

**JOSEPH PILSUDSKI, FOUNDER  
OF POLISH NATIONAL  
INDEPENDENCE AND CHIEF OF  
THE POLISH STATE**

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**J. BONCZA**

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# JOSEPH PÍLSUDSKI

Founder of Polish National Independence and  
Chief of the Polish State

by  
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I.

THE YOUTH AND THE ACTIONS OF PILSUDSKI  
UNTIL THE OUTBREAK OF THE GREAT WAR.

Like Kosciuszko and Mickiewicz, Pilsudski was born in Lithuania, the country that as early as the XIVth century joined Poland in a voluntary union when threatened by Teutonic invasions. Poland and Lithuania together formed one State, which was later on looked upon by both nations as their fatherland.

The parents of Pilsudski belonged to the gentry of Poland, White-Ruthenia and Lithuania, that gentry which had for centuries protected these three nations from the invasions constantly threatening from East and West. In the family estate of Zulov, not far from Vilno, the future Commander in Chief and Chief of the Polish State first saw the light. He was born soon after the national insurrection in which the whole family took an active part. The child, brought up by his mother—a woman of unusual generosity and elevation of character—in traditions of family and national events, and taught

to respect those engaged in simple physical labour, passed his early years under the influence of government terror menacing on all sides and under the elevating home influence, that inspired him with courage and a never failing faith for the future.

Leaving home for a Russian school, the soul of the little lad was already deeply imbued with the sentiments of a future champion of freedom. His school life, during which he had to endure in silence all the worries and torments to which the government system subjected the boys, in order to efficaciously root out all that was Polish, only served to harden the character of the coming conspirator. Expelled later, when a student, from Charkov University for participation in student disorders, he entered the Polish Revolutionary Circle, a society tinged with Socialism.

The following fact is most characteristic of the views of Pilsudski at this time: when in 1887 the delegate of a Russian revolutionary organisation arrived in Vilno from Petersburg and proposed to the Circle to participate in an attempt on the life of Alexander III, Pilsudski opposed him. "The revolutionary duty of the Poles", he asserted, "is to struggle against Russian oppression as it is, but not to fight for changes in the form of the government in Russia, the result of which, as far as the Poles are concerned, is doubtful". "As a Socialist I am averse to terror", he stated at the same time.

Being tried later on as an alleged complice in the above attempt, Pilsudski was condemned to 5 years exile in Eastern Siberia.

One of his letters written to his father at that time, reflects the social political views of the twenty years old youth.

It contains first and foremost the intense regret of a born man of action, who complains, not of his punishment, but that

it is brought about solely by fatal chance and not by any real action of his own.

It contains further the social creed of the writer: "I wish every man to see a brother in his neighbour, that all should have the right to this world's goods, and that, unburdened from toil, they could strive for the happiness of humanity".

We have here also a sketch of the mode of action of the coming organizer and creator of the State: "We shall accomplish nothing, if we only have the fulfilment of our own ideas in view and try to force our will on others". "One should go with deliberation perseveringly towards the end in view, following the stream of life and not the calling of noble but empty dreams".

This exile became for Pilsudski a new school of political thought.

"I had now the possibility of becoming acquainted with the character of the Russian nation, to look into the very depths of its soul, to understand the spirit of Russian history". "All Russians", Pilsudski was wont to assert, "are more or less disguised Imperialists, not excepting the Revolutionaries. Elementary centralism is the characteristic of these people who eternally sigh for the absolute. They are unable to reconcile opposites, they reject completely even the needs of conscious social organisation, in order merely not to be compelled to think of them. Let everything be done by itself, in an elementary manner. That is the cause of the many Anarchists among them. It is an extraordinary thing however, that I never met any Republicans at all among the Russians".

After his return from exile in 1892 Pilsudski joined one of the secret political groups in the country, which then had not yet created any organisation. Owing to his very energetic and prominent assistance the Polish Socialist Party (P. P.



S.) was formed in the same year. It took as the political aim of its minimum programme: "The Independence of Poland".

Later, we see Pilsudski as editor and printer of the secret paper of this party. From the columns of his "Robotnik" (Workman) Pilsudski urged independence as the necessary and real aim in view and spoke of the necessity of preparing for an armed struggle to attain this end. As this took place during the period of the most terrible Russian repression and the complete resignation and crushing of the Polish public, the voice of Pilsudski, according to the just expression of the contemporary writer Sieroszewski, rang like a bell amidst the darkness and deafness of the night. "Some one is watching" said Poland with a mysterious thrill. Pilsudski aroused the soul of his nation and taught it afresh its already forgotten idea of the sacrifices of blood for national independence. Appealing to the most numerous of the social classes, the most defenceless in suffering — he said to them: "We wish for an independent Poland in order to organize for her a better life and one just towards all alike". Distributing his secret papers himself, Pilsudski visited in turn the different organisations, forming new ones from the working and educated classes and from Polish youth; investigating relations; becoming acquainted with the whole country, its needs and its defects. After awaking the country the turn came for public manifestation. This took place on the celebration of the workmen's holiday, the first of May, strictly forbidden by the Imperial Police. During this manifestation there was an encounter with the police. The young working men began to clamour for arms. This was the result so desired by Pilsudski. Educating in this manner and selecting persons for his ends, he was always directed by an unequalled intuition and penetration. He sought not only for capacity and intuition, but for character and conscience. He

built up the future on the spiritual and moral worth of the individual and of the nation. At the beginning of 1900 the Imperial authorities discovered the printing press of the "Robotnik" in Lodz in Pilsudski's private apartment and arrested him. He was sent first to the 10th Pavilion in the Warsaw Citadel and was there committed for trial. It is said that during the cross-questioning a colonel of gendarmes turned to Pilsudski and asked how he, the descendant of an ancient noble and hitherto wealthy family could be the leader of a party undermining the very foundations of private property and authority? Pilsudski is said to have replied: "In order to make this more comprehensible to you, I must remind you that when Russian princes mounted the horses over the necks of their boyars, my forefathers were already free citizens. How then can you expect me not to fight for freedom to-day?"

Transferred from the 10th Pavilion to the Petersburg hospital, Pilsudski was assisted to escape by his loyal friends and comrades. Once back in the country he decided at once to undertake preparations for the organisation of a national insurrection. In the face of the expected Russian-Japanese war his first care was to prevent a mobilisation, as he wished that the blood which was to be shed, should be rather shed in the struggle with Russia. But after investigating conditions in the country he was convinced that such an action could not then be successful, as the fear of Russian power was predominant. He then left for Japan in order to organize an insurrection in the rear of the Russian army, backed by the strength of Japan. He was however, baffled once again. The sole protest which he was able to call forth against mobilisation was the bloody demonstration of the workmen of the Polish Socialist Party on the Grzybowski Square in Warsaw. At the time when those elements which were opposed to insurrection got the

upper hand and showed a desire for common action with the Russian Revolutionaries, with a view to a change of government in Russia, Pilsudski was cut off from Warsaw by a railway strike, which was caused by these demonstrations. Thus he was enabled to hold himself aloof from all the prevailing unrest. Shortly after he formed the so-called "Fighting Organisation", collecting small detachments of volunteers and after drilling them in the use of arms, accustoming them to iron discipline, he equipped them and sent them, as the first partisans in the struggle for the freedom of Poland. The destruction of the greatest scoundrels among the Imperial police and gendarmes, the attacking of lesser detachments of the army, the breaking open of government safes — all formed part of the plans of this organization. Pilsudski saw that he would not be able to call a general insurrection by these means, but he wished to make a beginning, to bring about above all the first breach in the views of the Polish public, convincing it in this or in some other way, that a revolutionary struggle, understood as a struggle between Poland and Russia — was a possibility.

A proof of how highly each soldier of this "Fighting Organisation" understood the political and ideal character of these struggles, is the fact that when several of the soldiers were once seized for an attempt on the Russian authorities and were sentenced to be hanged they demanded that their sentence should be changed and that they should be shot, as they were not bandits but Polish soldiers fighting for the independence of their country. Their demand was granted. Even the Tsar's satraps realised the real character of Pilsudski's "Fighting Detachments".

When, at the weakening of the revolutionary movement in Russia the detachments were disbanded, Pilsudski's thoughts