

TRUTH ABOUT POLAND

(By J. H. HARLEY, in *Everyman*.)

The following article by the editor of *The New Poland* gives authoritative explanation, from the Polish point of view, of the causes that induced Poland to attack Russia. His accusations against the Supreme Council of having tacitly encouraged Poland to make war on the Bolsheviks are based on first-hand information from the highest sources.—Ed. *Everyman*.

Poland, since the dark days of her Partition, has had many warm friends and champions, but it has often needed all their energy and perseverance to get simple justice done to her cause. Even to-day there remains a school of historians, owing their inspiration for the most part to Germany, who persist in asserting that Poland became the prey of three autocratic empires because, at the end of the eighteenth century, she fell hopelessly into chaos and anarchy. The proofs to the contrary are despised or disregarded, just as those who clamorously asseverate, in unison with Bolshevik propagandists, that the present Polish State is the creature of Imperialist Polish Pans, have never given any serious attention to the constitution and actual rulers of the State which they criticise.

The fact is there never was a time when clear thought and detached consideration of great problems were more needed than they are to-day. Mr. Bonar Law once admitted in the House of Commons that there was an organised Bolshevik propaganda in full swing in this country of Britain. There can be no possible doubt about it. And the result has been to diffuse an atmosphere in which it is very difficult to make the truth known in regard to the actual situation in Poland. Open enemies can be marked and boldly faced: but when we find a reputable organ of free Liberal opinion making the fantastic suggestion that to bring about European peace you must disarm Poland while Bolshevik Russia may conscript and arm herself as she pleases, we realise to the full the world of make-believe in which we are, on this question, invited to live and move.

It cannot be doubted, too, that the visit to Soviet Russia of many Labor politicians, who know not a single word of Russian, has had unfortunate results which were exceedingly unfair to Poland. The more prominent Labor leaders who went had their heads on their shoulders, and, though they were at the mercy of their hosts and interpreters, they kept their minds clear. But along with them there were less reputable and immature men who went there to see what their minds brought the power of seeing, and there can be no doubt that their hasty and ill-considered judgment produced a false impression on the Soviet leaders just as it has misled many people in this country since their return.

On two particular points, as against all such special pleaders, the truth requires to be told and emphasised about Poland at the present time. In the first place, the recent Polish advance to Kieff was not an unprovoked offensive, and in the second place the Poles were not invading undoubted Russian territory.

Many of my readers will read this last paragraph with surprise. It has been so constantly and skilfully dinned in their ears that the few recent weeks have seen the defeat of the last and most unscrupulous gamble of Polish Imperialism that they have come to look on the iniquity of Poland as capable of being demonstrated with the same certitude as a proposition of Euclid.

Yet the advance to Kieff was only another act in a play, and a very serious play, that had been going on for a very long time before the Poles took the action of which Bolshevik propaganda has made such a skilful use. When the German Reich began to collapse and the German armies began to evacuate Lithuania they left the territory, starting from the Russian side first. That resulted in a Bolshevik occupation with undesirable consequences to the inhabitants of these

occupied territories, and the result was that dramatic appeals, not coming entirely from the Polish sections of these people, were sent to the Polish Chief of State and Diet begging for the intervention of a Polish army to liberate them from their oppressors.

A volunteer Polish army, lacking arms and munitions, composed chiefly of refugees from these territories, spontaneously springing up in response to such an appeal,—this, not the advance to Kieff, was the beginning of what was practically a state of war between Poland and the Bolsheviks. This is simply a matter of history, and why the contrary should be proclaimed so confidently in many British organs of public opinion is what no one who has studied the question can understand! So far from this action being animated by any Imperialistic motives, it was clearly proclaimed, on every available occasion, by the Polish Head of the State and the Polish Government that they would in the case of all territories occupied by them, respect the opinion of the Allies. But the Allies on this, as on many other questions, proved vacillating and uncertain. At the beginning of the war Poland was regarded by France as a natural barrier between Bolshevism and Germany, and was helped in her campaign, whereas Britain was content to "wait and see." Later on Poland was promised war material in the autumn of 1919 by the British Government if she decided to join Denikin's forces. What was Poland to do in face of these variant ebbs and flows of Allied opinion? But the most serious of these Allied interventions was in the autumn of 1919 when certain intermediaries approached the Polish Government with very advantageous proposals of peace on behalf of the Soviets. *The Polish Prime Minister, who was at that time in Paris, asked the Supreme Council what Poland's attitude should be. He was told that there could be no question of any negotiations between Poland and the Bolsheviks at that time.* The Poles, like good Allies, adopted the advice of the Supreme Council, and yet Viscount Grey of Fallodon tells us that the League of Nations has no responsibility for Poland in a war which she continued at the request of the chief authority for the Allies at that particular time.

It should now be perfectly clear that the Polish advance to Kieff, whether it was prudent or not, was no unprovoked offensive, but simply another move in a war, or, at any rate, in hostile operations, which had been going on for many months before this particular movement occurred. The Bolsheviks were smarting from defeats sustained in the past, and were known to be preparing a big offensive. If this offensive had been allowed to materialise it is certain, in the light of what has now occurred, that their armies would have been in Warsaw long ago; but the Polish General Staff thought that if they pushed on to Kieff, they might attain a temporary safe, strategical line of defence which would enable Poland to reduce her army and yet be safe from the threat of a future Bolshevik aggression. That is the whole truth of what many organs of British public opinion and mere politicians and publicists persist in calling Poland's mad gamble.

But what about the second accusation that the Poles, being arrogant Imperialists, were recklessly invading undoubted Russian territory?

In the Polish *Encyclopaedia* there has just been published a Note from the Allies on December 8, 1919, which lays down a provisional eastern frontier for Poland. The note was signed by M. Clemenceau, and it concludes with the statement that "any clear right which Poland may claim to any territory on the east of the line, is reserved." This shows that at any rate the question of frontiers was not foreclosed and that it was anticipated that Poland would be able to present claims to lands which were not included in what are understood as her more strictly ethnographic frontiers.

But surely by this time it is realised that Lithuania is not Russia and that the people of the Ukraine cannot be ignored if a nationalist movement gathers strength in that territory. Marshal Pilsudski himself is a Lithuanian, and Prince Sapieha, the Polish For-