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LETTER TO MY FRIENDS OF THE
BRITISH LEFT

PRICE THREEPENCE

To my friends of the British Left

DEAR FRIENDS,

A year ago I arrived in London, a refugee from France. I and my countrymen will never forget the hospitality offered to us; the kindness with which we all met here, the help given not only by friends, but by complete strangers. In this year we all—who had always looked towards France as our second spiritual home—have learned to understand and to love the Britishers; have learned to appreciate their splendid qualities, their calm courage, their fairness, their sense of justice.

On the other hand, I know that the people of Scotland, where our army is stationed, have learned equally to love and appreciate the Poles. I know that a sense of deep brotherhood is growing between the Scots and the Poles, a sentiment which will not die.

And there is, "somewhere in England," a silent cemetery full of Polish graves, the graves of Polish airmen who have given their lives for our common struggle.

It is this sentiment of the numerous and strong ties which unite to-day our nations which compels me to speak in order to clear up certain basic misunderstandings which may cloud our relationship.

I, for one, do not care much if the *Times* does not see for the future of Central Europe—Poland included—another solution than the hegemony either of Germany or of Russia. The opinion of the appeasers of the *Times* does not matter to me. I am just mildly surprised that



the heroic struggle of the Polish people, the millions of Polish dead, have not been enough to teach the leader-writers of the *Times* that Poland will always object to being ruled either from Berlin or from Moscow.

But I am distressed indeed every time I must acknowledge that you, my friends, the people with whom I have fought shoulder to shoulder the battles for Ethiopia, for Spain, for China, for Czechoslovakia seem to have a blind spot wherever the fate of my country is concerned. I believe in frankness between friends; therefore I will state my case bluntly without trying to find nice circumlocutions and I will enter immediately in *medias res*.

I will start with a question which—I hope sincerely—is already liquidated, for this question will give the best illustration of the differences of our outlook: the question of the relations between Poland and Russia.

When I arrived in London in July, 1940, each of my friends tried to convince me that the Poles are making a major, an unpardonable, blunder by claiming that they are still at war with Russia, by not renouncing all claims to the territories occupied by the Soviet troops. I was told that it was the Polish attitude which rendered impossible a British-Russian understanding, that we, the Poles, were hampering by our unreasonable claims the war effort.

My answer was simple. I stated that for the time being there was the brutal fact that Russia had committed an aggression against Poland and seized Polish territories. That for the moment there was no moral or political ground on which a Polish Government could reconcile itself to this fact. And I always added: "I am absolutely sure that this 'state of war' between Poland and Russia will not hamper any British-Russian under-

standing, the day such an understanding becomes possible." I was right. General Sikorski's declaration followed immediately the speech of Winston Churchill, and the alliance between Great Britain and Russia was not held up for a moment by any Polish opposition. Then followed the days of negotiations between the Russians and the Poles. Again the *Times* reproached the Poles for the "long" duration of these negotiations and pointed out that the agreement between Czechoslovakia and Russia was signed promptly, conveniently forgetting in its self-righteousness and complacency that the Czechs had only to complain of a rupture of diplomatic relations, while the Polish account with Russia was more complicated and difficult to settle.

Eventually the agreement was signed. The territorial settlement between Poland and Russia was shelved; it was not to interfere with the common fight against Hitler.

Shelved. Of course, it does not mean that the Poles have accepted the Ribbentrop demarcation line between the territories occupied by Germany and by Russia, a demarcation line which included in Soviet-occupied territory the purely Polish towns of Wilno and Lwow, the purely Polish district of Lomza, as the permanent future frontier between Poland and Russia.

Even the Russians themselves do not claim it. The *Isviestia*, in answering General Sikorski's broadcast, have simply contested the claim of the permanence of the frontier settled by the Treaty of Riga. But they have not claimed as permanent the frontiers settled by von Ribbentrop.

You, however, my British friends, have jumped immediately to the conclusion that von Ribbentrop has

settled once and forever what was Polish—or shall I say, German?—and what was Soviet territory. For you it is a foregone conclusion that Soviet Russia shall keep the whole territory which von Ribbentrop had agreed to leave under the occupation of Soviet armies for two years.

I will not enter on a discussion of the percentage of Poles, Ukrainians, White Ruthenians and Jews who live inextricably intermingled on these territories. (There are very few Russians living on them.) Such a discussion would be completely irrelevant to my point.

The point is that in taking up this attitude you have departed from a principle, which had been our common principle in all our fights, the principle with which we have defeated the Hoare-Laval plan: the principle that it is immoral to place a premium on aggression.

For other countries you still admit its validity. Nobody asks whether the tribes conquered by Menelik—not so long ago—were content with the rule of the Amharas. Ethiopia is to be reconstituted as a whole in the frontiers she had before the Italian aggression. Nobody asks whether the inclusion of 500,000 Albanians in the Yugoslav State was justified—Yugoslavia is to be reconstituted as it existed in 1939. Nobody proposes to maintain the separation between the Czech and the Slovak nations, nobody suggests that the Ukrainians of Czechoslovakia—the Carpatho-Ukrainians—should rejoin the rest of the Ukrainian nation in the common fold of the Soviet Union; even the inclusion of the Sudeten Germans in the new Czechoslovak State is considered as completely justified. Yes, you hope even to restore the ancient frontiers of Finland; the *Tribune* proposes a British mediation to this effect. This, notwithstanding

the fact that Finland has thrown in her lot with our enemies, that the Finnish armies commanded by the butcher, Mannerheim, fight to-day against our ally, Soviet Russia.

Your supreme principle—a right principle—is that everything which had been done by force is to be undone—everywhere.

Except in Poland.

Here we have no clear-cut principle like the principle that there must be no premium on aggression, the principle that all which has been done by force must be undone.

As soon as Poland crops up we have instead dissertations on the injustice of leaving Ukrainians or White Ruthenians under the Polish rule; statements that in fact Poland has no right to these territories because they are beyond the Curzon Line. The Curzon Line. Lord Curzon and von Ribbentrop as supreme arbiters of the frontiers of Poland! Who would have believed that Lord Curzon, of all men, would one day appear to the British Left as the embodiment of political wisdom? It is the more curious that the Curzon Line was an integral part of Curzon's interventionist policy in Soviet Russia. Curzon and Poincaré considered themselves as trustees for the Russian Tsar and that was the reason for which they were opposed to any encroachment on the territories of the erstwhile Russian Empire. They did not want to recognise the independence of the Baltic States; they wanted to limit Poland to those ten Governments which even the Tsarist administration had considered as Polish. And Lenin, for one, never claimed that the Curzon Line was a justifiable frontier.

I will not dwell any longer on this question, which

to-day has a purely academical interest. I firmly believe that Poland and Russia will be able to settle their frontiers amiably once the fight against the common foe shall have strengthened the bonds between them, and I venture to prophesy that the basis of this settlement will be the self-determination of the people.

However, I think that you will admit that I have made my point, i.e., that your attitude in this question has shown a discrimination against Poland.

A second instance. It is with dismay that we of the Polish Left find under the signature of people whom we admire and respect, like H. G. Wells, Victor Gollancz, Kingsley Martin and others, the statement that the British Government has committed a folly, some say even a criminal folly, in giving in the Spring of 1939 a guarantee to Poland without a previous understanding with Soviet Russia.

Here again I do not want to discuss the question whether at that moment an understanding with Russia was still in the realm of possibilities. I agree wholeheartedly that it ought to have been sought nearly at all cost. I agree that neither the Chamberlain Government, nor the Beck Government in Poland, had a record capable of inspiring confidence in Moscow. (Though a shrewd observer ought to have known that the Polish people will not allow any Government to accept a collaboration with Hitler or a submission to Hitler and that the British people were just as decided to call a halt to the Nazi aggressions.) I am even prepared for the argument's sake to admit that the British and French negotiations with Russia have failed, not by the fault of Stalin, but by the fault of Chamberlain, Daladier and Beck.

But I am unable to see in the fact of the British

guarantee to Poland without an understanding with Russia a folly, still less a criminal one. I see in it just the reverse: the belated—yes, the very belated—recognition that a stand must be made against the Hitlerite aggressions. In signing the British-Polish Agreement and in implementing it, Neville Chamberlain has finally done what we had urged him to do in the days when the Spanish Republic bore the brunt of the Fascist aggression, in the tragic days of Munich. He has clearly and unmistakably committed Great Britain to fight for the freedom of Europe.

And this act—the act for the sake of which the future historian will probably absolve Chamberlain of many of his earlier shortcomings—is to be considered as a folly, as a criminal folly. Why?

Because the country menaced by Hitler happened to be not Ethiopia or Czechoslovakia, but Poland?

Why has the obligation of defending the collective security, of helping the victims of aggression, which, in my eyes as well as in yours, was absolutely binding in 1938 (when Great Britain was still less prepared than in 1939) become in your eyes, a year later, contingent on the Russian help?

Is it because Czechoslovakia was a "Democratic" State and Poland a "Fascist" one?

I could perhaps limit myself to point out that the frequent drawing in of the question of Polish "Fascism" is simply a new symptom of discrimination, because somehow this problem seems to matter only when Poland comes into the picture. The Government of General Metaxas in Greece was more purely Fascist than the Government of Smigly Rydz and Slawoj Skladkowski in Poland. However, the day Greece

entered the war not a word was said about it. Greece had joined the common struggle, and it was only the splendid heroism of the Greek people, which mattered, and not the form of their Government. Metaxas himself was no longer considered as a Fascist ruler, but simply as the soldier who had refused to submit to the Fascist bully. The *New Statesman* speaks of the undying democracy of Greece.

I will, however, discuss the question of "Fascist" Poland at some length, because here we touch the root of our misunderstandings.

This root is your ignorance of Poland. I do not imply that Poland is for you "a far-away country about which we know nothing." Certainly, you know and knew a lot about Poland. Only, alas! very few of you, if any, know the Polish language; very few of you, if any, have ever lived in Poland; very few even had any direct contact with Polish democracy. Your information about Poland is second-hand. And the majority of this information has passed through channels traditionally inimical to Poland, German, or Russian. Thus your vision of Poland is distorted.

Yes, it is true, the last Governments in Poland were military semi-dictatorships with totalitarian leanings. But it is equally true (1) that they represented only a tiny minority; (2) that the opposition they have encountered has prevented the establishment of a fully fledged Fascist regime. It is really strange to see how the same people who are sure and certain that there is a strong democratic Germany—of which we see nothing—and that as soon as Hitler's rule is broken this Germany will be a trustworthy partner of the European Commonwealth, simply ignore the fact that the Polish democracy

had been strong enough to secure to the end the existence of political parties, of free trade unions, of an independent Opposition press, the maintenance of a social legislation which was one of the most progressive in Europe. They ignore the fact that the last municipal elections in Poland (in 1938) had given a clear majority to the two great popular parties: the Peasant Party and the Socialist Party.

For them the Polish worker and the Polish peasant apparently do not exist. Their picture of Poland is of a nation of romantic, highly patriotic and hopelessly out-of-date noblemen who represent the Polish nation, with inarticulated masses in the background. H. G. Wells is particularly haunted by this picture, a picture as true of to-day Poland as the picture of a parliamentary election in the *Pickwick Papers* is true of contemporary England.

Let there be no misunderstandings. I do not dream of defending the rule of the Smigly and the Becks in Poland. You know that I was in the foreground of the battle against them; some of you may even know the price I had to pay for my fight.

Neither shall I try to defend this particular brand of Polish Fascists who have found refuge here in Great Britain and edited this loathsome publication, *Jestem Polakiem*. We fight them and will continue to fight them just as you are fighting the remnants of Mosleyism.

(Though I must add in fairness that even among the home-bred Polish Fascists, Hitler has not succeeded in finding a Quisling. Their patriotism has proved stronger than their ideological affinities with Hitlerism.) I even will not hold a brief for the Polish Government in

London. It is an all-party Government, a National Government with all the shortcomings and necessities for compromise which such a character entails (and of which you here, in Great Britain, are well aware). But I do object strongly to the identifying of the former Polish Government or of the reactionary minority in Poland with the Polish nation and still more to the drawing of conclusions for the future of Poland on the basis of such an identification. And I object still more strongly to such slanders on the Polish nation as the statement of Ivor Jennings that "it is a little difficult to ask Polish peasants to consider themselves as citizens of a vast federation."

The S.A. man who rapes Polish girls, the S.S. man who tortures Polish prisoners, may become, in Ivor Jennings' opinion, a worthy citizen of a vast Western federation, but the Polish peasant, who has proved his political maturity by refusing the totalitarian system and by defending stubbornly and successfully his democratic rights, who has proved his heroism by his undying struggle against the Nazi oppressors, is to be refused the *dignus es intrare*.

Why?

I am very much afraid that the answer is, that unconsciously for many of you the distinction of Eastern (Soviet Russia excluded) and Western Europe is still a distinction of *quality*.

One of the erstwhile leaders of British democracy, the Great Old Man Lloyd George, has stated this belief quite frankly. He said in *The Truth About the Peace Treaties* that he considered it unjustified "that we should place 2,100,000 Germans under the control of a people (the Poles) which is of a different religion and which has

never proved its capacity for stable self-government." As Lloyd George—who could not ignore the ruthless extermination policy of the Germany of Wilhelm II against the Poles—had no qualms about placing as many Poles under German rule, the only inference is that for him Poles as an inferior race had less rights than Germans—the *Herrenvolk*.

It is not in order to recriminate that I have made these quotations—recriminations are idle. It is in order to avert future and still graver misunderstandings, in order to avert a danger when the hour of the peace settlement will come.

You, my friends, have two most noble and lovable traits of character: your fairness, which obliges you to be fair even towards the enemy, and your instinctive sympathy for the underdog.

Only it happens that you pick out the wrong underdog—like the child which wept over the "poor lion, who has got no Christian."

And sometimes in your desire to be fair to the enemy you are likely to overstress this fairness to a point where you hurt the most vital interests of your friends.

Indeed I wonder sometimes whether to-day some of you are not more concerned about the future well-being of Germany than over the well-being of her victims.

Let me again make a preliminary statement. I am as certain that Poland will not be a stumbling block for the future organisation of Europe as I was certain that it will not prove a stumbling block for a British-Russian collaboration. We, the Polish democrats have always supported—just as you did—the League of Nations, have always believed in the necessity of collective security, and we realise perfectly well that the return

to an illimited national sovereignty would spell the gravest dangers. We are perfectly aware of the necessity of a world-wide, if possible, but in any case of a European, organisation much more strongly knit together than the League of Nations was. We know that it is only within the framework of such an organisation that it will be possible to solve the grave problems of European reconstruction. Therefore, we will readily surrender to a future league or federation as much of our sovereignty as the other members of this future league or federation will surrender. (By the way, the Polish-Czechoslovak negotiations are *the first* attempt at such a future organisation.) We will accept all the limitations of national sovereignty to which the other partners, Great Britain, France or Belgium will submit.

All these—but not more.

Do you remember the story of the minorities treaties? These treaties were imposed on Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Iraq, in order to guarantee the rights of the minorities.

But nobody dared to suggest in 1919 that such treaties should be signed by any of the Great Allied and Associated Powers. Nobody thought even of imposing such a treaty on the vanquished Great Power—Germany. These Powers were considered as “civilised” countries, who could not be submitted to any international control over their internal policy.

Well, the only real persecutions of minorities did occur in these “civilised” States.

It was not in Poland or in Czechoslovakia that people were forbidden to speak their mother tongue, were forced to change their names, that even the tombstones

in the graveyards had to change their inscriptions—it was in Istria and in South Tyrol.

It was not in Poland or Latvia that the Jews were deprived of all civic and human rights and hounded to death—it was in Germany. There was anti-Semitism in Poland, it was even fostered by the last Governments. But there can be no comparison between the position of Jews in Poland and in Germany or Italy. Here again the Polish democracy proved its strength. No legislative discrimination was enacted, and when the Fascists attempted to stage a pogrom in Cracow the workers flocked out of the factories, and their presence in the streets was sufficient to deter the Fascist gangs.

And to-day, while in France the Pétain Government obediently enacts the Nuremberg laws, in Warsaw Polish patriots, at the risk of their lives, demolish a part of the Ghetto wall and place on it the Polish flag as a symbol that in free Poland there will be no wall between Jews and Gentiles.

Yes, we will gladly and willingly accept any plan of European settlement, of European collaboration, but only on the conditions of the five-hundred-years-old union between Poland and Lithuania, a union of “free with the free and equals with equals.”

“Equals with equals.” These words—for nations as well as for individuals—have a wider implication than a pure formal, juridical equality, which nobody in Great Britain (except perhaps the leader-writers of the *Times*), and you less than any will grudge the Poles.

Equality means also equal regard for our economic interests and possibilities of development. Let me explain my point. Hitler's New Order has a double aspect. The hideousness of one of them—the barbaric

destruction of the Polish population, the destruction of Polish and Czech culture in order to create a race of slaves who will have to toil for their German masters—is such that it is rejected with abhorrence by everybody, decent Germans not excepted.

But there is a second aspect, more insidious, which is favoured not only by German *émigré* Socialists, like Sering, but also by certain of you.

It is the vision of a highly industrialised Germany, drawing its raw materials and part of its food resources from the agricultural countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The same vision that in the last war Friedrich Naumann pictured in his able book, *Mitteleuropa*.

In fact, however, this attractive picture means the doom of Poland as well as of Jugoslavia or Rumania.

For in reality neither of these countries—and Poland less than the others—is a country able to export regularly agricultural surpluses.

Their exports are possible only at the expense of the standard of living of the agricultural population. And even after a complete redistribution of the whole land between peasants (it had started in 1920 and its slow progress is partly explainable by the lack of necessary funds to provide the new proprietors with housing and agricultural implements) the density of the agricultural population in Poland will be such that the ekeing out of a decent living will be an impossibility for millions of peasants. There is only one solution of this problem—the industrialisation of Poland, which will give productive employment to this surplus population. A solution aiming at retaining Poland as a part of Germany's *Grosswirtschaftsraum*, as a market for Germany's in-

dustrial production, means the condemnation of the innocent Polish peasant to a permanently lower standard of life than the standard of his German neighbour.

We democratic Poles wholeheartedly agree with Winston Churchill's declaration that the future peace ought not to spell for Germany an economic ruin, that Germany must be able to live and develop herself economically.

Yes, Germany must live—but not at the expense of Poland. Poland must be Polish and not German *Lebensraum*.

The *Polish Fortnightly Review*, edited by the Polish Ministry of Information, puts the question very aptly. It says :

“ The only permanent solution is the industrialisation of Central Eastern Europe. For those export surpluses which went from these countries to Germany, feeding her and simultaneously tying these countries by indissoluble economic bonds to Germany, are not normal, healthy production surpluses, but predominantly hunger exports. A cursory study of the average consumption of agricultural produce per head of population in the Central Eastern European countries and its comparison with the consumption of a citizen of a country genuinely capable of agricultural export (the New Zealander, Australian, Canadian and even Argentinian) will reveal that the consumption per head of the population in Central Eastern Europe is three, four and even five times lower. These countries do not export the majority of their agricultural produce because they have a surplus, but simply because in their present state of economic development they have nothing else to export ; simply in order to live. So they export little, and export at the

expense of their own consumption (the average foreign trade per head of population in these countries during the past twenty years was regularly lower than the average world trade per head of population). When as the result of an increase of prosperity their own consumption increases, certain of their export surpluses will decline considerably and others disappear almost entirely.

“In order that this should happen these countries must find sources of national income other than those of agriculture, and this can be achieved only by way of their further and permanent industrialisation. This will simultaneously remove them from Germany’s economic influence, for there will not be the necessity to place agricultural surpluses on the market at any price; those surpluses will disappear and Germany indirectly will be brought in the international market permanently and organically, irrespective of the economic clauses of the Peace Treaties.

“The German tendencies towards autarky can be permanently shattered only from the East, and not from the West, and this constitutes the international economic problem of Central Europe.”

A last point.

You insist, and you are right, that the future peace ought not to be a peace of vengeance. You insist that the folly of reparations is not to be repeated. (It was, by the way, Lloyd George’s insistence on the inclusion of war pensions in the amount due by Germany which contributed largely to the astronomical total of the reparations figures. Poland, which had been the main battlefield and which had afterwards been stripped bare by the German occupying forces, did not get a single penny of reparations moneys.)

We agree with you. Not a peace of vengeance—but a peace of justice. And that means that justice must be meted out not only to Hitler, Goering or Goebbels. But that all the sadists, torturers and murderers who have made a hell of my country must be punished as criminals.

No excuse must be found for the murderers and torturers of the Gestapo, for the officials who send Polish girls to brothels, for the officers who have looted and burnt Polish houses. They will not be able to hide themselves behind “orders.”

The S.S. man who in concentration camps tortures prisoners is just as responsible as Dr. Frank, the bloody Governor-General who orders these tortures. The German Fifth Columnist who guided the German troops and who to-day is the chief purveyor of the Gestapo, a purveyor highly rewarded by the spoils of his victims, is just as responsible as the Greisers and Forsters.

Not vengeance—but justice. And not reparations—but restitution.

H. G. Wells has reconciled himself easily (did not La Rochefoucauld say, “On a toujours assez de force d’âme pour supporter les maux d’autrui”) to the fact that millions of Poles have been driven away from their land, from their homes, to make room for German immigrants. He thinks it admissible that the Germans should remain in the possession of the stolen farms, the stolen shops, the stolen factories, the stolen houses, the stolen medical cabinets. The expelled Poles, the new nomads, can find employment in Germany.

We will not be so magnanimous. The Germans, whether imported from Latvia, Estonia, Bessarabia or



Germany, will have to go. The Polish peasant will return to his land, the Polish artisan to his bench, the Polish doctor to his medical cabinet.

Nor is it all.

The Germans have stolen the radium which the American women have offered to Mme. Curie Sklodowska ; they have stolen the physical apparatus of Polish universities ; they have stolen books from the Polish libraries, pictures and sculptures from Polish churches and museums ; they have stolen silver, carpets, furs and furniture from Polish homes.

Not only that.

In order to destroy the vestiges of Polish culture they have wantonly destroyed priceless historical documents and books, destroyed the—sometimes centuries—old—monuments of Polish kings and poets ; in order to de-industrialise Poland they have destroyed factories.

Is this stolen radium to remain in the Berlin or Munich Universities ? Are the pictures and books to remain in German museums and libraries ? Are the people whose dwellings have been looted and who have lost all their belongings to be compensated by the Polish Government—that means by the toil and sweat of the Polish worker and peasant ? Are the factories and houses wantonly destroyed to be rebuilt out of Polish savings—which do not exist ?

Even if the restitution of stolen goods or their equivalent would mean some “hardship” for Germany, is it not more just that this hardship should be borne by Germany and not by Poland ?

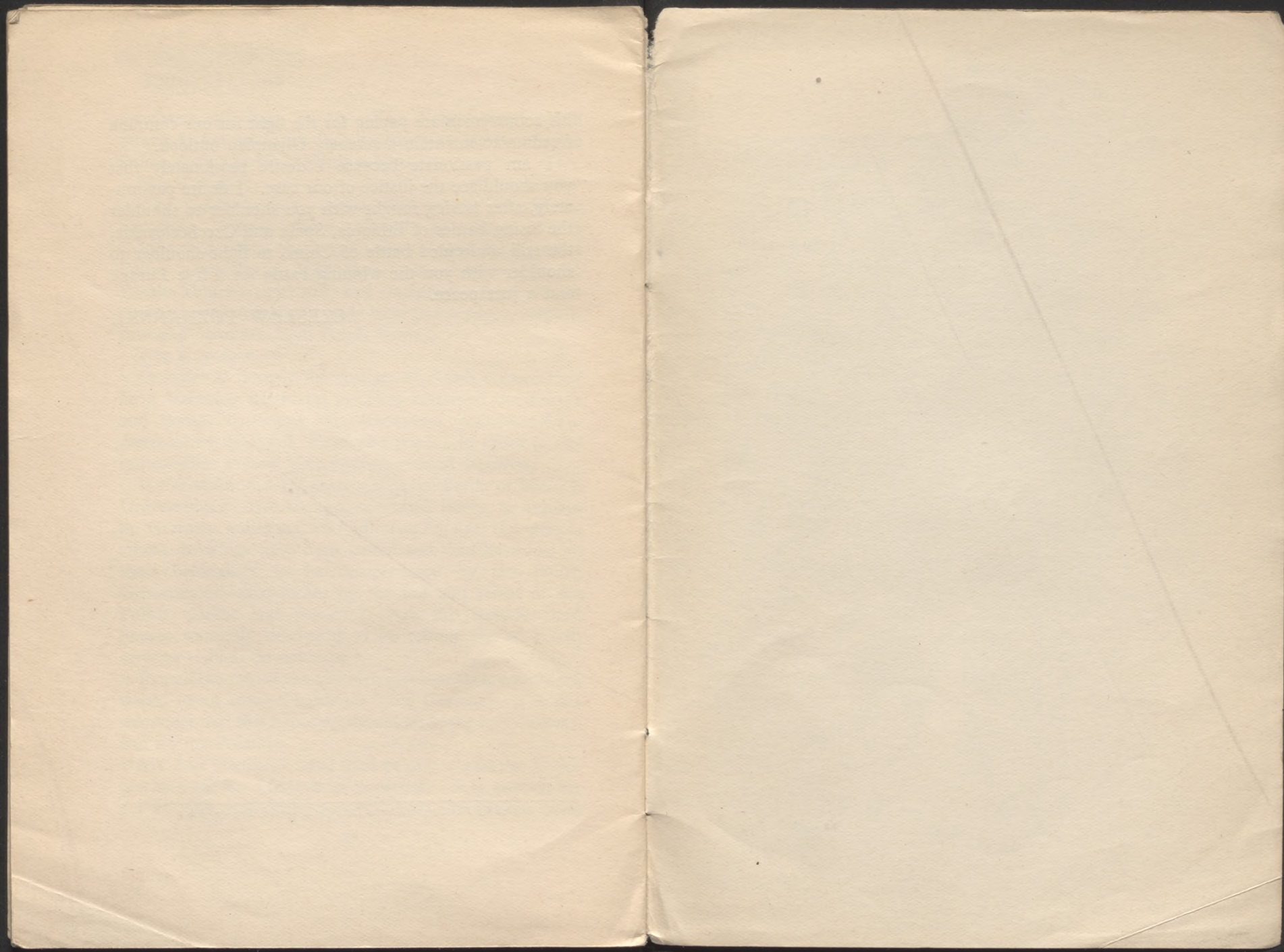
My dear friends, I have tried to put to you the Polish case as I see it. I have been passionate—it is difficult for a Pole who reads daily reports about the terrible price

his countrymen are paying for the fight for our common freedom to maintain a serenely Olympian outlook.

I am passionate because I desire passionately that you should see the justice of our case. I desire passionately, after having fought with you shoulder to shoulder the losing battles of Ethiopia, Spain and Czechoslovakia, the still undecided battle of China, to fight shoulder to shoulder with you the winning battle for a free Europe and a just peace.

CZESŁAW POZNAŃSKI.





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