

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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Information

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PADERE
WSKI
Ignacy
Jan

Person

PADEREWSKI Ignacy Jan

Born

1860

Died

1941

Description

"Despite the tragedies which fell upon the Nation,

Divine Providence always sent us some outstanding people who set an example and were the foundations on which our Polish life was laid.” - these were the words spoken by the rector of the University of Poznań, prof. Stanisław Dobrzycki, when he welcomed Ignacy Jan Paderewski on 23 November at *Almae Matris* in Poznań during the last visit of the Master in his Homeland. At that time Paderewski was being hosted like a king in Poznań, which he himself called “the most Polish city”, however, there is no surprise in that. After all, starting from December 1918, he had had exceptionally strong symbolical bonds established with the capital city of Greater Poland, and they quickly became the foundation on which the cult of the “great musician and citizen” was built during the following years.

The road which had led him to this place began in Kurilivka, in the Podolia region, where his father, Jan Paderewski, administered the estate owned by the Iwanowskis family. It was here that the future pianist and statesman was born on 6 November 1860 (according to the Julian calendar). Soon orphaned by his mother Poliksena, née Nowicka, hardly three years old, he also lost his father for a year, as his father, whom the Russians had accused of helping January insurgents, was imprisoned in Lityn. He was raised for some time by his aunt, and this exceptionally sensitive boy quickly started to manifest various skills, especially those related to music. Initially (from 1868), he developed these skills under the supervision of a November insurgent and participant of the Great Emigration - Michał Babiański. In December 1872, only 12 years old, his father finally sent him to Warsaw, where he soon began his proper education at the famous Warsaw Music Institute. In addition to the piano, which was his first choice music instrument, he also learned to play the flute,

oboe, clarinet, bass, French horn and trumpet. His uncompromising character came into play for the first time at school and he was punished twice with expulsion from it. However, he always returned, to complete the school at last in 1878 with the award of distinction, and despite his young age he took the post of a teacher in lower piano classes. It was here that he met the slightly older Antonina Korsakówna whom he married on 7 January 1880. Unfortunately, at that time he was not allowed to experience the happiness and warmth of the family life as he became a widower still in the same year.

The family tragedy probably contributed to Paderewski taking the decision to devote himself to work, leave Warsaw and bring his compositional skills to perfection in Berlin (as a student of Friedrich Kiel), and also in Vienna, where in the years 1884-1887, under the watchful eye of Theodor Leschetizky, he managed to achieve true technical mastery. Several years later, the then best piano teacher of his time would recall: "Paderewski... Paderewski... [...] - he is my pride... He will be a brilliant artist till the end of his life, as he has the character, and as apart from work, he was not able to perceive or know any other goals". In fact, shortly after completing his education as a student of Leschetizky, Paderewski started a dazzling career as a pianist-virtuoso, taking the largest and most splendid concert halls of the world by storm. From Paris (1888), through Prague, Brussels, Antwerp, Vienna and London (1890), and then in November 1891 he finally arrived overseas when he went on his first American *tour*. This American epic lasted for a number of years bringing financial stabilisation to Paderewski and even more evidence of unprecedented recognition, which quickly started to attain the traits of true "Padermania". His success was complete. At the

same time, it also allowed the family life of the Master, which he had officially shared with Helena née Rosen, *primo voto* Górska, since 1899, to be stabilised.

Despite the great international fame and success which he gained at salons, by no means did Paderewski forget about his home country. Particularly, he made sure that he was presented as a Polish artist and selected his repertoire focusing on the achievements of prominent Polish artists, especially Frédéric Chopin. Very often he would also get involved in the life of the Polish-American community, providing financial support for the activities of Polish organisations and associations operating abroad. On political ground, he started to feel more and more confident, and this was reflected, among other things, in the notable funding of the Grunwald Monument which was unveiled in Cracow exactly in time for the 500th anniversary of the battle, and above all, his activities during the World War I. At that time he became a mandatory of a great charity event run for the countrymen in Poland (*vide*, the Vevey Committee - run by H. Sienkiewicz, the Polish Relief Found in London and hundreds of concerts during which he campaigned for his home country in bondage), and also, mainly as the result of extensive contacts in the world of American and English politics, the ambassador of the Polish cause in the West. Since 1917 he had already been an official representative of the Polish National Committee in the U.S., having at the same time direct access to the most important American politicians including President Thomas Woodrow Wilson.

The exceptionally strong political position which Paderewski gained across the Atlantic in the era of the Great War made his return to Europe in December 1918 possible. Here, after talks with the minister of foreign affairs of Great Britain,

Lord Arthur Balfour, and also in consultation with Roman Dmowski and General Józef Haller, he took the decision to travel to Poland by sea. Already the choice of the final destination port per se as well as the route of his trip through the country was highly symbolic; it led through Gdańsk, the city to which the independent Republic of Poland made legitimate claims, and also through Poznań. He arrived in the latter city in the evening of 26 December 1918, thus activating the apparently dormant forces which then led to the outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising on the following day. As the head of the Poznań City Council, Witold Hedinger, recollected after many years, it was thanks to Paderewski that "a wonderful spell was cast upon the whole city on that night as we realised that we were already free - free in the Polish Poznań".

Thereafter, the Master travelled from the capital city of Greater Poland to Warsaw, where, on 16 January 1919, he took the post of prime minister and minister of foreign affairs in the extra-parliamentary government of the independent Republic of Poland. He remained in this sensitive post until 9 December 1919, representing Poland at the peace conference in Paris, during which he effectively sought the acknowledgement of the Polish rights to the Greater Poland region liberated by the insurgents and managed to obtain acceptance for the accession of a significant part of Pomerania to Poland as well as contributing to the decision of great superpowers on granting the entire former Galicia to Poland. With varying degrees of success he also made attempts at the internationalisation of the matter of Silesia, Powiśle, Warmia and Masuria. Having left the country in February 1920, he still held the function of delegate of Poland at the League of Nations, and later on removed himself from national politics for a long time.

He returned to politics in the autumn of his life, firstly, indirectly, by getting involved in a project which went down in history as Front Morges and then on the eve of World War II (December 1939 – January 1940), when he became the president of the substitute for the Polish parliament in exile – the National Council. In fact, in 1940 he went overseas yet again to lobby for Poland in bondage. He would write numerous memoranda, meet politicians of various levels, give radio interviews, etc. Overwork surely did not help his rather poor health condition at that time. Ignacy Jan Paderewski died on 29 June 1941 in the Buckingham hotel in New York, at the age of 81. His funeral (5 July 1941) became a great demonstration of the Polish-American friendship, whose natural settings were the streets of New York and Washington. The holy mass held in the New York St. Patrick's Cathedral, the funeral procession of the Master going along Fifth Avenue, and his burial at the National Cemetery in Arlington, not far from Washington, all contributed to the state character of a ceremony personally ordained by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Paderewski himself, who wished to rest in the "free Homeland", set off for his final voyage to Poland after 51 years. On 5 July 1992, his mortal remains were buried in the crypt of the Arch-cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist in Warsaw in the presence of among others: President Lech Wałęsa and President George Bush.

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