

ONE MORE TRAGIC ANNIVERSARY

A Pole Looks Back

TWO years had passed on the first day of this month since the misty dawn of the Polish autumn witnessed an unheralded invasion of the Republic of Poland by Germany. Twenty-seven days later, the overrun country, after a gallant but hopeless struggle against the mechanised hordes of the 20th century's Attila, ceased to exist as an independent State. But only geographically, only on the official maps. For Poland, the true Poland, lives on and fights the foe wherever possible. She fights in the air, on the sea, and on land. Polish soldiers were in Norway and France, are in Egypt, Palestine, Great Britain, and Russia. The tiny but efficient Polish Navy sails the seven seas; the Polish airmen are worthy comrades of the R.A.F. boys. In London a Polish Government and a National Council are working hard for victory—encouraging the unhappy, persecuted, but unquelled Polish people to endure and fight on. Among 33 millions of people suffering beyond description, the Germans have not succeeded in finding or creating a single "Quisling." Yes, there was one instance of attempted anti-Polish sabotage; a certain Igo Sym—a former cinema actor, a Pole by birth but reared, educated, and corrupted in Nazi Germany—was nominated by the invaders as Director of Art and Culture of the occupied country.

The actor accepted the post, and the same evening he was shot on the stage of the theatre at which he performed. This Igo Sym, only nominally a Pole, was the only traitor in Poland.

Collapse Was Unexpected

When Poland succumbed to the Nazi might, after three weeks of fighting, her people, friends and allies were stunned. For Poland prided herself on her excellent, brave army, an army big in numbers, strong in drill and patriotic spirit. The people were led to believe that the Republic was capable of beating off any attack, no matter where it might come from. Frequent smart parades augmented this belief. Internationally, the State was rising from a third-rate power to a first-rank one. Even sceptics thought Poland would be able to check the enemy for a considerable time. The German High Command expected a stiffer resistance, and the Polish army fought heroically, but unfortunately with no avail.

The whole story of what happened is not yet told. It will be—one day. There is no doubt—and no real Polish patriot is likely to deny it—that grave mistakes were made. The responsible men have paid for them dearly already. So has Poland. Mistakes whether in external or internal politics have been repeated over and over again. History will pass judgment upon the guilty.

Poland Looks to the Future

Meanwhile, the Polish Government-in-exile in London has set itself to the difficult but glorious task of conducting the war of the Polish nation against its hereditary enemy. It works alongside Britain and her Allies—for democracy and freedom against Nazi-Fascism and oppression. The members of the present

In this frank review of his country's recent history, DR. LEON LIPSON explains to readers of "The Listener" why the people of Poland fight on. Dr. Lipson was born and educated in Poland, where he worked both as a journalist and as a lawyer



Above: Gen. Sikorski, Prime Minister, with Polish sailors

Government do not accuse the former leaders of the mistakes of the past. They do not dwell upon those things; for the present is difficult and strenuous enough to absorb all the strength they possess, all the effort they are capable of producing.

This attitude—a right and logical one—is working even further.

Without shedding tears or making accusations, thus wasting energy, the Government corrects the errors of its predecessors, first of all in external relations. Take Czechoslovakia. When Hitler made his vulture's demands on the Czechs, Poland, through her Foreign Minister (Colonel Joseph Beck), put in her claim to a part of Czech territory, which, it was argued, was historically and ethnologically Polish. When the fact of this demand became known to the people of the Republic of Poland, a strange, paradoxical situation arose. Outwardly, public opinion supported Colonel Beck—since the patriotic Poles did not want to betray any disunity in such trying and dangerous times as the Czech crisis certainly was. Inwardly, however, the feelings of the people were entirely different. Every decent Pole, especially those equipped with some political experience, resented the way the claim upon the Czechoslovak Republic was made by the Polish Government. The righteousness of the demand was not important really.



Left: President of the Polish Republic; Raczkiewicz

Czechs are Slavs and so are the Poles. And the people of Poland felt it would be better and wiser to unite the two nations against Nazified Germany. Furthermore, Polish chivalry revolted against pressing people who were already pressed hard enough. But this honest and liberal opinion did not dare to speak up loudly—possibly it could not.

What happened later, everyone knows well.

The second problem was the U.S.S.R. Poland had common frontiers with both Germany and Russia, which she fought in 1920-21. In this difficult situation she had these alternatives—to join with Communistic Russia against Nazi-Germany, or vice versa. The Polish Government decided on vice versa. They announced explicitly that no Russian soldier would be allowed on Polish territory, no matter to whose assistance he might come. The Communistic scarecrow was effective as it was (or still is?) in many other countries.

All this was in the past and belongs to the past. Now, in London, the Polish Government has adopted the policy of decency and logic. General Sikorski and President Benes have buried mutual grievances and plan a close collaboration in the future. We have no inside information, but there are all the signs that the frontier disputes between the two countries will be settled in mutual agreement after the war. The pact with Russia has released about 200,000 im-

prisoned or interned Poles, who are already being formed into an army of about six divisions, a strong potential force, to throw against the common foe.

When the Nazis succeeded in defeating Poland, they showed for the vanquished people nothing but contempt and oppression and destruction. Poles—they claim—are born slaves, and have no right to be a nation with an independent state. There is no necessity to argue with such claims. Their value is nought. Nevertheless, let us consider the questions: have the Poles the right to be independent and have their own free state? Did they contribute to the civilisation of humanity in the past? Were they capable of creating lasting values?

Work for Civilisation

In 1918, Poland regained her independence after almost 150 years of partition. Robbed mercilessly by three invaders, she was left poor, undeveloped, with a deformed social system. In spite of all that, the whole Polish nation set itself to work. In these short 21 years it opened schools (32,550), academic schools or universities (24), built roads, established industries, sprang to life daily. Museums (263), art galleries, theatres, libraries were opened in all cities, towns and villages, social reforms were introduced, modern and progressive. The prestige of Poland abroad increased enormously. It is true that this good, useful work was often obstructed, sabotaged by hyper-nationalistic quasi-patriots, who, with their erratic and harmful political orientation and activities, wasted much of the nation's efforts. Nevertheless, the country's development went ahead until the criminal neighbour decided to destroy it.

Names to Remember

That is the materialistic aspect. Now, what about the spiritual one—the culture and art?

Germany has had many great men, nobody can successfully deny the fact. But I shall mention only a very few Polish names representing different branches of culture, which will stand up to any test their German opposite numbers can put before them:

Science: Nicolas Copernicus, Madame Curie, Sklodovska.

Music: Chopin, Paderewski.

Literature: Sienkiewicz, Reymont (both Nobel Prize Winners), Joseph Conrad (who was a Pole by birth).

Theatre: Krolikovski, Modjewska (Modrzekewska).

Opera: De Reszke, Kiepusa.

For military Germany such names as King Sobieski, the hero of Vienna; Kosciuszko, who also won immortality in America; and Pilsudski, the founder of independent Poland, may be a good reminder.

This modest list is compiled only from the very few names known to everybody. A legion of other Polish names, important contributors to the civilisation of humanity, are well known to experts in particular professions.

This Poland is now Britain's ally and is proud of it. She is proud and happy to fight together with England in the camp of the democracies. And it is much more than a hope, it is a strong faith, that the future, independent Poland will be a true democracy.