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THE ORIGINS OF POLAND

According to Polish myth, the Slavic nations trace their ancestry to three brothers who parted in the forests of Eastern Europe, moving in different directions to found tribes of distinct peoples - about twenty such tribes formed small states between A.D. 800 and 960. Although it is just mythology, this tale accurately describes the westward migration and gradual differentiation of the early West Slavic tribes following the collapse of the Roman Empire. One of these tribes, the Polanie or Poliane ("people of the plain"), settled in the flatlands that eventually formed the heart of Poland, lending their name to the country. Over time the modern Poles emerged as the largest of the West Slavic groupings, establishing themselves to the east of the Germanic regions of Europe with their ethnographic cousins, the Czechs and Slovaks, to the south.



In spite of evidence of prior political and social organization, the official starting date of Polish history -known as the “Baptism of Poland”- is identified as April 14, 966, when Prince Mieszko accepted Christianity into the Polish culture, becoming first ruler of the Piast Dynasty. Poland received acknowledgment as a separate principality, owing some degree of tribute to the German Empire (later officially known as the Holy Roman Empire), an expansionist force that inaugurated the Polish culture’s strong belief in Roman Catholicism.

Mieszko's son and successor Boleslaw I, known as the Brave, won international recognition as the first king of a fully sovereign Poland before his death in 1025. Boleslaw I was a remarkable politician and strategist. He turned Poland into a country comparable to older western monarchies. He consolidated Polish lands and conquered territories outside the borders of modern-day Poland, including Slovakia, Moravia, Red Ruthenia, Meissen, Lusatia, and Bohemia. He helped establish a new structure of the Polish church with a Metropolitan See at

Gniezno. It was independent of the German Archbishopric of Magdeburg, which had tried to claim jurisdiction over the Polish church. As the culmination of his reign, in 1025 Boleslaw I had himself crowned King of Poland. He was the first Polish ruler to receive the title of *rex* (Latin: "king").

THE MEDIEVAL ERA

Fragmentation and Invasion, 1025-1320

The most fabled event of the period was the murder in 1079 of Stanislaw, the bishop of Krakow. A participant in uprisings by the aristocracy against King Boleslaw II, Stanislaw was killed by order of the king. This incident led to open rebellion and ended the reign of Boleslaw II. Although historians still debate the circumstances of the death, after his canonization the martyred St. Stanislaw entered national lore as a potent symbol of resistance to illegitimate state authority.

By 1150, the dynasty had been divided among the sons of Boleslaw III (successor of Boleslaw I). Because it was so decentralized, many invasions began ravaging the state, most notably the Mongols. The Mongol invasion cut a swath of destruction through the country in 1241; for fifty years after their withdrawal in 1242, Mongol nomads mounted devastating raids into Poland from bases in Ruthenia. - as the fourteenth century began, much of Poland lay under foreign occupation.

Meanwhile, an even more dangerous foe arrived in 1226 when a Polish duke invited the Teutonic Knights, a Germanic crusading order, to help him convert Baltic pagan tribes. Upon completing their mission, the knights built a number of strongholds, most on the Baltic seacoast, from which they sought to enlarge their holdings at Polish expense. By that time, the Piasts had been parceling out the realm into ever smaller units for nearly 100 years. This policy of division, initiated by Boleslaw II to appease separatist provinces while maintaining national unity, led to regional governance by various branches of the dynasty and to a near breakdown in the face of foreign aggression. As the fourteenth century opened, much Polish land lay under foreign occupation and continued existence of independent Poland seemed unlikely.

The Later Piasts, 1321-1370

In the fourteenth century, after a long period of instability, the Polish state experienced a half century of recovery under Kazimierz III the Great. While using diplomacy to win Poland a respite from external threat, the king focused on domestic consolidation. He earned his singular reputation through his acumen as a builder and administrator as well as through foreign relations. Two of the most important events of Kazimierz's rule were the founding of Poland's first university in Kraków in 1364, making the city an important European cultural center, and his

mediation between the kings of Bohemia and Hungary at the Congress of Kraków, signaling Poland's return to the status of a European power. Lacking a male heir, Kazimierz was the last ruler in the Piast line. The extinction of the dynasty in 1370 led to several years of renewed political uncertainty.

Without question the most significant development of the formative era of Poland's history was the gradual absorption of the country into the culture of medieval Europe. After their relatively late arrival as pagan outsiders on the fringes of the Christian world, the Western Slavs were fully and speedily assimilated into the civilization of the European Middle Ages. Latin Christianity came to determine the identity of that civilization and permeate its intellect and creativity. Over time the Central Europeans increasingly patterned their thought and institutions on Western models in areas of thought ranging from philosophy, artistic style, literature, and architecture to government, law, and social structure. The Poles borrowed especially heavily from German sources, and successive Polish rulers encouraged a substantial immigration of Germans and Jews to invigorate urban life and commerce. From its beginning, Poland drew its primary inspiration from Western Europe and developed a closer affinity with the French and Italians, for example, than with much closer geographically and culturally Slavic neighbors of Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine heritage. This westward orientation, which in some ways has made Poland the easternmost outpost of Latin and Catholic tradition, helps to explain the Poles' tenacious sense of belonging to the "West".

THE JAGIELLON ERA, 1385-1572

The Polish-Lithuanian Union

Poland's unlikely 1385 partnership (Union of Krewo) with the adjoining Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Europe's last heathen state, provided an immediate remedy to the political and military dilemma caused by the end of the Piast Dynasty. At the end of the fourteenth century, Lithuania was a warlike political unit with dominion over enormous stretches of present-day Belarus and Ukraine. Putting aside their previous hostility, Poland and Lithuania saw that they shared common enemies, most notably the Teutonic Knights. The compact hinged on the marriage of the Polish queen Jadwiga to king Wladyslaw Jagiello. In return, the new monarch accepted baptism in the name of his people, agreed to confederate Lithuania with Poland, and took the name Wladyslaw II. In 1387 the bishopric of Wilno was established to convert Wladyslaw's subjects to Roman Catholicism. (Eastern Orthodoxy predominated in some parts of Lithuania.) From a military standpoint, Poland received protection from the Mongols and Tatars, while Lithuania received aid in its long struggle against the Teutonic Knights.

The Polish-Lithuanian alliance exerted a profound influence on the history of Eastern Europe (see fig. 2). Poland and Lithuania would maintain joint statehood for more than 400 years, and over the first three centuries of that span the "Commonwealth of Two Nations" ranked as one of the leading powers of the continent.

The association produced prompt benefits in 1410 when the forces of Poland-Lithuania defeated the Teutonic Knights at Grunwald, seizing the upper hand in the long struggle with the renegade crusaders led by Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen. Although defeated in one of the largest and most important battles in Medieval Europe, the Teutonic Knights withstood the siege of their fortress in Malbork and suffered relatively small territorial losses at the Peace of Torun (1411). The knights, however, would never recover their former power, and the financial burden of war reparations caused internal conflicts and an economic downturn in the lands under their control. The battle shifted the balance of power in Eastern Europe and marked the rise of the Polish-Lithuanian union and the dynasty, called "Jagiellon" as the dominant political and military force in the region. By the end of the fifteenth century, representatives of the Jagiellons reigned in Bohemia and Hungary as well as Poland-Lithuania, establishing the government of their clan over virtually all of Eastern and Central Europe.

This vast federation was greatly diminished in 1526 when armies of the Ottoman Empire won a crushing victory at the Battle of Mohács (Hungary), wresting Bohemia and Hungary from the Jagiellons and installing the Turks as a menacing presence in the heart of Europe.

Poland-Lithuania as a European Power

The Teutonic Knights had been reduced to vassalage, and despite the now persistent threats posed by the Turks and an emerging Russian colossus, Poland-Lithuania managed to defend its status as one of the largest and most prominent states of Europe. The wars and diplomacy of the century yielded no dramatic expansion but shielded the country from significant disturbance and permitted internal development. An "Eternal Peace" concluded with the Ottoman Turks in 1533 lessened but did not remove the threat of invasion from that quarter.

A lucrative agricultural export market was the foundation for the kingdom's wealth. A population boom in Western Europe prompted an increased demand for foodstuffs; Poland-Lithuania became Europe's foremost supplier of grain, which was shipped abroad from the Baltic seaport of Gdansk. Aside from swelling Polish coffers, the prosperous grain trade supported other notable aspects of national development. It reinforced the preeminence of the landowning nobility that received its profits, and it helped to preserve a traditionally rural society and economy at a time when Western Europe had begun moving toward urbanization and capitalism.

The "Golden Age" of the Sixteenth Century

The Jagiellons never recovered their dominance over Central Europe after the Battle of Mohács. However the period following it, from the late 15th century Jagiellon Poland to the death of the last of the Jagiellons, Zygmunt August in 1572 marked an era of stability, affluence, and cultural advancement unmatched in national history and widely regarded by Poles as their country's golden age. Some historians claim that the Golden Age lasted until the mid-17th century, when

in 1648 the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was ravaged by the Chmielnicki Uprising, and Swedish invasion.

During its Golden Age, the Commonwealth prospered thanks to its enormous grain, wood and salt exports. It still comprised of an area of nearly 1 million sq.km., with a population of 11 million. Poland-Lithuania was a political, military and economic power. Its goods were transported to Western Europe via Baltic Sea ports of Gdańsk, Elbląg, Riga, Memel and Königsberg. The Commonwealth had several major cities, such as Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, Lviv, Vilnius, Toruń and Kiev, and its economic development made it possible for the culture to flourish.

The Government of Poland-Lithuania

In other respects as well, the distinctive features of Jagiellonian Poland ran against the historical trends of early modern Europe. Not the least of those features was its singular governmental structure and practice. In an era that favored the steady accumulation of power within the hands of European monarchs, Poland-Lithuania developed a markedly decentralized system dominated by a landed aristocracy that kept royal authority firmly in check. The Polish nobility, or *szlachta*, enjoyed the considerable benefits of landownership and control over the labor of the peasantry. The *szlachta* included 7 to 10 percent of the population, making it a very large noble class by European standards. The nobility manifested an impressive group solidarity in spite of great individual differences in wealth and standing. Over time, the gentry induced a series of royal concessions and guarantees that vested the noble parliament, or Sejm, with decisive control over most aspects of statecraft, including exclusive rights to the making of laws. The Sejm operated on the principle of unanimous consent, regarding each noble as irreducibly sovereign. In a further safeguard of minority rights, Polish usage sanctioned the right of a group of gentry to form a confederation, which in effect constituted an uprising aimed at redress of grievances. The nobility also possessed the crucial right to elect the monarch, although the Jagiellons were in practice a hereditary ruling house in all but the formal sense. The prestige of the Jagiellons and the certainty of their succession supplied an element of cohesion that tempered the disruptive forces built into the state system.

In retrospect historians frequently have derided the idiosyncratic, delicate governmental mechanism of Poland-Lithuania as a recipe for anarchy. Although its eventual breakdown contributed greatly to the loss of independence in the eighteenth century, the system worked reasonably well for 200 years while fostering a spirit of civic liberality unmatched in the Europe of its day. The host of legal protections that the nobility enacted for itself prefigured the rights generally accorded the citizens of modern democracies, and the memory of the "golden freedoms" of Poland-Lithuania is an important part of the Poles' present-day sense of their tradition of liberty. On the other hand, the exclusion of the lower nobility from most of those protections caused serious resentment among that largely impoverished class, and the aristocracy passed laws in the early sixteenth century that made the peasants virtual slaves to the flourishing agricultural enterprises.

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The Polish Renaissance

The sixteenth century was perhaps the most illustrious phase of Polish cultural history. During this period, Poland-Lithuania drew great artistic inspiration from the Italians, with whom the Jagiellon court cultivated close relations. Styles and tastes characteristic of the late Renaissance were imported from the Italian states. These influences survived in the renowned period architecture of Kraków, which served as the royal capital until that distinction passed to Warsaw in 1611. The University of Kraków gained international recognition as a cosmopolitan center of learning, and in 1543 its most illustrious student, Nicolaus Copernicus (Mikołaj Kopernik), literally revolutionized the science of astronomy.

The period also bore the fruit of a mature Polish literature, once again modeled after the fashion of the West European Renaissance. The talented dilettante Mikolaj Rej was the first major Polish writer to employ the vernacular, but the elegant classicist Jan Kochanowski (1530-84) is acknowledged as the genius of the age and one of the greatest Polish poets of all time. Accomplished in several genres and equally adept in Polish and Latin, Kochanowski is widely regarded as the finest Slavic poet before the nineteenth century. Polish language, common to all educated groups, matured and not only coexisted with Latin but penetrated all areas of public life, including the legal code, the Church and other official uses. Biernat of Lublin, wrote his own version of Aesop's fables in Polish.

Renaissance music developed centered around the royal court. Sigismund I kept a permanent choir at the Wawel castle, while the Reformation brought large scale group Polish language church singing during the services. Jan of Lublin wrote a comprehensive tablature predominantly for the organ. Among composers, who often permeated their music with Polish national and folk elements, were Wacław of Szamotuły, Mikołaj Gomółka, who wrote music to Kochanowski translated psalms, and Mikołaj Zieleński, who enriched the Polish music with a Venetian School polyphonic style.

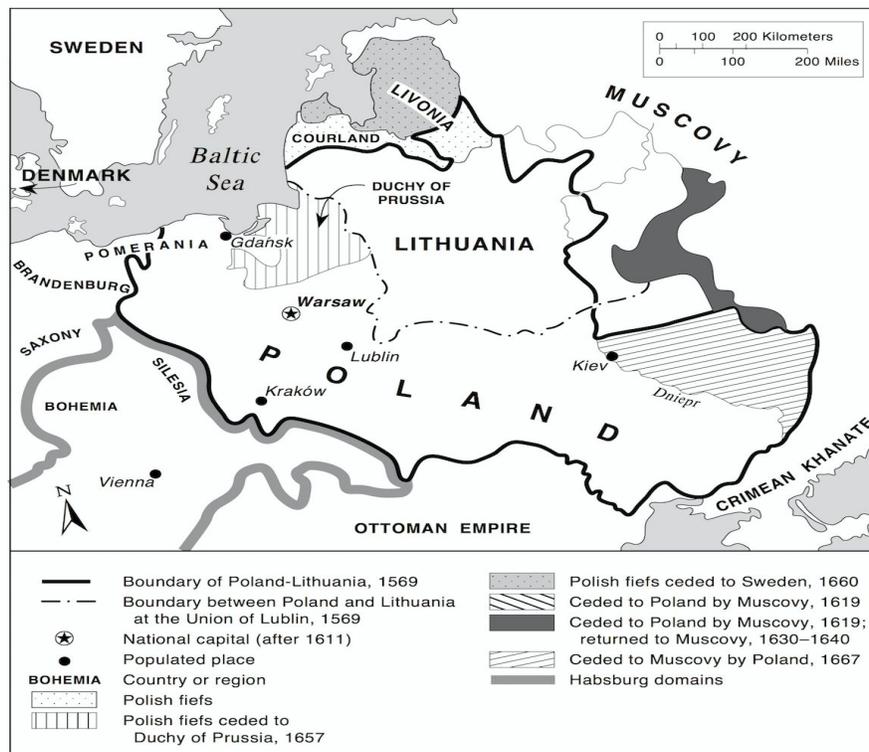
Architecture, sculpture and painting developed under Italian influence. A number of artists and artisans from Italy worked as royal artists in Kraków. Bartolommeo Berrecci and Benedykt from Sandomierz rebuilt the Wawel royal castle between 1507 and 1536. Berrecci also built Sigismund's Chapel. Polish magnates, Silesian Piast princes, and even merchants often built their residences to make them resemble the Wawel Castle. Kraków's Sukiennice and Poznań City Hall are among numerous buildings fashioned in the Renaissance style, even though Gothic construction continued alongside for a number of decades. Between 1580 and 1600 Jan Zamoyski commissioned the Venetian architect Bernardo Morando to build the city of Zamość. The town and its fortifications were designed to consistently implement the Renaissance aesthetic.

The Eastern Regions of the Realm

The population of Poland-Lithuania was not overwhelmingly Catholic or Slavic. This circumstance resulted from the federation with Lithuania, where ethnic Poles were a distinct minority. In those days, to be Polish was much less an indication of ethnicity than of rank; it was a designation largely reserved for the landed noble class, which included members of Polish and non-Polish origin alike. Generally speaking, the ethnically non-Polish noble families of Lithuania adopted the Polish language and culture. As a result, in the eastern territories of the kingdom a Polish or Polonized aristocracy dominated a peasantry whose great majority was neither Polish nor Catholic. This bred resentment that later grew into separate Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian nationalist movements.

In the mid-sixteenth century, Poland-Lithuania sought ways to maintain control of the diverse kingdom in spite of two threatening circumstances. First, since the late 1400s a series of

ambitious tsars of the house of Rurik had led Russia in competing with Poland-Lithuania for influence over the Slavic territories located between the two states. Second, Sigismund II Augustus (1548-72) had no male heir. The Jagiellon Dynasty, the strongest link between the halves of the state, would end after his reign. Accordingly, the Union of Lublin of 1569 transformed the loose federation and personal union of the Jagiellonian epoch into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, deepening and formalizing the bonds between Poland and Lithuania.



THE NOBLE REPUBLIC, 1572-1795

Although most accounts of Polish history show the two centuries after the end of the Jagiellon Dynasty as a time of decline leading to foreign domination, Poland-Lithuania remained an influential player in European politics and a vital cultural entity through most of the period.

The Elective Monarchy

The death of Zygmunt II August in 1572 was followed by a three-year Interregnum during which adjustments were made in the constitutional system. The lower nobility was now included in the selection process, and the power of the monarch was further circumscribed in favor of the expanded noble class. From that point, the king was effectively a partner with the noble class and constantly supervised by a group of senators. Once the Jagiellons passed from the scene, the fragile equilibrium of the commonwealth government began to go awry. The constitutional

reforms made the monarchy electoral in fact as well as name. As more and more power went to the noble electors, it also eroded from the government's center.

In its periodic opportunities to fill the throne, the *szlachta* exhibited a preference for foreign candidates who would not found another strong dynasty. This policy produced monarchs who were either totally ineffective or in constant debilitating conflict with the nobility. Furthermore, aside from notable exceptions such as the able Transylvanian Stefan Batory (1576-86), the kings of alien origin were inclined to subordinate the interests of the commonwealth to those of their own country and ruling house. This tendency was most obvious in the prolonged military adventures waged by Zygmunt III Vasa (1587-1632) against Russia and his native Sweden. Elected to the throne of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, he sought to create a personal union between the Commonwealth and Sweden. He succeeded for a short time in 1592 but was deposed in 1599 from the Swedish throne by his uncle, Charles IX of Sweden. He spent much of the rest of his life attempting to reclaim it.

On occasion, these campaigns brought Poland near to victory over Muscovy (Russian Tzardom) and the Baltic coast. Shortly after his victory over his internal enemies, Zygmunt took advantage of a period of civil unrest in Muscovy and invaded Russia, holding Moscow for two years (1610–1612) and Smolensk thereafter. In 1617 the Polish–Swedish conflict, which had been interrupted by an ceasefire in 1611, broke out again. While Zygmunt's army was also fighting Ottoman forces in Moldavia (1617–21), King Gustavus II Adolphus of Sweden (Charles IX's son) invaded Zygmunt's lands, capturing Riga (1621) and seizing almost all of Polish Livonia (today's Latvia and southern Estonia). Sigismund, involved in compounded the military burden imposed by the ongoing rivalry with the Turks, and the Swedes and Russians, never regained the Swedish crown and lost Poland's Livonia thus diminishing the kingdom's international prestige and owing heavy war reparations decades to come.

The Deluge, 1648-67

The term **Deluge** (Polish: *potop*) denotes a series of mid-17th-century campaigns in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. In a wider sense it applies to the period between the Chmielnicki Uprising of 1648 and the Truce of Andrusovo in 1667. Although Poland-Lithuania escaped the ravages of the Thirty Year War, which ended in 1648, the ensuing two decades subjected the country to one of its severest trials. This colorful but ruinous interval, the stuff of legend and the popular historical novels of Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916), became known for the magnitude of its hardships. The emergency began with an uprising of Ukrainian Cossacks that persisted in spite of Warsaw's efforts to subdue it by force. After the rebels won the intervention of Muscovy on their behalf, Tsar Aleksei conquered most of the eastern half of the country by 1655. Taking advantage of Poland's preoccupation, Charles X of Sweden rapidly overran much of the remaining territory of the commonwealth in 1655. Pushed to the brink of dissolution, Poland-Lithuania rallied to recover most of its losses to the Swedes. Swedish brutality raised widespread revolts against Charles, whom the Polish nobles had recognized as their ruler in the meantime. Under Stefan Czarniecki, the Poles and Lithuanians drove the Swedes from their territory by 1657. Further complicated by noble dissension and

wars with the Ottoman Turks, the thirteen-year struggle over control of Ukraine ended in the Truce of Andrusovo in 1667. Although Russia had been defeated by a new Polish-Ukrainian alliance in 1662, Russia gained eastern Ukraine in the peace treaty. The Commonwealth lost approximately one third of its population as well as its status as a great power. Swedish invaders robbed the Commonwealth of its most important riches, and most of the stolen items never returned to Poland. Warsaw, the capital of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, was completely destroyed by the Swedes, and out of a pre-war population of 20,000, only 2,000 remained in the city after the war.

Despite the improbable survival of the Commonwealth in the face of the *potop*, one of the most dramatic instances of the Poles' knack for prevailing in adversity, the episode inflicted irremediable damage and contributed heavily to the ultimate demise of the state. When Jan II Kazimierz abdicated in 1668, the population of the commonwealth had been nearly halved by war and disease. War had destroyed the economic base of the cities and raised a religious fervor that ended Poland's policy of religious tolerance. Henceforth, the commonwealth would be on the strategic defensive facing hostile neighbors.

Decay of the Commonwealth

Before another 100 years had elapsed, Poland-Lithuania had virtually ceased to function as a coherent and genuinely independent state. The commonwealth's last martial triumph occurred in 1683 when King Jan Sobieski drove the Turks led by Kara Mustafa from the gates of Vienna with a cavalry charge. Upon reaching Vienna, with the Ottoman army close to breaching the walls, Sobieski ordered a full attack. The united army of about 65,000–76,000 men (22,000–27,000 of them Poles) attacked a Turkish force of about 80,000–115,000 men. After observing the infantry battle from the Kahlenberg hilltop, Sobieski led the Polish husaria cavalry along with Austrians and Germans in a massive charge down the hillside. They broke the Ottoman battle line and the Ottoman forces scattered in disarray.

The Pope and other foreign dignitaries hailed Sobieski as the Savior of Vienna and Western European civilization. Poland's important role in aiding the European alliance to roll back the Ottoman Empire was rewarded with territory in western Ukraine by the Treaty of Karlowicz (1699). Nonetheless, this isolated success did little to mask the internal weakness and paralysis of the Polish-Lithuanian political system. For the next quarter century, Poland was often a pawn in Russia's campaigns against other powers. Augustus II of Saxony (1697-1733), who succeeded Jan Sobieski, involved Poland in Peter the Great's war with Sweden, incurring another round of invasion and devastation by the Swedes between 1704 and 1710.

In the eighteenth century, the powers of the monarchy and the central administration became purely trivial. Kings were denied permission to provide for the elementary requirements of defense and finance, and aristocratic clans made treaties directly with foreign sovereigns. Attempts at reform were stymied by the determination of the *szlachta* to preserve their "golden freedoms" as well as the rule of unanimity in the Sejm, where any deputy could exercise his veto right to disrupt the parliament and nullify its work. Because of the chaos sown by the veto

provision, under Augustus III (1733-63) only one of thirteen Sejm sessions ran to an orderly adjournment.

Unlike Spain and Sweden, great powers that were allowed to settle peacefully into secondary status at the periphery of Europe at the end of their time of glory, Poland endured its decline at the strategic crossroads of the continent. Lacking central leadership and impotent in foreign relations, Poland-Lithuania became a chattel of the ambitious kingdoms that surrounded it, an immense but feeble buffer state. During the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725), the commonwealth fell under the dominance of Russia, and by the middle of the eighteenth century Poland-Lithuania had been made a virtual protectorate of its eastern neighbor, retaining only the theoretical right to self-rule.

The Three Partitions, 1764-95

During the reign of Empress Catherine the Great (1762-96), Russia intensified its manipulation in Polish affairs. Prussia and Austria, the other powers surrounding the republic, also took advantage of internal religious and political bickering to divide up the country in three partition stages. The First Partition occurred after the balance of power in Europe shifted, with Russian victories against the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774) strengthening Russia and endangering Habsburg interests in that region (particularly in Moldavia and Wallachia). At that point Habsburg Austria started considering waging war against Russia. In 1793, the Second Partition occurred in the aftermath of the War in Defense of the Constitution. The division was ratified by the coerced Polish parliament (Sejm) in 1793 in a short-lived attempt to prevent the inevitable complete annexation of Poland. The Third Partition in 1795 wiped Poland-Lithuania from the map of Europe.

First Partition

In 1764 Catherine dictated the election of her former favorite, Stanislaw August Poniatowski, as king of Poland-Lithuania. Confounding expectations that he would be an obedient servant of his mistress, Stanislaw August encouraged the modernization of his realm's ramshackle political system and achieved a temporary moratorium on use of the individual veto in the Sejm (1764-66). This turnabout threatened to renew the strength of the monarchy and brought displeasure in the foreign capitals that preferred an inert, pliable Poland. Catherine, among the most displeased by Poniatowski's independence, encouraged religious dissension in Poland-Lithuania's substantial Eastern Orthodox population, which earlier in the eighteenth century had lost the rights enjoyed during the Jagiellon Dynasty. Under heavy Russian pressure, the Sejm restored Orthodox equality in 1767. This action provoked a Catholic uprising by the Confederation of Bar, a league of Polish nobles that fought until 1772 to revoke Catherine's mandate.

Poland, weak and devastated by a civil war in which the forces of the Bar Confederation, attempted to disrupt Russian control, had been a Russian protectorate. The Koliyivschyna peasant and Cossack uprising in Ukraine further weakened the Polish, position while the Russian-supported Polish king, Stanislaw August Poniatowski, was seen as both weak and too

independent-minded. The Russian court decided that the usefulness of Poland as a protectorate had diminished. The three powers all interested in territorial gains officially justified their actions as a compensation for dealing with a troublesome neighbor and restoring order to Polish anarchy.

Under pressure from Prussia, which for a long time wanted to annex the northern Polish province of Royal Prussia, the three powers agreed on the First Partition of Poland. An attempt of Bar Confederates to kidnap King Poniatowski on 3 November 1771 gave the three courts another pretext to showcase the "Polish anarchy" and the need for its neighbors to step in and "save" the country and its citizens. In 1772 Russia, Prussia, and Austria forced terms of partition upon the helpless commonwealth under the pretext of restoring order in the anarchic Polish situation.

National Revival

The first partition in 1772 did not directly threaten the viability of Poland-Lithuania. Poland retained extensive territory that included the Polish heartland. In fact, the shock of the annexations made clear the dangers of decay in government institutions, creating a body of opinion favorable to reform along the lines of the European Enlightenment. King Stanislaw August supported the progressive elements in the government and promoted the ideas of foreign political figures such as Edmund Burke and George Washington. At the same time, Polish intellectuals discussed Enlightenment philosophers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau. During this period, the concept of democratic institutions for all classes was accepted in Polish society. Education reform included establishment of the first ministry of education in Europe. Taxation and the army underwent thorough reform, and government again was centralized in the Permanent Council. Landholders emancipated large numbers of peasants, although there was no official government decree. Polish cities, in decline for many decades, were revived by the influence of the Industrial Revolution, especially in mining and textiles.

Stanislaw August's process of renovation reached its climax on May 3, 1791, when, after three years of intense debate, the "Four Years' Sejm" produced Europe's first written constitution. Conceived in the liberal spirit of the contemporaneous document in the United States, the constitution recast Poland-Lithuania as a hereditary monarchy and abolished many of the eccentricities and antiquated features of the old system. The new constitution abolished the individual veto in parliament; provided a separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government; and established "people's sovereignty" (for the noble and bourgeois classes). Although never fully implemented, the Constitution of May 3 gained an honored position in the Polish political heritage; tradition marks the anniversary of its passage as the country's most important civic holiday.

2nd Partition and Destruction of Poland-Lithuania

Passage of the constitution alarmed nobles who would lose considerable stature under the new order. In autocratic states such as Russia, the democratic ideals of the constitution also threatened the existing order, and the prospect of Polish recovery threatened to end domination of Polish affairs by its neighbors. In 1792 domestic and foreign reactionaries combined to end

the democratization process. Polish conservative factions formed the Confederation of Targowica and appealed for Russian assistance in restoring the status quo. Catherine gladly used this opportunity; enlisting Prussian support, she invaded Poland under the pretext of defending Poland's ancient liberties. The irresolute Stanislaw August capitulated, defecting to the Targowica faction. Arguing that Poland had fallen prey to the radical Jacobinism then at high tide in France, Russia and Prussia abrogated the Constitution of May 3, carried out a second partition of Poland in 1793, and placed the remainder of the country under occupation by Russian troops.

The second partition was far more injurious than the first. Russia received a vast area of eastern Poland, extending southward from its gains in the first partition nearly to the Black Sea. To the west, Prussia received an area known as South Prussia, nearly twice the size of its first-partition gains along the Baltic, as well as the port of Gdansk (then renamed Danzig). Thus, Poland's neighbors reduced the commonwealth to a rump state and plainly signaled their designs to abolish it altogether at their convenience.

In a gesture of defiance, a general Polish revolt broke out in 1794 under the leadership of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a military officer who had rendered notable service in the American Revolution. Kosciuszko's ragtag insurgent armies won some initial successes, but they eventually fell before the superior forces of Russian General Alexander Suvorov. In the wake of the insurrection of 1794, Russia, Prussia, and Austria carried out the third and final partition of Poland-Lithuania in 1795, erasing the Commonwealth of Two Nations from the map and pledging never to let it return.

Much of Europe condemned the dismemberment as an international crime without historical parallel. Amid the distractions of the French Revolution and its attendant wars, however, no state actively opposed the annexations. In the long term, the dissolution of Poland-Lithuania upset the traditional European balance of power, dramatically magnifying the influence of Russia and paving the way for the Germany that would emerge in the nineteenth century with Prussia at its core. For the Poles, the third partition began a period of continuous foreign rule that would endure well over a century.

PARTITIONED POLAND

Although the majority of the nobility (*szlachta*) was reconciled to the end of the commonwealth in 1795, the possibility of Polish independence was kept alive by events within and outside Poland throughout the nineteenth century. Poland's location in the very center of Europe became especially significant in a period when both Prussia/Germany and Russia were intensely involved in European rivalries and alliances and modern nation states took form over the entire continent.

The Napoleonic Period

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Europe had begun to feel the impact of momentous political and intellectual movements that, among their other effects, would keep the "Polish Question" on the agenda of international issues needing resolution. Most immediately,

Napoleon Bonaparte had established a new empire in France in 1804 following that country's revolution. Napoleon's attempts to build and expand his empire kept Europe at war for the next decade and brought him into conflict with the same East European powers that had beleaguered Poland in the last decades of the previous century. An alliance of convenience was the natural result of this situation. Volunteer Polish legions attached themselves to Bonaparte's armies, hoping that in return the emperor would allow an independent Poland to reappear out of his conquests.

Although Napoleon promised more than he ever intended to deliver to the Polish cause, in 1807 he created a Duchy of Warsaw from Prussian territory that had been part of old Poland and was still inhabited by Poles (see fig. 8). Basically a French puppet, the duchy did enjoy some degree of self-government, and many Poles believed that further Napoleonic victories would bring restoration of the entire commonwealth.

In 1809, under Józef Poniatowski, nephew of Stanislaw II Augustus, the duchy reclaimed the land taken by Austria in the second partition. The Russian army occupied the duchy as it chased Napoleon out of Russia in 1813, however, and Polish expectations ended with the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. In the subsequent peace settlement of the Congress of Vienna, the victorious Austrians and Prussians swept away the Duchy of Warsaw and reconfirmed most of the terms of the final partition of Poland.

Although brief, the Napoleonic period occupies an important place in Polish annals. Much of the legend and symbolism of modern Polish patriotism derives from this period, including the conviction that Polish independence is a necessary element of a just and legitimate European order. This conviction was simply expressed in a fighting slogan of the time, "for your freedom and ours." Moreover, the appearance of the Duchy of Warsaw so soon after the partitions proved that the seemingly final historical death sentence delivered in 1795 was not necessarily the end of the Polish nation. Instead, many observers came to believe that favorable circumstances would free Poland from foreign domination.

The Impact of Nationalism and Romanticism

The intellectual and artistic climate of the early nineteenth century further stimulated the growth of Polish demands for self government. During these decades, modern nationalism took shape and rapidly developed a massive following throughout the continent (predominantly in Paris), becoming the most dynamic and appealing political doctrine of its time, played by political groupings among Polish emigrants after the November Uprising of 1830. Such groups were: the Polish Democratic Society the liberal right concentrated around Prince Adam Czartoryski (*Hotel Lambert*) and Christian socialists, so-called "Communities of the Polish People" (*Gromady Ludu Polskiego*). They based their understanding of the term *nation* not on ethnic, linguistic or religious criteria, but on a shared political history. They had as their ideal the multiethnic Jagellonian Poland.

By stressing the value and dignity of native cultures and languages, nationalism offered a rationale for ethnic loyalty and resistance to assimilation. The associated principle of the nation state, or national homeland, provided a rallying cry for the stateless peoples of Europe.

Romanticism was the artistic element of nineteenth-century European culture that exerted the strongest influence on the Polish national consciousness. The Romantic movement was a natural partner of political nationalism, for it echoed the nationalist sympathy for folk cultures and manifested a general air of disdain for the conservative order of post-Napoleonic Europe. A specific element of the political thinking of Polish Romantics was the belief in the universal brotherhood of nations. Hence the conviction that the nations should help each other in the struggle for freedom and democracy. This idea was expressed in the famous catchword of the Polish November Uprising "For our freedom and yours". Furthermore according to the Romantics, the mission of the Polish nation was the so-called "christianization of politics". It meant the introduction of moral criteria into politics, the establishing of ethical principles in international relations. This idea has since Romanticism become an important element in Polish political thought. The idea of introducing moral norms into politics was further developed in the philosophy of Polish Romantic Messianism. Messianism claimed that Polish history would repeat the history of salvation. Poland, like Christ, would suffer in order to deliver freedom to mankind. Such a view of history gave meaning to suffering and to every struggle for freedom, even the struggle doomed to failure from the outset. Messianism, as a utopia, was codified in the works of the most prominent Romantic poets: Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Ignacy Krasiński. Mickiewicz concentrated on patriotic themes and the glorious national past. Frédéric Chopin (1810-49), a leading composer of the century, also used the tragic history of his nation as a major inspiration for his music.

Nurtured by these influences, nationalism awoke first among the intelligentsia and certain segments of the nobility, then more gradually in the peasantry. At the end of the process, a broader definition of nationhood had replaced the old class-based "gentry patriotism" of Poland. It maintained and fortified national consciousness. Polish Romantic literature created strong national myths, stereotypes and legends, which had an integrating and mobilizing function for the community.

The Era of National Insurrections

For several decades, the Polish national movement gave priority to the immediate restoration of independence, a drive that found expression in a series of armed rebellions. The insurgencies arose mainly in the Russian zone of partition to the east, about three-quarters of which was formerly Polish territory. After the Congress of Vienna, St. Petersburg had organized its Polish lands as the Congress Kingdom of Poland, granting it a quite liberal constitution, its own army, and limited autonomy within the tsarist empire. In the 1820s, however, Russian rule grew more arbitrary, and secret societies were formed by intellectuals in several cities to plot an overthrow. In November 1830, Polish troops in Warsaw rose in revolt. When the government of Congress Poland proclaimed solidarity with the insurrectionists shortly thereafter, a new Polish-Russian war began. The rebels' requests for aid from France were ignored, and their reluctance to abolish serfdom cost them the support of the peasantry. By September 1831, the Russians had subdued Polish resistance and forced 6,000 resistance fighters into exile in France, beginning a

time of harsh repression of intellectual and religious activity throughout Poland. At the same time, Congress Poland lost its constitution and its army.

After the failure of the November Revolt, clandestine conspiratorial activity continued on Polish territory. An exiled Polish political and intellectual elite established a base of operations in Paris. A conservative group headed by Adam Czartoryski (leader of the November Revolt) relied on foreign diplomatic support to restore Poland's status as established by the Congress of Vienna, which Russia had routinely violated beginning in 1819. Otherwise, this group was satisfied with a return to monarchy and traditional social structures.

The radical factions never formed a united front on any issue besides the general goal of independence. Their programs insisted that the Poles liberate themselves by their own efforts and linked independence with republicanism and the emancipation of the peasants.

Handicapped by internal division, limited resources, heavy surveillance, and persecution of revolutionary cells in Poland, the Polish national movement suffered numerous losses. The movement sustained a major setback in the 1846 revolt organized in Austrian Poland by the Polish Democratic Society, the leading radical nationalist group. The uprising ended in a bloody fiasco when the peasantry took up arms against the gentry rebel leadership, which was regarded as potentially a worse oppressor than the Austrians. By incurring harsh military repression from Austria, the failed revolt left the Polish nationalists in poor position to participate in the wave of national revolution that crossed Europe in 1848 and 1849. The stubborn idealism of this uprising's leaders emphasized individual liberty and separate national identity rather than establishment of a unified republic--a significant change of political philosophy from earlier movements.

The last and most tenacious of the Polish uprisings of the mid- nineteenth century erupted in the Russian-occupied sector in January 1863. Following Russia's disastrous defeat in the Crimean War, the government of Tsar Alexander II enacted a series of liberal reforms, including liberation of the serfs throughout the empire. High-handed imposition of land reforms in Poland aroused hostility among the landed nobles and a group of young radical intellectuals influenced by Karl Marx and the Russian liberal Alexander Herzen. Repeating the pattern of 1830-31, the open revolt of the January Insurrection by Congress Poland failed to win foreign backing. Although its socially progressive program could not mobilize the peasants, the rebellion persisted stubbornly for fifteen months. After finally crushing the insurgency in August 1864, Russia abolished the Congress Kingdom of Poland altogether and revoked the separate status of the Polish lands, incorporating them directly as the Western Region of the Russian Empire. The region was placed under the dictatorial rule of Mikhail Muravev, who became known as the Hangman of Wilno. All Polish citizens were assimilated into the empire. When Russia officially emancipated the Polish serfs in early 1864, it removed a major rallying point from the agenda of potential Polish revolutionaries.

The Time of "Organic Work"

Increasing oppression at Russian hands after failed national uprisings finally convinced Polish leaders that insurrection was premature at best and perhaps fundamentally misguided and counterproductive. During the decades that followed the January Insurrection, Poles largely

forsook the goal of immediate independence and turned instead to fortifying the nation through the subtler means of education, economic development, and modernization. This approach took the name *Organic Work* for its philosophy of strengthening Polish society at the grassroots. For some, the adoption of Organic Work meant permanent resignation to foreign rule, but many advocates recommended it as a strategy to combat repression while awaiting an eventual opportunity to achieve self-government.

Not nearly as colorful as the rebellions nor as loftily enshrined in national memory, the quotidian methods of Organic Work proved well suited to the political conditions of the later nineteenth century. The international balance of forces did not favor the recovery of statehood when both Russia and Germany appeared bent on the eventual eradication of Polish national identity. The German Empire, established in 1871 as an expanded version of the Prussian state, aimed at the assimilation of its eastern provinces inhabited by Poles. At the same time, St. Petersburg attempted to Russify the former Congress Kingdom, joining Berlin in levying restrictions against use of the Polish language and cultural expression. Poles under Russian and German rule also endured official campaigns against the Roman Catholic Church: the Cultural Struggle (Kulturkampf) of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to bring the Roman Catholic Church under state control and the Russian campaign to extend Orthodoxy throughout the empire.

The Polish subjects under Austrian jurisdiction (after 1867 the Habsburg Empire was commonly known as Austria-Hungary) confronted a generally more lenient regime. Poles suffered no religious persecution in predominantly Catholic Austria, and Vienna counted on the Polish nobility as allies in the complex political calculus of its multinational realm. In return for loyalty, Austrian Poland, or Galicia, received considerable administrative and cultural autonomy. Galicia gained a reputation as an oasis of toleration amidst the oppression of German and Russian Poland. The Galician provincial Sejm acted as a semi-autonomous parliamentary body, and Poles represented the region in the empire government in Vienna. In the late 1800s, the universities of Kraków and L'vov (Polish form Lwów) became the centers of Polish intellectual activity, and Kraków became the center of Polish art and thought. Even after the restoration of independence, many residents of southern Poland retained a touch of nostalgia for the days of the Habsburg Empire.

Social and Political Transformation

Throughout the later nineteenth century, profound social and economic forces operated on the Polish lands, giving them a more modern aspect and altering traditional patterns of life.

Especially in Russian Poland and the Silesian regions under German control, mining and manufacturing commenced on a large scale. This development sped the process of urbanization, and the emergence of capitalism began to reduce the relative importance of the landed aristocracy in Polish society. A considerable segment of the peasantry abandoned the overburdened land. Millions of Poles emigrated to North America and other destinations, and millions more migrated to cities to form the new industrial labor force. These shifts stimulated fresh social tensions. Urban workers bore the full range of hardships associated with early capitalism, and the intensely nationalistic atmosphere of the day bred frictions between Poles and the other peoples remaining from the old heterogeneous Commonwealth of Two Nations.

The movement of the former noble class into cities created a new urban professional class. Mirroring a trend visible throughout Central Europe, antisemitic sentiment mounted visibly, fed by Poles competing for the urban livelihoods long regarded as Jewish specialties. These transformations changed the face of politics as well, giving rise to new parties and movements that would dominate the Polish landscape for the next century. The grievances of the lower classes led to the formation of peasant and socialist parties. Communism gained only a marginal following, but a more moderate socialist faction led by Józef Pilsudski (1867-1935) won broader support through its emphatic advocacy of Polish independence. By 1905 Pilsudski's party, the Polish Socialist Party, was the largest socialist party in the entire Russian Empire. The National Democracy of Roman Dmowski (1864-1939) became the leading vehicle of the right by espousing a doctrine that combined nationalism with mistrust of Jews and other minorities. By the turn of the century, Polish political life had emerged from the relative quiescence of Organic Work and entered a stage of renewed assertiveness. In particular, Pilsudski and Dmowski had initiated what would be long careers as the paramount figures in the civic affairs of Poland. After 1900 political activity was suppressed only in the Prussian sector.

INDEPENDENCE WON AND LOST, 1914-45

Beginning in 1914, the newly invigorated Polish political scene combined with cataclysmic events on the European continent to offer both new hope and grave threats to the Polish people. By the end of World War II, Poland had seen the defeat or retreat of all three occupying powers, establishment of a shaky independent government, world economic crisis, then occupation and total domination by the resurgent Germans and Russians.

World War I

The first general European conflict since the Napoleonic Wars exerted a huge impact on the Poles, although their position in Europe was not an issue among the combatants. Again, however, Poland's geographical position between Germany and Russia meant much fighting and terrific human and material losses for the Poles between 1914 and 1918.

The war, which finally erupted in the summer of 1914, surprised Poles as well as other European societies. At this point, Poles displayed some loyalty toward the occupying states – Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany – respectively. The Russian authorities noted with astonishment that mobilization in Russian-Poland occurred without any major obstacles. This unexpected attitude was a result of a deep-seated resentment toward the Germans among Poles in Russian-Poland, due primarily to the Germanization policy in Prussian-Poland, further exacerbated by atrocities committed by the German army in Kalisz, in the early days of the war. The German army bombarded Kalisz and set it on fire after an accidental shooting. The city's historical center was obliterated.

But the greatest enthusiasm for the war among Poles was observed in Galicia, a phenomenon explained by the political atmosphere in the pre-war period. Poles believed the war was being waged because of the Russian-Poland's ties to Galicia.

In the German Partition apart from fear of persecution due to the anti-Polish laws, the main reason for this conciliatory attitude was the widespread conviction that powerful Germany would inevitably win the war. Meanwhile, the only concession made to Poles by the German authorities was the nomination of a new Polish archbishop of Gniezno-Poznań after eight years of vacancy. Moreover, a mobilization order was also published in Polish.

War and the Polish Lands

The war split the ranks of the three partitioning empires, pitting Russia as defender of Serbia and ally of Britain and France against the leading members of the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary. This circumstance afforded the Poles political leverage as both sides offered pledges of concessions and future autonomy in exchange for Polish loyalty and recruits. The Austrians wanted to incorporate Congress Poland into their territory of Galicia, so they allowed nationalist organizations to form there. The Russians recognized the Polish right to autonomy and allowed formation of the Polish National Committee, which supported the Russian side. In 1916, attempting to increase Polish support for the Central Powers, the German and Austrian emperors declared a new kingdom of Poland. The new kingdom included only a small part of the old commonwealth, however.

As the war settled into a long stalemate, the issue of Polish self-rule gained greater urgency. Roman Dmowski spent the war years in Western Europe, hoping to persuade the Allies to unify the Polish lands under Russian rule as an initial step toward liberation. In the meantime, Pilsudski had correctly predicted that the war would ruin all three of the partitioners, a conclusion most people thought highly unlikely before 1918. Pilsudski therefore formed Polish legions to assist the Central Powers in defeating Russia as the first step toward full independence for Poland.

Much of the heavy fighting on the war's Eastern Front took place on the territory of the former Polish state. In 1914 Russian forces advanced very close to Kraków before being beaten back. The next spring, heavy fighting occurred around Gorlice and Przemyśl, to the east of Kraków in Galicia. By the end of 1915, the Germans had occupied the entire Russian sector, including Warsaw. In 1916 another Russian offensive in Galicia exacerbated the already desperate situation of civilians in the war zone; about 1 million Polish refugees fled eastward behind Russian lines during the war. Although the Russian offensive of 1916 caught the Germans and Austrians by surprise, poor communications and logistics prevented the Russians from taking full advantage of their situation.

A total of 2 million Polish troops fought with the armies of the three occupying powers, and 450,000 died. Several hundred thousand Polish civilians were moved to labor camps in Germany. The scorched-earth retreat strategies of both sides left much of the war zone uninhabitable.

Recovery of Statehood

In 1917 two separate events decisively changed the character of the war and set it on a course toward the rebirth of Poland. The United States entered the conflict on the Allied side, while a process of revolutionary upheaval in Russia weakened and then removed the Russians from the Eastern Front, finally bringing the Bolsheviks to power in that country. After the last Russian advance into Galicia failed in mid-1917, the Germans went on the offensive again, the army of revolutionary Russia ceased to be a factor, and the Russian presence in Polish territory ended for the next twenty-seven years.

The defection of Russia from the Allied coalition gave free rein to the calls of Woodrow Wilson, the American president, to transform the war into a crusade to spread democracy and liberate the Poles and other peoples from the suzerainty of the Central Powers. Polish opinion crystallized in support of the Allied cause. Pilsudski became a popular hero when Berlin jailed him for insubordination. The Allies broke the resistance of the Central Powers by autumn 1918, as the Habsburg monarchy disintegrated and the German imperial government collapsed. In November 1918, Pilsudski was released from internment in Germany, returned to Warsaw, and took control as provisional president of an independent Poland that had been absent from the map of Europe for 123 years.

Interwar Poland

Pilsudski's first task was to reunite the Polish regions that had assumed various economic and political identities since the partition in the late eighteenth century, and especially since the advent of political parties. Pilsudski took immediate steps to consolidate the Polish regions under a single government with its own currency and army, but the borders of the Second Polish Republic were not established until 1921. Between 1921 and 1939, Poland achieved significant economic growth despite world economic crisis. The Polish political scene remained chaotic and shifting, however, especially after Pilsudski's death in 1935.

Formative Years, 1918-21

From its inception, the Second Polish Republic struggled to secure and maintain its existence in difficult circumstances. The extraordinary complications of defining frontiers preoccupied the state in its infancy. To the southwest, Warsaw encountered boundary disputes with Czechoslovakia. More ominously, an embittered Germany begrudged any territorial loss to its new eastern neighbor. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles settled the German-Polish borders in the Baltic region. The port city of Danzig, a city predominantly German but as economically vital to Poland as it had been in the sixteenth century, was declared a free city. Allied arbitration divided the ethnically mixed and highly coveted industrial and mining district of Silesia between Germany and Poland, with Poland receiving the more industrialized eastern section. These terms would be a primary incentive to the German aggression that ignited World War II. Military force proved the determinant of Poland's frontiers in the east, a theater rendered chaotic by the repercussions of the Russian revolutions and civil war. Pilsudski envisioned a new federation with Lithuania and Polish domination of western Ukraine, centered at Kiev, forming a Polish-led East European confederation to block Russian imperialism. Vladimir I. Lenin, leader of the new communist government of Russia, saw Poland as the bridge over which communism

would pass into the labor class of a disorganized postwar Germany. When Pilsudski carried out a military thrust into Ukraine in 1920, he was met by a Red Army counterattack that drove into Polish territory almost to Warsaw. Although many observers marked Poland for extinction and Bolshevization, Pilsudski halted the Soviet advance before Warsaw and resumed the offensive. The Poles were not able to exploit their new advantage fully, however; they signed a compromise peace treaty at Riga in early 1921 that split disputed territory in Belorussia and Ukraine between Poland and Soviet Russia. The treaty avoided ceding historically Polish territory back to the Russians.

From Democracy to Totalitarianism

Reborn Poland faced a host of daunting challenges: extensive war damage, a ravaged economy, a population one-third composed of wary national minorities, and a need to reintegrate the three zones kept forcibly apart during the era of partition. Under these trying conditions, the experiment with democracy faltered. Formal political life began in 1921 with adoption of a constitution that designed Poland as a republic modeled after the French example, vesting most authority in the legislature. The postwar parliamentary system proved unstable and erratic. In 1922 disputes with political foes caused Pilsudski to resign his posts as chief of state and commander of the armed forces, but in 1926 he assumed power in a coup that followed four years of ineffectual government. For the next decade, Pilsudski dominated Polish affairs as strongman of a generally popular centrist regime. Military in character, the government of Pilsudski mixed democratic and dictatorial elements while pursuing *sanacja*, or national cleansing. After Pilsudski's death in 1935, his protégé successors drifted toward open authoritarianism.

In many respects, the Second Republic fell short of the high expectations of 1918. As happened elsewhere in Central Europe, the attempt to implant democracy did not succeed. Minority peoples became increasingly alienated, and antisemitism rose palpably in the general population. Nevertheless, interwar Poland could justifiably claim some noteworthy accomplishments: economic advances, the revival of Polish education and culture after decades of official curbs, and, above all, reaffirmation of the Polish nationhood that had been disputed so long. Despite its defects, the Second Republic retained a strong hold on later generations of Poles as a genuinely independent and authentic expression of Polish national aspirations.

Poland's International Situation

By far the gravest menace to Poland's longevity came from abroad, not from internal weaknesses. The center of Poland's postwar foreign policy was a political and military alliance with France, which guaranteed Poland's independence and territorial integrity. Although Poland attempted to join the Little Entente, the French-sponsored alliance of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, Czechoslovak suspicions of Polish territorial ambitions prevented Polish membership. Beginning in 1926, Pilsudski's main foreign policy aim was balancing Poland's still powerful neighbors, the Soviet Union and Germany. Pilsudski assumed that both powers wished to regain the Polish territory lost in World War I. Therefore, his approach was to avoid Polish dependence on either power. Above all, Pilsudski sought to avoid taking positions that

might cause the two countries to take concerted action against Poland. Accordingly, Poland signed nonaggression pacts with both countries in the early 1930s. After Pilsudski's death, his foreign minister Józef Beck continued this policy.

The failure to establish planned alliances in Eastern Europe meant great reliance on the French, whose enthusiasm for intervention in the region waned markedly after World War I. The Locarno Pact, signed in 1926 by the major West European powers with the aim of guaranteeing peace in the region, contained no guarantee of Poland's western border. Over the next ten years, substantial friction arose between Poland and France over Polish refusal to compromise with the Germans and French refusal to resist Adolf Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s. The Polish nonaggression treaties with Germany and the Soviet Union resulted from this bilateral deterioration of confidence.

The Polish predicament worsened in the 1930s with the advent of Hitler's openly expansionist Nazi regime in Germany and the obvious waning of France's resolve to defend its East European allies. Pilsudski retained the French connection but had progressively less faith in its usefulness. As the decade drew to an end, Poland's policy of equilibrium between potential enemies was failing. Complete Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in early 1939 encircled Poland on three sides (East Prussia to the northeast had remained German). Hitler's next move was obvious. By 1939 Hitler had shattered the continental balance of power by a concerted campaign of armed diplomatic extortion that brought most of Central Europe into his grasp.

World War II

Profiting from German national resentment of World War I peace terms and international aversion to new armed conflict, Hitler began driving a new German war machine across Europe in 1939. His invasion of Poland in September 1939 was the tripwire that set off World War II, the most devastating period in the history of the Polish state. Between 1939 and 1945, 6 million people, over 15 percent of Poland's population, perished, with the uniquely cruel inclusion of mass extermination of Jews in concentration camps in Poland. Besides its human toll, the war left much of the country in ruins, inflicting indelible material and psychic scars.

The Outbreak of War

The crisis that led directly to renewed European conflict in 1939 commenced with German demands against Poland, backed by threats of war, for territorial readjustments in the region of Danzig and the Baltic coast to connect East Prussia with the rest of Germany. When Warsaw refused, correctly reading Hitler's proposal as a mere prelude to further exactions, it received only hesitant promises of British and French backing. Hitler overcame the deterrent effect of this alliance on August 23 when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression treaty that ended their interwar hostility. A secret provision of the treaty essentially divided all of Eastern Europe into Soviet and German spheres of domination. This provision signified the blessing of Soviet dictator Joseph V. Stalin for Berlin to attack Poland without fear of Soviet interference.

The Hitler-Stalin pact sealed Poland's fate and put the country in an indefensible position. On September 1, Germany hurled the bulk of its armed forces at its eastern neighbor, touching off

World War II. Based on existing guarantees of security, Britain and France declared war two days later, but they gave no effective assistance to their ally. By mid September, Warsaw was surrounded in spite of stout resistance by outnumbered Polish forces. As Poland reeled under the assault from the west, the Soviet Union administered the coup de grace by invading from the east on September 17. By the end of the month, the "September campaign" was over, Hitler and Stalin had reached terms defining their respective gains, and the Polish lands had been subjected once more to occupation.

German and Soviet Rule

For the next five years, Poland endured the most severe wartime occupation conditions in modern European history. Initially, Germany annexed western Poland directly, establishing a brutal colonial government whose expressed goal was to erase completely the concept of Polish nationhood and make the Poles slaves of a new German empire. About 1 million Poles were removed from German-occupied areas and replaced with German settlers. An additional 2.5 million Poles went into forced labor camps in Germany.

Until mid-1941, Germany and the Soviet Union maintained good relations in the joint dominion they had established over Poland. Moscow had absorbed the eastern regions largely inhabited by Ukrainians and Belorussians. By 1941 the Soviets had moved 1.5 million Poles into labor camps all over the Soviet Union, and Stalin's secret police had murdered thousands of Polish prisoners of war, especially figures in politics and public administration. The most notorious incident was the 1940 murder of thousands of Polish military officers; the bodies of 4,000 of them were discovered in a mass grave in the Katyn forests near Smolensk in 1943. Because Soviet authorities refused to admit responsibility until nearly the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, Polish opinion regarded the Katyn Massacre as the ultimate symbol of Soviet cruelty and mendacity

After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, all the Polish lands came under control of the Third Reich, whose occupation policies became even more bloodthirsty as the war continued. Hitler considered Poland to be an integral part of German Lebensraum, his concept of German domination of the European continent. Eastern Europe would be purged of its population of putative racial inferiors and prepared as the hinterland of a grandiose Germanic empire. This vision fueled the genocidal fanaticism of the conquerors. Reduced to slave status, the Poles lived under severe restrictions enforced with savage punishment. As the principal center of European Jewry, Poland became the main killing ground of the Nazi Holocaust; several of the most lethal death camps, including Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka, operated on Polish soil. The Nazis annihilated nearly all of Poland's 3 million Polish Jews. Roughly as many Polish gentiles also perished under the occupation.

Resistance at Home and Abroad

Poland was the only country to combat Nazi Germany from the first day of the Polish invasion until the end of the war in Europe. After the disaster of September 1939, a constitutionally legitimate Polish government-in-exile established a seat in London under the direction of General Wladyslaw Sikorski. In the early years of the war, Stalin maintained a strained

cooperation with the Polish government-in-exile while continuing to demand retention of the eastern Polish territories secured by the Hitler-Stalin pact and assurances that postwar Poland would be "friendly" toward the Soviet Union.

Shortly after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the Kremlin sought to organize Polish forces to aid in repelling the Nazis on the Eastern Front. Although 75,000 Polish troops were amassed on Soviet soil from Soviet camps, they never were deployed on the Soviet front because of disagreements about their utilization. Instead, the forces under the command of the "London Poles" fought with great distinction in the British Eighth Army in North Africa and Italy. The armored Polish I Corps played an important role in the Normandy invasion. Although some Polish units fought with the Red Army on the Eastern Front in the early years of the war, by 1943 Stalin had broken relations with the Sikorski government and the Soviet Union formed a rival front group, the Union of Polish Patriots, led by Polish communists in the Soviet Union. That group formed an entire field army that aided the Red Army in the last year of the war. Polish intelligence personnel also made a major contribution to the Allied side. In the 1930s, Polish agents had secured information on the top-secret Nazi code machine, Enigma, and in the war émigré Polish experts aided the British in using this information to intercept Hitler's orders to Nazi military leaders.

In Poland itself, most elements of resistance to the German regime organized under the banner of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa), which operated under direction of the London government-in-exile. The Home Army became one of the largest and most effective underground movements of World War II. Commanding broad popular support, it functioned both as a guerrilla force, conducting a vigorous campaign of sabotage and intelligence gathering, and as a means of social defense against the invaders. The Home Army became the backbone of a veritable underground state, a clandestine network of genuine Polish institutions and cultural activities. By 1944 the Home Army claimed 400,000 members. Acting independently of the overall Polish resistance, an underground Jewish network organized the courageous but unsuccessful 1943 risings in the ghettos of Warsaw, Bialystok, and Vilnius.

Soviet Liberation of Poland

Later in the war, the fate of Poland came to depend on the Soviet Union, which was initially the agent of deliverance from Nazi tyranny but later was the bearer of a new form of oppression. Stalin responded to Polish indignation over the Katyn Massacre by establishing an alternative Polish government of communists. The underground Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza) had already been active in German-occupied Poland for over a year. In 1943 it established a small military arm, the People's Army (Armia Ludowa). The Home Army and the Polish Workers' Party acted separately throughout the war.

As the tide of war turned in favor of the Allies, the Soviet shadow over Poland and Central Europe loomed larger. When Soviet forces neared Warsaw in the summer of 1944, the Home Army, anticipating imminent Red Army assistance, launched a rebellion against the German garrisons in the capital. Instead, the Soviets halted their advance just short of Warsaw, isolating the uprising and enabling the Germans to crush it after two months of intense fighting. In

retaliation against the Poles, the Germans demolished Warsaw before retreating westward, leaving 90 percent of the city in ruins.

Just before the Home Army uprising, the communist factions had formed the Polish Committee of National Liberation, later known as the Lublin Committee, as the official legal authority in liberated territory. In January 1945, the Lublin Committee became a provisional government, was recognized by the Soviet Union, and was installed in Warsaw. From that time, the Polish communists exerted primary influence on decisions about the restoration of Poland. Given this outcome, there is a strong suspicion that the Soviet failure to move on Warsaw in 1944 was an intentional strategy used by Stalin to eliminate the noncommunist resistance forces. The Red Army expelled the last German troops from Poland in March 1945, several weeks before the final Allied victory in Europe.

THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

Soviet success in liberating Poland began an entirely new stage in Polish national existence. With the reluctant blessing of the Allies, the communist-dominated government was installed in 1945. During the next seven years, Poland became a socialist state modeled on the Soviet Union. Although Poland remained within this political structure through the 1980s, open social unrest occurred at intervals throughout the communist period. Protests in 1980 spawned the Solidarity (Solidarnosc) labor movement, which forced fundamental compromise in the socialist system.

Consolidation of Communist Power

The shattered Poland that emerged from the rubble of World War II was reconstituted as a communist state and incorporated within the newly formed Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, despite the evident wishes of the overwhelming majority of the Polish nation. The deciding factor in this outcome was the dominant position gained by the victorious Red Army at the end of the war. At the conferences of Yalta and Potsdam in 1945, United States presidents and Britain's prime minister, Winston Churchill, met with Stalin to determine postwar political conditions, including the disposition of Polish territory occupied by the Red Army. At Yalta in February, Stalin pledged to permit free elections in Poland and the other Soviet-occupied countries of Eastern Europe. At Potsdam in July-August, the Allies awarded Poland over 100,000 square kilometers of German territory, west to the Oder and Neisse rivers, commonly called the Oder-Neisse Line. In turn, about 3 million Poles were removed from former Polish territory awarded to the Soviet Union and resettled in the former German lands; similarly about 2 million Germans had to move west of the new border.

The Yalta accords sanctioned the formation of a provisional Polish coalition government composed of communists and proponents of Western democracy. From its outset, the Yalta formula favored the communists, who enjoyed the advantages of Soviet support, superior morale, control over crucial ministries, and Moscow's determination to bring Eastern Europe securely under its thumb as a strategic asset in the emerging Cold War. The new regime in Warsaw subdued a guerrilla resistance in the countryside and gained political advantage by gradually whittling away the rights of their democratic foes. By 1946 the coalition regime held a

Carefully controlled national referendum that approved nationalization of the economy, land reform, and a unicameral rather than bicameral Sejm. Rightist parties had been outlawed by that time, and a pro-government Democratic Bloc formed in 1947 included the forerunner of the communist Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza--PZPR) and its leftist allies.

The first parliamentary election, held in 1947, allowed only opposition candidates of the now-insignificant Polish Peasant Party, which was harassed into ineffectiveness. Under these conditions, the regime's candidates gained 417 of 434 seats in parliament, effectively ending the role of genuine opposition parties. Within the next two years, the communists ensured their ascendancy by restyling the PZPR as holders of a monopoly of power in the Polish People's Republic.

From Stalinism to the Polish October

Communist social engineering transformed Poland nearly as much as did the war. In the early years of the new regime, Poland became more urban and industrial as a modern working class came into existence. The Polish People's Republic attained its principal accomplishments in this initial, relatively dynamic phase of its existence. The greatest gains were made in postwar reconstruction and in integration of the territories annexed from Germany. Imposition of the Soviet model on the political, economic, and social aspects of Polish life was generally slower and less traumatic than in the other East European countries following World War II. The PZPR took great care, for example, to limit the pace of agricultural collectivization lest Soviet-style reform antagonize Polish farmers

Nevertheless, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, PZPR rule grew steadily more totalitarian and developed the full range of Stalinist features then obligatory within the Soviet European empire: ideological regimentation, the police state, strict subordination to the Soviet Union, a rigid command economy, persecution of the Roman Catholic Church, and blatant distortion of history, especially as it concerned the more sensitive aspects of Poland's relations with the Soviet Union. Stringent censorship stifled artistic and intellectual creativity or drove its exponents into exile. At the same time, popular restiveness increased as initial postwar gains gave way to the economic malaise that would become chronic in the party-state. Soviet-style centralized state planning was introduced in the First Six-Year Plan, which began in 1950. The plan called for accelerated development of heavy industry and forced collectivization of agriculture, abandoning the previous go-slow policy in that area. As the earlier policy had cautioned, however, collectivization met stubborn peasant resistance, and the process moved much more slowly than anticipated. The state also took control of nearly all commercial and industrial enterprises. Leaving only family-run shops in the private sector, the government harassed such independent shopkeepers with bureaucratic requirements.

In its relations with the Roman Catholic Church, the communist government carefully avoided open intervention, seeking rather to foment anticlerical sentiment in society. Polish Catholic clergy denounced the atheism and materialism in the regime; in 1949 the Vatican's excommunication of Catholics belonging to the PZPR brought open hostility from both sides, including state control of church institutions and propaganda against them and church officials.

By 1954 nine high Polish churchmen, including Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, had been imprisoned

A brief liberalizing "thaw" in Eastern Europe followed the death of Stalin in early 1953. In Poland this event stirred ferment, calls for systemic reform, and conflict in the ranks of the PZPR. The de-Stalinization of official Soviet dogma left Poland's Stalinist regime in a difficult position, especially following Nikita S. Khrushchev's 1956 attack on Stalin's cult of personality. In the same month as Khrushchev's speech, the death of hard-liner Boleslaw Bierut exacerbated an existing split in the PZPR. In 1951 Bierut had won a struggle with Wladyslaw Gomulka for the top position in the party. In June 1956, scores of demonstrators died when army troops quelled street riots in Poznan, inaugurating a recurrent phenomenon of Polish worker protest against the self-proclaimed workers' state.

Realizing the need for new leadership, the PZPR chose Gomulka as first secretary in October 1956. This decision was made despite Moscow's threats to invade Poland if the PZPR picked Gomulka, a moderate who had been purged after losing his battle with Bierut. When Khrushchev was reassured that Gomulka would not alter the basic foundations of Polish communism, he withdrew the invasion threat. On the other hand, Gomulka's pledge to follow a "Polish road to socialism" more in harmony with national traditions and preferences caused many Poles to interpret the dramatic "Polish October" confrontation of 1956 as a sign that the end of the dictatorship was in sight.

The Gathering Crisis of People's Poland, 1956-80

Although Gomulka's accession to power raised great hopes, the 1956 incident proved to be a prelude to further social discontent when those hopes were disappointed. The 1960s and 1970s saw Gomulka's decline in power and his eventual ouster; spectacular economic reforms without long-term results; widespread dissent, often including open confrontations, from intellectuals, the church, and the workers; and, finally, the near-collapse of the Polish economy.

The Gomulka Years

The elevation of Gomulka to first secretary marked a milestone in the history of communist Poland. Most importantly, it was the first time that popular opinion had influenced a change at the top of any communist government. Gomulka's regime began auspiciously by curbing the secret police, returning some collective farmland to private ownership, loosening censorship, freeing political prisoners, improving relations with the Catholic Church. In general, Gomulka's Poland gained a deserved reputation as one of the more open societies in Eastern Europe. But the new party chief disappointed many Poles by failing to dismantle the fundamentals of the Stalinist system. Regarding himself as a loyal communist and striving to overcome the traditional Polish-Russian enmity, Gomulka came to favor only those reforms necessary to secure public toleration of the party's dominion. The PZPR was to be both the defender of Polish nationalism and the keeper of communist ideology. By the late 1960s, Gomulka's leadership had grown more orthodox and stagnant as the memory of the Poznan uprising faded. In 1968 Gomulka encouraged the Warsaw Pact military suppression of the democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia.

Gomulka's hold on power weakened that year when Polish students, inspired by the idealism of the Prague Spring, demonstrated to protest suppression of intellectual freedom. Popular disenchantment mounted as police attacked student demonstrators in Warsaw. The PZPR hardliners, who had been alarmed by Gomulka's modest reforms, seized the opportunity to force the first secretary into purging Jews from party and professional positions, exacerbating discontent among the most vocal elements of Polish society.

The downfall of the Gomulka regime in December 1970 was triggered by a renewed outbreak of labor violence protesting drastic price rises on basic goods. When strikes spread from the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk to other industrial centers on the Baltic coast, Gomulka interpreted the peaceful stoppages and walkouts as counterrevolution and ordered them met with deadly force. The bloodshed claimed hundreds of victims and inflamed the entire coastline before the party declared price increases and pushed Gomulka into retirement. The Baltic slayings permanently embittered millions of workers, while the events of the later Gomulka period convinced Polish progressives that enlightened communist rule was a futile hope. Many of the future leaders of Solidarity and other opposition movements gained their formative political experiences in 1968 and 1970.

Consolidation of the Opposition in the 1970s

In the wake of the Baltic upheavals, Edward Gierek was selected as party chief. A well-connected party functionary and technocrat, Gierek replaced all of Gomulka's ministers with his own followers and blamed the former regime for all of Poland's troubles. Gierek hoped to pacify public opinion by administering a dose of measured liberalization coupled with a novel program of economic stimulation. The center of the program was large-scale borrowing from the West to buy technology that would upgrade Poland's production of export goods. Over the long term, the export goods would pay for the loans and improve Poland's world economic position. The program paid immediate dividends by raising living standards and expectations, but it quickly soured because of worldwide recession, increased oil prices, and the inherent weaknesses and corruption of communist planning and administration. By the mid-1970s, Poland had entered a seemingly irreversible economic nosedive compounded by a crushing burden of external debt. Another attempt to raise food prices in 1976 failed after an additional round of worker protests

Domestic economic problems were accompanied by increased pressure from the Soviet Union for closer Polish cooperation with the other members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon). In 1971 Poland abandoned Gomulka's strict opposition to closer economic integration, and a series of long-term agreements committed Polish resource and capital investment to Soviet-sponsored projects. Such agreements guaranteed Poland access to cheap Soviet raw materials, especially oil and natural gas. Nonetheless, in the 1970s Poland experienced shortages of capital goods such as computers and locomotives because Comecon obligations moved such products out of Poland.

Meanwhile, the Helsinki Accords of 1975 inspired open dissent over human rights issues. The immediate objects of dissent were the regime's proposal of constitutional amendments that would institutionalize the leading role of the PZPR, Poland's obligations to the Soviet Union, and

the withholding of civil rights pending obedience to the state. In 1976 a group of intellectuals formed the Committee for Defense of Workers (Komitet Obrony Robotników--KOR), and students formed the Committee for Student Solidarity. Together those organizations intensified public pressure on Gierek to liberalize state controls, and many publications emerged from underground to challenge official dogma.

By the end of the 1970s, the hard-pressed Gierek regime faced an implicit opposition coalition of disaffected labor, dissident intelligentsia, and Roman Catholic clergy and lay spokespeople sympathetic to dissident activities. Democratically oriented activists grew more adept at defending workers' interests and human rights, a strategy that paid off handsomely in 1980. Under the stellar leadership of its longtime primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Catholic Church attained unrivaled moral authority in the country. The prestige of the church reached a new peak in 1978 with the elevation to the papacy of the archbishop of Kraków, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła. As John Paul II, Wojtyła became the first non-Italian pope since the sixteenth century. The election of the Polish pope sparked a surge of joy and pride in the country, and John Paul's triumphant visit to his homeland in 1979 did much to precipitate the extraordinary events of the next year.

The Birth of Solidarity

When the government enacted new food price increases in the summer of 1980, a wave of labor unrest swept the country. Partly moved by local grievances, the workers of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk went on strike in mid-August. Led by electrician and veteran strike leader Lech Walesa, the strikers occupied the shipyard and issued far-reaching demands for labor reform and greater civil rights. The workers' top priority was establishment of a trade union independent of communist party control and possessing the legal right to strike. Buoyed by a wave of popular support and formally acknowledged by other striking enterprises as their leader, the Gdansk workers held out until the government capitulated. The victorious strikers hailed the Gdansk Agreement of August 31 as a veritable social contract, authorizing citizens to introduce democratic change to the extent possible within the confines of the communist system.

Solidarity, the free national trade union that arose from the nucleus of the Lenin Shipyard strike was unlike anything in the previous experience of Comecon nations. Although primarily a labor movement led and supported by workers and represented by its charismatic chairman Walesa, Solidarity attracted a diverse membership that quickly swelled to 10 million people, or more than one of every four Poles. Because of its size and massive support, the organization assumed the stature of a national reform lobby. Although it disavowed overtly political ambitions, the movement became a de facto vehicle of opposition to the communists, who were demoralized but still in power. With the encouragement of Pope John Paul II, the church gave Solidarity vital material and moral support that further legitimized it in the eyes of the Polish population.

In the sixteen months following its initial strike, Solidarity waged a difficult campaign to realize the letter and spirit of the Gdansk Agreement. This struggle fostered an openness unprecedented in a communist East European society. Although the PZPR ousted Gierek as first secretary and proclaimed its willingness to cooperate with the fledgling union, the ruling party still sought to frustrate its rival and curtail its autonomy in every possible way. In 1980-81,

repeated showdowns between Solidarity and the party-state usually were decided by Solidarity's effective strikes. The movement spread from industrial to agricultural enterprises with the founding of Rural Solidarity, which pressured the regime to recognize private farmers as the economic foundation of the country's agricultural sector.

Meanwhile, the persistence of Solidarity prompted furious objections from Moscow and other Comecon members, putting Poland under constant threat of invasion by its Warsaw Pact allies. This was the first time a ruling communist regime had accepted organizations completely beyond the regime's control. It was also the first time an overwhelming majority of the workers under such a regime were openly loyal to an organization fundamentally opposed to everything for which the party stood. In 1981 an estimated 30 percent of PZPR members also belonged to an independent union.

In late 1981, the tide began to turn against the union movement. In the midst of the virtual economic collapse of the country, many Poles lost the enthusiasm that had given Solidarity its initial impetus. The extremely heterogeneous movement developed internal splits over personality and policy. Walesa's moderate wing emphasized nonpolitical goals, assuming that Moscow would never permit Poland to be governed by a group not endorsed by the Warsaw Pact. Walesa sought cooperation with the PZPR to prod the regime into reforms and avoid open confrontation with the Soviet Union. By contrast, the militant wing of Solidarity sought to destabilize the regime and force drastic change through wildcat strikes and demonstrations. In 1981 the government adopted a harder line against the union, and General Wojciech Jaruzelski, commander in chief of the Polish armed forces, replaced Stanislaw Kania as party leader in October. Jaruzelski's very profession symbolized a tougher approach to the increasingly turbulent political situation. At the end of 1981, the government broke off all negotiations with Solidarity, and tension between the antagonists rose sharply.

The Jaruzelski Interlude

The Jaruzelski regime marked another historic turning point in governance of the Polish state. Beginning with repressive measures to silence all opposition, Jaruzelski eventually presided over the popular rejection of Polish communism.

Martial Law

In December 1981, Jaruzelski suddenly declared martial law, ordering the army and special police units to seize control of the country, apprehend Solidarity's leaders, and prevent all further union activity. In effect, Jaruzelski executed a carefully planned and efficient military coup on behalf of the beleaguered and paralyzed the PZPR. The motives of this act remain unclear. The general later claimed that he acted to head off the greater evil of an imminent Soviet invasion; detractors dismissed this explanation as a pretext for an ironfisted attempt to salvage party rule. In any case, the junta suppressed resistance with a determination that cost the lives of several protesters, and by the new year the stunned nation was again under the firm grip of a conventional communist regime.

Under martial law, Jaruzelski's regime applied draconian restrictions on civil liberties, closed the universities, and imprisoned thousands of Solidarity activists, including Walesa. During the

succeeding months, the government undid much of Solidarity's work and finally dissolved the union itself. Official pressure overcame repeated attempts by Solidarity sympathizers to force the nullification of the December coup. By the end of 1982, the junta felt sufficiently secure to free Walesa, whom it now characterized as the "former leader of a former union." After gradually easing the most onerous features of the state of emergency, Warsaw lifted martial law in July 1983, but Jaruzelski and his generals continued to control the most critical party and government posts.

Poland at an Impasse

From the viewpoint of the regime, implementing martial law efficiently extinguished the immediate challenge posed by Solidarity. It did nothing, however, to resolve the long-standing crisis of "People's Poland," which in many ways originated in the very foundation of communist rule and the shadow of illegitimacy and ineptitude from which it never escaped. Jaruzelski presented himself as a realistic moderate, a proponent of reform who nevertheless insisted on the leading role of the party. Polish society remained sullenly unresponsive to his appeals, however. At the same time, he encountered resistance from the PZPR conservatives. These so-called hardheads, held in contempt by the public, regarded the party chief as too conciliatory and resented the interference of Jaruzelski's fellow generals in the affairs of the civilian party apparatus.

Time proved that Jaruzelski's coup had staggered Solidarity but not killed it. Adherents of the union operated underground or from jail cells, advocating a waiting game to preserve the principles of the Gdansk Agreement. Walesa in particular refused to fade into obscurity; he gained added luster by his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1983. In the next year, the Jaruzelski government suffered embarrassment when secret policemen were discovered to have abducted and murdered Father Jerzy Popieluszko, a priest who had gained recognition as the spiritual adviser of the repressed Solidarity. At that juncture, Poland seemed mired in frustrating deadlock, with no reasonable prospect of resuscitating the stricken economy or achieving political harmony.

Collapse of the Communist Regime

The deadlock was broken chiefly by events elsewhere in the Soviet alliance. The birth of Solidarity proved to be a precursor of forces of change across all of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Once again Poland was in the midst of cataclysmic European events, but in this case Poland had a decisive influence on events in neighboring countries. Beginning with the liberalization programs of Mikhail S. Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and continuing with the unforeseen and sudden demise of Poland's communist regime, decades of tension had been released throughout the region by the end of 1989.

Toward the Round-Table Talks

The first break in the Polish logjam occurred in 1985 when Gorbachev assumed leadership of the Soviet Union. Although Gorbachev in no way willed the demolition of the communist order in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, his policies of *glasnost'* and *perestroika* inadvertently

accelerated the indigenous systemic rot in those countries. As the literal and figurative bankruptcy of East European communism became obvious, apologists resorted more frequently to the Brezhnev Doctrine--the understanding that Moscow would use force to prevent ceding any territory once under its control--as the ultimate justification of the status quo. But the sustained liberalism of the Gorbachev era undermined the credibility of this last-ditch argument. The inhibiting fear of Red Army retaliation, which had blocked reform in Poland and elsewhere in earlier years, gradually faded. Hastening to identify itself with Gorbachev, the Jaruzelski team welcomed the spirit of reform wafting from the east and cautiously followed suit at home. By 1988 most political prisoners had been released, unofficial opposition groups were flourishing, and Solidarity, still nominally illegal, operated quite openly. In the meantime, however, economic malaise and runaway inflation had depressed Polish living standards and deepened the anger and frustration of society. In early 1988, strikes again were called in Gdansk and elsewhere, and a new generation of alienated workers called for representation by Solidarity and Walesa. Amid widespread predictions of a social explosion, Jaruzelski took the momentous step of beginning round table talks with the banned trade union and other opposition groups. This measure was taken over the objections of the still-formidable hard-line faction of the PZPR.

The 1989 Elections and Their Aftermath

After months of haggling, the round table talks yielded a historic compromise in early 1989: Solidarity would regain legal status and the right to post candidates in parliamentary elections (with the outcome guaranteed to leave the communists a majority of seats). Although to many observers the guarantee seemed a foolish concession by Solidarity at the time, the election of June 1989 swept communists from nearly all the contested seats, demonstrating that the PZPR's presumed advantages in organization and funding could not overcome society's disapproval of its ineptitude and oppression.

Solidarity used its newly superior position to broker a coalition with various small parties that until then had been silent satellites of the PZPR. The coalition produced a non-communist majority that formed a cabinet dominated by Solidarity. Totally demoralized and advised by Gorbachev to accept defeat, the PZPR held its final congress in January 1990. In August 1989, the Catholic intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki became prime minister of a government committed to dismantling the communist system and replacing it with a Western-style democracy and a free-market economy. By the end of 1989, the Soviet alliance had been swept away by a stunning succession of revolutions partly inspired by the Polish example. Suddenly, the history of Poland, and of its entire region, had entered the postcommunist era.