. But it is both naïve and stupid of them to imagine that we also share their hatred. Jewish blood . . . has cemented in a strong bond the various elements of the proletariat. In our ranks, we recognise neither Jew nor German nor Russian, but only workers attacking the tsarist monster for freedom and human happiness.

Long live international workers' solidarity! Shame on the dark forces of Reaction!

**Source: Declaration by a cell of the Polish Socialist Party  
in Łódź, July 1905**

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### Document 7

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*Józef Piłsudski's proclamation to his fellow-Poles at the start of the First World War:*

The decisive hour has struck. Poland ceases being a slave and will alone determine her fate. She will build her future by throwing the weight of her armed forces into the balance. Detachments of the Polish army have already crossed the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, restoring it to its real owner – the Polish people – who caused it to become fruitful and rich. They take possession of it in the name of the supreme authority of the National Government. To the entire nation we bring release from its chains, and to every class the right to develop in freedom. The entire nation should now rally behind the National Government. Only traitors will stand aside, and for them we will have no mercy.

**Source: J. Piłsudski, commander-in-chief of the Polish army, 6 August 1914.**  
**Cited in K. W. Kumaniecki, *Odbudowanie Państwa* (Warsaw: Biblioteka Polska, 1924), p. 12**

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### Document 8

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*Proclamation of the Grand Duke Nicholas (1856–1929), commander-in-chief of the Russian Army, 14 August 1914:*

Poles! The time has come when the dream of your fathers and forefathers will at last be realised. A century and a half ago, the living body of Poland was torn into pieces, but her soul has not perished. She lives in the hope that the time will come for the resurrection of the Polish nation and its fraternal union with all Russia. The Russian armies bring you glad tidings of this union. May the barriers which have divided the Polish people be united under the sceptre of the Russian emperor. Under this sceptre, Poland will come together, free in faith, in language, and in self-government. From you Russia expects an equal consideration of the rights of those nations with which history has linked you. With open heart and with hand fraternally outstretched, great Russia comes to you . . . The morning star of a new life is rising for Poland.

**Source: J. Holzer and J. Molenda, *Polska w Pierwszej Wojnie Światowej* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1963), pp. 48ff.**

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**Document 9**

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*The response to the outbreak of war of several Polish political parties, including the National Democrats, and of many prominent Poles, was:*

[We] welcome the proclamation of His Imperial Highness to the Poles . . . as an act of momentous historical importance, and believe firmly that after the end of the war the promises expressed therein will be realised . . . that the body of Poland, torn to pieces a century and a half ago, will be reunited . . . The blood of her sons shed in the common struggle against Germany will constitute in equal measure a sacrifice offered on the altar of the resurrected fatherland.

Deeply moved by the proclamation of Your Imperial Highness, who declares to us that the valiant Russian Army, unsheathing its sword in defence of all Slavs, fights also for the holy cause of our nation, the restoration of a united Poland, the unity of all her disjointed parts under the sceptre of His Imperial Majesty, [we] representatives of Polish political parties and social groups strongly believe that the blood of Poland's sons, shed together with the blood of Russia's sons in the struggle with the common enemy, will constitute the best guarantee of a new life in peace and friendship for the two Slavonic nations.

On this historic day of the proclamation of such importance for the Polish nation, we are filled with an ardent desire for the victory of the Russian Army, which is under the most illustrious command of Your Imperial Highness, and we await its complete triumph on the battlefield.

We beg Your Imperial Highness to place at the feet of His Majesty the Emperor these wishes and our sentiments of loyalty as Russian subjects.

**Source: *Kurier Warszawski*, 15 August and 24 September 1914**

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**Document 10**

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*Resolution of the radical leftist party, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, January 1916:*

The development of the war has proved that the epoch of national states is over . . . the Polish proletariat has never made national independence one of its aims. The proletariat has sought to destroy not the existing state boundaries but the character of the state as an instrument of class and national oppression. In view of what has happened in the war, the

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advancement of the slogan of independence as a means of struggle against national oppression would not only be a harmful utopia, but would also constitute a repudiation of the basic principles of socialism. The right of self-determination is impracticable in capitalist society and unnecessary under socialism. Under socialism, cultural autonomy would be wholly adequate. The working class of Poland rejects all pleas for the 'defence of the Fatherland'. The proletariat of Poland will fight neither for the unification of Poland nor for independence . . . The Polish workers will struggle, in solidarity with the international proletariat, for a social revolution, which is the only possible solution to social and national problems.

**Source: *Gazeta robotnicza*, No. 25, January 1916**

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### Document 11

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*Józef Piłsudski on the Polish fighting spirit, 1916:*

In 1914, I was not concerned with settling the details of the military question in Poland, but simply with this: was the Polish soldier to remain a mystical entity deprived of flesh and blood? In a great war fought on Polish soil, when a soldier with his bayonet and uniform would penetrate to every cottage and farm of our countryside, I wanted the Polish soldier to be something more than a pretty picture often looked at secretly in corners by well-brought-up children. I wanted Poland, which had forgotten the sword so entirely since 1863, to see it flashing in the air in the hands of her own soldier.

**Source: J. Piłsudski, *The Memoirs of a Polish Revolutionary and Soldier*, ed. D. Gillie (London: Faber & Faber, 1931), p. 186**

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### Document 12

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*The Two Emperors' Proclamation to Poland, 5 November 1916:*

His Majesty the German emperor, and His Majesty the Austrian emperor and apostolic king of Hungary, sustained by their firm confidence in the final victory of their arms, and guided by the wish to lead to a happy future the Polish districts which by their brave armies were snatched with heavy sacrifices from Russian power, have agreed to form from these districts

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an independent state with an hereditary monarchy and a constitution. The more precise regulation of the frontiers of the Kingdom of Poland remains reserved. In union with both the Allied Powers, the new kingdom will find the guarantees which it desires for the free development of its strength. In its own army, the glorious traditions of the Polish Army of former times and the memory of our brave Polish fellow-combatants in the great war of the present time will continue to live. Its organisation, training and command will be regulated by mutual agreement.

Giving due consideration to the general political conditions prevailing in Europe and to the welfare and safety of their own countries and nations, the Allied monarchs express the confident hope that Polish wishes for the evolution of a Polish state and for the national development of a Polish kingdom will now be fulfilled.

The great realm which the western neighbours of the Kingdom of Poland will have on their eastern frontier will be a free and happy state, enjoying its own national life. And they will welcome with joy the birth and prosperous development of the state.

**Source: Schulthess' *Europäischer Geschichtskalender*  
(Nördlingen: Beck, 1916), II, p. 441**

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**Document 13**

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*From Roman Dmowski's 'Memorandum on the Territory of the Polish State', 26 March 1917:*

As the war progressed, the chances of a Russian solution of the Polish problem gradually vanished. The chief reason lay in . . . the character and limitations of Russian policy itself . . . Her Polish policy . . . became simply incomprehensible, and showed a lack of consistency . . . Russia has treated the Polish problem exclusively as her own domestic matter. Now, nobody in Poland and only a small minority in Russia believes in the settlement of Poland's future by Russia.

As the German solution of the Polish problem is unacceptable as far as the Allies are concerned, for it would mean the most important step in the conquest of the whole of Central Europe by Germany, only the establishment of an Independent Polish State remains. That state must be sufficiently large and strong, it must be able to be economically independent of Germany, which means having an outlet to the sea and the rich coalfields of Silesia, and it must be a sovereign state with its own foreign policy . . .

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The territory of the future state cannot be defined either on a strictly historical or purely linguistic basis. A re-creation of Poland in its historical frontiers of 1772 would hardly be possible today, and would not produce a very strong state. The basis of the strength of Poland is the territory where the mass of the population speaks Polish, is conscious of its Polish nationality, and is attached to the Polish cause. This territory is not restricted to the limits of the Poland of 1772. There are Polish provinces in Germany and Austria which did not belong to Poland at the time of the Partition, but where the mass of the population not only speaks Polish but is Polish in its ideas and feelings. These are: Upper Silesia, the southern part of East Prussia . . . and part of Austrian Silesia (Principality of Teschen) . . . On the other hand, in the Russian Empire, to the east of the Polish-speaking country, there is a large territory with a population of 25 million which belonged to old Poland and where the Poles are in a minority . . . It is true that the Polish minority represents culture and wealth, that Polish civilisation in spite of the antagonism of the Russian government is predominant there . . . None the less, the masses of that territory would present a field for anti-Polish agitation, and might become . . . a great danger to the solidity of the Polish State.

. . . the most desirable territory of the future Polish State would comprise: Austrian Poland (Galicia and half of Austrian Silesia [Teschen]); Russian Poland (the Kingdom of Poland and the governments of Kovno, Wilno, Grodno, parts of Minsk and Volhynia); and German Poland (. . . Poznan and West Prussia with Danzig . . . Upper Silesia and the southern area of East Prussia). Perhaps the most difficult task is to wrest from Germany her part of Poland . . . for it would mean for her the destruction of the great historical work founded by Frederick the Great, the real author of the destruction of Poland.

Source: Public Record Office, Kew: FO371/3000-63741

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### Document 14

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*The Petrograd Soviet issues a declaration to the Polish people, 28 March 1917:*

The Tsarist regime, which in the course of the last one and a half centuries has been oppressing the Polish and the Russian people at the same time, has been overthrown by the combined forces of the proletariat and the army.

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Notifying the Polish people of this victory of freedom . . . the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies declares that Russian democracy stands for the recognition of the national political self-determination of peoples, and proclaims that Poland has the right to complete independence as a sovereign state in national and international affairs.

We send our fraternal greetings to the Polish people, and wish it success in the forthcoming struggle for the establishment of a democratic, republican order in independent Poland.

**Source: J. Pajewski, *Historia powszechna 1871–1918* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967), pp. 420–1**

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**Document 15**

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*Proclamation of the Russian Provisional Government to the Poles, 30 March 1917:*

Poles! The old regime of Russia, the source of your and our enslavement and disunity, has now been overthrown for good. Liberated Russia, represented by its Provisional Government . . . hastens to extend its fraternal greetings and invites you to a new life, to freedom.

The old regime made hypocritical promises to you which it could, but did not wish to, fulfil. The Central Powers took advantage of its mistakes in order to occupy and devastate your territory. With the sole aim of fighting against Russia and her allies, they gave you chimerical state rights . . . Brother Poles! . . . Free Russia calls on you to join the ranks of those fighting for peoples' freedom . . . the Russian people recognise the full right of the fraternal Polish people to determine their own fate . . . the Provisional Government considers that the creation of an independent Polish State, comprising all the lands where the Polish people constitute the majority of the population, would be a reliable guarantee for lasting peace in the new Europe of the future. United with Russia by a free military alliance, the Polish State will become a firm bulwark of Slavdom against the pressures of the Central Powers . . . The Russian Constituent Assembly will give binding strength to the new fraternal alliance and agree to those territorial changes of the Russian State which are necessary for the creation of a free Poland out of her three, now separated, areas.

Accept the fraternal hand, brother Poles, which free Russia extends to you . . . stand up now to meet the bright new day in your history, the day

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of the resurrection of Poland . . . forward, to the struggle, shoulder to shoulder and arm in arm, for your freedom and ours!

**Source: J. Pajewski, *Historia powszechna 1871–1918* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967), pp. 422 ff.**

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### Document 16

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*President Woodrow Wilson's 'Peace without Victory' Senate speech on 22 January 1917, and from his Fourteen Points, 8 January 1918, Point Thirteen:*

No peace can last, or ought to last, which does not recognise and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property . . . statesmen everywhere are agreed that there should be a united, independent and autonomous Poland.

Point Thirteen:

An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

**Source: *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, edited by A. S. Link *et al.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966–98), Volume 40, pp. 535–8; and Volume 48, p. 254**

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### Document 17

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*Statement issued by the Polish National Committee, Paris, 12 August 1918:*

Our aim is to create an independent Polish State composed of all Polish territories including those which provide Polish access to the sea; a strong state which would be able to keep in check its western neighbours, the Teutonic empires, and would be a bulwark against their expansion in Central Europe and the east. We fully appreciate the fact that it is only with the assistance of the great free nations, in conflict with the Central

Powers, that we shall be in a position to achieve the unification as well as the independence of Poland; and firmly trusting in their ultimate victory, which will mean at the same time the triumph of liberty and justice, we consider ourselves as their ally, not only for the duration of the war, but also after the conclusion of peace. We feel ourselves bound to those nations by unity of thought and struggle against the common enemy in order to safeguard the solemn rights of nations which are the basis of humanity's peaceful development.

The Polish State must have a democratic constitution. It must govern according to the principles of liberty and justice, together with principles of order. Without such principles, no effort towards civilisation or progress is attainable. No privileged classes should exist in the new Poland: Polish citizens without distinction of origin, race or creed must stand equal before the law

**Source: W. Stankiewicz and A. Piber (eds), *Archiwum Polityczne Ignacego Paderewskiego*, Volume 1, 1890–1918, (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1973), pp. 483 ff.**

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#### Document 18

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*Louis Marshall, chairman of the American Jewish Committee, in a letter to President Woodrow Wilson, 7 November 1918:*

It is generally recognised that one of the most important subjects to come before the Conference of Nations to be held at the close of the war is the restoration of Poland. It necessarily affects the future of all of the inhabitants within the area of the re-created Polish State . . . approximately four million Jews . . . will be directly concerned. Hence, whatever the geographical extent of the new State or its form of government, the civil, political and religious rights of these Jews must be safeguarded.

The American Jewish Committee has long sympathised with the aspirations of the Polish people for independence and the right of self-government. It heartily approves of the establishment of a [Polish] State . . . Unfortunately, however, in 1912, there was inaugurated by the leaders of the Polish National Committee, and has ever since been carried out in that country, a policy looking to the practical destruction of the Jews of Poland through the medium of a most virulent economic boycott, which is still in full operation and has grown in intensity from year to year . . . an intolerable condition [exists] and bodes unspeakable evil unless immediate

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remedial action is taken by those who are seeking the recognition of an independent Polish State to end this policy of extermination . . .

**Source: Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research,  
New York, correspondence Louis Marshall-  
Ignacy J. Paderewski, 1918**

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## CONSOLIDATION

Józef Piłsudski, the personality most intimately associated with the cause of Polish independence in the public mind, arrived in Warsaw on 10 November 1918, following his release from Madgeburg Castle, where he had been interned since July 1917 for having refused to co-operate fully with the German occupation authorities over the creation of a sponsored Polish army, the *Polnische Wehrmacht*. Piłsudski found a chaotic political situation, whose principal ingredients were: the German-installed Regency Council led by Prince Zdzisław Lubomirski (1865–1943) was still in office; a revolutionary provisional government of the ‘Polish People’s Republic’ had been set up on 7 November in Lublin under the veteran socialist Ignacy Daszyński (1866–1936); and the Polish National Committee led by Roman Dmowski in Paris continued to be recognised as the official Polish Government by the Western Allies. As a first step towards establishing at least a semblance of order, the Regency Council appointed Piłsudski commander-in-chief of the Polish armed forces on 11 November and asked him to form a national government. On the same day, and amidst widespread patriotic euphoria, Poland’s independence was proclaimed, thus symbolically if not yet formally terminating the partitionist era. Foreign governments were notified of Poland’s new status on 16 November, though reaction was not entirely favourable. On 14 November, Piłsudski’s hand had been further strengthened with his appointment as provisional head of state, a position he retained until surrendering his extensive power to the Constituent *Sejm* early the following year. When his first choice as Prime Minister, Daszyński, was unable to form a coalition cabinet because of the opposition of the National Democrats, he was more successful with the moderate socialist, Jędrzej Moraczewski (1870–1944), and then sought to co-opt to it the Polish National Committee.

While problems of political, governmental and social stability were obviously of the highest priority for Poland in these turbulent early days,