"I WANT TO DEFEND THE PURITY OF SOCIALISM"

Zygmunt Zulawski's speech in the new Parliament in Warsaw.

("Gazeta Ludowa", No. 69, February 10th, 1947.)

Zygmunt Zulawski is a veteran Socialist leader, member of the Polish Parliament since 1919 until 1935, Secretary General of the Polish T.U.C. and, since 1934 Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Polish Socialist Party.

After vain attempts at co-operation with the leadership of the official Socialist Party, he left that Party in November 1946 and concluded an electoral agreement with M. Mikolajczyk's Polish Peasant Party. Under it, independent democratic Socialists stood as candidates on common lists with the Polish Peasant Party in the recent general election of January 19th, 1947. Most of these candidates were, however, struck off the lists and Zulawski is the only one who was returned. Below we give his first speech in the newly elected Parliament, which he made on February 9th, 1947. The text has appeared in Poland only in one single daily, the "Gazeta Ludowa", after having been heavily censored.

It is 12 years since I last mounted this rostrum. For the first time I now take part, as an independent Socialist, in the debate on the declaration of the new Government, which, in effect, is nothing new, but represents the continuation of the same political thought that was revealed already in Lublin /1/.

And were it not for the ruins which surround me, were it not for the absence of my old comrades-in-arms, Barlicki, Niedziałkowski, Czapinski, Lieberman, Piotrowski, Dubois, Ziemiecki and others, together with whom I fought against the totalitarian schemes of the Sanacja /2/, were it not for the knowledge that, in the meantime, a monstrous storm had passed over our heads - I would say that nothing had changed here.

/1/ Zulawski refers to the "Polish Committee of National Liberation", better known as the "Lublin Committee", brought into Poland in July 1944 in the wake of the advancing Russian armies, to become the Russian-sponsored Provisional Government of Poland.

/2/ "Sanacja" - a nick-name for the Pilsudski regime.

It is the same Chamber, the same compact majority, drunk with power and victory, the same ideas, propagated then by the Sanacja Bloc and to-day by the Democratic Bloc, according to which "forces of Polish democracy took on themselves all responsibility before the Nation", the same commonplace slogans about "everything creative and healthy in the Nation having joined forces within the Democratic Bloc", exactly on the pattern of the "Camp of National Unity" /1/ of old days, the same proud boasts about the achievements of the Government in the field of Poland's construction or re-construction. The same weak opposition which to-day - as in those days - is being accused of inability to do anything constructive, but of vainly repeating again and again the same complaints about the lawlessness of the authorities, about arrests, electoral abuses and the violation of the freedom of speech and of the Press. And finally, in the same way as it was asserted in those days that General Skladkowski's Government, based on the Sanacja, had been chosen by Providence and was the only one capable of strengthening Poland, - so to-day it is asserted that only a Government based on the Bloc is capable of assuring permanently her independence and of re-building her from the ruins.

Certainly, as in the Sanacja period, so to-day, every work gives some results. But this technique is not, to-day, an exclusive secret of one or the other government. To-day everybody knows already how to build a house or a bridge, whether it be in the United States or in Europe, in the Soviet Union or in China. In Poland too we have the same results, irrespective of whether the work is being done under the Sanacja or under the Government of National Unity.

Thus, the fact that, as time passes, the nation is creating ever greater values through its own work, is not a particular merit of this Government. Is it not a fact that in the course of one year, in 1938, under the regime of the hated "Camp of National Unity" more houses and flats were built in Warsaw than to-day? Also, dresses are being made in the same way all over the world, whether it is the Conservatives, the Democrats or the adherents of totalitarianism who govern. Only, these dresses not always suit citizens equally well. And, I suppose, those citizens have the right to choose the tailor.

Every tailor claims to be perfect and every government considers itself the best and the one set up by Providence. There probably has never been a Government in the world which would not claim that its only aim is to bring about general prosperity and to make the nation happy. That was the case under the Vasa and the Saxon dynasties, under the Targowica, under Wielopolski, under the "Old Polish Members", under Pilsudski and Skladkowski - and it is still the same to-day. All governments claim that they aim only at the general good and the independence of the whole nation and those who disagree with them are called enemies of the country, traitors, idiots or reactionaries.

Pilsudski called the Poles a nation of idiots and concluded that, in their own interest, he had the right to educate them by by using the whip. To-day's ruling elite, "the best in the nation", equally insist that frightful things would happen in Poland, were they to go: there would be white terror and black reaction.

/1/ A semi-Fascist organisation created by Pilsudski's followers after his death.

Who has the right to suspect this nation - composed in the main of working people, peasants, workers and intellectuals - of reactionary tendencies, for the sole reason that it wants to decide freely about social justice, about the equality of laws, about liberty, about its parliamentary representation and its government?

Pilsudski declared that, by conducting the "Brest elections"/1/ he saved the nation from even worse things, and Colonel Slawek frankly said that it was better sometimes to practise electoral abuses than to have to shoot at the people. At that time we all shared a common indignation at such things.

That is why I was appalled when I learnt of the Premier Osubka's declaration, in the Cracow Univoppity, to the effect that the Government must win, because there had never been a case of someone holding power to lose elections. I very well recall a number of cases in which the governments were defeated at the polls. Prime Minister Moraczewski in 1919 and Pilsudski in 1928 lost the elections, Republicans lost in America despite the fact that they were in power, the nationalist French Government lost in favour of the People's Front, Chancellor Papen lost in favour of Hitler and now, recently, Churchill lost in favour of the Labour Party.

It is only the totalitarian governments that cannot lose at the polls, because they terrorize the electorate. That is what happened in Italy, in Poland, in Germany. In the parliaments of those nations the governments had an overwhelming majority, regardless of the opinion and the will of the nation.

The Speaker: Citizen Deputy, I must call you to order!

Zulawski: I do not want to invoke any obligations, whether those of Yalta, Moscow or Potsdam, because I hold that every election must be free, honest and clean, - otherwise there is no need to hold it at all and to create the fiction of a "directed" or a "people's" democracy.

I shall not even insist on these last elections. I shall only quote a few examples which I witnessed myself. In Cracow thousands and thousands of people were struck off the electoral lists under the pretext that they had collaborated with the Germans or with the "underground". One of those struck off was my son, who had spent three years in the concentration camps of Oswiecim and Buchenwald. His name was restored to the list only after he had threatened to bring a libel action. My daughter-in-law was ordered to sign a declaration to the effect that she would vote openly for the Government, and my niece, who is living with me, was threatened with eviction from my flat, dismissal from employment and even arrest, with not even the semblance of decency being preserved.

I was not allowed to publish even one single electoral appeal and the printing house, in breach of an agreement, stopped printing the Polish Peasant Party weekly "Piast" which had co-operated with me. The police requisitioned all private cars and buses for the purposes of the Bloc's electoral campaign.

/1/The so-called "Brest elections" - general election of November 1930, which by means of terror and fraud gave Pilsudski and his followers a majority in the Polish Parliament. The outstanding event of the electoral campaign was the imprisonment of the Opposition leaders in the military fortress of Brest Litovsk; hence the name.

Apart from Cracow I also stood in the Chrzanow constituency where my list was banned under the pretext that I had terrorized the electors to sign it. That is an extraordinary thing. For the third time, those in power deprived me of my seat in the constituency where I have the greatest influence and the greatest number of friends. The first time it was the Conservative National Council in 1911, the second time it was Pilsudski in 1930 and this time it was the Democratic Bloc whose list thus remained the only admitted one.

And what was done to my old friend, Zdanowski, for years my deputy in the General Council of the T.U.C.? At one time, Zdanowski, like myself, could not approve of the policy of the W.R.N. /1/ You may level various political reproaches at the W.R.N. but you have to admit that its struggle against the Germans was most stubborn, most self-sacrificing and most heroic. - Zdanowski, like myself, wanted to run as an independent candidate. During the occupation he had a miraculously narrow escape, by slipping out of the office at the last moment. For this the Gestapo arrested his wife. And this man, who was then helped in hiding by the "Spolem" Co-operative Society and by vice-President Szwalbe at the risk of the latter's own safety, - this man was accused, in the National Electoral Commission, of collaboration with the Germans by no other than a former member of the W.R.N. And the Commission ruled that, since the leadership of the W.R.N. had "opposed the armed struggle against the occupying Power" it must deprive Zdanowski of his right to stand for Parliament.

He appealed against this decision to the National Council of the Homeland, calling several witnesses, vice-President Szwalbe among others. But the Praesidium of the National Council of the Homeland did not hear the witnesses, did not hear the accused himself and ignored his appeal, thus confirming the decision of the Commission.

You have won.

I have declined in all consciousness to participate in this victory although I have been invited to share it. I preferred to put forward my own independent list, although I know that it would be defeated. But I could not bring myself to associate myself with the very thing which all my life I have fought against.

But you claim that the new Government, that your Bloc, is being guided by the most beautiful ideals of social justice and freedom. Maybe. I do not know.

Mr. Attlee was right when he said recently: "we in Great Britain have always considered public discussion as the basis of democracy and the guarantee of justice". This principle, however, should be applied not in Britain alone, but in the whole world. The fairness of a case must not be decided by physical force, by use of a revolver or a whip, byt by the verdict of the majority, arrived at in a free exchange of arguments.

First the July Manifesto /2/, then the programme of the PPS and the PPR and, finally, the Bloc, in its last electoral appeal, guaranteed the freedom of speech.

/1/W.R.N. - the war-time name of the underground organisation of the Polish Socialist Party.

/2/Manifesto issued by the Lublin Committee on its formation.

I had thought that when I joined you, when I joined the P.P.S. /1/, I should be able to speak my mind and to advocate my own ideas about freedom and social justice - the more so since this was officially guaranteed to me. But promises were not kept. I was gagged to such an extent that, practically speaking, I could write nothing at all. And yet I did send articles to the "Naprzod" and the "Robotnik" on the W.R.N., on the co-operation with the P.P.R., on the Bloc, on racial theories - but all this was considered "nieblagonadiozne" /2/. To-day again all my articles which I send to the "Gazeta Ludowa" or "Piast", even those which are only answering personal attacks made upon me, are being banned by the "Press control".

During the occupation I wrote a book entitled "Prosperity, Freedom and Morality". It was submitted to the censor in June or July 1946 and the censor deleted a number of sentences and passages, amongst others a sentence stating that "Boleslaw Chrobry /3/ had drawn the frontiers of the State from Meissen to the Dnieper." The censor replaced the word "Dnieper" with the word "Bug" and I could not possibly explain to him that Kiev is situated on the Dnieper and not on the Bug. But, after all, these were only minor, ridiculous things. After more trouble I finally received the stamp: "The Voivodship Control Office of Press, Publications and Performances. Permission to publish. September 24th, 1946."

I thought that the matter was now settled, but far from it. The publication of the book, already in proof, was held up in view of the approaching elections in which I had the courage to put forward my own independent candidature. And then, in spite of the given authorisation, I was asked to delete new passages, as for instance, "what is important for members of the community is not so much the form of ownership but the guarantee that no one is going to exploit them" - because apparently these sentences ran against the law.

We had always complained - and with justice - about the censorship of the Sanacja. But I was amazed to hear a Polish writer speaking recently over the wireless and praising the present freedom of speech in Poland.

It was explained to me that the gagging of the Press was necessary because of our foreign policy. It seems to me that the contrary is true. This gagging of the Press, this way of conducting elections, throws only discredit upon us and is the reason why more and more often the world speaks about Poland as it speaks about Spain. We - at least I - have nothing to hide from the world and I do not know what the world could possibly be trying to "spy out" in our country. America is far away, - and we have only had friendly gestures from her. During the first World War President Wilson supported our aim, which was independence, later the Hoover Committee helped us as UNRRA is doing now. In Britain it is our comrades who are in power, with whom we have been linked for years by common Socialist ideals. And we shall never forget that, had it not been for Britain's resistance, Hitlerism would have destroyed us in the meantime.

/1/ Zulawski refers to the official Socialist Party which he joined in December 1945.

/2/ A Russian word with no equivalent in any other language, implying something which is distasteful to the authorities.

/3/ A Polish King in the 11th century.

Finally, with regard to the Soviets I say that, despite past and present irritations, thoughtlessly provoked by the one or the other side, we wish to live with them in the greatest and in real friendship. We wish to do so not because of any common Slavonic tribal origin, but because of our "raison d'Etat" and our conviction that there can exist no Government in Poland to-day which would not wish to live and co-operate with the Soviets as closely as possible. I speak with difficulty /1/ and therefore, before I utter a word, I consider it and weigh it seriously. I already said once in Moscow, during the Kremlin banquet, in the presence of Mr. Stalin, that I sincerely wished for friendship with the Soviet Union.

The Speaker: Citizen Deputy, your time is up.

Zulawski: I am just finishing. - I must say with regret that this friendship is not being helped by statements to the effect that Polish reaction, both legal and illegal, did its utmost to win the elections, but that the nation, conscious of its aims, would not let itself be terrorized.

Just think, Mikolajczyk and I are supposed to represent Polish reaction!

Besmirch the good name of Mikolajczyk, even destroy the P.S.L., and still Mikolajczyk's name will remain, in the soul of the peasants - this greatest stratum of our nation - a symbol, in the same way as Bojko's and Witos's names were symbols. /2/ Mikolajczyk may fall under the blows, but by his protest against violence, supported by the P.S.L. and the peasants, he saved the honour of our nation.

As for me, I want to defend Socialism and its purity and I want to be a living reproach to all those who, despite their promises, obligations, words of honour and even convictions, could not resist the temptation to participate in power. Premier Osubka may well describe me to foreign journalists as a decrepit old man, half irresponsible, - Dr. Drobner /3/, suffering from a serious, incurable megalomania, may well try to bury me alive in a coffin - which I would anyhow always find preferable to infamy - because apparently I am the one who has betrayed our ideals, - I am not going to be offended either at them or at history.....

/1/ Zulawski is a sick man. He is 67.

/2/ Bojko and Witos - prominent peasant leaders in the past.

/3/ Dr. Drobner, Member for Cracow on behalf of the "Democratic Bloc", who - following Zulawski's rupture with the official Socialist Party - wrote an article, full of attacks and personal invective against the old leader, accusing him of having chosen a "political coffin".

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