Hello and welcome history friends, delegates all to episode 15 of the DG. Last week, we ended on something of an incredible cliff-hanger, as WW appeared to have succumbed to the intense pressures of life in the London Conference. We will deal with the implications of Wilson’s episode today, but by and large, our episode will be dominated by the undertaking known as the Clemenceau Directive, the long running plan between the French and Poles above all, to arrange an invasion of Bolshevik Russia from Warsaw. Conveniently for me, the Polish borders treaty has passed, which makes everything a little less ridiculous in the east. It also makes things clearer for Poland’s delegates and her neighbours, and clarity is something in short supply in this game. All delegates should be excited and encouraged, because this right here is the first example of a truly different outcome to the real life PPC that they have helped create.

Unlike in our DG timeline, of course, the big three essentially left Russia to its own devices, once it became apparent that the White Russian forces under Admiral Kolchak could not eke out a victory. Any support they did muster came far too late, but here, in our DG timeline, thanks to the underhanded actions of the Bolsheviks, above all in striking down the war hero GC, support for an anti-Bolshevik intervention into Russia remains at an all-time high. Guided first and foremost by the desire for revenge, the French and their Polish allies are also bolstered by the addition of several tiger brigades, constituted of volunteers. Stay tuned until the end of the episode, to learn how you will be able to shape the fate of this intervention through your vote. Our episode is pulled largely between three different scenes; the skeleton conference which remains in London, the deeply disconcerting confines of WW’s private chambers, and the triumphant and ambitious atmosphere of the parade ground at Warsaw, where the Council for Russian Freedoms meets to bless the fulfilment of the CD, at long last. Without any further ado then, I will now take you all to that scene in London, where a few delegates remain to hold the fort as the main event takes place in the Polish capital…

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‘Signor Orlando, I would really appreciate it if you would get to the point.’ Orlando bit his lip – he wasn’t sure if LG was deliberately trying his patience, or if he was merely engaging in some spirited teasing. The PM’s face certainly gave nothing away. They had been here in this room for several hours now, and the conversation had been remarkably revealing. ‘It is incredible what one can achieve when not burdened by the unfortunate opinions of others’, LG said. There was no confusion over who he meant – the American delegation had been thrown into chaos over the previous week, ever since WW had been taken down by a paralysing stroke. As VP Thomas Marshall seemed poised to take over much of his duties back in the US, the real question was who could assume his responsibilities in London? ‘I am sure we will gain a great deal more clarity by the end of the day, PM’, Orlando said. It was known that the American delegates were meeting in Wilson’s chambers later that afternoon, for the express purpose of nominating the team or individuals who would carry the load. ‘Are we certain, gentlemen, that the President is completely incapacitated?’ Rene Massigli asked. ‘From the information I have been sent, Sir, the prognosis is grave indeed’, Fitzwilliam replied, adding: ‘The poor man has been suffering with debilitating headaches for some time now. I fear this is merely the logical outcome of so many years of stress and fighting.’

VO stood up to stretch his legs. The room where they had been doing business was one of the finest the ABH had to offer. It was pleasant indeed to reside in this hotel now that so many other delegates were absent. The place had lost virtually two thirds of its residents, and the procession of all of these delegates had made its way to Warsaw, where the ceremony effectively blessing the intervention of the CD into Russia would be held. VO strolled over to the window, where he could see swans lazing about in the large lake feature outside. He couldn’t help but envy their freedom. ‘Gentlemen’, Orlando said, ‘as I was attempting to explain earlier on, I have received news of the Middle East. It seems that the planned creation of an Arab Kingdom in the region has not gone off without a hitch. Indeed, unfortunately, there appears to be a situation akin to war there.’ Orlando walked back to the centre of the room and placed his leathered hands on the large, shiny oak table, before exhaling. ‘I fear that our great work will be undermined terribly if we as allies cannot formulate a unitary policy.’ ‘What of that other theatre in the ME, Signor Orlando?’ Fitzwilliam asked. ‘’To what do you refer, Sir Arthur?’ the confused Italian premier replied. Fitzwilliam then rose from his seat and unfurled a map of Asia Minor.

Observe, if you will, Your Excellency, how the current Greek landing in the region of Smyrna has the potential to greatly upset the delicate balance in the whole of the ME. I have heard reports of terrible crimes conducted by the Greek soldiers in the region. If we are not careful, this initiative has the potential to ignite the entire Muslim world against us. Perhaps the disturbances in Palestine and around Mecca are just the beginning? Would a peacekeeping force be available to send to the affected regions? Would it be wise perhaps to temper the ambitions of our Greek friend, to ensure that Anatolia does not unravel into a state of civil war? Previous arrangements to partition the region will be severely jeopardised if we do not arrive at a solution soon.

Fitzwilliam then sat down, and LG nodded at him in recognition. It was convenient to be able to rely on officials like Fitzwilliam to carry the load. LG wondered how WW had managed to last so long, taking upon himself the burdens of all meetings and virtually all decisions. The situation in Greece did indeed present a problem, particularly if the British control over the Straits was to be maintained. ‘Would it be possible to welcome in the Greek premier now?’ Rene Massigli asked. ‘As far as I am aware he did not travel to Warsaw with many of the other delegates.’ ‘That might be wise’, LG said, ‘but first I believe we are to receive a deputation from the Austro-Germans.’ VO sighed. ‘I have heard quite enough of these troublemaking fellows’, Orlando said. ‘Why do we give our enemies so much time and space to spread their propaganda and undermine our peaceful mission?’ ‘I understand your concerns and I share your frustration, Signor Orlando’, Massigli said, ‘but according to the terms of all civilised conferences, while we do not owe our former foes an audience, we are bound by all considerations of decency and humanity to consider their woes.’ Orlando sighed loudly once again. ‘Very well, bring them in.’

The room suddenly became a great deal more crowded. The large oak bookcases, lined with red velvet, hugged the walls, and made the conference room appear more luxurious and homely. The carpet was soft to the touch, and threatened to absorb even the most deliberate of footprints. Above their heads, a new chandelier hung, sparkling and gleaming as the sun rays shone on its individual jewels. Fitzwilliam found that when he was bored, he lost himself staring into the endlessly reflecting lights that seemed to bounce off it. But now there was work to be done. The large oak table which dominated the centre of the room now had four new occupants, as the allied delegates sat on the right side, and the Austro-German delegates sat facing them on the left side. The Austrian Chancellor Karl Renner was staring a hole in VO, who returned the favour. Keeping them apart would be a difficult task indeed. Philip Scheidemann had also built up a reputation as something of a loose cannon, and PVLV had made it abundantly clear that he had little time for his dramatic entrances or pompous expressions. ‘Why did the President send me such a buffoon?’, Fitzwilliam had once heard the old Prussian general whisper to himself. But now, VLV would have to work with this buffoon if he wished to take advantage of this situation. VLV got up to speak.

Gentlemen, I thank you for receiving us. My peers from Austria and Germany wish to impress upon you the urgency of our mission. Reports from home have not been positive. I have it on good authority that men march in the streets demanding bread, and women sell their bodies and their children to acquire it. You do not have any love for me or my colleagues, but please do not let the events of the recent war blind you as to your humanity. The traits of mercy, compassion, and decency must not be extinguished by this recent war.

‘What is it that you want General?’ VO asked abruptly, no sense of compassion in his voice. ‘Signor, we want merely to be in a position to feed ourselves. Currently the British blockade hampers our ability to bring in food from across the world. People are dying in the streets, and their hearts are hardening against sensible politics. I fear if much more starvation takes root, we will lose the country to Bolshevism.’ Orlando coughed, and Rene Massigli intervened:

Gentlemen, and general, you surely know that the blockade is a precaution which we have taken in the event of war. To cease with the naval blockade now would place Germany in a position to heal herself and prepare for perhaps another chapter in this conflict. The last thing I or my colleagues want is to see German people suffer and die, but we want even less to provide opportunities for the war to be restarted by some backroom scheme.

‘M Massigli’, VLV replied, ‘on my honour as a soldier, my countrymen are in no fit state to restart any war. Please understand, the German people are tired and thoroughly depressed. This is a desperate plea which requires urgent attention.’ Philip Scheidemann then rose from his chair and bellowed

Gentlemen, my country is in ruins, our politics, dead, our future dead, our people dead. Do you wish to kill Germany or to defeat her? If you wish to kill her, then proceed as you were, but know that Germany will rise again, and the phoenix which rises from the ashes will have but one goal in its heart – revenge. Stop this madness now, before you create in German hearts and minds a burning hatred of all things democratic and good.

Scheidemann then left the room, and Karl Renner, taking the opportunity, rose from his chair to speak.

Gentlemen, I apologise for my colleague, but I do not mince words either. Austria is burning and in desperate need of aid. Our neighbouring states in Hungary and the Balkans continue to wage private wars against one another, and our Austrian state, so seriously reduced, faces utter calamity if it is not relieved soon. Please, end the blockade, so that my countrymen can finally imagine life after the war once again. Doing so will win you no strategic victory, it is true, but it will win the adulation of the Austrian and German people, which is surely worth far more in the circumstances.

LG stroked his chin, and VO looked left to right at his French and British colleagues, before answering Karl Renner’s challenge: ‘The Austrian Chancellor must bear in mind that trust is not so easily given. We require some form of guarantee, and yet this cannot be given until the peace treaty with Austria and her neighbours, let alone with Germany, is finally concluded. What guarantee do we have that you will not simply sell these foodstuffs to power back up your war effort?’ Karl Renner couldn’t hide his frustration ‘Signor Orlando, believe me when I tell you that when your countrymen die on the streets, little matters other than feeding them and saving them from such a terrible fate. We are defeated, and we accept our defeat, we do not want to fight anymore. We want to eat, and only to eat. Please.’ Fitzwilliam intervened, before tempers flared up:

Gentlemen, thank you for this presentation. We will in due course consider your appeal. I believe that there are grounds for lifting the blockade, or at least permitting some food to get through. Herbert Hoover continues to work for this task, but it is understandable that he has his work so cut out for him. We will consider your appeals, and we will deliver our verdict as soon as next week, if not before. If we cannot agree to lift the blockade, then we will reach a solution to this acute problem. You have my word.

With that, the Germans left the room, and Venizelos, who must have been waiting outside, came in straight after them, accompanied by the Spanish premier Antonio Maura. Orlando raised his eyebrow – what kind of presentation was the Greek premier about to give? ‘Gentlemen, I trust you have met my friend Signor Maura, premier of Spain? I heard you wished to talk with me about the situation in Smyrna. I know very little about that, save what you know yourselves. What I do know is that Greece wishes desperately to ensure its position in the Mediterranean, and I have been told by my Spanish friend here that the Pact of Cartagena holds great potential in this regard.’ Orlando then spoke up, ‘M Venizelos, thank you for arriving so quickly and for bringing our esteemed friend. Italy is greatly perturbed by the aforementioned Pact, largely because it threatens to undermine her carefully arranged balance in the Balkans.’ Fitzwilliam then interjected, ‘Signor Maura, I was not aware that you had been acquainted with M Venizelos. If you wish to expand the Pact of Cartagena, to include Greece alongside France, Britain and Spain, then perhaps these negotiations would be better conducted in private.’

‘Now see here gentlemen’, Orlando said, ‘Italian interests must not be undermined by secret pacts such as these. Now I have avoided talking about this pact out of courtesy to my friends present in the room, but further discussion must include Italy, if that pact’s major goals include the challenging of Italian interests in the Balkans.’ Antonio Maura then spoke up, his voice carrying some measure of authority. ‘Forgive me, Gentlemen. I did not wish to make matters awkward today. I merely expressed to my Greek friend that I was surely Spain and Greece would have common interests in our favourite sea. Signor Orlando, please do not interpret the interests of this pact in a negative light. We want only to restore peace and a lasting arrangement to peace in the troublesome Balkans. Surely you appreciate the nobility of this task?’ ‘Mr Maura, this region is far too sensitive to be placed under the control of external parties’, Orlando replied. ‘I fully appreciate your good intentions, but Italy is governing the ceasefire arrangement with Belgrade just fine. The Serbian King has even agreed to cede independence to formerly dominated Balkan states like Montenegro, Slovenia and Croatia. To turn back the clock and place these states under the Serbian dictatorship would be tantamount to an atrocity. We must consider the rights of self-determination in the region.’

Maura sighed loudly. ‘Signor Orlando, Spain does not wish to undermine Italian security, we only wish to ensure that peace will be maintained in the Balkans. Perhaps some peacekeeping force would be useful for maintaining order?’ Fitzwilliam then interjected. ‘Gentlemen, so long as the situation in the Balkans holds, I believe we should wait the return of M Felix Calonder from Warsaw. His experience in mediating disputes such as these is invaluable.’ ‘Very well’, Massigli said. ‘If all are agreed to postpone this discussion till next week at least, we shall hopefully arrive at a solution to this troublesome Balkan question.’ Orlando looked around the room, and realised he had little to lose by agreeing to talks which he could later ignore anyway. ‘Very well, gentlemen’, Orlando said. ‘Consider Italy willing to keep the issue up for discussion. I should say that it has not escaped my notice that American troops have moved to occupy several points in Germany and Belgium. I am not sure what you and your American friends are planning PM, but you cannot exclude Italy from these plans forever. Please remember that an element of urgency is essential. I cannot guarantee how long the treacherous Serbs will hold the peace.’ LG then interjected:

Indeed, Signor Orlando, it seems we have no choice sometimes other than to trust the normally treacherous. The situation in Belgium and along the Rhine continues to develop, and after liaising with our American friends in the area, it seemed to make the most sense for the sake of stability to intervene there. Just as Italian arms moved into the crumbling Yugoslav state, so we have moved to prevent the breakdown of law and order in such a disadvantaged region, which the recent war has left so devastated and without even basic amenities. Banditry can often emerge in such situations, particularly in the atmosphere of want which this war has created.

Orlando raised an eyebrow yet again. ‘I see, PM, well please give my condolences to M Hymans if you see him. The state of his country is an unfortunate case indeed. I also would urge a decision be made in Palestine, where it seems Jewish interests have flocked to establish some kind of Jewish state.’ LG interrupted ‘We heard of these developments, I have also been informed that Italian arms have been supplied to the Jewish settlers. I do hope these rumours do not prove to be true. Such a policy could engender instability in the region for the foreseeable future.’ ‘Of course PM’, Orlando said, ‘since the very last thing Britain or France would ever sponsor is an ill-conceived project for partitioning far off regions, I understand your concern. Rest assured, Rome is doing all it can to get to the bottom of the situation.’ LG nodded, rarely was it ever possible to discern Orlando’s true intentions, but the Italian premier seemed especially slippery lately.

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‘Mr President, perhaps it would be best to ask Mr Wilson what he thinks.’ WC’s request was noble, if somewhat naïve. WW was unlikely to be capable of making any decision at all at this point, certainly not one of such monumental importance as to who would succeed him in his duties at London. ‘Did you hear the latest bulletin from Washington?’ Hearst asked. ‘My reporters tell me that Mr Thomas Marshall is ready to assume the President’s responsibilities, at least until our President’s term ends.’ ‘Is there a precedent for serving as a caretaker president?’ WC asked. ‘Not as a far as I am aware, gentlemen’, Hearst replied, ‘but I have it on good authority that the presidency is the last thing that Thomas Marshall wants.’

Oliver Flanagan took a long drag on his cigarette and looked around the small room. The six of them were here, all gathered for an informal meeting where, hopefully, it would be decided what should be done about the delicate presidential situation. Next door was Wilson, convalescing in bed, unable to take visitors. Edward House permanently was at his bedside, and both SOS Lansing and General Tasker Howard Bliss had travelled to Warsaw. TR continued to pace up and down the room. He knew his health had not been stellar over the previous months, but he was at least in control of his faculties, which was more than could be said for the incapacitated Wilson. ‘Gentlemen, what we need is a leader, to channel the wishes of the American delegation. I will serve willingly as that figurehead.’ WC made a face – Roosevelt’s monopolising of the American delegation was exactly what he had feared. Before he could have a chance to speak, Josef Zahn intervened: ‘Mr President, please do not take offence, but I fear that your leadership of our delegation may prove polarising. I am quite willing to support your leadership, but I believe your leadership of our delegation will benefit from drawing on the firm abilities of two delegates, preferably one from each side of the ideological fence.’

Roosevelt scoffed, ‘Mr Zahn, I am afraid I do not follow. The last thing America needs is for its voice to be divided at a time like this.’ Bruce Pug then interjected, ‘Perhaps Mr Zahn is onto something, Mr President. After all, one could hardly call Mr Wilson’s leadership particularly well organised or unanimous. Maybe what America needs is several voices cooperating together?’ WC then said, ‘While Mr Pug and I have rarely seen eye to eye, I commend him for his foresight here. Mr President, we are willing to defer to your wisdom and experience as a leader, but I believe it would be wrong to pass the leadership of our delegation from one President to another.’ Roosevelt sighed. ‘Very well, gentlemen, what do you propose?’ ‘If Mr Pug will allow me to venture an opinion, I would like to recommend him as advisor’, WC said.

Bruce Pug, evidently taken aback, then said, ‘Mr Cameron, you do me a great honour. Alas, I cannot accept this honour unless you agree to stand by my side. Together, we will be in an unequalled position to lead this American delegation towards peace.’ Oliver Flanagan then spoke up. ‘It seems that Mr Pug and Mr Cameron will be advising Mr Roosevelt. Will our beleaguered President accept this arrangement?’ ‘The real question, Mr Flanagan’, Cameron said, ‘is whether Mr House will be convinced. If he is, then he will be the best candidate for presenting the arrangement to Mr Wilson.’ ‘A remarkable arrangement, gentlemen’, Zahn said. ‘Perhaps if we succeed, we might actually be in a position to finish this blasted peace treaty with the vanquished foe before the end of the year.’

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The rain had abated for the last few days, and the streets of Warsaw seemed strangely calm and beautiful. It was as though war had never touched the city. The Old Town Market Place in the oldest and most culture part of the city hosted the grand procession. A large open air ceremony, with a top table containing the leaders of France, flanked by the leaders of the new Polish Republic, dominated the scene. The area was cordoned off to protect the delegates from the enthusiastic crowds, who mostly watched with eager anticipation, waving Polish flags and singing the Polish anthem. It was quite a sight to behold. Below the top table were several round tables arranged in a certain hierarchy. White tablecloths adorned each table, and flags had been inserted into small holes to denote which national delegate was to sit where. Above their heads, a gazebo fluttered in the gentle breeze, just in case the rains arrived, but for now Polish weather was holding out.

‘Well, Mr Sheer, this is quite something’, Genuris Dinglebrush exclaimed to the Alsatian delegate. Charles Sheer nodded with some apprehension. It was just his luck to be seated next to this bumbling Belgian officer. Evidently, they were thought of as the least important of the delegates present, for their table was near the back of the room. Seated at Sheer’s table, but engrossed in a conversation of their own, was the Siamese Prince Charoon, and Makino Nabuaki. Were these two Orientals even sending soldiers for this cause? Sheer was not sure, but he had been informed that an Alsatian Tiger Brigade had been formed, some 500 men strong. A few days before, during a private conversation, Poincare had marvelled at the enthusiasm of his countrymen in AL for the task, and Sheer had awkwardly smiled in response. It was common knowledge that Poincare had worked behind the scenes to undermine Sheer’s position.

Still, it was impressive that Alsatians had volunteered in such numbers, but he would have preferred if they hadn't been folded into the larger French contingent that made up the bulk of the intervention. ‘Mr Sheer, are you aware that I was nominated as the second in command for this incredible adventure into Bolshevik Red Russia? Alas, due to my club foot, I was unable to command.’ Charles Sheer supressed a snigger, before saying, ‘Mr Dinglebrush, if you’ll excuse me, I wish to converse with some of my peers before the ceremony begins.’ It was a fair enough excuse – the presentation was not due to begin for another 30 minutes. There was no reason to stay here, at the back of the gallery, with no one for company but this Belgian buffoon, until it did. Sheer made his way towards the dominions, who were well represented indeed.

‘Mr Rabotnik, I am not quite sure I follow. Are you meaning to suggest that you do not support Polish independence?’ Lady Nora Csok was quite shocked. ‘Not at all Madame, I merely regret the tone used in the recent Polish Borders treaty. It made use of a tone which, I fear, undermined Russian freedom of action and threatened my country’s sovereignty.’ ‘Oh do settle down, Dmitri’, Ioan Bratianu said, from the other side of the table. ‘Thousands of Europeans have travelled all this way to bail you and your hapless countrymen out. I hardly think you need to fuss over the tone of some unrelated treaty at a time like this. One may be tempted to interpret your attention to detail for ungratefulness.’ A stunned silence came over the table. They were, like that of Sheer and Dinglebrush, positioned a little further back from the front than they were probably happy with, but they were at least further forward than that other table. Bratianu was feeling particularly emboldened though, since Romania had contributed nearly 8,000 volunteers, and PMF had personally congratulated him for it. The sense of importance had evidently gone straight to his head. Bratianu puffed lethargically on his cigarette. ‘Ridiculous that Romania should be seated so far back. We provided the greater amount of volunteers per population, did you know that?’ ‘The entirety of Europe knows that, Mr Bratianu’, Dmitri Rabotnik said, adding with some venom, ‘I hardly know how you have enough soldiers left to illegally occupy the Transylvania, with all the men you’re sending in my country.’

Felix Calonder, also seated at their table, coughed and choked loudly on the drink he had chosen to take at that exact moment. There were some moments where mediation simply would not cut it. Bratianu had the unique ability to make himself despised wherever he went, so it seemed. It was as though the Romanian premier enjoyed rubbing people up the wrong way. ‘Mr Rabotnik’, Bratianu said, ‘I hardly need to remind you of the service which my countrymen are doing for you. Perhaps you would not take such a tone with me if you knew what Romanian soldiers were capable of.’ Rabotnik replied with relish ‘Oh trust me, your excellency, if your men make as good an account of themselves in Russia as they did in the recent war, I believe my country will be safe indeed.’ Bratianu could not tell whether Rabotnik was being sarcastic or serious, so he abruptly changed the subject. ‘Ms Csok, tell me, how are matters progressing in Budapest. You are ruled by a Habsburg now, is that correct?’ Lady Nora Csok took one look at Bratianu, then one look at Rabotnik, and then spoke to Felix Calonder sat opposite her. ‘Mr Calonder, I believe it is not too late to grab one more drink before the festivities begin. Would you do me the honour?’ Calonder couldn’t help but jump up out of his seat. ‘It would be my honour, my lady’, the Swiss man said. As they walked away, arm in arm, they could hear Rabotnik and Bratianu argue about the finer points of Pan-Slavism. Some conversations were best avoided like the plague.

‘Mr Lind, do you rate Canada’s justice system?’ Sir Robert Borden asked. ‘I am afraid I have not had the pleasure of studying it, Mr Premier, though of course, the exploits of the late justice Joseph Doherty were renowned in Newfoundland.’ This was the answer Borden was looking for, and he smiled. ‘Mr Borden’, Arthur McColville asked, ‘Have you had the opportunity yourself to make use of the extensive fishing facilities at St John’s? I do believe you will find no pastime more tranquil and rewarding than a good day’s spent fishing.’ The three men were relaxed and well-oiled with vodka. It was late in the afternoon, and this trip to Poland gave them all a chance to escape from the suffocating confines of the London Conference. At their dominions table also sat Louis Botha. ‘Have you had the pleasure of speaking with General McCay?’ Botha asked. ‘He seems in very good spirits, which is a good sign.’

The Australian veteran of Gallipoli had been nominated to lead these multinational forces into the Russian countryside. In previous weeks, David McCay had aroused a great deal of enthusiasm for a better deal for Russia, and he seemed like the ideal candidate to command there. ‘It is a good thing that an official of the wide family of dominions has been nominated for such a task.’ Botha said, ‘I believe he will be an excellent representative of our Empire family. I must say I have been greatly impressed by the answering of so many of countrymen to the call of Russian freedoms. I only hope that the Russian people return the favour in the future with a firm alliance.’ ‘I believe Russia will be a worthwhile friend’, Borden replied. ‘You must recall how peaceful the world was from 1907, when our Entente solved decades of Anglo-Russian competition. Another such agreement is by far the best way to guarantee peace in the world.’

‘Ah gentlemen’, exclaimed a flustered Genuris Dinglebrush, ‘I am honoured to make your acquaintance. I was wondering if you had seen any sign of my friend Charles Sheer? He left a short time ago and I have not seen him since. The presentation is due to begin soon and I do not wish him to miss it.’ Borden blinked several times, and Arthur McColville intervened, ‘I am sure he will turn up soon, Mr Dinglebrush. Perhaps he is merely getting a drink?’ ‘Capital, capital, excellent idea! I will go and look for him there’, Dinglebrush said, and began to walk away, before abruptly returning, and startling Owen Lind as he placed his hand on his shoulder. ‘By the way gentlemen, did you know that I was nominated to serve as the second in command of this great military adventure? Had to turn them down unfortunately, due to my club foot.’ ‘Yes, of course’, Louis Botha said, ‘how could we forget. Your military exploits are…legendary.’ ‘Well now, do not do me too great an honour Mr Botha. It is honour enough to be in the presence of such an esteemed statesman of the Boer people.’ Louis Botha’s demeanour suddenly changed, as he absorbed the compliment willingly. ‘You are a flatterer, Mr Dinglebrush’. ‘Oh nonsense’, Dinglebrush replied, slapping Owen Lind on the back as he did so. The drink flew out of Lind’s hand, and went all over Botha’s overcoat. Suddenly, Botha’s demeanour changed again. ‘Why you idiotic jumped up little…’ ‘Ah, gentlemen’, Dinglebrush said, walking swiftly away, ‘it has been a pleasure.’

A bell was sounded from the front of the room, and all eyes turned to the top table. Just as the ceremony was about to begin, a figure shuffled in between McColville and Lind, it was Charles Sheer. ‘Permit me to stay at your table gentlemen, and drinks will be on me for the evening’, the Alsatian said. The two Newfoundlanders looked at one another and grinned: Charles Sheer was more agile than they thought – evidently he had sneaked right past Dinglebrush. ‘We just encountered your friend’, whispered McColville. ‘Oh dear’ Sheer said, ‘missed me did he? I confess, hiding under the table nearby wasn’t my proudest achievement, but sometimes, desperate times call for desperate measures.’ Owen Lind laughed out loud, and Louis Botha proposed a quick toast. ‘Gentlemen’, the South African said with a whisper, ‘to desperate times and desperate measures.’ At the top table, the French premier and President were now seated, with Polish general Pilsudski and premier Paderewski beside them. David McCay, the Australian commander, was sandwiched between the two delegations. It was truly a multinational affair, as though the nations of the world had finally banded together against Bolshevism. Nothing less than international cooperation, Foch had insisted, would defeat that evil ideology. Now it was time to see if he was right.

Silence fell over the open square. Even the masses who had gathered outside of the barricades made not a sound. Paderewski rose from his feet, and found that those delegates and VIPs seated in front of him, and his countrymen standing beyond, were hanging on his every word.

Delegates, friends, countrymen and democrats. It brings me great pleasure to welcome you all here today, for our CFRF. When this body was incepted a month ago, its purpose was clear – to free Russia from the Bolshevik chains that disadvantage and destroy her people. Today, after so many weeks of negotiation and hard work, it is fair to say that we have demonstrated a unanimous desire to fulfil the goal of this Council. This was not, of course, a mission which only a few contributed to. Those delegates and supporters seated in front of me, and my countrymen, those of you that stand shoulder to shoulder in this historic Market Square, your love of Poland, of freedom and of democracy, has made all of this possible. From now on, we say no more to Bolshevism. We declare an end to waiting for someone else to fix the problems of this world. We announce that this war was not fought for nothing, and insist that never again should true friends of democracy ever feel hopeless or abandoned. Today, it is a moment of great significance, for it is a moment when Poland fights for Russia. We know that many will decry this act. Russia must pay for her crimes against Poland, they might say. Russia deserves to endure these terrible trials, claim others. Yet, in my heart of hearts gentlemen, for as long as I have attended the peace conference in Paris or in London, I have learned that all men are worth saving. It is quite a thing to declare, but if this wretched war can bring us anything, we hope it will bring us solidarity, and not among a certain social strata or class, but among all nations, whose peoples will fight for what is right and good. Today, we begin this fight, and I look forward to the conclusion of that fight, when we return to this place in God’s good time, and proclaim the victory of humanity over the forces of evil. Thank you.

Paderewski sat down to a chorus of applause and rapturous cheers. Evidently, many Poles behind them believed in the cause, and next to stand up was the grizzled general Pilsudski. A hush came over the audience once more. ‘You know me gentlemen’, Pilsudski’s gruff voice boomed;

You know that I am an honest man, and a true patriot. I do not scheme, I do not politic. What I do is fight. I am like Poland, tenacious, passionate and powerful. I do not tire easily, and I do not give up. This, friends, is our moment to demonstrate that Poland is not yet lost. But it is more than that. As my friend Paderewski said, we fight in the name of our old foe in Russia. Yet we remember that in Russia lives people, people who deserve a chance to be happy and to be free. I ask you all, does these descendants of those that wronged us deserve to be wronged also? Do these Russian people deserve to be condemned to suffer, to starve, to have the lifeblood of their nation squeezed out, as we did, in 1795?

At that, a resounding ‘no’ emerged from all around, and it became clear from the sound just how many people were present for the procession. Pilsudski continued:

I knew I was right to put my faith in all of you. I am at home with every one of you. And now, like I put my faith in you, the world puts its faith in all of us. Whether we come from this great country, revitalised after years of struggle, or whether we come from our vibrant ally in France, or some far flung dominion of the British Empire, whose name might escape me, but whose deeds invoke wonder in us all. Today we say that nationality, creed, faith and wealth has no bearing on our comradery. We are all united in the cause to end the suffering of that Russian nation, to put to bed the ruinous ideology which has lied and deceived its way into the hearts and minds of so many Russians. These Russians will be cured, not killed, but for those unique few irredeemable manipulators, who have led their countrymen off the cliff of despair, we bring you a message of wrath and destruction. We bring you no quarter, only punishment and consequence for your actions. We hope you are ready to face us, because we are positively itching to face you. Thank you.

The applause was even louder now, and Premier Poincare stood up. The applause took a little bit longer to die down, likely because the surrounding citizens had less ingrained respect for someone who was not of their country. Still though, once he began to speak, the manners of those assembled shone through, and Poincare was given the floor.

My friends, I thank you for receiving us here and now. My Polish is unfortunately not up to much, so I will speak slowly to allow my interpreter her to follow my words. Indeed, much has been said already about why we are here. What has brought Frenchmen away from the cause of concluding the war with their German foe, and to this cultured Polish capital? The answer is simple – humanity. It is our humanity that separates us from the Bolsheviks; it was our humanity that facilitated the miracle on the Marne in 1914, and it is our humanity now that distinguishes those willing to help his fellow man from those willing to stand by and do nothing. Poland has never done nothing – my friends Pilsudski and Paderewski have assured me of that, but let me tell you something about France. You know that, a century ago, an Emperor of the French marched here. His message was freedom, but the cause was too great even for him to manage. He was betrayed, friends, by lesser men. In his cause to create a better world, Napoleon Bonaparte failed, and we have been living with the consequences ever since. Gentlemen, citizens, people of the world, today we must not fail. Lest in a century’s time, men will gather on a stage like this, and speak of those brave visionaries who promised much, but were ultimately overwhelmed. The shame of such a defeat would be impossible to bear, but the failing of the Russian people would be something more painful entirely. To the people of Russia, our hearts beat as one for you and your freedom. Soon we will walk hand in hand down the gilded roads of civilisation, soon we will forget what it meant to struggle and hate your neighbour. Until that day comes though friends, we must first work hard. One last push will bring our nations to the point of success. One last push, and Russia’s freedom will be in our hands. Thank you.

Whistling and cheering followed, and Poincare was visibly moved. Perhaps he had been bothered to have not been saved for last, but Poincare had certainly done his finest work. He suspected that Foch would not be able to top that speech, but Poincare also found that he had been caught in up in the moment. ‘A stirring speech, your excellency’, General McCay whispered to him. Tears formed in Poincare’s eyes. After waiting for the applause to die down, then the PM got up to speak. For about ten seconds, he smiled around at the people gathered, before he finally spoke.

It brings me great joy and pride to see this vision of mine come to life. My friends, when I imagined Warsaw hosting this expedition, it was a vision which I confess, I did not have the capacity properly to do justice to. It never occurred to me that such an outpouring of enthusiasm and patriotism would take shape. It is not wonder that Poland has not been lost, with citizens like yourselves counted among the sea of proud Poles before me. It is also no great mystery why I advocated so enthusiastically for a defence arrangement with Poland. There was no firmer ally, no more loyal friend, than Poland to France, I said. But now I speak to all nationalities and peoples. Many of you have come a great distance to be here, and you still have much further to go. I will not pretend the journey will be easy, nor will I pretend that it is always glamorous. Yet, as the weather bites at you, as hunger occasionally gnaws, as your mood is preyed upon by the opportunistic, I want you to remember what you hear today. I want you to remember that we are all comrades in arms, and that our cause is a just one. When the great fortress of Verdun seemed lost, it was supplied by one single route, which came to be known as the sacred way. We are travelling the sacred way today, my friends, we are travelling out of our comfort zones and into the fire of war. Yet we go there for good reason, and our consciences are clear. The man to my left, General David McCay, is one such man whose conscience is clear. He led men ashore during the Gallipoli campaign, he served his country in politics, he defended Australia when it mattered most. Mr McCay is here, as the father of two children, because he knows that our future is too valuable to leave in the hands of well-meaning platitudes and gestures. Action is what will heal the Russian wound, and today we take action. I invite now the archbishop of Warsaw to bless our expedition.

An old man in traditional Papal garb strolled onto the stage, and began loudly reciting several Latin prayers. The non-Catholic delegates seated in front of the prelate maintained a respectful disposition – there was no need to cause or take offence at a time like this. As he finished his blessing, Foch then assumed his old position.

My friends, there is so much I could say to you today, so much I could say to inspire you, or perhaps much I should say to prepare you for what is ahead. Instead, I simply offer my sincere thanks. The bulk of the military forces are present today because you have volunteered. No government has conscripted you, and no agency has compelled you. You are here because you believe in the task ahead of you, and the tens of thousands of soldiers who will shortly embark for the front carry with them the promise of a new life for the millions of Russian souls that you save. I am but your humble servant, the first citizen of the French republic, but you, gentlemen, are men of a different calibre altogether. You answered the call when it mattered most. Not the Russian people, not historians a century from now, not posterity, and certainly not your own countrymen back home will ever forget your brave sacrifice. You march tomorrow into this strange world of Bolshevik Russia, and out of the sumptuous hospitality of our Polish friends. Your make history with this march, just as you make the actual future of the Russian people possible. Thank you.

An eruption of applause moved across the seated delegates, who soon stood up, and the off duty soldiers and citizens outside the barricades added to the eruption. Smiling faces could be easily picked out among the crowds. Foch sat down next to Poincare, ‘Excellent job, PM’, Poincare said. ‘M Poincare’, Foch said, ‘I really believe that soon, we will be able to free the Russian people from this terrible fate. Do you believe it too?’ Poincare nodded enthusiastically. ‘I was not sure if you heard, Mr president, but PL was found strangled in his jail cell in Paris.’ Foch took a moment to respond. ‘A shame’, the PM said. ‘It would have been better to execute him today, before this fantastic crowd.’ ‘Indeed’, Poincare said, ‘what a scene that would be.’

McCay couldn’t help but overhearing their conversation. He was horrified. Did these two men, these two leaders of France, truly want what was best for Europe and democracy, or were they only a few terrible decisions away from returning her to her medieval past. Had he truly gotten himself into something awful? Would he ever return from this Russian quagmire? The mention of Napoleon made McCay nervous – he had been the greatest general that ever lived, but Russia had been his undoing. While he liked to pride himself on his skill, McCay wasn’t sure if he measured up to the standard set by Bonaparte. If that genius had been unable to tame Russia, did he and his tens of thousands in this new grand army really stand a chance? Either way, whatever the future held in store, he was committed to the cause. This mission would either make him the most famous Australian who ever lived, or it would prevent him from ever seeing his children again. Not much of a grey area, McCay thought, but then, the greatest risks often presented the greatest rewards. There no reward more noble than liberating an entire nature from Bolshevism’s ills. Tomorrow, the next day of the rest of his life, would begin…

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And that history friends and delegates is the end of the episode. Here we have watched as the expedition to Russia takes shape, as the London conference ticks by, and as the American delegates work to imagine life without Wilson. Next week we’ll examine the consequences of such developments, but we will also learn something of the fate of General McCay’s Russian adventure, since today I’m asking you to vote on it. Yet, I’m also going to ask you to vote on something else. As per the information given by the Austro-German delegation near the beginning of the episode, we learned that Austria and Germany is suffering from acute starvation thanks to the blockade of the royal navy, just as it suffered in real life. My question for you then is, what do you propose to do with this blockade. Do you unconditionally end the blockade, continue it as normal, maintain it at half strength, or end it conditionally. What conditions could you end it on? Well that is up to you, but make sure you make some kind of suggestion about what Germany and Austria might have to give in return, and if this choice wins, I’ll pick what I think is the best and most logical one.

As for the Russian vote, it is up to you to determine its fate, and we have a few options to choose from. Will McCay’s expedition be completely successful, thereby eradicating Bolshevism; will it be a complete failure, resulting in the destruction and retreat of McCay’s force; will they capture Moscow, but fail to eradicate the threat, as what happened to Napoleon; will they enjoy moderate success, and establish a permanent democratic Russian state based out of Southern Russia and the Crimea in the process. If you’ve forgotten these options, make sure you have a read over them when you’re making your choice, and make sure that you do vote, because it is the best way to ensure that you have a say in how this story progresses. That’s going to do it for today dear delegates, so until next time my name is Zack I have been your delegation master, thanks for listening and playing, and I’ll be seeing you all next week.