

Documents
on
Return of Doles
to Poland



Introduction

THE set of documents assembled in this booklet speaks for itself. The Polish Provisional Government in Warsaw has, first by refusing and delaying to give the necessary guarantees of safe-conduct to Polish soldiers returning from the West, and then by its comments on the British Foreign Secretary's introductory note to the declaration and on the declaration itself, proved beyond any doubt that it does not, in reality, want Poles from the West to return to Poland. It is left to the readers of this booklet to draw their own conclusions as to why this is so.

EDINBURGH,
April 1946.

PUBLISHED BY
POLISH PRESS AGENCY
43 CHARLOTTE SQUARE
EDINBURGH

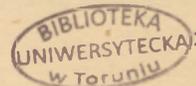
Message from the British Foreign Secretary to all Members of the Polish Forces under British Command

His Majesty's Government have many times made it clear that it is their policy to assist the greatest possible number of members of the Polish armed forces under British command to return to Poland of their own free will and in conditions worthy of their great services to the Allied cause. In accordance with this policy they have in recent months been in negotiation with the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity, which the British Government, like other Governments, regard as the only authority entitled to speak on behalf of Poland, regarding the conditions upon which returning Polish soldiers, sailors and airmen will be received back in their own country. As a result of these negotiations the Provisional Government has furnished His Majesty's Government with a statement setting forth its policy on this question. The text of this statement is annexed.

The British Government regard this statement as satisfactory. In the light of these assurances they have reviewed the position of the Polish armed forces under British command. They consider it to be the duty of all members of those forces who possibly can do so to return to their home country without further delay under the conditions now offered them in order that they may make their contribution to the restoration of the prosperity of liberated Poland. Only thus can they serve their country in a manner worthy of her great traditions.

Those who nevertheless feel compelled to remain abroad in full knowledge of the present situation will be treated, as far as our resources permit, with due recognition of their gallant service. In execution of the policy announced by Mr. Winston Churchill, the British Government will give, in collaboration with other Governments, such assistance as is in their power to enable those who fought with us throughout the war to start a new life outside Poland with their families and dependants. But the British Government, after the most careful examination of the whole problem, are bound to make it plain that they can promise no more than this. There is no question of the Polish Army, Navy or Air Forces at present under British command being preserved by the British Government as independent armed forces abroad, and it is the intention of the British Government to disband as soon as practicable those men who decide not to return to Poland. Nor can the British Government offer to the members of the Polish armed forces under British command any guarantee that they will all be enabled to settle in British territory at home or overseas.

I appeal on behalf of the British Government to every individual member of the Polish armed forces to consider carefully the alter-



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natives which are here set before him. I earnestly trust that the overwhelming majority will decide to avail themselves of this opportunity, especially as I am not in a position to guarantee that there will be a further opportunity for them to return to Poland.

Speaking on behalf of the British Government, I declare that it is in the best interests of Poland that you should return to her now, when she requires the help of all her sons in the arduous task of reconstructing the country and making good the devastation caused by the War.

(Signed) ERNEST BEVIN.

(House of Commons Official Report,
Hansard, 20th March 1946, Vol. 420, No. 106.)

II

Statement by Polish Provisional Government

1. The treatment of the Polish armed forces returning to Poland from abroad has already been demonstrated in practice in the case of those soldiers who have returned from France and Italy. The same principles will also be adopted towards those returning home from other territories.

No punitive measures or reprisals will be carried out against returning officers and soldiers, except in the following cases:

(a) Against persons who served in the German forces.

It should be added here that all persons who served with the German forces were divided by the German authorities into four groups of "Volksdeutsche." Group 3 and 4 comprised those persons who had been compulsorily inscribed on the list of "Volksdeutsche." Group 2 comprised those persons whom the German authorities considered as deserving their confidence to a certain extent only. Group 1 comprised those persons who were considered to be completely loyal to the Hitler regime.

As far as these persons are concerned the general rules regarding the treatment of "Volksdeutsche" will also be applied to members of the Polish armed forces returning from abroad. Persons previously domiciled in territories which were incorporated into the German Reich, and who had been classified into Groups 3 and 4, will be automatically rehabilitated, while persons whom the German authorities classified as Groups 1 or 2 will have to obtain their rehabilitation before the ordinary Law Courts. For persons previously domiciled in the so-called "General Government" rehabilitation before the ordinary Law Courts will be obligatory because they adopted German nationality voluntarily and without any compulsion being exercised.

(b) Against persons who are guilty of High Treason—as defined in the Polish penal code in force since 1st September 1932.

(c) Against persons guilty of common crimes as defined in the Polish penal code in force since 1st September 1932. Returning members of the Polish armed forces will not, however, be charged retrospectively with offences under amendments to the penal code introduced by the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity, where the acts in question were committed before the said amendments were introduced.

The Amnesty Decree of 21st August 1945 will be applied to all members of the Polish armed forces returning from abroad.

2. The sacrifices of the Polish soldiers who fought on many fronts under the colours of our Western Allies are accorded equal recognition with the gallantry of the Polish Army formed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Consequently, these soldiers when returning to Poland will be treated on an equal footing with all soldiers of the re-born Polish forces. This, of course, covers also the right to pensions.

3. Soldiers liable to demobilisation will be demobilised, and those

expressing the wish to choose a professional military career will be enabled to enter officers' and N.C.O.'s training schools, and remain in the forces. Those demobilised may be liable for service in the Reserve on the same basis as other demobilised members of the Polish forces.

Rank, length of service, decorations and military awards won by officers and soldiers in the fight against Germany—no matter on what battlefield—will be recognised and taken into account.

4. Those who are demobilised have the same right to the grants of land, which is being distributed among soldiers, as the demobilised soldiers of the re-born Polish forces.

5. War invalids will receive allowances and pensions in accordance with existing laws.

All the points dealt with in paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 above have been covered in the public announcement which the President of Poland's National Council, M. Bierut, made at a Press conference at the Ministry of Information and Propaganda in Warsaw, as well as in an appeal of the Government of National Unity issued to all Polish officers, soldiers, sailors and airmen abroad.

These points have also been the subject of an exposé by the Minister of National Defence, Marshal Zymierski, at a meeting of the Polish National Council on 1st January 1945. Moreover, they were also included in the Orders of the Day issued by the Commander-in-Chief on the occasion of the 1st of May, the National Day, 3rd May, Independence Day, 22nd July, and the anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald. Moreover, they have been mentioned in a speech delivered on the first anniversary of the First Division, and in an interview given by Marshal Zymierski to the representative of the Polpress Agency on 2nd August 1945.

6. The members of the Polish armed forces will be allowed to bring their personal belongings into Poland free of duty. They will be allowed to transfer their sterling accounts in the United Kingdom to Poland. For this purpose account holders will have to make an application to the British authorities for the transfer of their sterling balances, or any part thereof, to an account of the National Bank of Poland with the Bank of England. On this basis an account will be opened for them in Polish banks. The payments from these accounts will be effected accordingly to the current exchange rates as announced by the Polish authorities to the members of the Polish armed forces. (The Polish authorities state that their present exchange rate for this purpose is, together with subsidies, 420 zloty to the £ sterling.)

7. On their return to Poland members of the Polish armed forces originating from the provinces east of the Curzon Line will automatically be regarded by the Polish Government as Polish citizens if they are of Polish or Jewish race and will not be required to perform any act signifying that they wish to choose Polish citizenship.

8. Families of members of the Polish armed forces who are now scattered all over the world, for instance East Africa, Iran, Palestine,

South America, etc., are allowed to join soldiers, members of their families, in Poland.

9. Telegraphic and postal communication with Poland has been basically restored: it needs only technical improvement.

Persons returning to Poland as demobilised soldiers will be provided with assistance and information in the Polish Repatriation Offices, which have been set up on the frontier and in different Polish towns.

(House of Commons Official Report,
Hansard, 20th March 1946, Vol. 420, No. 106.)

III

Comments from Poland

Warsaw Broadcasting Station at 10 p.m. on 21st March announced that:

"In order to avoid any misunderstanding, a statement has been made, in circles connected with the Foreign Office, that no official Government declaration has ever been made regarding the Government's attitude towards Polish soldiers who return to Poland or the conditions awaiting them on their return."

On the same day the daily paper *Rzeczpospolita*, quoted by Warsaw Radio, describes the disappointment of the Polish population with regard to the manner in which the return of soldiers has taken place:

"The Polish people wished to see their soldiers return with colours flying, bearing the arms with which they had fought so gallantly alongside their Western Allies.

"Unfortunately, however, the men who returned home, after the well-known plebiscite, were deeply shocked by the fact that, while they bore only old-fashioned rifles, they were met at the frontier by detachments of the Polish Army, magnificently equipped, armed and mechanised, thanks to the aid of the U.S.S.R. . . ."

"Polish soldiers abroad had been presented with a declaration stating the conditions under which they would return, described as the Polish Government's statement. But apparently the soldiers noticed that it is written in broken Polish and bears no signature.

"It is essential to point out that the Polish Government did not issue any statement.¹ The 'conditions,' however, which correspond in fact to the attitude adopted by the Polish Government are simply a summary of information and declarations which have been submitted on many occasions by the Polish Government to Great Britain.

"It is quite probable," continues *Rzeczpospolita*, "that the British Government, who for so long opposed the final settlement of the problem and complained of the lack of any declaration, found it convenient to present a summary of our justifiable attitude, with which they have long been familiar, in the form of an official declaration by the Polish Government, made after much toilsome negotiation."

¹ Italics ours (P.P.A.).

Warsaw Radio Comment

THE statement that "Mr. Bevin takes it upon himself to protect Poles in Poland" was made in a broadcast by Warsaw Radio on Thursday night.

It occurred in a commentary on the Foreign Secretary's statement in the Commons on Wednesday on the disbandment of the Polish armed forces under British command. The commentator said that part of Mr. Bevin's statement was "neither accurate nor fitting."

"He refers to the fulfilment of the Yalta and Potsdam decisions, but the returning Polish soldiers were discussed neither at Yalta nor at Potsdam," he continued. "His remark that the British Government will not be disinterested in the fate of those Polish soldiers who return home means that Mr. Bevin takes it upon himself to protect Poles in Poland. With this incomprehensible statement of the British Foreign Secretary we close our commentary."—*Reuter*.

Mr. Bevin said in his statement: "His Majesty's Government, as one of the signatories of the Yalta declaration on Poland, and in view of the further undertakings they received at Potsdam, cannot disinterest themselves in developments in Poland. When these men go back they can be assured that we shall continue to use our influence in favour of the strict fulfilment of these decisions, and that we shall watch with the closest interest and sympathy the progress of the great tasks of political and economic reconstruction and the rebuilding of Polish independence, which the Polish nation is already tackling so courageously."

(*The Times*, 23rd March 1946.)

Statement of the Polish Government (London)

(20th March 1946)

ON 20th March 1946 the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ernest Bevin, announced in the House of Commons, after paying a tribute to the contribution of the Polish armed forces to the common victory of the Allies that it is the intention of the British Government to disband as soon as practicable those men who decide not to return to Poland.

The Polish Government, speaking for the Polish people, feel it to be their duty to issue the following statement:

1. In their note of 18th February 1945 to H.M. Ambassador accredited to the Polish Government, they have protested against the Yalta agreement. They stated in that note that this agreement took no cognizance of the existence of the Polish state, represented by its lawful authorities, that is, its President and Government under whose orders the Polish Army, Navy and Air Force fought during the war; they stated further in that same note that the decisions of the Crimean Conference were reached without the knowledge and concurrence of the Polish Government; and that, consequently, the Polish Government, acting as the only lawful and true representative of the Polish people, are unable to regard the decisions reached at Yalta as binding and valid. The Polish nation has never recognised and never will recognise the Yalta decisions.

2. The present decision of H.M. Government on the future of the Polish armed forces was also taken without the knowledge and concurrence of the lawful and legal representatives of the Polish nation.

3. The British Government have decided the fate of the Polish armed forces without even waiting for the implementing of the Yalta decisions by the so-called "provisional government of national unity." The recognition of that government, imposed upon Poland by foreign pressure and not in the least representative of the Polish people, by the signatories of the Yalta agreement was conditioned by their pledge to hold free and unfettered elections in Poland. This condition has not been implemented and the Warsaw administration is continually violating and breaking its own pledges of free elections. The persecution of the parties and persons who are regarded as dangerous to the police regime in power and the pressure towards a single electoral list, are a clear indication that not only now, but also in the future, this precondition of "free and unfettered elections" is not likely to be implemented by the Warsaw administration.

4. The decision about the future of the Polish armed forces was complemented by an appeal to the men serving in these forces in which H.M. Government urged them to return to Poland, relying on the assurances of the provisional Warsaw administration regarding their personal safety. **It must be stressed, however, that the vast majority of Polish service men abroad refuses to return to Poland, not because they fear personal reprisals but because they want to lead the life of free men in their own country, to which they have longed to return for many years.**

Statement issued by the Polish Press Agency, Edinburgh

(20th March 1946)

THE declaration from the Polish Provisional Government guaranteeing the safe return of Polish soldiers from this country to Poland, together with the note of introduction signed by Mr. Ernest Bevin, has been delivered to all individual Polish soldiers abroad to-day.

The feeling among the soldiers can be described as one of disappointment. The declaration printed in the form of a small leaflet unsigned, except for the signature of the British Foreign Secretary, which covers only the first part of the document, and written in broken Polish, made a very unfavourable impression. The main points of the declaration which deal with reprisals and the punishment of certain elements, like those who served in the German Army, and those who are guilty of betraying the interests of the Polish State, caused uneasiness and bitter comments. Those of the Polish soldiers who expected some positive guarantees, with regard to their treatment after returning to Poland, expressed their amazement that the declaration should first of all mention those who are liable to punishment, and the amnesty declared in August last year by the Polish Provisional Government.

The common question asked by everybody is, "What have we done wrong that the 'invitation' addressed to us should be made on so many conditions?"

The fact that the leaflet does not appear signed on behalf of the Polish Provisional Government is interpreted as undermining the value of the document itself. "Who is going to pay any attention to this document once we are in Poland," Polish soldiers are asking, "when so many other documents signed and endorsed by Polish statesmen have not been fulfilled?"

The Yalta agreement and the present pre-election campaign in Poland are being widely discussed.

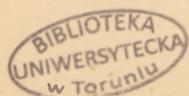
Generally speaking, there is a widespread belief among the rank and file of the Polish Army in Scotland that this declaration is the best proof, so far made public, of the unwillingness on the part of the present rulers of Poland to see the Poles from the West returning freely to their country.

Mr. Bevin's comments, in which he says that this declaration has been considered satisfactory by the British Government, left many of the Polish soldiers wondering why it is so, when quite obviously the declaration consists of more negative than positive points.

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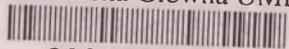


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J. & J. GRAY
Printers of Fine Books
EDINBURGH