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## Bronisław Piłsudski (1866–1918) – an Encounter with Big Politics

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**Bronisław Pasierb****BRONISŁAW PIŁSUDSKI (1866–1918)  
– AN ENCOUNTER WITH BIG POLITICS**

What was the road to big politics of a convict sent to Siberia in the Far North of Sachalin, and then a recognised ethnographer, a linguist interested in dying languages of peoples living there as well as their trustee, defender, a soul doctor? This is by no means a rethoric question since there is no simple answer to it despite the fact that many researchers have studied this figure for a long time already (Kuczyński 1968: 503–584; Sokolewicz 1973: 169–176).

Also the present paper is an attempt only to formulate a few research questions. There is much work to be done in order to solve all of the puzzles that co-constituted his life and achievements.

Bronisław Piłsudski got entangled in the swirl of top level diplomacy and promotion of the so called Polish cause in 1918, during the last year of the war when events were reaching their peaks. The meeting place was Switzerland, then Paris, the capital city of France. The Polish issues included propaganda and conceptual work related to preparing a post-war European order. Polish politicians attached great hopes to a chance to reconstitute an independent Polish state.

He was a traveller who travelled across the world, being a frequent guest in Switzerland and Paris. In 1906 he went back to the home country probably *via* London and Paris to reach Cracow. In August of 1909, he went in turn to France; in September he was again in Paris. He worked as a correspondent to „Kurier Lwowski” recommended by its publisher and editor Bolesław Wysłouch (*Słownik biograficzny* 2005: 1683–1684). The following year, he brought to Paris his fiancée of old days who underwent an operation in the capital of France. Unfortunately, her progressing lethal illness destroyed Piłsudski’s hopes to normalise his private life. Maria Baniewicz-Żarnowska’s death soon closed this phase of his life (*Kalendarium życia...*, Internet).

In the autumn of 1911, owing to Piłsudski's initiative, Sekcja Ludoznawcza [Ethnographic Section] was created within Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie [The Tatra Society], chaired by the initiator. He undertook many study visits related to museums (Wójcik 2003; Pasierb 2008: 233–272). In May of 1913, he went to Paris again and then to Brussels from where he got back to Zakopane in autumn. In March of 1914, he moved to Cracow invited by Polska Akademia Umiejętności [Polish Academy of Fine Arts] that had established its Sekcja Etnograficzna Komisji Antropologicznej [Ethnographic Section of the Anthropological Commission]. Piłsudski was employed as its full-time secretary.

When World War I broke out, Piłsudski began the next stage in his turbulent life. In the autumn of 1914, he was in Vienna, and in March of 1915, carrying an Austrian passport, he went to Switzerland. There, he was to coordinate works to compile a Polish encyclopedia. This was also the first of Piłsudski's contributions to the promotion of the Polish cause abroad (Florkowska-Frančić 1997: 49, 66, 67, 74, 131–132; *Kalendarium życia...*, Internet). „He hated the war. The unheard-of slaughters whose descriptions he read, the wave of debauchery and demoralization that was flooding big cities behind the front, made him overwhelmed with aversion and despair”. But he cherished the idea of serving the nation, perhaps not in the role of a soldier in the legions – since Bronisław „had no taste” for it, but as a scholar, an independence-promoter. The involvement of Piłsudski in the work to compile an Polish encyclopedia let him speak out to a bigger audience, „let the world know about the rights, needs and riches of Poland” (Sieroszewski 1914–1921: XXV).

Piłsudski was invited to join the circle of collaborators in the encyclopedia project, most probably, by Erazm Piltz (1851–1929) – a journalist, politician, diplomat and the initiator of *Mała encyklopedia polska* [Small Polish encyclopedia]. What was decisive – Piłsudski's Siberian experiences or his professional qualifications, comprehensive education, knowledge of congress languages – it is not easy to say. In this milieu he met many people similar to himself whom he privately called „friendly people from the outside”.

In Vienna there was also Bishop Władysław Bandurski (1865–1932), then the suffrage bishop of the Lvov archdiocese and Rector of the theological seminary, who was an enthusiast of the Polish cause, ardent just like Piłsudski, but controversial: in 1914–1918 he was a supporter of the „Austro-Polish” option, being a fanatic follower of

the Commander Piłsudski (Papiery M.B. Wysłouchów 1918: 13–14; Romer 1989: 154, przypis 154; Florkowska-Frančić 1997: 95, przypis 40).

The Bishop's milieu included other people from Lvov, such as Professor Oskar Balzer (1858–1933), who was a historian of Polish law since 1890 and at the same time Director of Archiwum Krajowe Aktów Grodzkich i Ziemskich in Lvov, chairman of Towarzystwo Naukowe dla Popierania Nauki Polskiej, member of Naczelny Komitet Narodowy (Romer 1989: 154, przypis 536); Stanisław Starzyński (1853–1935), who was also Professor of the University of Lvov, a lawyer, a conservative politician and at the time a deputy at Sejm Galicyjski (Romer 1989: 154, przypis 537).

Also, Eugeniusz Romer (1871–1954), Professor of geography at the University of Lvov, was invited to co-operate with Bishop Bandurski. Romer was already living in Vienna at that time, where he moved when the war broke out; he began to work there on *Geograficzno-statystyczny atlas Polski* (Papiery M.B. Wysłouchów 1915: 361). At the beginning of March in 1915 Romer turned to E. Piltz with a proposal of co-operation (Romer 1989: 155, przypis 542). The proposal generated an understandable interest (*Papiery Rozwadowskich*, 1915: 129). Recommended by E. Piltz, B. Piłsudski asked E. Romer to write an entry to the geographical part of the then elaborated encyclopedia (*Listy Profesora Romera* 1915: 59; *M.B. Wysłouchowie* 1915: 361). Thanks to Professor Romer and his diligent chronicles we know more not only as regards Bishop Bandurski's initiative but also as regards the activities of the Polish delegation and other delegations that were gradually arriving with all kinds of experts to Paris to take part in the Peace Conference. Researchers are well acquainted with writings of the many reporters of those events but they still appreciate so called *Pamiętnik paryski* by E. Romer as well as his efforts both in the role of an expert at Versailles in 1918–1920 and during border negotiations in Riga in 1921 (Pasierb 1998: 87–110; Leczyk 1990: 83–85; Molenda 1990: 86–91). Romer's notes include his opinion about Bishop Bandurski's initiatives and about E. Piltz and his encyclopedia. According to the Professor, Bishop Bandurski's idea was to turn the planned encyclopedia into a „functional” work, that is congruent with the Legions' orientation, i.e. „anti-Russian”. In Romer's opinion, not only „as Poles, but also primarily as scholars we should not agree to this”. However, fighting against Bishop Bandurski's plans, as with an exaggeration

noted Romer, a „more terrible monster [was] in front of us. Namely, we had already got some news that apart from Bandurski’s encyclopedia, in Lausanne some other Polish encyclopedia was being edited by E. Piltz, *Petite encyklopedie polonaise*”. Romer disliked the other encyclopedia because of its possible „pro-Russian sentiments”, that were attributed to Piltz. In the circumstances, as Romer writes, „we decided in the milieu of scholars involved in the work on Bandurski’s encyclopedia to volunteer for work on Piltz’s encyclopedia at the same time, to send to both of the editorial committees quite identical entries, purely scientific, devoid of any by-product orientation in order not to let appear two, and what is more two differently oriented, books that present information about Poland”. I skip here the fate of Romer’s text, who had prepared his study entitled *Polska. Ziemia i państwo* [Poland. The land and the State] first for Bandurski’s encyclopedia and then, having received Piltz’s promise that the „Lausanne encyclopedia is to be thoroughly objective” he sent it to the editorial staff of the latter encyclopedia too. Romer writes that he had addressed it at B. Piłsudski but the mail „reached him with much delay, without maps and diagrams that had been confiscated by the hyper-careful... Swiss authorities”. The result of the matter was such that Romer’s text was not only rejected by the Lausanne encyclopedia’s editors but they had given up the idea „to publish this dissertation separately as a special propaganda brochure” altogether. The complicated situation was resolved successfully partially owing to B. Piłsudski, as Romer writes. He contacted a dr. F. Rabowski, Polish geologist, an assistant to Professor J. Luguët in Lausanne who translated Romer’s text into French and then recommended it to be published by a French periodical (Romer 1989: 1655; Frankowska-Francić 1997: 130–132).

Returning to B. Piłsudski’s role in the preparation of Bishop Bandurski’s encyclopedia, we know only that this idea fell through quickly both because of the scholars’ opposition and even more so because of down-to-earth matters – financial ones. The initiator was not able to raise in the homeland enough funds for his publication, „which he much deplored”. We may infer basing on Piltz’s correspondence and his other writings that there had also been other such initiatives, for example so called *Encyklopedia warszawska* that had been initiated the earliest by a group of people gathered around a well known economist Stefan Dziewulski (1876–1941) who was „a man of millions and ready to support social initiatives”, as Piltz characterised him. After some

time Dzewulski came to the conclusion that it was better to join the efforts. For this purpose, he sent to Lausanne one of his collaborators, an economist August Zaleski, who was to be his envoy (*Papiery Rozwadowskich* 1915: 129).

Bishop Bandurski made an analogous proposal to join efforts on Piltz's encyclopedia. For this purpose, B. Piłsudski was to go to Lausanne as a link between the two initiatives. „We naturally accepted the plan to join the efforts with utmost readiness, said the chairman of the Editorial Committee during a meeting of Koło Przyjaciół i Współpracowników Encyklopedii. We immediately selected Mr. Piłsudski to be a member of our organization, expecting that the Vienna papers will be mailed or transported and that together with Mr. Piłsudski and some other delegate that had been mentioned, we will be able to look through materials and having done it to decide on what conditions this merger could be concluded. Four months elapsed since then and until today we have received not a bit of the manuscripts from Vienna. In this situation we had to work on our encyclopedia, not counting at all on the possibility to merge our materials with the Vienna ones” (*Papiery Rozwadowskich* 1915: 21). In the meantime Bishop Bandurski's „initiative” in Vienna was taken over by Rev. Jan Gralewski (1868–1924) (Konarski 1959: 538–540) who stayed in Switzerland and basing on the earlier collected texts prepared two language versions of that encyclopedic publication.

Piłsudski, starting from mid-August in 1915, participated as a full-time member of the editorial team in works over „Encyklopedia lożańska” that was also called „Encyklopedia E. Piltza”. He was tasked with preparing a few entries to the so called encyclopedic handbook about Poland. In the second chapter, entitled „Bogactwa naturalne” [Natural resources], he was to elaborate the topic of mineral resources and health resorts. His text was ready in the beginning of January in 1916: five pages type-written in Polish that were subsequently revised and completed by Professor Estreicher. Then it was to be sent to a French translator. In turn, in the III part, titled „Mieszkańcy” [Inhabitants], in point 1, Piłsudski was envisaged as an author of an entry dedicated to archeology, seven pages type-written that were translated by P. Rongier (Florkowska-Frančić 1997: 123). This text was already undergoing some technical-linguistic revision, and it was to be shortly sent over for a „professorial review”. In the same part, in point 2 – „Etnografia” [Ethnography], also authored by Piłsudski, the material counted 37 pages type-written, translated by P. Rongier too. This text

was then also already revised and was just being type-written; soon it was to be sent over for the professorial review. In the XX part („Litwa i Ruś” [Lithuania and Ruthenia]) „Wstęp ekonomiczny” [Economic introduction] was also entrusted to Piłsudski, and in addition further sections of part XXI: „Rolnictwo” [Agriculture], XXII: „Przemysł” [Industry], XXIII: „Handel i komunikacja” [Trade and Transportation]. The author was to prepare the entries within two weeks basing on earlier collected materials (*Papiery Rozwadowskich* 1916: 81–85). This listing evidences that the work over the encyclopedia was being done rhythmically and speedily but it is not known if this did not mean an overload that exceeded a working capacity of a single author. What might be heartening was the belief that the work was done by competent people, funds were secured and they were guaranteed by members and collaborators bearing recognized names.

In the beginning of 1915, Piltz initiated the creation of Redakcja Wydawnictw Encyklopedycznych o Polsce in Lausanne that was to propagate the Polish cause in Western Europe and the United States. The editorial work was supervised by Komitet Redakcyjny located in Fribourg, initially chaired by Piltz, later by J. Wierusz-Kowalski and J. Żółtowski. Apart from those, it was composed of E. Cros, T. Estreicher, K. Lutostański, J. Modzelewski, J. Rozwadowski, Z. Lubicz-Zaleski.

Two scientific commissions collected and arranged materials. One of them worked in Fribourg, staffed by J. Kallenbach, A. Plater-Zyberk, J. Puzyna, and the other in Lausanne, staffed by L. Janowski, J. Kucharzewski, Z. Laskowski, K. Lutostański, J. Perłowski, B. Piłsudski, H. Ratyński and M. Seyda (Frankowska-Frančić 1997: 128–130).

In turn, among the collaborators preparing *Encyklopedia polska*, since such was the official name given to E. Piltz’s initiative, there were prominent and well-to-do people: I.J. Paderewski, H. Sienkiewicz, A. Skarbek, K.M. Morawski, J. Przeździecki, S. Dobrzycki, B. Gubrynowicz, A. Benis, S. Filasiewicz, J. Frejlich, S. Głąbiński, A. Rzewuski, K. Skirmunt, S. Dzierzbicki, S. Kozicki, A. Meysztowicz, J. Olizar, L. Janta-Pełczyński, G. Simon (Wolsza 1996–1997: 522–524; Romer 1989: 155, przypis 545). It seems that Piłsudski had gone to Switzerland to complete his academic studies in Fribourg that had been interrupted by the brutal imprisonment at Sachalin. In the meantime, the swirl of emigree life in Switzerland got him entangled in the traditional „Polish little hell”. The Polish groups, „of Vienna, of Lausanne and of Paris”, fighting one another, created too many problems, consuming precious time. B. Piłsudski thought that it was possible to unite those

groups through collaborative work over *Encyklopedia polska* that was published in foreign languages „for the use of European politicians and diplomats”. Being a „hotbed of noble ideas”, as labelled by his acquaintances, Piłsudski remained isolated in his naivete, which was not for the first time. Running out of his own capacity to implement his ideas, he turned to various persons asking them to take them up. He started to participate in the operations of Komitet Sienkiewiczowski Pomocy Ofiarom Wojny, and, as if this was not enough, he founded a „more closely structured committee of assistance to Lithuania. He got involved Lithuania-lovers staying in Fribourg in its operations, as he was respected in their milieu. He sought reconciliation in this area”. The thing that he managed to organise most successfully in Fribourg, as confirmed by witnesses, was fund-raising for the benefit of Komitet Pomocy Polakom Pracującym Naukowo, a będącym w biedzie w wyniku wojny [Committee of Assistance for Poles Engaged in Scholarly Work who found themselves in poverty as a result of the war] that he had created (Romer 1989: 103).

Those were not all of the enterprises initiated by B. Piłsudski during his stay in Switzerland. He never lacked new ones since he had unceasingly cared for others – that idea had never left him. With such initiatives, quite varied, and not only humanitarian in nature, he could come up in any situation, without much premeditation. The role of Piłsudski during his stay in Switzerland was already described in literature and this is why I do not intend to develop this topic further since others have done the job. Research was carried out in the context of a broad array of charity, information and promotion-political initiatives. Piłsudski’s role during this period was studied but certainly not exhaustively. To re-create a full calendar of eventful B. Piłsudski’s life there is still much to do (Florkowska-Francić 1997: 49, 66, 67; Kuczyński 1999: 2003; Florkowska-Francić 2003; 185–210; Pasierb 2007: 233–272).

However, Piłsudski’s activities during his stay in Switzerland caused his physical exhaustion, and, what was more important – his psychological resilience was also diminished. Political issues, meetings, sessions, discussions, press battles – that was not the climate appropriate for his type of personality.

Basing on a few pieces of information, we managed to find out that in November of 1917 Piłsudski went to Paris and was employed as an officer by Komitet Narodowy Polski. He stayed in the building that officially hosted KNP at Avenue Kléber 11 bis. The first official docu-



ment, most important as it reveals the salary that B. Piłsudski received as the Komitet's officer (600 fr), is dated as of 1 October in 1917 (*O niepodległą i granice...* 2007: 13, 90).

It is quite justified to assume that the last period of Piłsudski's activities lasted between October of 1917 and 17 May of 1918.

Piłsudski was given a modest but important task for which he was well prepared. It involved the creation of a library that collected various works, especially representing „cartography, demographics, statistics, history, ethnography related to Poland, and were housed in foreign libraries”. This gave him an opportunity to penetrate not only Parisian libraries and museums. W. Sieroszewski recalls that he met Piłsudski for the last time in Rapperswil's libraries and then in Zurich. „He told me that he was working at Redaction des publications encyclopédiques sur la Pologne (Fribourg)”. Letters authored by other Poles living then in Switzerland (Edward Cros, Józef Komenda) suggest that Piłsudski prepared for this publishing venture: 1) an article about ethnography, 2) articles about archeology, 3) a complete chapter devoted to economic life in Lithuania and Ruthenia, 4) papers about education in Lithuania and Ruthenia. He collected necessary historical sources pertaining ethnography, archaeology, statistics, demographic issues (Sieroszewski 1949: XXIX). As a matter of fact, he himself with great satisfaction wrote in his letters to his friends-Siberian convicts: „I managed to get out of Galicja and I have been here already for two years. I am busy with academic activities, elaborating, however, not only my own materials related to the Ainu, but a Polish encyclopedia in French” („Literatura Ludowa” 1999: 159). Beginning his work at KNP, Piłsudski voiced an idea of establishing a Polish-French Publishing Company that was to „get the allies acquainted with Polish relations, history, ethnography and culture of Poland”. This idea took shape of a project at the beginning of May in 1918, that is in the period of an increasing crisis and disappointment with the rapidly developing political events (*Papiery Rozwadowskich* 1918: 49–85).

Piłsudski got employed at one of the Departments of Komitet Narodowy Polski in October of 1917, the one that was at the time called: Wydział Stosunków z Krajem oraz Biurem Studiów i Wydawnictw Politycznych [Department of relations with the Country and the Bureau of Political Studies and Publications] that was headed by Jan Rozwadowski. In this experienced politician, an established father of a numerous family, Piłsudski found not only a supervisor but

also

a friend, and, as it turned out, a trustee in many matters, not only connected with his work but also personal ones (Zdrada 1989–1991: 409–412; Pasierb 1996: 83 and ff.).

Collecting materials and sources for the encyclopedia did not take up the whole of his occupational life. He had quite a lot opportunities for conceptual work for which he found time. One of the examples was an idea to establish a Polish-French publishing company that was to „get the allies acquainted with Polish relations, history, ethnography and culture of Poland”. Unfortunately, the idea had been born only at the beginning of May in 1918, that is in the period of his increasing health problems and disappointment with the fast developing political events (*Papiery Rozwadowskich* 1918: 49–85). Nonetheless, even earlier, as a letter to Rozwadowski, dated as of 12 April 12 in 1918 suggests, the first worrying symptoms had appeared evidencing that something wrong was happening with Piłsudski, with his health. Among the manuscripts of Jan Rozwadowski, stored at Ossolineum, the last letters, notes and drawings had survived that Piłsudski sent to him as to the head of the Komisja. As the aforementioned letter suggests, his duties – apart from protocols of the Komisja’s settings, that he prepared in their final versions, included also distributing tasks to his collaborators, evaluating time needed to perform those tasks, calculating the value of money earned. Apart from this, as the Komitet’s official he was obliged to undertake some new tasks, even though in reality he did not always participated in them. Nevertheless, the very fact that the KNP leadership sometimes used his name just to make their actions more credible, was enough for him to feel responsible for those operations. In this manner, in March of 1918 his name appeared among the many other candidates for *Urząd Polski Spraw Cywilnych* [Polish office for civilian affairs], where he was to work both in its general commission, the commission dealing with passports and legal protection, and a commission for prisoners of war and the detainees. In reality, he did not take part in the work of the commissions which resumed operations on 8 May in 1918 (*O niepodległą i granice* 2007: 309, 329). Complaints voiced by Piłsudski, regarding the prolonged tackling of the budget issues, for which Rozwadowski was responsible at the top level, could seem strange. However, judging by the aforementioned letter, one can see that its author was not informed about many decisions – decisions concerning the budget had been taken already in mid-February of 1918 (*O niepodległą i granice* 2007: 242–249).

I am unable to describe and verify all of the information that Piłsudski had got with the real state of the matter. What is relevant here is not credibility of that information but the fact that it had started to circulate. Wishing to be accurate in the description of Piłsudski's last weeks, I am not seeking any scandalous news. I do not make up any new facts wanting to indicate basic factors that had persuaded him to take his desperate step. I am inclined to agree with opinions expressed by his closest collaborators at that time, even though I realise that what they contain might be not so much facts as motivations, little negligences. For example, what to do to make a grown-up man visit a medical doctor? Could more have been done than was done? There are no easy answers to such questions. I am still thinking about the documentation that has been collected in *Papiery Jana Rozwadowskiego*, whose credibility does not need any proof. They contain, for instance, a kind of Rozwadowski's obituary that was written almost immediately after that tragic event. It is rather a *laudatio*, an expression of respect and grief following the loss of a person who had passed away at such a moment. It is of course an essay, typical of politicians of Rozwadowski's rank, who saw the tragedy but still thought about coming events that were to be decisive from the vantage point of the Country. This is normal and it would be hard to expect anything else from such a politician. Anyway, respect is to be paid to two of the brothers – the one whom Piłsudski met in his first difficult months after having returned to the country – that is the academic authority, Jan Michał Rozwadowski (1867–1935) who was Professor of the Jagiellonian University, a linguist, and the other brother, also with many academic credentials from Lvov – Jan Jordan Rozwadowski (1872–1935) whom B. Piłsudski met in Switzerland, and then in Paris, quite by chance. The latter remained loyal to him till the end. Both of the brothers, Piłsudski's co-evals will always be credited with being able to overlook political animosities, to see the value in that man who was the brother of the future Naczelnik Państwa [Head of State]. This testifies to the greatness of the character of those eminent persons (Pasierb 1996; Romer 1989: 102; Zdrada 1989–1991: 409–412).

The current story of Piłsudski's tragic death is basically uncontested if one accepts that modern medicine is able to depict credibly an act of will by a man that passed away many years ago. Such a description comes from a man who has not only gained knowledge about the life of his idol but also about his achievements (Kuczyński 1–31).

All that has been written so far about Bronisław Piłsudski, his life, tragic experiences, broad scientific interests, many accomplishments may not obscure the figure of the man who in the last, mature stage of his life let himself to be carried away by politics. Anyway, the times were just like that, such attractions emanated from big politics, and everyone who understood and felt the course of events could not have remained unruffled. Several generations of Poles were to live long enough to see their homeland independent. No one knew what it was going to be like – Bronisław Piłsudski did not know that either but he dreamed about his homeland in the shape that it had had when he had to leave it, saying farewell to his closest „till the XX century”. Was he a naive dreamer or was he just like many others from his generation but unfortunately crippled by a serious illness that made him die prematurely?

Big politics was only a short episode in his life and a background against which the last stage of his tragic biography had been played out.

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