December 10, 1944

Dear fellow countrymen and countrywomen, I greet you with the words: Praised be Jesus Christ!

The American nation, as it is with others, has its virtues and its vices. Poles have an expression that clearly defines the good as well as the bad, when they say that every nation has its pluses and minuses! It is not my task to count them. It is beyond my ability to do that! I readily admit that the American is not without virtue, but I am not free to say that he is without vice. Since we are a part of the American nation, and I have you in my thoughts, so the following criticism is directed toward you. The general fault of the citizens of the United States is: complaining! The term means a lot, very much, namely, renounce, lament, grumble, feel sorry for, and complain! I dare to ask where there is an individual who doesn’t have at least one of these. Men complain about long work hours; lack of gas, car tires; lack of cigarettes, cigars, and liquor! Women complain about lack of coupons; not enough meat and butter, shoes and stockings. Everyone murmurs, everyone criticizes, and everyone expresses dissatisfaction. We forget that we are at war. We forget that despite certain shortages. There is no other nation under the sun who has it better than we do. But what American wants to eat bread bakes the day before? Is there a woman in America who wants to have a lack of cookies, pies, or ice cream? For our people everything must not only be good but the best, the freshest and the most recent. An appetite exists and there is money and so we live and use the resources. Not too long ago, I attended a reception. There were fourteen of us around the table. There was plenty of everything on the table. I really am not interested what anyone takes and what they have on their plates and pack into their stomachs. Despite that, I had to look at other people from time to time. I noticed that a certain gentleman of those present took, with certain enthusiasm and seriousness to – butter. First in his first portion, he took a piece of bread and smeared a good portion delighting in American butter. Not enough? He took a donut replete with sugar and spread a good portion over both sides with a wall of butter. And after dinner, he complained of the lack of things. I pursed my lips and gritted my teeth.

**WE ARE NOT PERMITTED TO COMPLAIN**

Outside of certain parameters which deal with justice and importance, we live in comfort and necessary resources which the affluent of Europe don’t even have in periods before the World War. Whoever travelled through Europe and observed the conditions of life in old Europe will not deny this. Actually, I have in mind the affluence or abundance and comfort of daily material life, meaning, food, clothing etc. There, where the nation gave its subjects many tools which made their work easier and living easier. Now, for proof. And here, so that no one would accuse me of one-sidedness, I quote from “Warring Poland.” On the pages of this journal dedicated to a soldier’s life I found a specific write-up about the gray and hunger-driven life on Polish lands. And now for evidence of this: “Found in Warsaw, Lwow, Cracow in a small town a woman, who has to upkeep a home – a mother – who wishes to rear her children. Therefore to the most difficult thing – to feed and clothe them. From store books, the Germans let her obtain bread, potatoes, marmalade, soap and clothes washing liquid. Fat was considered useless. During the entire war, it was given out only once. Meat, sugar, and flour are made available two or three times a year, before the holidays: a small portion per person. Bread in Poland, during the war, was black as the earth, tasted like clay, stuck to the teeth and bent the knife in cutting.

There are a variety of ingredients in it: lupine, chestnuts, sawdust, and the least – flour. Flour for baking the usual daily bread, is given out by the Germans when it begins to spoil in war storage. Then you have to break up hard, wet lumps, and milled it after drying again. At the beginning of the war, it was hard to make something out of it called bread. At the counters of shops lay heavy pancakes, cracked at the top, sticky and moist on the inside. Caring German benefactors, brought professionals from the Fatherland who teach our bakers. It is hardly called nourishment. – This black bread which is difficult to eat is the main stay of nourishment in the home. It is lacking most of the time, anyway. The allotment was 15 decagrams for adults and 10 decagrams for children. They allot more potatoes as the supply dictates with the ease of transportation. There is no lack of complaints on the distribution. Notification on the distribution is given at the last moment, the potatoes are kept for months and they rot and people wait in long lines to retrieve the food.

The rest of these “treasures” are: marmalade which is made of beetroot and is sticky with saccharin; clothes washing liquid – soda. Cakes of soap are soft and sticky, sometimes rough and sharp as sand, useful only to wash hands.

Every autumn is a battle demanding greater creativity and resourcefulness – from a foresight in getting the pantry ready in order to survive the winter. It is necessary to review constantly to prevent the risk of loss and face a day of hunger. An old piece of clothing can be exchanged for a few pounds of butter, but pork fat is harder to trade. Rendered fat in jars must suffice for the winter. Relatively, most available is rapeseed oil, unless one can find it well purified, golden and tasting like the olive. Most often however one has to use oil that is almost black and not tasting good. Potato pancakes are most often fried in it and only when really necessary in other uses. For a change or necessity one needs to get flour or cereal. Tiny yellow millet, thick pearl barley, barley hash, became the main dish on Polish tables. Occasionally there is a lack of salt. It is not found on store shelves for weeks at a time.

Herbal tea, after using it for several years, seems better. Doctoring the leaves somewhat and closing your eyes, it is drinkable. The taste of real tea and coffee has fallen by the wayside, even with the Germans. By the second year of the war, it was totally gone. Irritating is the lack of sugar. “Crystalline saccharine” is sold by men on the streets, is expensive and very hard to obtain. Children especially yearn for something sweet which is totally unavailable these days.

If you are wealthy you can obtain what you wish, especially in Warsaw. Occasionally, then you can get a kilogram of butter for 200 złotych, a kilogam of sugar for 140 złotych, or a kilogram of old, sad looking meat. Everyone needs bread, flour, and kasza. The prices are high – about 20 zlotych for a kilo.

Despite all of this people somehow manage to live. Those better off help the less fortunate and the town survives. In reality, the towns are experiencing hardships; typhus is prevalent in the cities. Poland has been robbed by its occupants in spite of the fact that it is an agricultural nation and nevertheless is beset with hunger. Every corner of the garden, even places utilized by vegetables, rye, potatoes. Every dollar goes toward food. Everyone knows that what you have eaten cannot be taken away from you. In addition to the lack of foods, one needs other things besides. The most looked for item in addition to food is soap. In the first years of the war, every woman made soap for washing. For some families, making soap was a main source of income. Recipes for its making were becoming better. In the beginning soap had a lot of water content; later the soaps were perfumed and colored for bathrooms. Because of these innovations soap became more expensive and sometimes not affordable.

Sometimes sewing needles, thread, and string, and paper was unobtainable. Paper was rationed in small quantities even for German bureaus. One of the other bleak needs was heat. Warsaw, winter after winter, was confronted with cold living quarters and the price of coal was not consistent with the wages. A ton of coal cost 2000 zloty. Besides transporting the coal was another difficulty. In Cracow, close to mines, it was easier obtained. There it cost 400 to 600 zloty for a ton. It was easier obtained if you worked for the colliery.

In the beginning people used electric heaters, but later on, in the third year, the Germans rationed electricity and gas. For two rooms and a kitchen, one could use 13 kilometers monthly, and the electric heaters heated the rooms, especially in Warsaw, use of gas in the kitchen enabled cooking.

Unable to continue this way, gas and electricity was curtailed to three hours and eventually some households needed to continue without lights. To residences in Warsaw, a small “Koza,” a kitchen appliance, had limited use, but you could prepare something to eat on it. It was still an inconvenience. It was more expensive to buy more clothes to keep warm than to feed them. In the fifth year of the war, it wasn’t as bad to clothe the children, now they have t have shoes, clothes, coats. Now the clothes have to be passed on to the younger children. There were no rationing coupons for shoes. Before rationing, people were able to buy in stores and stockpile their needs. Now that stockpiles could be maintained, there is no money. Without provisions, one must pay from the pocket. However, costs are skyrocketing day after day. Just a while ago women’s shoes were 800 zloty; for a yard of woolen material for man’s clothing was 4,000 zloty. Add socks for 300 zloty. Some light muslin cost 120 złoty.

Also, fashion changes and you need a little creativity to clothe yourself. One makes over old clothing. Musing over the open wardrobe and prewar clothing one it is replaced stuff strew on shop counter, and bales of silk and wool. A nice blouse can be sewn from a pillow case. Men’s clothes left in the closet as they went to war were also made into women’s clothes. A son can walk in oversized father’s shoes. The best clothes await the end of the war when the men come back home. An old woolen kerchief can be made over to a skimpy dress. Using synthetic threads one can create colorful blouses, dresses for children. Old torn sweaters, can be made into socks, gloves and boots. Wooden shoes tell of vacations but are not too warm in cold weather and bad for the feet.

The situation is even worse as far as clothing goes in the towns. The cities had more of a variety of clothing. In the towns and farms for the most part two sets of clothes, one for work and one for more holiday wear. Children run around naked all summer long. The village, buys for extremely exacting price the older clothes from the city, rags worn out with heavy physical labor. It is also largely rural doing, that we find homespun fabricating, tanning leather, and weaving wool. A more acceptable brand of clothing is found in the city’s collection centers. These are stores that buy up clothing and wash and put it in good shape and sell it. All of these necessities occur because the war drags on.

It is in this scenario that lean, hungry, underfed, badly dressed, tired figures move. I add this description: “She has grey eyes and short cut hair. Small and underfed. She is 35 years old. “I can’t complain – it was ok. – said with a sing song voice.” “We began all over and the Lord helped us to survive. Twelve acres of land, some cattle, two horses, and twelve sheep. It was sufficient but not extravagant.” The face brightens up. She narrates that in a few years they raised wheat, rye, potatoes and sold them in the city. For every Christmas we managed feeding two or three pigs and a heifer. This lasted at best to September of 1939. The world of this Polish woman was not huge – perhaps 40 acres. It was a full life for her lived by he own hands in hard labor built and stood peaceful, solid. And then came the tempest, which uprooted the trees, a tempest made by man. The tempest will pass and the stronger trees will survive but the war machine will grind on. As September passed along, planes began the fly overhead. Then came a long stream of tanks. Shortly after that a disturbance in the towns and bands of foreigners appeared and began to threat en. In November her husband died and she was left alone with two children. In a few days a commissioner came. He took away the cattle. Then the horses. After that before their eyes foreign people came in, took goods, and shared among themselves.

Ultimately in January of 1940, truck appeared in front of their house and told them to get aboard. Not knowing where they were going she packed away some of her precious belongings, head covering and two pillows, a bed covering and she left. At the railroad station, she stepped onto a train for the first time in her life. Despite her protests they put her children on another wagon. In two days later the train with a load of people drove away into the world. She does not remember the name of the camp she was sent to in which she lived for 6 months. She does not know where her children were sent. She tells with sadness her search for her children. After she was released from the camp she found out from her neighbors the address of the orphanage. Then she again searched. After a week, travelling through snow and mud she was hungry and ended up in a far-away city to an orphanage but her children were not there. They were sent somewhere else. Again by foot, again searching. Someone said they would help. She ended up in Africa where she spent a year. She did not have it bad, but the heat was too much for her. She suffered from malaria. Her skin broke out into some kind of rashes. Ultimately she found her way to England. She wishes to return to her land, to the world, to which she belongs like a tree to its earth to the whitewashed home. To beautiful mornings and peaceful evenings to hear the voice of the crane in the neighboring village. She still seeks her children constantly asking if anyone has any information on where they are. But she has the same philosophical surrender today. She joined the armed forces and asked why; she replied that she wanted to help in some way. All that roaming.

Another lady was sent away with her parents and family. After several months both parents died. Her 15 year old sister died of hunger. Later, her brother from dysentery. – “They brought him in by train and left his body at the railroad station and drove away.” She tells this story in a quiet manner. Later she starts to cry aloud. She recovers saying “at some remote station. They dropped him off and left. Then we preceded, three of us, my younger brother, sister in law and I. We got sick on tyfus and my brother died. We were two left of a family of eight. My sister is 19 and is healthy and wants to start life anew.

My dear people, listeners, let these portraits etch themselves into our imagination, in our memories when we wish to complain at the lack of something in these wartimes. They are nothing compared in comparison with those of our brothers and sisters endured during the war