

## A MEETING OF POLISH AND BRITISH HISTORIANS

A meeting of Polish and English historians held under the auspices of the Committee of Historical Sciences took place in Warsaw on the 18th and 19th of April, 1978. It was devoted to the problems of Renaissance and Reformation (section I), and to the diplomacy of the inter-war twenty years (section II).

The session of section I was opened by the paper of Professor A. G. Dickens (London) entitled *The Early English Protestants: A Social Survey*. On the basis of a card-index containing 2,500 biograms the lecturer discussed the geography of early Protestantism in England, its social structure and also analyzed the age of the adherents of the new faith. The author who availed himself of rich source material was able to find interesting links between the centres of late Lollardism and the early Protestantism as well as to present, as a typical cradle of the latter, the small textile towns (the movement was dominated by poor weavers and other workers who constituted 88 per cent of those who perished during persecutions). Of great interest was also the statement that the new religion attracted mainly young people (the most numerous group of those who perished embraced people between the twentieth and thirtieth year of life, there were also many young people under twenty as well as children). The animated discussion placed emphasis on the importance of results achieved, and postulated to correlate the age structure of the adherents of Protestantism with general age structure of the English population at the time. It also indicated the greater susceptibility to persecution of the poor and simple people (those who stood to lose more were more cunning, and those who occupied influential posts could avoid a sentence, etc.). The discussion postulated to take up research of the civil status of those who adhered to early Protestantism (among them there was probably a great number of single persons, unmarried young men, widows,

etc.); a research of the relation between social-professional frustrations (e.g. among weavers) and adherence to the movement, the role of literacy (capability to read the Bible) as an intellectual preparation for the reception of new trends.

Equally animated discussion was provoked by the other English paper delivered by Dr. N. G. Parker (Edinburgh) entitled *The Reformation and "Dechristianization" in Early Modern Europe*. The lecturer focussed his attention on the negative results of Reformation, which having ruined the earlier Catholic network of parishes (together with school institutions, hospitals, etc., attached to them) was not able to build instead of them an equally dense, new structure, which led to a "dechristianization" of whole regions. The participants in the discussion praised the wealth of presented materials dealing with the number of parishes, the clergy and their functioning in the 16th—18th centuries, but raised some objections as to the thesis of "dechristianization" itself, postulated a broader consideration, besides the clergy, of secular milieus, and drew attention to the role of devastations caused by wars and elemental disasters (the crisis of the 17th century and the well-known discussion of its course). They also raised the problem of secularization of terminology, which occurred in the 16th and following centuries, and of the growth of prejudice and a wave of witch-hunt which swept over many countries of Europe.

The Polish side came up with a paper delivered by Professor M. Bogucka (Warsaw), entitled *Towns in Poland and the Reformation. Analogies and Differences with Other Countries*, which was focussed on the problem of causes for the weakness of Reformation trends among Polish townspeople. This phenomenon was caused by a whole number of factors, such as economic weakness and ideological immaturity, the fact of lingering on the margin of political life, strong subordination to the King's officials—*starosts* or private owners, a relatively low degree of literacy, a relatively weak development of social conflicts inside the towns connected with the non-existence of early capitalism, and lastly mental passivity and conservatism (connected with economic conservatism and passivity). The discussion raised the problems of development of Protestantism in Lithuania, the problem of the weak anticlericalism in Polish towns connected with the survival of the church network of school-and-charity institutions, the role of reading and the issues connected with the research of its development, (the vagueness of the term "literacy", the insignificance of the ability to make a signature, the problems of recurring illiteracy). The second Polish paper, by Assistant Professor S. Grzybowski (Cracow) was devoted to the problem *The Confederation of Warsaw, 1573, Compared with Other Acts of Tolerance in 16th Century Europe*. The author presented the text of Warsaw Confederation against a wide geographic and chronological background, beginning with the medieval institutions of *Treuga Dei* through the so-called *Landfrieden*, up to the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, Maximilian II's edict for Austria in 1568 as well as the act of tolerance of the Transylvania Parliament of 1571.

The discussion was focussed on the problem of the social extent of religious tolerance as well as its dependence on the political set-up dominating in the given territory.

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Two sessions of section II (recent history) were devoted to the diplomacy of the inter-war twenty years. On the first day of the session Dr. M. Nowak-Kiełbikowa (Warsaw) delivered a lecture on *British Policy Towards Poland in the 1930s*.

Having recorded the instrumental character of the British policy towards Poland and having stated that the main problem in Polish-British relations in the thirties consisted in a controversy about the Polish-German frontier, the author presented four stages of evolution of the British standpoint. This evolution started from the principle formulated by Austen Chamberlain in the second inter-war decade about leaving the final solution of the shape of Polish-German frontier to time. The first stage in this evolution covered the period from 1930 to January 1933 and was marked by a resignation from this principle and a formulation of a question addressed to the Foreign Office whether a revision of the Polish-German frontier would not be advisable. The second stage of this evolution, which lasted from spring 1933 until the autumn of 1937 was marked by a departure from the prorevisionist tendencies. This was a result of the growing distrust of the policies of Nazi Germany. In the third stage, between November 1937 and January 1939 the idea was reconsidered of giving consent to the revision of the status of the Free Town of Gdańsk. During the last stage the Foreign Office and Cabinet after much hesitation acknowledged that it was in the interest of the British that Poland should neither become a satellite of Germany, nor a neutral state, but an ally of Great Britain.

During the discussion it was indicated that the policy of Great Britain towards Poland resulted in a great measure from Britain's ignorance of the matters of Central Europe. This was partly a result of the geographical distance and partly of a view of Poland as a country remaining in the orbit of French influences. Moreover, the attitude of Britain to Poland was determined by economic and strategic factors and by its attitude to the then Polish government. During the rule of Neville Chamberlain the British attitude to Poland reflected also the prime minister's style of conducting foreign policy outside of the Foreign Office and independently of it. Also the British public opinion vaguely realized the situation in which Poland found itself on the threshold of the war, the emotional engagement on the part of the British being very weak. This situation has radically changed since the beginning of the Second World War. On the other hand the Polish policy was marked by illusions as to the value of the Polish-British alliance. This

alliance was valuable only for Great Britain. By concentrating the first attack of Germany on itself Poland gave Great Britain the necessary time to mobilize its powers of defence.

On the second day of debates Professor D. C. Watt (London) delivered a report entitled *Misinformation, Misconception, Mistrust. Episodes in British Policy and the Approach of War, 1938—1939*.

Following polemical remarks on the subject of British historiography the author posed a question whether the Second World War was an accidental or a non-accidental phenomenon. The answer resulted from the analysis of German and British policies carried out in the report. With reference to the former D. C. Watt propounded the thesis that Hitler was influenced by three different political concepts, i.e. those of J. Ribbentrop, H. Göring, and of the SS. Whereas the British policy was formed under the influence of misinformation, a faith that Hitler did not aim at a territorial expansion, as well as unjustified hopes for the creation of a bloc composed of Balkan countries and Poland, safeguarded by Great Britain, France, USSR and Italy, as well as an erroneous evaluation of the USA and USSR politics. The primary role in this bloc was to be played not by Poland but by Rumania. The guaranties for Poland were viewed as an important, but transitory stage. The policy of building a bulwark against the German expansion in the form of a bloc of central-European states suffered a defeat, for it was opposed to the intentions of particular central-European states, which wished for individual guaranties and alliances. Apart from that Neville Chamberlain had some doubts whether the price of the possible help on the part of USSR and also of USA would not be too high. London had not envisaged the potentialities of the Soviet policy and expected a German-Soviet war. In spite of the attempts on the British part to investigate the possibilities of coming to terms with Germans, no agreement was reached, and finally Great Britain declared war to Germany. In the final part of his paper the author stated in a polemics with A. J. P. Taylor that an analysis of pre-war events allowed to state that this war was not an accidental phenomenon.

In the discussion, a controversy arose about the author's thesis on Soviet policy. On the one hand the direction of this policy had not been finally decided in 1938, on the other already at the very beginning of the thirties the Soviet side suggested that Germany could have proposed some agreement to them. Another subject of considerations was the problem of ideological premises of the Soviet policy, the possibility of solving the question of European security under the conditions of Polish and Rumanian obstruction, and the attitude of British public opinion towards the possible British-Soviet agreement. It was indicated that a new light on these problems was thrown by the Soviet historiography of the sixties and seventies. With regard to the German policy it was stated that we should rather speak of three tactics than three political concepts. A broader consideration of the French policy was also postulated. A remark was voiced that neither re-

port paid enough attention to the strategic motives of the British policy. Whereas the participants in the discussion agreed with the author's thesis about the foremost importance of Rumania in the British policy of building a bloc of Central-European states.

The sessions of the both sections were attended by over 30 people. In his recapitulation Professor A. G. Dickens emphasized the importance of the meeting both for the English and Polish research and pointed to the fact that the problems studied in both countries appeared to be paralel and there is a need to compare the results achieved. The next Polish-British meeting will take place in London in 1981.

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