

AN INDEPENDENT POLAND

A Necessity for Democratic
Europe

LECTURE

BY

H. M. HYNDMAN

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H. M. HYNDMAN.

INTRODUCTION.

Since the Address now published was delivered events have moved fast. The complete collapse of Russia, followed by the occupation of vast territories by Germany in defiance of the miserable Bolshevik peace, have proved conclusively that the emancipation of Poland can be rapidly brought about only by the victory of the Allies and the United States. All hope of a satisfactory arrangement with the Central Powers must be finally abandoned, even by Poles who are most impressed by German efficiency and determination. This truth seems to have been accepted by the majority of the Slav peoples, whose growing confidence in their own destiny, untrammelled by German domination, is viewed with so much concern not only by Germany herself but by her useful subordinate Austria-Hungary. As a result Poland, Bohemia, Croatia, and Jugo-Slavia in general are drawing closer and closer together. Such jealousies and differences as exist are being kept under by the sense of mutual danger and common aspirations. Should this sensible and patriotic policy be followed up the cause of Poland and the Slav peoples will conquer.

Every month that the war goes on brings the United States more and more to the front. The great Republic

of the West sees now as clearly as the Allied Powers of Europe that a reorganised Poland, mistress of her own country, secure of a free outlet to the Baltic and having friendly relations with the other emancipated nationalities to the South, is a necessity for ensuring a permanent peace. Desperate, therefore, as the period of warfare may be which lies ahead of us, the principles for which the Poles have so long and so courageously contested are now firmly established in the public mind on both sides of the Atlantic.

May the realisation of all their hopes be speedily brought about and may Poland as an independent nation take her full share in the development of the democratic Europe of the immediate future.

H. M. H.

13, Well Walk, Hampstead,
March 25th, 1918.

An Address was delivered at the Duke's Room, Holborn Restaurant, London, on Saturday, February 16th, 1918, by Mr. H. M. HYNDMAN.

The Chair was occupied by Sir JAMES FRAZER.

The CHAIRMAN : Ladies and Gentlemen,—Whatever our political opinions may be, I am sure we all agree that the partition of Poland was one of the most monstrous and shameful crimes in history, and that, like all great crimes, it has been attended by disastrous consequences. The restoration of Polish independence is one of the most important results we anticipate from the war, and we trust it will be a powerful guarantee for that permanent peace which it is the aim of the Allies to secure for Europe. Mr. Hyndman has made a special study of this question, and I am sure that you will listen to him with great attention. He needs no introduction to a London, or to a British, audience, and I shall not stand longer between you and him, but will at once invite him to deliver his Lecture. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Hyndman : Sir James Frazer, friends and fellow-citizens,—First of all I will say just one word in relation to yourself being in the Chair. It is, to me at any rate, a great privilege that you should be presiding here this afternoon, representing, as you do, the first man in the particular science to which you have devoted yourself, not only in this country, but in Europe. And when so many of the German professors—who always profess—are devoting themselves, at the present time, to excusing and advocating brutality and outrage, it is something, I think, that a man who is in my opinion of greater eminence than any of them, should take the side of the emancipation of humanity and of the application

of ordinary morals to political life. Therefore, Sir, I thank you very much for taking the Chair on this occasion. But you are not a Socialist: far from it, I believe. I am. And it only shows that people of the widest difference of opinion possible on matters of sociology in our own day, may be entirely agreed upon the political necessities of Europe at the present time.

The title of my address this evening is, as you know, "An Independent Poland a Necessity for Democratic Europe." I do not think there is anybody in this hall who will dispute that that is a necessity. Those who differ may differ upon the question whether a democratic Europe is attainable: but if it is attainable, unquestionably an independent Poland is a necessary part of it.

Now, there are two ways of looking at this. There is the sentimental way, which, at times, is most important, because, after all, reason leads to reflection, but, nine times out of ten, sentiment leads to action. And I do not hesitate to say that the sympathy of Great Britain to-day is entirely with Poland and the Poles; the same in the United States of America; the same, as we all know, in France. That sympathy is for a reconstituted Poland. And it is based upon grounds which are sufficient in every way; upon the great and glorious history of Poland in the days when she was defending Europe from the Tartar hordes which were flooding in from the East, and when, under the walls of Vienna, John Sobieski defeated the invading Turk. In the affairs of to-day historic considerations do not necessarily lead to practical politics. But if I were a Pole I should feel a glow of enthusiasm when I remembered that my ancestors were among those who not only beat back the Tartar, but delivered themselves from the barbarism of the Germanic hordes in the form of the Teutonic Knights. (*Applause.*) It is a fine thing, a very fine thing, to recall, and it arouses in foreigners who are acquainted with the details of the history of that time a sensation of enthusiasm even to-day.

Then those abominable partitions, of which Sir James has spoken: the partition of 1772, the partition of 1795,

the sanctification of those atrocities in Vienna in 1815, all those things must raise a sense of indignation in our minds, and we feel that only emancipation complete and entire will—not make amends, but at least do something to repair, the mischiefs which then were done. Again, the Poles have never, sheeplike, accepted domination; they have always vigorously resisted the oppressor. Where possible, they have done it under arms. The glorious patriot Kosciuszko in 1813, when fighting against tremendous odds, kept alive the hope of freedom in the breast of every Pole, and that they look back to with satisfaction and glory to-day. At a later date, in 1863, you will know, better than I do, the splendid work which was done by the Polish volunteers, not only against Russia, but against Prussia, that sinister figure which has built up German power on the ruin of the Polish State. She began with Poland, and she will finish with Poland, if you will let her.

That is the position as it stands and as it stood; and therefore I say, on these grounds, and on the grounds also of the artistic, literary and scientific culture of Poland, which has maintained itself in spite of Austrification, in spite of Russification and in spite of Prussification, which still continues to hold its own as a nationality in every particular which beautifies and helps forward culture among men; on all these grounds I say Poland and the Poles are entitled to the sympathy, the enthusiasm of every Englishman, as they are to the sympathy of every cultivated man throughout the world. (*Applause.*)

In regard to the position to-day, also, we know what the Prussians have done in Poland. What the Russians did, we may hope is now at an end. But the Prussian domination has been even more fatal, in some ways, than that of Russia, or would have been so but for Polish tenacity and courage. The conduct of the Prussians in their portion of Poland has been deliberately directed towards crushing out the Polish speech, the Polish intelligence, and all Polish aspirations for the future. The children themselves have been forced not to

speak their mother tongue. It has been an offence to take part in Polish gatherings in the Polish language. The horrors of Russia, I hope, as I have said, are passed. The trickery of Austria still remains; and it is as necessary that we who are in sympathy with Poland should be entirely against the trickery of Austria as that we should have been, and as we have been in the past, against the tyranny of Russia, and even more so against the tyranny of Prussia.

But, as I say, these are sentiments; and, after all, in what the Germans call "Realpolitik"—which we may translate as "blood and business"—we have to consider the serious practical position, which is disadvantageous alike for Poland and for Europe. Here I say most distinctly that in dealing with this question it is impossible to imagine a really democratic Europe, which is freed from the German menace, unless Poland is reconstituted. Now that is admitted: it is admitted, against their will, even by the German and Russian statesmen themselves. There is an idea that it may be achieved in some strange way, leaving Germany and Austria still to have virtual control. If that is done, the war, so far as the reconstitution of Europe is concerned, is lost.

What makes the present situation especially dangerous is that, if I were a Pole myself and found that tricks and intrigues and surrenders were going on, I should think: "Well, if this is to be the thing, and we do not know where we are, and nobody tells us what they intend to do, will it not almost be better to come to terms with Germany, as Russia has done, rather than to trust to men who do not keep faith even with their own promises?" I say that with shame as an Englishman whose forbears have lived here for hundreds of years. But I am obliged to say it, for already, by refusing to back our friends in the Constituent Assembly in Russia, we have practically allowed the whole thing to turn to anarchy there. It is possible—I do not say it is probable; I trust not,—it is possible that the same sinister game of "wait-and-see" may be played with

regard to Poland, and she may find herself, at the last moment, betrayed. I trust not. My object in coming here to-night is to do what little a single individual can to prevent that from being done, and I hope and believe that the Poles and the English in this room will all be of one opinion, at any rate, that such a matter as that is not to be tolerated. I say that this is necessary—the map shows it to be so. Racial affairs show it to be so. The reconstitution of Poland means that there is, at last, a nation of certainly not less than twenty million inhabitants interposed between Germany and the East.

It means likewise, as I hope and believe—for I see more than one Bohemian here—a thorough understanding with Bohemia. The Czechs and the Poles seem to me, in this matter, to be interested jointly. You Poles need, and you put it in the forefront of your programmes, an outlet to the sea. Bohemia likewise needs an outlet to the sea. But the mere general statement that Poland is to be free and given an outlet to the sea, and that Bohemia is to be freed and given an outlet to the sea, practically solves no question: it is when you come to deal with details that difficulties arise. Those difficulties we must not shut our eyes to in any way, nor must the Poles. Friends and fellow-citizens here, I often hear that the differences among the Poles themselves are one of the greatest difficulties in the way of solving the Polish question. Frequently I have had that put to me, and I believe it to be partly true. Well, that may be; but, of course, one must remember that it has been the object of Prussia and Russia and of Austria to intensify any differences, to endeavour to show that the various Polish interests cannot be harmonised. But I believe they are closer together to-day than ever they were: and the title of the Society under whose auspices I am speaking is, as I understand, that of "The Polish Union"—Polish union—the sinking of all petty differences in the one great aim of the emancipation of their country. It is worth doing! (*Applause.*)

Well, concerning this access to the sea. When you come to deal with that you have, inevitably as I see it, to deal with the problem of the port of Danzig. There you come down to practical facts. And that necessarily means, as I shall endeavour to show a little later, a very serious and important difficulty in regard to our enemies of to-day. It also may be argued, that we are not strictly adhering to the lines of nationality in dealing with these affairs. That, likewise, is an issue which I think the Poles ought to face clearly and state their opinions, so that they may be understood by the world, and especially that they may be understood in the United States.

Mr. Chairman, it so chanced that the United States of America to-day holds a position which renders it absolutely imperative that all nationalities which are striving for emancipation should make themselves felt and put their information at the disposal of Washington. There are in the United States at the present moment, as I am informed, 3,200,000 Poles, and one of those Poles, whose name is known all over the civilised world for his artistic qualities, M. Paderewski, is in close touch with President Wilson at the present time. I hope, and I believe, that no effort will be spared to bring home to President Wilson and Mr. Lansing—who holds to President Wilson much the same position that Mr. Seward did to President Lincoln in my younger days—that it will be brought home to them that it is no use evading details in this matter; that it is of no use to speak of glorious ideals unless you are prepared to look facts in the face and see how they are to be dealt with. There is one thing certain: the consolidation of Poland cannot be achieved, so far as we can judge of it, by arms upon the spot. It is to be achieved by the arms of moral pressure and the Allied forces from without. All whom you can get in other countries to help you therefore are your allies in the conquest of the future for your country.

The demand of the Poles themselves, I say, has not, in my opinion, been sufficiently made public in Great

Britain; also certainly it has not among the working classes. They are not as well advised on this matter as I think they ought to be, and as I hope in the future they will be. Because, after all, the sentiments of the mass of the people are, in the great majority of cases, where they are at all able to judge, perfectly sound; but their intelligence, unfortunately, is frequently in default because they are unable to obtain the information which is necessary to form a sound judgment.

If we take the political and geographical situation, it will be clear, I think, as has been admirably pointed out in a memorandum I have seen, that Germany may lose this war militarily and yet win it politically. That seems to me an important distinction. That is to say, if she is left in a position whereby she can use Austria-Hungary's fifty millions of people for her aggressive policy in the future, as she has used them in the past—and, for my part, I do not see sufficient evidence that the German people themselves are going to give up the policy of aggression into which they have been hypnotised by the Junker class, the professors and the aristocrats—then, in that case, the war, to all intents and purposes, is a victory for Germany. Consequently, it is absolutely essential, to my mind, that we should all thoroughly understand the continuance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is an impossibility if the aims of the democracies are to be achieved. In other words, when you say, and furthermore when you intrigue to accomplish, that you shall bring about the making of an omelette without breaking eggs—and there are several eggs to break down there in Austria-Hungary—you practically give up the basis of the very thing you are fighting for. Surely, looked at from any reasonable point of view, Germany, with seventy millions of people, with the probability that some eight or ten millions of Germans in Austria will join her, has a sufficient population for any one nation or empire to command; and this great Germany must inevitably exercise an enormous influence upon the politics of the world. But when to that you add the domination of the other populations of Austria-Hungary

and so put at the disposal of this aggressive Power all those elements of success which lie to the south-east of her, than you are simply giving up to her material for an early renewal of the war which is being carried on so desperately to-day.

That is how I read the situation. Do not let us forget that by giving way in the least we are at the same time strengthening the rights of minorities. The Magyars are the minority in Hungary, and yet by maintaining the Austro-Hungarian Empire you not only give the complete control to the minority in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but you also give the minority the control in Hungary itself; in both cases abandoning the principles of democracy and self-determination which we have all declared to be right for the future of the race. Again, the idea of peace without annexations or indemnities is a most fraudulent phrase. In the first place, peace without compensations, that is, payment by the vanquished to the victor, is really meant. But a more fraudulent phrase than "peace without annexations or indemnities" was never invented, even in Germany; never! It means an absolutely German peace, that is what it means. It can mean nothing else. And it inevitably means, as you will see if you work it out, the sacrifice of Poland. (*Applause.*)

I come back, therefore, to the present situation. You are faced here, not merely with a Polish problem, but with a European problem; and when the Poles claim, as, in my opinion, they rightly claim, at any rate the free port of Danzig and the command of the Vistula, they are demanding what is geographically necessary for the permanent peace of Europe. (*Hear, hear.*) It is not merely a Polish claim, it is a European claim, and should be supported, in my judgment, by everyone who looks forward to freedom as the future of the new Europe. Well, if that be so, then you see an enormous vista open out before you. You have here a population bound together by ties of race, language and religion. The religious part of the matter, as you know, comrades and friends all, is no matter

to us Social Democrats; we let each one have his own religion, we do not interfere with him. We go for the economic position, and leave everybody to worship the God he likes.

But from the point of view of economics, likewise, it seems to me that the emancipation of Poland is an absolutely practical and necessary policy. Poland, as you all know better than I do, has developed its industry in a most marvellous way, and so long as the nationality of Poland is repressed, so long the party to which I belong, in spite of all its mistakes—and I admit them—the Party of Socialism, can never come to the front. Where national principles are at stake, the interests of the main body of the people are, too often, neglected in the aspirations of nationality. But, for the moment, we have to consider, as we considered in this war, the *people*. The people of this country, for instance, for the time being, rightly or wrongly—and I think rightly—have sympathised, perhaps too far, with nationalism, and have sacrificed their interests as a class in order to make absolutely certain of their future as a nation, side by side with the other free nations of the world. And the same is true of Poland. The emancipation of Poland, to my mind, is a necessity, not only for the development of Europe, but for the development of that which I believe to be the future reorganisation of humanity; and it can only be done by giving Poland that economic freedom, as well as that national freedom, which at the present moment is her right. The development of Lodz has been extraordinary, and the development of industry in Poland generally has been remarkable. Those people have the right to develop their territory to the fullest extent. But they are up against the lack of a free port. And that port, which was declared a free port even by the Congress of Vienna, is now entirely in German hands. And there, again, the river Vistula is at the present moment impeded in its beneficent action by Prussian interference. The canalization of the Vistula and the bringing of that great river into connection with the

Dniester would bring together the Baltic and Black Seas. It is a magnificent project, which never will be or can be realised except by the courage, genius and capacity of the Polish race. I believe that this would form one of the most remarkable changes which have been made in the map of Europe in our day. Danzig as a free port, if not a Polish port, brings this great scheme into practical politics. I do not agree with those who argue that it is now purely Prussian; but even if they were justified in their contentions, I hold that free Danzig is a necessity; Europe, if not Poland, ought to bring it about.

Again, at the present time we are looking forward to a Peace Congress, a Peace *Congress*, not a Peace Intrigue. When that Peace Congress takes place, the nations of the world will be gathered together under conditions which may influence the future even more than the great Congress of 1815, over a hundred years ago. At that coming Congress I contend that the Poles should be represented, and be in a position to enter their protest against any surrender of their rights. I think that the whole of those races—Poles, Czechs, Jugo-Slavs—should come together and make a demand, and an open demand, to the peoples of the world that they should be heard, in their own interests, at that Peace Congress when it comes. (*Applause.*) Nobody else can hold a brief for them as they can hold it for themselves. And do not forget this, friends, that at every Congress it does not matter so much how you get there as what you do when you are there. It sounds silly, but it is true. When Cavour attended at the Congress of Paris, he represented a small interest, but Cavour's brain dominated the Congress all the same. And I think it is possible that, out of the rising Slav peoples, out of the Poles—who at any rate never lacked brilliancy even if they have lacked, if I may say it without offence, some of the less engaging virtues of mankind—a leader will arise who will put his whole energies into his demands and feel the long history of his country flowing through his veins. A representative coming from those

peoples could not fail to produce an effect upon every single person at that Congress table. I hope you will claim a place for him, not merely by putting him forward from this or that Society, but demand that he shall be at that Congress as representing the Poles. If that is done, I think you will have taken a considerable step towards changing the situation; you will have done much to make matters better than they are to-day. That is to say, first give full outlet to the sentimental aspirations which affect the world; next show clearly the economic demands which at the present time are of great importance; and show that representation on a democratic basis is a necessity at the Congress which will be held. And let us understand definitely that we are up against Germany. There is a considerable party here—and you know it—among the well-to-do classes who do not want to beat Germany. I say it here plainly. And the reason they do not want it is that the beating of Germany means the downfall of aristocracy and petty parasitism here. Do not make any mistake about that. Here we are, going in for a tremendous transformation. Our sympathies are with you in your national struggle, and we want you to sympathise with us in our great economical upheaval. The changes which have taken place in the three and a-half years of war are greater than those during the whole of my life before—and I shall be 76 on the 7th of March—which is a good long time. The economic conditions are extraordinarily different. This country is no longer a buy-cheap-and-sell-dear country. From a supply-and-demand business, from a mere commercial parasitism, England is transforming herself steadily into an organised country which the democracy can conduct and control in the interests of every man, woman and child in it.

I desire, Sir, to see, out of this terrible war, which has brought such horrible suffering, and will bring still more, upon such a large portion of the human race, and I hope and believe I shall see, old as I am, these nationalities for which we are fighting emancipate themselves and go

along with us for the emancipation, not only of the nationalities, but of the workers of the world. (*Applause.*) I would make an appeal, therefore, to the Poles here to sink all minor differences, to forget all questions as between one portion and another, and not to consider for the moment, even the aspirations which go outside of that great aim. When I was a young man, Italy was in a worse condition than Poland is to-day. The state of Italy was, to all appearance, hopeless. I happened to be an intimate friend, as I am proud to remember, of Mazzini and Garibaldi, and the other great men of that day. (*Applause.*) I am proud to think, also, that some of the Poles who fought and died for their country have been men whom I have known, and whose glorious career I celebrate in their death. Now, I say, is the opportunity, now is the time! Make not only your voice heard, but your arms felt. You have fought in the past unsuccessfully, you will fight to-day, I believe, with success. Having sunk your differences, having appealed to the world at large, take up your courage in both hands and force these issues, to the democracies of the world! They are ready to hear and to help; I believe they will come with one accord to your assistance. Only the other day a Russian General saw our forces at the Front, and he said "Such an Army never was," and he doubted whether such an army would be. It is to-day fighting for you. Help them, encourage them! Say to them: "You are doing for us what we Poles cannot at present do for ourselves; but ever hereafter, if you win this battle, our thanks will go down to humanity, for ourselves, our friends, and our children of the future!" It is a glorious future to look forward to, and I believe that Poland, taking up its nationality, will go to the front with the other peoples to a great future among the workers of the world. (*Loud applause.*)

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