

2010

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Review

<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/>

Published on **16 June 2010**

H-Diplo Review Editor: Diane Labrosse

H-Diplo Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane Labrosse

H-Diplo has commissioned reviews of the Makers of the Modern World Series (Haus Publishing), which concerns the Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and their aftermath. The 32 volumes are structured as biographies in standard format or as specific national/organizational histories.
<http://www.hauspublishing.com/product/229>

Anita Prażmowska. *Ignacy Paderewski: Poland.* (Makers of the Modern World Series). London: Haus Publishing, 2009. pp. xxii +199pp. Notes, chronology and further reading. Cloth. £12.99.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/Haus-Poland.pdf>

Reviewed for H-Diplo by **M. B. B. Biskupski**, Central Connecticut State University

Ignacy Jan Paderewski is a major figure in modern Polish history. His service to the Polish cause during the World War was considerable and his subsequent efforts at the Paris Peace Conference, though disappointing to many Poles, were certainly devoted and exhausting. Author Anita Prażmowska was given only a very few pages to discuss Paderewski's career and the focus is to be on his role at the Peace Conference in this volume in the *Makers of the Modern World* series. Given this assignment, concision and careful selectivity are demanded. First we must compliment the author for many well-turned phrases, an overall graceful style, and some valuable insights. For example, the author describes well Paderewski's failure to comprehend the dynamics of the Polish situation when he returned after World War I. Her discussion of Roman Dmowski's almost invisible political career in the Polish Second Republic is well-handled, as is her discussion of Paderewski's hauteur and naïveté and there are a number of *bons mots*. However, there are serious problems with the volume which must be addressed in detail.

First, the book spends as much time on Paderewski's colleague Dmowski as it does on him. For example, the initial biographical chapter on Paderewski is 14 pages; that on Dmowski is 16. Not only do we read much of Dmowski, but odd items are included; for example, his concern over the high price for prostitutes in Paris. Considerable space is given to Dmowski's political views -- which are rarely contrasted to Paderewski's thus making the lengthy sections of yet more dubious value. For example, Paderewski's detailed statement of his view of future Poland, presented in a memorandum intended for President Wilson, is

not discussed although it is the only systematic presentation of Paderewski's views on Polish geo-politics. As for Dmowski, despite the attention devoted to him, his views are not clearly presented. We are told that he was more concerned about Germany than Russia; that he was a nationalist, and that he was an Anti-Semite. All of these are well-known aspects of Dmowski. However his ambivalent views of Russia and occasional flirtation with Pan-Slavism are not considered. The reader can only wonder why we have no reference to *Rosja, Niemcy a sprawa polska*, his main text regarding Poland's strategic difficulties. Władysław Bułhak's work would have been useful here. The reader becomes eventually convinced that Prazmowska devotes so much attention to Dmowski due to a considerable admiration for him. The references to his not finding Polish politics after 1919 congenial, because a statesman of his stature found them beneath him, is a case in point.

Despite the purpose of the book, we are given relatively little about Paderewski's activities in Paris. This is handled very sparingly. More disturbing is the extremely abbreviated discussion of his wartime activities -- which were a greater service to Poland than his efforts at Paris. Paderewski's international stature in the war years was based on two factors besides his international celebrity. The first was his efforts on behalf of Polish relief, and the second was his ability to organize American Polonia and convince both American public opinion and the Wilson administration that he was the unalloyed leader of the Poles in America and perhaps the most powerful Pole in the world. Neither of these points is developed beyond a few scattered remarks. Paderewski's involvement with American Polonia is virtually ignored and the basic building blocks of his position are not presented. Paderewski's ability to appeal directly to major figures -- Herbert Hoover, Col. Edward House, and President Woodrow Wilson over relief issues is also not discussed. Paderewski became an enormously sympathetic figure in America because he symbolized the suffering of Poland. This is essential to understanding Paderewski but it is not discussed in the book.

The organization of the book is most unfortunate. The author introduces a theme in one chapter only to discuss its antecedents in the next. We are told for example, of Marshal Józef Piłsudski's 1926 *coup d'état* and then, a few pages later, we are given an account of the events of the early 1920s which preceded it. The *coup* itself is badly explained and appears as merely a lust for power by Piłsudski. The threatening international situation (Locarno was in 1925); the problems with the parliament's inability to manage military affairs -- vital to a vulnerable country like Poland -- and the virtual paralysis of the Polish *sejm*, all go unmentioned yet these were the factors which caused many to hail the *coup* as an escape from stagnation and floundering. We have known this since Rothschild's work a generation ago.¹ The whole notion of the renewal of Polish life--the so-called *sanacja*--had wide appeal because the realities of post-war Poland were so disappointing to those who expected far more. Eva Plach has discussed the larger meaning of the coup in a recent study, *The Clash of Moral Nations*.² The fact the Piłsudski's successors did not fulfill the

¹ Joseph Rothschild, *Piłsudski's Coup d'Etat*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966.

² Eva Plach, *The Clash of Moral Nations: Cultural Politics in Piłsudski's Poland, 1926-1935*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006.

promises represented by the *sanacja* (the name given to Piłsudski's regime, roughly translated as "cleansing" or ridding of corruption) do not diminish its original attractiveness. The reader unfamiliar with the complex world of Poland between 1918-1923 would be confused if not baffled. Polish politics are presented in a most unhelpful way. A striking example is referring to Dmowski and Piłsudski as "two Polish Nationalist leaders" (why, parenthetically, is Nationalist capitalized?) a statement not only misleading but confounding to anyone trying to unravel the evolution of Polish political life before 1918. (xxi).

On November 10, 1918 Piłsudski returned to Warsaw after months in German captivity. The Regency Council, a puppet institution in German hands, surrendered all power to him. He negotiated the withdrawal of German troops from Poland the next day. His devotees -- largely the *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa* (POW), a number of student organizations, and others, disarmed the Germans in Warsaw and other major cities -- often with sharp fighting. Five days later, Piłsudski announced to the world that Poland had regained its freedom and was again functioning as an independent state. Polish Independence Day was therefore celebrated on November 11th although the day was only officially proclaimed in 1937. It is celebrated on that day now. However, to Prażmowska, independence came in 1919 (vi-vii). Perhaps the author refers to the fact that the allies only recognized Poland in 1919.

This is part of a huge number of mistakes which are strewn throughout the text. Let us consider some of these. The initial union between Poland and Lithuania was begun in 1385 by the Treaty of Krewo; the act is not mentioned. There was no "Russian Empire" in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but a Muscovite state (viii); the "formal" union between Poland and Lithuania was in 1569 not 1568 and it was known as the Union of Lublin. The statement that Stefan Batory ignored "Polish interests on the Baltic coast" (ix) bizarrely overlooks the Livonian Wars, the triumphant Treaty of Jam Zapolski and epitomized by the rather famous Jan Matejko painting of King Batory at Psków known to every Polish student. How the author could proclaim the last quarter of the seventeenth century with the convulsive war with the Turks an era of "relative stability" (ix) is hard to understand. The discussion of the Partition era - the Partitions are repeated at least three times in a few pages - omits the vital reform movement and stunningly omits the Constitution of May 3, 1791 (xi). The November Rising ended in 1831 not 1832 (xv). Nothing is mentioned about the Polish risings in 1846. The movement in the last years of the nineteenth century is "Neo" Romanticism, not Romanticism which was discredited after 1863. To refer to Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki as representing a movement of the second half of the century is odd because both were then dead (xviii).

To describe the trips by Piłsudski and Dmowski to Japan as both seeking "Japanese support" is highly misleading as Piłsudski wanted Tokyo's help in organizing a Polish rising and Dmowski argued just the opposite. (xxi). The Teutonic Knights were not the "Crusader Knights" when they conquered East Prussia (14). The abbreviation ZET (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej i.e. Alliance of Polish Youth) is mentioned on page 20 but it is not translated or presented in full. Dmowski's election to the Duma is confusingly presented.

The 1912 election is discussed on page 16, but the 1907 election waits until page 34. Dmowski's 1912 defeat goes unmentioned.

Eric Ludendorff was not a nobleman (39). The Puławski Legion formed in Russia at the beginning of the war was insignificant but the 1914 *Komitet Narodowy Polski* (not to be confused with the 1917 organization of the same name) was not, nor was the *Centralny Komitet Obywatelski*. Prazmowska mentions the first and omits the latter two (41). In the summary biography of Pilsudski she does not include the Legions, perhaps the fundamental source of the Pilsudski legend in Polish politics. (43). In discussing World War I there is no mention of Wilson's January 22, 1917 "Peace without Victory" speech. It was vital to the international evolution of the Polish Question and reflected a major role for Paderewski in the United States. This epitomizes the much abbreviated coverage the author gives to the American aspects of the maestro's career. The reader should, at the very least, have been introduced to the Paderewski-dominated organizational structure of American Polonia. Never before or since has Polonia accomplished so much for Poland but it goes largely unmentioned. It is something which could have happily replaced the excessive coverage of Dmowski.

The author speak of Polish "communities in exile" undertaking a host of actions during the first year of the war (46-47). This is misleading from several aspects. First, many of the organizations active in 1914 were founded before the war. Second, the section is written in the passive voice and it is unclear, therefore, who is doing what. Finally, the Poles in exile were disunited and feuding, not acting in unison. A master-plan is outlined when none existed. The Lausanne Committee, a triumph of the émigrés, is not noted. It was a major creation of the Polish exiles bridging the gap between the Vevey Committee of 1914 and the *Komitet Narodowy Polski* (KNP) of 1917 in terms of the organizational evolution of international Polonia.

Paderewski's meeting with Wilson, at the moment of the 1916 election, should have prompted some discussion of the so-called Gerson thesis which portrayed Paderewski as buying Wilson with Polish votes. This is an important aspect of the Paderewski-Wilson relationship which is ignored. (52). The United States did not declare war on Austria in April, 1917 but only December (52). The chronology of the war years 1915-1918 is badly scrambled (46-56). A reader unfamiliar with the complex Polish Question during the war would get the impression that the KNP preceded the Polish Army in France when in fact it followed (54). The author speaks of Piłsudski deciding to "go along with German plans in Polish areas" after October, 1917 (55). On the contrary, he was then under German arrest and this after months of determined opposition to German policy towards Poland. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in March, not January, 1918 (55). The author does, however, correct this later (68). To date the creation of the Polish Army in France to "February, 1918" is wrong and contradicts what the author herself said earlier. (63). The idea that "Warsaw was liberated in November, 1918, "without a shot being fired" is untrue. It required some armed conflict. (70.)

To describe the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference as "firmly committed to the restoration of Poland to the map of Europe" suggests a sympathy for Poland which did

not exist, especially as regards Prime Minister Lloyd George, a bitter foe of Poland even later during World War II (78). Dmowski did not argue for the restoration of the Polish 1772 borders at Paris, but specifically denied their applicability. (83). To claim that there were “no ethnic grounds” for Poland’s acquisition of Galicia is completely false. Western Galicia was overwhelmingly Polish and Eastern Galicia has a large Polish minority. (85). One can only wonder what the author has in mind when she refers to “the Lithuanian areas, including the ancient city of Lwów”. Perhaps she means Wilno (94).

The author manages to stumble over a major event in Paderewski’s life. He did not leave office in December, 1920, but a whole year earlier. (99). In discussing the period of Paderewski’s brief term in office, the author should have consulted the valuable dissertation by Zofia Sywak, “Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Prime Minister of Poland 16 January to 9 December 1919” (St. John’s University, 1975) The author twice introduces us to the Spa Conference (110 and 141). A bizarre *obiter dictum* is the statement: “While Pilsudski and Dmowski vied for power in different ways, Paderewski, as a decent man, thought only of helping Poland” (101). This is tantamount to questioning the patriotism of the other two notables.

The so-called “Polish Corridor” contained a Polish, not a German majority as the author wrongly contends (even the 1910 Prussian census gave the Germans only 42.5% of the population) (103). The discussion of the Upper Silesian risings is difficult to follow with no first rising mentioned and a second being referred to out of context (106-107). The Teschen dispute is presented as Poland bullying Czechoslovakia whereas it was Czech seizure of the territory that was the key step. (109). By referring to “the Polish offensive against the Soviet Union beginning on “April 25th (1920), the author has managed to commit several unfortunate errors. First, fighting had been going on for months before April. Second, the offensive of which she speaks -- the so-called Kiev campaign -- was launched on the 24th not 25th, and third, most evidence suggests that the attack pre-empted a Soviet invasion. (109) Kiev was not taken by the Poles on May 8th, but the day before (110). The sequence of events disintegrates when the author has Pilsudski staging a “triumphal procession” through Warsaw in March, 1920 over his victory in the Ukraine “at a time when the Polish army was in full retreat” (124). The reader does not know how to understand this passage. In March the Ukrainian campaign had not yet begun -- that was April -- and the Polish army was not in retreat, but preparing major offensive operations. There was yet no “victory in the Ukraine” to celebrate. The reader’s confidence in the author’s grasp of the Polish-Russian war is thus badly shaken. To discuss the Battle of Warsaw without mentioning Pilsudski is unacceptable (111). Referring to Britain as the “champion of the Baltic States’ (again why the capitalization?) independence from Poland” makes little sense as Poland had designs on neither Latvia or Estonia. (112). In this context it is most unfair for the author to speak of “Polish disregard for the national aspirations of other groups” (113). Which power acted otherwise? Certainly the Polish federal policy -- ardently opposed by Dmowski but supported by Paderewski -- at least made efforts to extend broad rights to Belarus and Lithuania although the effort proved unavailing (113). Incidentally, Paderewski’s apparent federalism deserves attention. The statement that Polish-Czech estrangement was traceable to the Teschen issue is an oversimplification. (156). Profound differences over Central Europe -- here we should mention the complex

issue of the so-called “Little Entente” -- and relations with France and Russia were far more important. Teschen was symbolic not causative in interwar Polish-Czechoslovak relations.

Chapter 7, which supposedly introduces us to the travails of independent Poland opens with a discussion of Dmowski, not Paderewski -- a pattern too often repeated.(121). The paean to Dmowski on p. 126 is really quite offensive. “Dmowski did not fit into the nationalist, jingoist atmosphere which prevailed in Poland” we are told because he was “a man of considerable intellectual qualities”. He had hobnobbed in Paris with men who had a “profound understanding of European conflicts”. He had a “thorough understanding of the European balance of power”. Pilsudski, by comparison had a “reckless attitude towards Bolshevik Russia”.(126) One hardly knows where to begin. Dmowski was the epitome of Anti-Semitic nationalism and intolerance. Dmowski’s profound understanding of the European balance of power was, we may suppose, manifested in his dismissal of Russian strength and conviction that Soviet Russia would not be a major factor in European geopolitics. The “reckless attitude” attributed to Pilsudski *et al.* is problematical and suggests that it was Poland not Russia who determined the structure and course of relations in the east-hardly a convincing view.

Following this the author returns to the early 1920s -- this despite the fact that she left us in 1926 eleven pages before. (126ff.). Why one can only ask, do we need a detailed history of Dmowski’s activities in the early 1920s in what is ostensibly a biography of Paderewski? We are next told that Dmowski’s 1924 work, *Polish Politics and the Rebuilding of the State* was a riposte to Pilsudski’s *The Year 1920*. This is quite untrue. Dmowski’s book concerns the First World War, while Pilsudski’s book is a reply to Soviet Marshal Tukhachevsky’s account of the Polish-Russian war of 1920. (129). The Christian Democratic Party (*Chadecja*) is not well rendered as the “National Christian Movement” (143). The OWP (*Obóz Wielkiej Polski*) was the Camp for *Great* Poland, not “Greater” Poland. (133). It was a far more radical organization than the author suggests. It was partially banned soon after its inception and disbanded a few years later for its reckless fomenting of national animosities, especially Anti-Semitism. What Paderewski has to do with all of this is hard to understand; he was not even living in Poland at the time.

In the post-war era Paderewski supported Polish priests being elevated to the hierarchy in the American Catholic Church. Many Poles were already priests for some time contrary to the author’s intimation. (145). Why was it “unfortunate” that neither General Władysław Sikorski, Wincenty Witos nor General Józef Haller was able to overthrow the Piłsudskiite regime? Certainly Sikorski would have proven competent if not more, while Witos had several periods in office-none memorable. Haller would have been preposterous. (150). The Soviet Union invaded Poland on September 17th not 18th -- a strange error for an author who has written extensively on World War II. (151). She repeats the mistake a few pages later (156).

Finally, the conclusions are not always convincing. “History has been kind to Paderewski and Dmowski” (154) is a problematical statement. It took years for the Polish Third Republic to erect a monument to Dmowski and it was soon defaced. Polls indicate that he and his achievements are little known by Poles. Scholarship concerning him is largely

critical due, doubtless, to his ethnic chauvinism. There is no biography of him in English except a brief account reaching only to 1905. As for Paderewski, the opinion is more favorable, but no serious historian regards him as a competent political actor. His actions in America were beyond question his crowning achievement but how much they gained for Poland is debatable. The book concludes with an utterly irrelevant *obiter dictum* about traditional Polish mistreatment of Ukrainians. Paderewski's name does not appear once in the last five pages of the book.

This study was constructed on a small resource base. Indeed, the author relies too heavily on a handful of works and virtually omits periodical literature from her sources. It is astounding why the most important published work ever produced on Paderewski, his collected papers, now running to six volumes, was not consulted by the author. This is a very disappointing volume by a prolific scholar whose gift for analysis, insightful conclusions, and graceful turns of phrase is nonetheless exhibited in this small volume. But the large number of errors, the dubious arguments, the organizational infelicities, and the miniscule resource base omitting the most important work on the subject combine to make this book impossible to recommend.

M. B. B. Biskupski, Ph.D Yale, holds the S. A. Blejwas Endowed Chair in Polish History at Central Connecticut State University. He has published ten books and several dozen essays. The most recent volumes, both appearing in 2010, are *Hollywood's War with Poland, 1939-1945*, and *The Origins of Modern Polish Democracy*.

Copyright © 2010 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.