



Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918

Germanization Policy: Speech by Ludwik Jazdzewski in a Session of the Prussian House of Representatives (January 15, 1901)

During the *Kulturkampf*, Bismarck designated the Poles living in Prussian territory as “enemies of the Reich” and undertook an aggressive program of assimilation and expropriation – in short, Germanization. Although he and the Catholic Church reached an agreement on this issue by 1887, the persecution of the Poles continued into the twentieth century. In the excerpt below, Polish party deputy Ludwik Jazdzewski condemns the Prussian government’s treatment of the Poles, including measures taken by the Settlement Commission (established in 1886) to facilitate German land acquisitions at Polish expense.

---

Gentlemen, if a population that was incorporated into the Prussian state on the basis of international state treaties, with the assurance, with the solemn royal promise, that its nationality would be protected and nourished within the Prussian state, that its language was to be given considerate treatment and sure protection in official and private life – if all these promises and assurances are withheld from this population, which has already been unfortunate enough to lose its independent statehood, and are turned into the opposite, one cannot be surprised that this our population, which has a thousand years of history and culture behind it, is discontented with – indeed, irate at – the all but hostile measures of the government, and, given its lively nature, expresses this discontent and deep unhappiness in a correspondingly vigorous way.

I would like to give you merely a cursory and far from exhaustive summary of all the things that have been done recently to this our population to incite and hurt it. Traditional names with a thousand-year history are simply eliminated in response to the request submitted by the *Landräte*, the government, and the ministry and approved by His Majesty; family names are often falsified by the authorities; every professional meeting is under police surveillance; every meeting in the open is prohibited; processions with music are outlawed; performances of Polish plays are for the most part prohibited or prevented. What about all the things the Settlement Commission is doing to insult the population? The Settlement Commission – and the Minister cannot deny this – was called into being in 1886 at his own suggestion, when he was still a deputy; it was he himself who pushed for this unfortunate measure. And what is its goal? The displacement of Polish owners and workers from their ancestral soil, with the stipulation that a parcel of the land purchased with state funds can never, ever be sold to a Pole, who is, after all, supposed to be a citizen with equal rights like everyone else. The various purchases and sales by this Commission upset the population every single day, and after this has happened, there are complaints that the population feels restless, and that a certain agitation working against these measures is rearing its head in the land. Poles are almost never admitted to the awarding of public contracts: there is not a single Polish demesne leaseholder in the entire Prussian state, not a single Polish administrative official, and not a single Polish judge in a higher position. In

fact, even where the various representatives of certain corporations – for example, the school representatives – wish to lease a property to a member of their tribe and religion, the government opposes the decision of the school boards in an obstructionist way and urges that even the lands belonging to Catholic school societies be leased only to Protestant, German owners, in order to prevent a Pole from earning a living, as happened recently in my town of Schroda.

Gentlemen, in court no Pole may represent his own case in his own language; he will get no hearing from administrative officials in his native language. In short, in every area the Pole is being pushed back, at every step he is humiliated; and with this happening every day, there are complaints about agitation, about unrest, and about a Polish threat, and there is talk of Germandom being besieged!

Gentlemen, now about the school! Is the *Volksschule* [extended elementary school] among us an educational institution, an educational establishment in the elevated sense of that phrase? No, it is virtually an establishment for miseducation; it is nothing so much as an obedience institute [*Abrichtungsinstitut*]. For this, I must reproach the school administration in the harshest terms, that it does not make sure – as is its duty and obligation – that the population is properly taught its mother tongue in school, the language of the family and the Church, that the Polish child in most cases cannot even learn to read and write Polish passably in the *Volksschule*. Gentlemen, these are all conditions that the Polish population has before its eyes every single day, and which it encounters daily; and now the recently arrived ministerial organ speaks of a Polish threat generated by agitation! This Polish threat, my dear gentlemen at the ministerial desk, you yourself have conjured up and raised. It is your very own work.

Source: *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Preußischen Hauses der Abgeordneten* [*Stenographic Reports on the Proceedings of the Prussian House of Representatives*], 19 LP, III Session, vol. 1, pp. 173-74.

Original German text reprinted in Willibald Gutsche, *Herrschaftsmethoden des deutschen Imperialismus 1897/8 bis 1917* [*The Ruling Methods of German Imperialism, 1897/8 to 1917*]. East Berlin, 1977, pp. 74-76.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap