

**INSIDE  
LIBERATED POLAND**

*By*

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## *CONTENTS*

I.	The Rebirth of a Nation	9
II.	The People of Poland Take Over	12
III.	Preparing for Liberation Day	15
IV.	Bringing Order Out of Chaos	18
V.	The Liberation Committee in Action	21
VI.	Poland's New Leaders	23
VII.	Land Reforms in Radzyn	27
VIII.	Polish Trade Unions Revived	31
IX.	What Happened in Lodz	35
X.	In Warsaw with the Polish Army	37
XI.	The Ill-Fated Warsaw Rising	40
XII.	The People of Praga	44

## INTRODUCTION

The people of the United States have a long and warm friendship for the people of Poland. During her long and painful history Poland has been frequently a football for international machinations, but the spirit of independence of the Polish people has never faltered. The names of such Polish patriots as Kosciuszko and Dombrowski are imperishable in the roster of those who have fought valiantly for liberty. Poland was the first victim of the Nazis when the present war burst over Europe. For six weeks the army and people resisted valiantly but unequally the mechanized onslaught of the most powerful army the world had ever seen.

Thereafter the Poles in the territories occupied by Germany suffered incredible tortures and privations. The Polish Jews who have been cruelly oppressed through the centuries, both by their own and foreign governments, were particularly singled out for unrestrained German brutality. The death camps in Poland were both fact and symbol of the most stupendous organized barbarism in modern history.

While all Americans of whatever national origin share with the Polish-Americans their desire for a free and independent Poland, it is unfortunately true that in the course of upholding Poland's supposed national interests, many organizations, speaking in the name of Polish-Americans, have sought to use the controversy between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Soviet Government as a wedge to divide the United States from her great ally, Soviet Russia.

The reactionary Government-in-Exile has painted a picture of the Soviet attitude toward Poland that has received ample endorsement in those sections of our press which are devoted to stirring up hatred between the USA and the USSR.

In contrast to the London Polish government, the Polish Provisional Government, formerly the Polish Committee of National Liberation, has always regarded the role of the Soviet Union as that of an active supporter of Poland's aspirations for a strong, independent democratic state.

To this provisional government has fallen the task of meeting the immediate needs for providing an administration and carrying out work of reconstruction in the liberated areas.

This fact was recognized by the Big Three in reaching their masterful solution of the Polish question at the Crimea Conference. While

new democratic elements are to be drawn in both from within Poland and from abroad, the Polish Provisional Government formed last New Year's Eve at Lublin, will form the core around which the new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity will be grouped.

The Crimea decisions have cleared the air on the Polish issue. However, there are still groups trying to keep it alive with the hope of utilizing it to undermine the Crimea accord, and to prevent the organization at San Francisco of a workable world security organization.

For this reason we are very glad to present this pamphlet, which is the work of a first-hand observer of the process of creating a new and democratic Polish state in the areas now administered by the Provisional Government. It is a vivid and intimate story of present-day Poland, of the concrete achievements and idealistic hopes of the Polish people now freed of the terrible Nazi yoke.

As a contribution to American understanding of the Polish question, Anna Louise Strong's eye-witness account should have an important influence in dissolving many false impressions. There emerges from its pages of varied anecdote and description a picture of a rejuvenated Poland friendly to the Soviet Union and the other United Nations and passionately and intelligently devoted to the accomplishment of democratic objectives.

*Edwin S. Smith,*  
Executive Director,  
*National Council of American-Soviet Friendship*

## ***TEXT OF CRIMEA AGREEMENT ON POLAND***

A new situation has been created in Poland as a result of her complete liberation by the Red Army. This calls for the establishment of a Polish Provisional Government which can be more broadly based than was possible before the recent liberation of western Poland. The Provisional Government which is now functioning in Poland should therefore be reorganized on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad. This new government should then, be called the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity.

M. Molotoff, Mr. Harriman and Sir A. Clark Kerr are authorized as a commission to consult in the first instance in Moscow with members of the present Provisional Government and with other Polish democratic leaders from within Poland and from abroad, with a view to the reorganization of the present Government along the above lines. This Polish Provisional Government of National Unity shall be pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot. In these elections all democratic and anti-Nazi parties shall have the right to take part and to put forward candidates.

When a Polish Provisional Government of National Unity has been properly formed in conformity with the above, the Government of the U.S.S.R. which now maintains diplomatic relations with the present Provisional Government of Poland, and the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the United States of America will establish diplomatic relations with the new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity and will exchange Ambassadors, by whose reports the respective Governments will be kept informed about the situation in Poland.

The three heads of Government consider that the eastern frontier of Poland should follow the Curzon Line, with digressions from it in some regions of five to eight kilometers in favor of Poland. They recognize that Poland must receive substantial accessions of territory in the north and west. They feel that the opinion of the new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity should be sought in due course on the extent of these accessions and that the final delimitation of the western frontier of Poland should thereafter await the peace conference.

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*It is well known that the people east of the Curzon Line are predominantly White Russian and Ukrainian. They are not Polish, to a very great majority. And the people west of the line are predominantly Polish except in that part of East Prussia and East Germany which will go to new Poland. As far back as 1919 the representatives of the Allies agreed that the Curzon Line represented a fair boundary between the two peoples. You must also remember there was no Poland, there had not been any Polish Government before 1919, for a great many generations.*

*I am convinced that this agreement on Poland, under the circumstances, is the most hopeful agreement possible for a free, independent and prosperous Polish state.*

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
in his Report to the Nation on the Crimea  
Conference.





# INSIDE LIBERATED POLAND

## I. THE REBIRTH OF A NATION

New Year's Eve in a large round hall with pale yellow marble columns in Lublin, I watched the birth of a new government. The Polish *Krajowa Rada Narodowa* (National Council of Poland) united unanimously to form a provisional government to hold power until Poland is entirely liberated and new general elections can be held.

I was the only American present when the Rada assembled at ten o'clock in the morning on December 31st. Other foreigners were official Soviet and French representatives and members of the Soviet press. An hour later after many impressive preliminaries – the national anthem, and an oath taken by the newly elected deputies – five other Anglo-American correspondents from Moscow came in.

There were 98 deputies actually in attendance. The total membership of the Rada in the liberated area of Poland at that time was 165, a number which will naturally be increased when all Poland is liberated. Delegates from occupied Poland came and went secretly before the congress, bringing reports and desires from the occupied areas, but were not exposed to view.

### **How the Deputies Were Elected**

Rada deputies were all elected, but not by the usual governmental forms. About half were elected by various political parties and public organizations, such as trade unions and cultural societies. The other half were elected by the lower Radas in an ascending scale from the village to the voyevodstvo, (the latter being the Polish administrative division roughly similar to our States.)

The deputies sat at three long tables radiating from the head table or Presidium. Surrounding them was a circle of marble columns and potted plants which separated them from the outer circle of visitors and press. The proceedings were formal and solemn. Representatives of four political parties gave the reasons why it was expedient to declare a provisional government, stating that the Rada contains leaders from all sections of the Polish people and has public backing and strength.

My eight weeks of touring liberated Poland enables me to supplement this claim by a few notes on deputies I met. For instance

Spychalski, chief of city planning in Warsaw before the war, assisted in organizing the Warsaw resistance in 1939, then he went underground. He organized the first group of the partisans who later became the Peoples' Army. He handled the technical organization of the famous secret meeting of the Rada which one year before had launched the organization now constituting the government. Spychalski, a dynamo of energy, is now Mayor of Warsaw and Praga.

In vivid contrast is Father Borovets, a priest who is also a Chairman of the Rada of the Rzeszov Voyevodstvo – in other words, chief of the legislative government of a fair-sized state. Before the war he was an important organizer of the peasant's movement. During the war he helped the Polish underground. During the organization of the land reform he visited each village personally, helping to infuse order and common sense into the new land distribution.

Another contrast is Helene Jaworska, a twenty-two year old girl who looks seventeen. She organized a youth underground and was their delegate to the illegal Rada a year ago. She participated in the Warsaw uprising in August and personally brought out the first news of the insurgents' positions to the Red Army enabling them to fly in and help. She travelled through sewers. Today she is chairman of the inter-party committee of all youth organizations and a member of the Presidium of the National Council of Poland.

These are only a few of many examples of types of strong personalities I recognized in the Rada. Other deputies have similar claims to leadership among other sections of Polish citizenry.

### **Composition of the Provisional Government**

President Boleslaw Bierut was formerly prominent in the cooperative movement and in the Polish Workers' (formerly –Communist) Party, but he now prefers to be non-party, since his function is to preside over all parties.

The Executive branch – what Europeans call the "Government" – consists of Premier Edward Osobka-Morawski, a member of the Polish Socialist Party, and a cabinet of eighteen members: five Socialists, five from the Peasant Party, four from the Workers' Party, one Democrat and two non-party. Among the non-party members is General Rola Zymierski, army Commander-in-Chief.

The executive branch or cabinet thus comes under the legislative branch as in Great Britain and France. Bierut and Morawski supplement each other rather effectively. Bierut, though quiet, is a very keen

theoretician, reserved in manner and obviously the chief brains. Morawski is accessible, effusive and friendly, especially at home in mass meetings of peasants and workers and easy to get on with.

Holding the Congress on New Year's Eve was a shrewd stroke. This was the anniversary of the famous illegal Rada held a year ago in Warsaw to launch the fight for the liberation of Poland. The choice of this date however, had an additional effect, perhaps unforeseen. All over Poland New Year's Eve parties were held by all organizations – the first time in five years the Poles were permitted to assemble. The Anglo-American correspondents were thus able in that single lay to attend a government banquet, a peasant's celebration, a Polish army dance. Everywhere the people were eating, drinking and hailing the dawn of liberation. The momentum was tremendous. The air was electric with the people's hopes and their bursting energy for the immense job of reconstruction that lay ahead.

### **From Birth to Growth**

When I returned to Moscow and met my fellow Americans – after those weeks entirely surrounded by Poles, I encountered forgotten questions that seemed as if they were from a different world. Does the government maintain order? Is it really independent or is it a Soviet puppet state? These natural legitimate questions raised by citizens from old established governments sound very differently in a country where a government is being born. The problem in Poland is not so much of maintaining order as creating order from the chaos that the Nazis left. The problem is to seek popular leaders and organizers in various fields and incorporate them into the government. The process is that from birth to growth.

At any rate, many facts prove that the newborn government is already an active baby functioning in normal governmental ways. First, the peasants last Autumn gave up the required quotas from their harvest without military compulsion. Second, this enabled the government to feed civil service workers and the army and industrial workers, thus establishing a stable routine of work. Third, the people accepted the government's printed money as payment for food goods. Fourth, the young men accepted mobilization into its army which already contains many infantry divisions plus tanks and aviation forces. Fifth, the peasant's locally elected committees parceled out the land to the peasants on the basis of the government title deeds.

The question of how independent the Polish government is will be dealt with later. It must be born in mind that when it came into being its independence was naturally conditioned by the presence of the German armies in two-thirds of the country facing the Red Army and the Polish army in another third. Normal standards of independence can hardly be applied to a country that is still a battleground.

There is no question that the present Polish government intends to achieve the fullest independence. The Russians in word and deed have consistently supported this aim.

## **II. THE PEOPLE OF POLAND TAKE OVER**

As I write these lines the Red Army is liberating the last areas of Poland in the most spectacular blitz of this or any other war. And in all the liberated towns and villages millions of shabby, underfed Poles emerge from cellars or return from concentration camps and cheer the Red Army and the new Polish Army and begin to rebuild a civilian life.

How do they do it? By what process do they organize a community life from chaos? What part does the provisional government play. The answers are needed not only to understand Poland, but also to understand the future of Europe and the post-war world.

Note first that destruction of all means of ordinary civilian life is part of the Nazi strategy. They still intend to remain the strong power in ruined Europe, preparing for ultimate victory in the third world war. It should be realized that the Germans still possess factories, engineers, mechanics, economic and political apparatus, and have destroyed these things in all the surrounding lands.

The Red Army of course understands this, and adapts its own strategy accordingly. They make long preparations and then they stage a terrific breakthrough, penetrating swiftly far into the enemy rear and encircling cities which the Germans still are using, and which consequently are not yet destroyed. The partisans also understand this and check Nazi destruction in the final moment of demoralization.

### **What the Germans Left Behind**

The extent of destruction differs therefore in different areas. Warsaw, for example, does not exist today as a city. It formerly had a population of a million and a half and is now probably the greatest single pile of ruins anywhere on earth. There is no water supply, no

gas and no electricity. No house has been preserved fully. All churches and historical monuments have been leveled. The direct cause of this utter destruction of one of Europe's great capitals, was the uprising staged last August by General Bor, under the instructions of the Poles from London, without consultation with the Red Army. The Red Army's strategy was to take the city by encirclement, preserving the capital and the population. But this required long preparation and it was impossible to end the summer offensive two and three hundred miles from base.

Bor's uprising was not synchronized with the Red Army's plans. It resulted in the destruction of the Polish capital and probably a quarter of a million Polish lives, mostly civilians who did not participate in the uprising and were caught in a trap. The Nazis thoroughly bombed the city during the uprising and afterwards systematically blew it up block by block, deporting or killing the inhabitants. The few tens of thousands of the population straggling back to the ruins curse the London Poles and General Bor.

By contrast many of the large Polish cities, notably Lodz, Czestochowa and in part Krakow, were captured relatively undestroyed. They were far behind the German lines and the Red Army came so fast that the Nazis hadn't time to destroy them. These therefore can be swiftly organized as a basis of reviving national life.

But how shall the local government be organized? The present war presents a new problem. Past wars overthrew armies and possibly the national governments but left the local governments intact. City and village mayors continued to function under the new rules. In the present war the Nazis poisoned the local administrations and all forms of social life.

### **The Need for Local Government**

This is an hour when local governments are painfully needed. They are needed at the very first hour to stop looting, bury corpses, fight epidemics and provide food and housing. Every hour of delay increases disorder and human misery.

Obviously this needed local government cannot be found in London. It must be found on the spot. It must have close contacts with the local people and the ability to cooperate with the liberating army.

These facts seem so self-evident in Poland that I hesitate to mention them. They weren't understood by the Poles in London who thought that the Polish government depended chiefly on relations

with foreign powers. At any rate, during the last half of 1944, Mikolajczyk was repeatedly urged by the Poles from Lublin and by the congress of his own Peasant Party, to return to Poland and be Prime Minister there. He delayed, imposing conditions. Whatever his reasons were, the government had to be organized, the government was organized and he wasn't there.

How was the government organized? How was order introduced? Fortunately there were far-sighted Poles in Poland who understood what was needed. They understood it more than a year ago and began to organize in "conspiracy", in expectation of the Nazi overthrow.

Spychalski, the present Mayor of Warsaw, told me a thrilling story of that first *Rada Narodowa* – National Council of Poland – formed in Warsaw on New Year's Eve at the end of 1943. Spychalski is a handsome dynamic man with black shining hair and deep blue eyes and a roman nose. But he is easier to look at than to interview. Four times an interview scheduled with him in Warsaw was called off by his civil duties. Finally I got him in Lublin where he had time to talk.

### **Organizing the Underground**

He told me that when the Polish government fled abroad with Polish gold reserves the Polish political parties, trade unions and cultural organizations didn't die. They went underground and functioned illegally, with many casualties. It is estimated that half the university professors perished or were killed for teaching ordinary university courses. Partisan groups developed, and followed world affairs by secret radio. More and more they saw in the Red Army's victories hope for Poland's freedom. Here they parted company with the Poles in London.

"The first session of the *Rada Narodowa*" Spychalski told me, was in Warsaw, although it was the hardest place, being under the very noses of the Gestapo. Warsaw is Poland's capital. All over Poland the peasants and citizens had spontaneously formed partisan bands to fight the Nazis, but only when the direction came from Warsaw could the movement gain nationwide scope.

"Delegates came to Warsaw from all parts of Poland representing our political parties and many partisan bands. They travelled unarmed lest they be searched and shot. Two were killed before they reached the meeting. I and one other person picked them up one by one and brought them to an apartment whose location was only known by the

two of us. This was done between five and seven in evening since at eight o'clock there was a curfew and only the Gestapo were in the streets. We had arms in the apartment, prepared to sell our lives dearly if discovered. However, all went well and the delegates went out one by one the next morning while it was still dark."

### III. PREPARING FOR LIBERATION DAY

Many different political views were represented in the first *Rada Narodowa* organized "in conspiracy", but all the delegates agreed on one thing – in which they disagreed with the London Poles – that the Red Army is an ally and the Poles must actively cooperate with it when it entered Poland, and organize for the liberation day. The *Rada Narodowa's* first meeting, therefore, resolved to create a "People's Army" by amalgamating all partisans willing to cooperate with the Red Army equally. They also resolved to organize local Radas – underground governments ready to take local power.

#### Uniting the People's Forces

The scene now shifts to the country town of Radzyn, a typical county center in which underground organization spreads. Marian Potapczyk, vice chairman of the county Rada – similar to a county commissioner – told me the tale in his kitchen while I wrote with freezing fingers huddled in the big comforter from Potapczyk's feather bed. Surveying the two coldest rooms in the bombed town where the county commissioner functions, I couldn't help thinking it was a lot more comfortable being the Polish government in London rather than being it on the spot.

"I was a leader of fifty-four armed partisans." said Potapczyk. "And last January after that Warsaw Rada session I got orders to organize a county Rada. I asked who it should include. And a colonel in the People's Army told me to include the Home Army (the forces under the London Poles), the People's Army, political parties, every anti-Nazi organization and trusted individuals."

It wasn't easy for Potapczyk to include the Home Army. Forty-five members of that organization had surrounded the house where he was hiding the previous year and had taken him out and beaten him, leaving him for dead. They did this because he organized sabotage against the Nazis. Potapczyk's kidneys are permanently injured by that beating and he won't live long. However, under instructions he

sought the leaders of the Home Army in the county, inviting them to cooperate to form underground government.

"Are you still alive!" they said. "Maybe it would be better to finish you now."

"You can do that", replied Potapczyk coolly, "but then you won't live long either for now I have fifty-four armed men in the woods!"

The leaders of the Home Army looked with more respect at Potapczyk, and agreed to send delegates.

During February, 1944, Potapczyk held secret meetings in every village in the county, chose secret mayors and a county council of fifty members, whose immediate task was to hide food from the Germans, preserving it for themselves and for the Red Army, which they expected soon.

This type of organization went on throughout Poland. By March it was sufficiently widespread so that the *Rada Narodowa* sent a delegation to Moscow to contact the Soviet Government and the Red Army. Soviet arms began parachuting down into the Polish woods. When the Red Army advanced towards Poland last summer the Polish People's Army under General Zymierski sprang into correlated action.

The People's Army struck the Germans in the rear, turning retreat into rout, rescued peasants who were being deported as slaves, policed liberated towns pending organization by the government.

"My commanding officer ordered me to enter Radzyn as *starosta* and take power." We return again to Marian Potapczyk.

Potapczyk went into Radzyn with nine armed men. Bombs were falling and there were very few people left. The first week the Rada's existence was still a secret since the Germans might counterattack. During that week Potapczyk ran the county with nine armed men and with the aid of volunteer citizens' militia, without arms but with arm bands.

"Our job was to clean the streets, bury the corpses, prevent looting and fires, grab Gestapo records. From this we learned the fate of many good comrades and also sometimes who betrayed them."

"What happened to those traitors?" I asked thinking the answer was foregone. But Potapczyk surprised me.

"The big traitors either fled with the Germans or were arrested." I learned that the two men who betrayed Potapczyk to a beating are still at large, not knowing that Potapczyk is aware of their identity.

## **Democracy under Difficulties**



During that first week Potapczyk organized elections. He invited everyone over 21 to the village meetings which elected their *soltys* (village chief) and the County Rada.

"Were elections open or secret?" I asked Potapczyk.

"Sometimes one way, sometimes the other. Of fifteen village meetings I attended, five voted by acclamation, but ten by ballot. If anyone called for balloting, they passed out paper. One village had seven candidates for the office of *soltys* and naturally voted by ballot."

"Did different political parties put up candidates?" I inquired.

"No political parties were yet organized," replied Potapczyk. "Later they were organized and sent representatives to the Council Rada, today the highest government body in the county. It has fifty members of which thirty-two were chosen by sixteen townships, fifteen by political parties or public organizations – the teachers for example have representatives – while three members who are specialists were coopted by Rada itself."

It was not possible to hold elections like they did in Radzyn everywhere. Every county is different. In some places political parties were the first to emerge and form temporary local governments. In Lublin the city factory workers held a meeting and formed a city government, thereafter adding representatives from doctors, merchants, teachers, etc. In Praga Mayor Spychalski, appointed by the central government, won popular support for the most rapid possible organization of ward committees and house committees to repair dwellings and secure food.

So an underground People's Government was organized even while all Poland was still under the German yoke.

### **The Polish Committee of National Liberation**

When the Red Army marched into Poland in late June, this underground Rada, while still remaining underground in German held areas, formed an open and legal Polish Committee of National Liberation from leading Poles in various spheres of the government. Here the Red Army never set up any military government. A civilian government in the hands of these Poles was already in existence, and recognized by the Soviet Government as the administrative power in the liberated areas.

In every liberated town and village they immediately called together all surviving members of the democratic parties and all leading

citizens generally to form a local government. They called all surviving teachers to get together with parents and to open schools – all of this in utter absence of money, books, desks, even buildings. But the teachers who had risked death teaching illegally were glad to teach legally again. The worst difficulty came from the scattered bands of Polish terrorists, who claimed allegiance to London but possibly were German agents, who assassinated some fifty representatives of the PCNL and also a certain number of Red Army officers.

The turning point came when the peasants handed over a definite quota of their harvest. The Germans had needed several army divisions to collect the harvest from these same peasants, but the PCNL collected through local authorities without any military force. The cause of this seeming miracle lay in the nature of their decree.

Whereas all past governments, including the Germans, favored the landlords and bore down the hardest on the poorest peasants, the PCNL freed the poorest peasants entirely from deliveries, taxed medium peasants only three quarters of what the Germans took, but demanded the entire landlords' harvest. They fixed low prices and also gave the peasants papers entitling them to buy kerosene, soap, salt etc. at similar low prices in government or cooperative stores – a measure most interesting to the poorest and quite uninteresting to the landlords. After this the local peasants helped to collect. Deliveries began early in September and by October the Committee had food reserves and began rationing townfolk at low prices. Its prestige rapidly grew.

#### **IV. BRINGING ORDER OUT OF CHAOS**

I saw the work of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, predecessor of the Polish Provisional Government, during eight weeks' tour of the liberated areas in November and December.

The first impression of today's Poland is the incredible chaos left by the Germans – an utterly scrambled ruin of human life and affairs. The second simultaneous impression is the incredible fortitude and organizing capacity of human beings, who, in chaos, manage to survive and build.

I came four days by train from Moscow to Lublin, slowly jogging by a partially repaired railroad, past a shifting panorama of wrecked bridges, burned railway stations, gaunt skeletons of towns and charred villages. Nothing in western Europe resembles this devastation, for in the west the Germans observed more or less the so-called

laws of war. In all the Slav countries the Nazis pursued a policy of national extermination.

Not only did they explode and burn buildings. They also drove off transport, autos, horses and cattle and rounded up the inhabitants, driving them to Germany as slaves and often killing out of hand those too old, too young or too feeble to work. I heard the same monotonous, horrible tale of destruction repeated endlessly by refugees.

"I saw them burn my house. I saw them drive off the people – men in one group and women in another. What happened to them I don't know for I escaped and walked for many days through the woods."

But the forces of destruction are not omnipotent. Considerable areas remote from the roads escaped. Even along the German line of march the peasants often managed to hide in the woods with their cattle or were rescued by the timely arrival of local partisans. Even in concentration camps where the Germans lined up helpless prisoners at open graves shooting them in masses, some individuals managed to escape through the arrival of the Red Army.

A well known political satirist, for instance, Stanislaw Letz, confined in the concentration camp at Tarnopol, secured a uniform by bribery and on the final evening of demoralized slaughter, put on this uniform and brought out six comrades as his prisoners, driving them several hours in a march past the German posts to freedom, a more satiric exploit than anything he ever wrote. A couple of hundred workers from a Lublin shoe factory, taken on the last day to the notorious death camp at Maidanek, spent eleven hours digging a trench, feeling sure it was their grave. Instead, at the last minute the guards ran away from Lublin. Here the dramatic breakthrough of the Red Army saved the city comparatively intact, although Lublin also has ruined areas, broken windows, a serious lack of fuel.

### **The Return of the Natives**

Poles poured into Lublin from all quarters of the globe. They faced all difficulties of distance, they risked their life to arrive. My railway car brought in several soldiers from the former International Brigade in Spain who had been in concentration camps in France and Algiers since. It also brought Polish professors, mathematician Mazur from Lvov and Jan Dembrowski from Vilno, the latter a world famous specialist on animal psychology and well known at the Rocke-

feller foundation, but on the death list of the fascist terrorists because of his democratic principles.

To Lublin come also congresses of peasants and trade unionists, re-organizing this liberated third of Poland. A week-end congress of farm cooperatives I attended had twenty-five hundred delegates coming God knows how, for there was no regular transport. The previous Congress of trade unionists represented over a hundred thousand members emerging from Nazi suppression, which permitted no unions. In hundreds of villages leaders from all parts of liberated Poland were taking short courses in organizing land reforms and schools.

Half the people one met seemed to be refugees from somewhere. Four approached me in one single morning as an American, begging me to help them contact the outer world. A nice looking Jewish woman wanted me somehow to inform her brother in Tel Aviv, Palestine, that while their mother, father, two sisters and a dozen nieces and nephews had been killed by the Germans, she herself and her children were alive. She was saved by a poor Polish woman hiding her and her four-year old child.

"She sold our belongings in order to buy food. We never dared to go out. But our belongings were all gone and if the Red Army had come a fortnight later both we and our hostess would have been dead."

A lad from Vilno, now in the Polish Army, wanted to contact his mother in Siberia and his father with Anders' army either in Italy or Palestine. A stalwart man from Transylvania begged me somehow to send a postcard to the village where he left his five-year old son. The Germans picked him up as a slave in the summer's retreat through Romania and brought him to Warsaw en route to Germany. He joined the insurgents and fought the Nazis for two months, then when General Bor capitulated, swam the Vistula to the Red Army which held him several days for investigation then turned him loose. Penniless and still in the clothes he swam in, he had only a single thought – to get his son or at least a report that he is still alive. When I said I had no possible way of communicating with his Transylvanian village he kept repeating reproachfully: "But I have left a five-year old son there!" – as if the intensity of his desire could somehow change these devilish conditions. I imagine he intends to walk there. I only fear that his insatiable homing instinct, like a migrant bird's, may dash him into a border guard's stray bullet somewhere in the Carpathians.

The fourth case seeking help to contact the world was an American.

Anthony Paskiewicz claimed that he was born in New York in 1919 and was caught in Poland in 1939 and has been unable to make an exit since. He contacted the American legation in Kaunas in 1940 which sent his American passport to the American Embassy in Moscow. He believes it is still there.

"I don't mind being in the Polish Army, I don't mind taking a good crack at Hitler. My only fear is that I will lose my American citizenship fighting in a foreign army. Tell me, do you think I will? I couldn't help the delay and the embassy is holding my passport. All my folks are in New York."

### **Stronger Than Death**

Such was the chaos in which the Polish Committee of National Liberation, as the de facto government in the liberated third of Poland, was achieving new creation. It seemed as miraculous as the first creation from that first chaos of time. The local governments and schools blossoming in all those ruined towns and villages, a new Polish army already at that time well over two hundred thousand, with more tanks, planes and modern weapons than pre-war Poland ever possessed. Land reform – probably the most bloodless land revolution in history – has already distributed over a million acres to a couple of hundred thousand peasant homes and all this had been done without international recognition, without help from the London Government-in-Exile, whose function seemed chiefly to prevent any outside help from reaching anybody in Poland itself. It was done almost without money.

It was basically done by that extraordinary patriotism residing in the Polish people and called forth by the leaders who are the blood and bone of the people and because something they passionately call democracy releases in these ordinary people those forces of life and human organization which always are stronger than death.

## **V. THE LIBERATION COMMITTEE IN ACTION**

A big three-story building stands on a slight rise in the city of Lublin. Entering you present a pass to the sentry. Once inside you wander informally from room to room through what is surely the most casually friendly "government" in the world.

Since all attempts to combine with the Polish Government-in-Exile in London to set up a provisional government had failed, various organizations in various parts of Poland were beginning to pass resolutions demanding that the Polish Committee of National Liberation assume the actual title of Provisional Government. The Committee, however, seemed to function just as well without the formal name.

Various departments were similarly not called "ministries", but "resorts" implying, as in English, a place where you go for a special purpose. Health resorts where you go for health, school resorts where you go to schools. Similarly you could visit finance, agriculture, press and propaganda resorts all under one capacious hospitable roof.

There were a dozen or two resorts, and more were being added constantly because as Morawski told me, "Many able people have arrived recently and so we can enlarge our cabinet." It was just as normal as that.

The people arriving from all over the world were given posts and work to do. On my train there was a Polish engineer from Afghanistan, a charming white haired man about sixty years old who seemed to know everything about roads and nothing about managing his personal life. He was chief engineer of roads in all Afghanistan. When he left Afghanistan the Prime Minister wept, saying: "I am your brother – go with God, but what will we do for roads?" He reached the Soviet border with about two tons of baggage and changed his life's savings from dollars into rubles at the official rate.

Four days in an unheated train, jogging through ruined country, he kept saying: "Why don't those Poles in London come back to our beautiful Poland. How can they bear to stay away?"

For a week or two he knocked about Lublin – nobody sent for him and he had to find folks who knew him. Then suddenly he turned up beaming. He was vice commissioner of roads and waterways for all Poland, living with six other people in a hotel room and working hard. "I am so happy that I can work in Poland now at this turning point of our history for a thousand years," he rejoiced. "We always ruined ourselves fighting the Russians, now we are going to be friends."

When any brilliant engineer or famous scientist arrived to offer services, the Committee just expanded in order to take him in. They gave him a bed and a monthly salary, but chiefly they gave him meals.

Food, not money, was the basis of life in this emerging new Poland. Six free dining rooms serving upper officials were the cornerstone the state. Similar dining rooms attached to the municipal services and important factories assured that workers and civil servants would survive – nobody asked more.

One day at lunch I asked the chief of one of the government departments what they would offer Mikolajczyk if he came from London.

Smiling, he said: "A seat in this dining room and as much work as he can handle. What more can any Polish patriot ask?" Which was one way of looking at it, but not London's way.

Seriously, these free dining rooms were a great stroke whereby the Committee cut through the chaos by establishing a real basis for power. The only real value left in Poland when the Germans retreated was the harvest still standing unripe in the peasants' fields. When the Committee succeeded in getting enough of this harvest to feed its needy workers till the next harvest, it proved itself fit to rule.

### **Not a Puppet Government**

But let's start from the beginning. London propaganda claimed that the Committee was formed by Moscow. This is untrue. Its origin was in the Polish underground, developing for five bitter years.

Since its enemies charge the Liberation Committee is a puppet government, I asked Boleslaw Bierut, Chairman of the underground Rada, exactly what financial help the Soviet Union gave. He answered very frankly.

"The chief help was that they armed and equipped our army. Besides this the Soviet Union gives some lesser but important aid in restoring our industry – not in money but materials and machinery. Coal and cotton for textile mills, kerosene and salt for the peasants' stores. These are given as short term credits repayable in goods."

"But didn't you need cash to start your government? Didn't they give you a loan?"

"We didn't even ask them," smiled Bierut. "We were very modest in our demands. We expect to live from the taxes and from food collections. It's true before the taxes began coming we needed some small amount of currency, but," here his smile grew whimsical – "we just printed that."

I am still a bit dazed by the informal realism of this de facto government which, while Polish governments-in-exile arise and fall in

London, in a vacuum without territory, without constituents, without people, grows so calmly and confidently from these solid realities: arms, food and people organizing community needs.

## **VI. POLAND'S NEW LEADERS**

The two leading figures in the PCNL were Edward Osubka-Morawski, its Chairman – a post similar to Premier – and Boleslaw Bierut, Chairman of the semi-underground Rada (Council) operating in both liberated and occupied Poland. Bierut became President when the Provisional Government was formed, while Osubka-Morawski retained the post of Premier, becoming also the Foreign Minister. I learned something about both these leaders both by watching them in action, and through personal interviews.

### **The Premier – Osubka-Morawski**

Morawski has no sense of personal prestige or importance or that thing sometimes called "dignity of office." In my first talk with him he made a highly characteristic remark: "Don't stick around Lublin talking to the leaders. Go see the villages, and how the land reform is working out, go to the cooperative and trade union congresses. Go the Polish people."

In pre-war life Morawski's name was Osubka. He was a lawyer, economist and district organizer of the Polish Socialist Party which had nothing in common with the Communists. His first big job of war was helping to organize the workers of Warsaw in the heroic defense of their capital. Thereafter he was sought by the Germans and went underground, taking the name of Morawski. Today, he uses the hyphenated name. When the underground Rada was organized, Morawski became its vice-chairman. Later he was sent as head of a delegation to contact Moscow, a mission which had notable success. When the Liberation Committee was organized last summer Morawski became chairman.

"Why were you picked?" I asked him, pressing for biographical tails. He looked positively embarrassed. "They needed somebody d I was there."

I gave him my opinion. "Perhaps it was because you're so easy to get on with, so pleasant to approach and work with, and this - all of Poland's conflicts and quarrels – is what is most needed most now." Morawski looked interested. I don't think he analyzes the technique of



leadership. I think he really believes in something called the will of the people. Perhaps he over-idealizes the people. Not a bad fault.

It is impossible for me, perhaps for anyone, to judge the future as a statesman of this utterly unassuming man. The committee under his chairmanship certainly performed miracles and he is fully aware of this as a collective victory. "We've done more in two months than that London crowd – all tied up in legalism and red tape – could do in two years," he told me.

### **The President – Boleslaw Bierut**

Morawski's figure was most seen by the public. Boleslaw Bierut was less seen at that time, as his work was still partly in underground Poland. When I told Morawski I wanted to meet Bierut he picked up the telephone and after a brief query, announced: "He will see you in five minutes." Five minutes later he opened the door leading into a large, light, corner room and Bierut was there.

Bierut is solid, a trifle phlegmatic, with no sudden flash of a welcoming smile such as Osobka-Morawski gives you. But as he answered my questions frankly and clearly and always patiently, I gradually felt free to ask everything that bothered me. I soon realized I was in the presence of the leading theoretician of the Liberation Committee, a man who in every act, knows what he is doing and why he does it.

I realized also that Bierut loves the Polish people not in an idealized way, but as human beings whose collective will must still be created. He loves them as a good peasant loves his earth, studying its fertile spots and its barren ones, always learning more completely how deep to plough and what to sow for the maximum harvest.

Perhaps it was in the way he said: "Our greatest lack is not money, not harvest, not machines, but people. Our best were killed. Every one of us has lost our nearest and dearest. Two of my best friends who first proposed our Rada were murdered by the Gestapo in November a year ago."

### **Differences with London Exiles**

Bierut outlined for me most clearly the differences between the Liberation Committee and the Polish Government-in-Exile.

"The policy-of the London government has been on a false premise. First they believed that if the Germans and Russians wore each other out, Poland, remaining passive, could become great. When the

Red Army began beating the Germans, they next counted on a conflict between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-Saxon powers.

"On this they based their policy. They sent large sums of money to Poland, paying high salaries to officers and former civil servants whose only task was to wait and remain loyal to the London government. They were ordered to take no action against the Germans but to conserve their strength for taking power later.

"We considered this wrong. We considered that every Pole must fight for his land. We organized for this. And agents of the London Government began killing us. Their armed bands killed many more of our partisans than the total killed by the Germans. When we saw we could get no help from London we organized our Rada.

"Our second difference with the London government was friendship for Russia. Before the war Poland had a foreign policy of friendship with distant powers – England, France, America – but antagonized her neighbors. She grabbed lands from the Czechs and Lithuanians and from the Russians. She was hostile at first to the Germans but then Hitler came began to admire his system of government where the rule was in the hands of a small group, with ordinary citizens doing as they're told. Even now they are not as hostile to the Nazis as to Russia.

"We, on the contrary, think a small country like Poland should be friendly with her neighbors, especially with a great anti-Nazi power like the Soviet Union. We believe Russian friendship is sincere. On this and on the desire for the unity of all the United Nations we base our foreign policy.

"Our third difference is in our ideas of a government. We oppose idea of a government telling the citizens what to do. We think a country is strong where every citizen uses his initiative in work and politics. We are for a democratic Poland."

After a moment Bierut continued.

"We have nothing to get from the London government. They only hinder Poland now by preventing our contact with our Western allies. They have squandered in exile Poland's gold reserve, built up in twenty years. They have not experienced the sufferings of Poland from which they have been absent for five years.

### **Unity of All Polish People Vital**

"Nevertheless, we have spared no effort to come to an agreement with them, because the land is so ruined that we need the complete unity of all Polish people."

Bierut related with the utmost frankness the content of his talk with Mikolajczyk on his return from Moscow. Bierut made it plain that the Liberation Committee was ready to accept Mikolajczyk as Premier if he accepted these four principles: the democratic constitution of 1921, the land reform voted by Parliament in 1919, the end of the murderous civil strife, and a foreign policy of friendship with the Soviet Union. Mikolajczyk himself professed personal agreement with these policies but had not convinced the London government.

I left Bierut feeling that the National Liberation Committee was strongly based on solid earth. When you meet the Poles of London - I met them in Moscow - you feel that upper class Poland produce diplomats whom nobody can outmaneuver except another Pole. But when you meet Morawski and Bierut you feel that these people have never learned to be diplomatic maneuverers, having nothing in their intentions to hide.

These were the first Poles who made me love Poland, feeling that humanity is forever richer because the Polish people exist. In their presence one became warmed by the honest friendliness of plain Polish people and humbled by their fortitude through centuries of division and pain.

Another of the leaders of the new government who should be mentioned is General Michal Rola-Zymierski, commander-in-chief of the new Polish Army, and minister of war in the Provisional Government. Like Bierut and Osobka-Morawski, he was active in the underground movement against the German invaders, and with them he helped to form the illegal Rada a year ago.

General Rola-Zymierski was an officer in the Polish legion in the Austrian army during the first World War. He was vice minister of war under the late General Sikorski in 1924. He wears the highest military orders of Poland.

In 1926 Rola-Zymierski opposed the Pilsudski *coup d'etat*, and that he was jailed, thrown out of the army, and later exiled. He lived abroad in France, but returned to Poland in her hour of need after Hitler's attack, when others fled to safety. Living underground, separated from his wife and family, he organized and trained the nationwide network of partisan forces, which, with the Polish troops trained on Soviet soil, make up the new Polish army he commands today.

## VII. LAND REFORMS IN RADZYN

I took Osubka-Morawski's advice, and went out to see the Polish people. He made arrangements for me to go to the little county town of Radzyn with Bienick, vice minister of agriculture from Lublin, who was to preside at the formal ceremony of land distribution. We walked across the park to the little assembly hall where the celebration of the land reform was to be held. To our left several blocks of jagged walls and rubble outlined the market place once fringed by rows of shops. To our right where three highways met – to Warsaw, to Brest, to Lublin – charred gray walls from what had been a gracious county building stood roofless and windowless against the winter sky.

All this ruin was Hitler's going away present, done not in war but in retreat. There had been little fighting in Radzyn. There had been only this wanton destruction to remind the Poles of the German masters and to make life difficult to rebuild.

A crowd of men and women were pouring into a plain oblong building without benefit of architecture, like an early Pilgrim Father's meeting house. Two Polish soldier boys, complete with automatics, stood like two pillars on either side of the entrance. They snapped to attention as we approached, for my companion was the representative of their government. As he crossed the threshold, strains of the Polish national anthem rose to greet him from the band somewhere inside.

Then, like a miracle, the crowd parted and the aisle led straight to a stage where stood a long table draped in the Polish colors, red and white. All the walls of the stage were green with Christmas trees, and the backdrop showed a peasant cottage in a snowstorm apparently awaiting St. Nicholas. Probably the only scenery in the county, but it was reasonably appropriate. St. Nicholas, in the person of Bienick, was about to bestow on the assembled peasants some thirty thousand acres of land.

### **The Peasants Get Their Land**

This was the climax of several months' labors. All the estates over 125 acres – under Polish conditions a farm that size is a regular manor worked by hired help – had first been listed and taken in charge by the government. Then the peasants and farmhands needing land were similarly listed, checked and counterchecked by the local

committees of peasants. Then lands were assigned. Now came the final act – bestowal of the formal title deeds.

The hall was bitterly cold. Many windows were broken and the building was unheated. The peasants sat in sheepskins, the women in heavy shawls. The faces, some grinning, some rapt, some wistful were all toilworn and very patient with long endurance.

The local county agent for land reform first reported "nearly five thousand families with twenty thousand individuals receiving land. Of these, 2,162 families of farmhands, formerly completely landless got an average of nine acres each. Some 2,700 peasants who formerly had less than five acres got about four additional acres each.

"Generations of peasants have awaited this day." said Vice Minister Bienick. He outlined the history of the long peasant struggle since the days of the first dynasty nearly a thousand years ago.

Worn peasant faces under shawls, under sheepskin caps, stared at him with interest. Then peasant heads nodded, accepting the fact that their nine acres received today were somehow part of history.

The loudest applause came for the representative of the Polish army, a fiery young spellbinder in uniform, with the Polish eagle on his cap.

"Some people told you it was dangerous to take this land. They said the Poles from London would come and take it away again and punish you. But you have an army now and I tell you we are a new kind of army. The old army suppressed peasants, shooting down all peasants' strikes. The new army supports the peasants and protects their rights. In our democratic army peasants' sons rise to be officers. The title deeds you get today are underwritten by bayonets from our new Polish army."

Then Vice Minister Bienick took up a pile of title deeds and read out the first name. A stocky, middle-aged peasant stepped forward and Bienick handed him the paper, with the words: "In the name of *Krajowa Rada Narodowa* – the People's Council of Poland – and in conformity with the decisions of the Peasants' Committee in this county, I give you this title deed to land." There was a scattering of applause but most of the peasants were as still and solemn as if in church.

Only a dozen or so title deeds were thus formally given. Then the meeting ended and the local county land agent took charge of handing out the rest.

## What Became of the Landlords

For me as a journalist, the transaction was not over. There was still a question I must ask. It might be a delicate question, even an unpleasant one, but it was needed for America. So I said, "What's come of the landlords?" I didn't really suppose they had been kept track of, but I wanted a general idea.

I got much more than I expected. To my amazement they said, "Better ask Jan Zaorski. He's one of them. Working now in the County Department of Agriculture. He will tell about the rest."

Strictly speaking, it was all quite irregular that Jan Zaorski – former landowner of 400 acres – should remain in the county at all. The landowners had all been ordered to leave lest they interfere with the land reform. But every law has its exceptions and Zaorski was one – an honest guy who knew so much about agriculture that the county wouldn't let him go.

"They wanted me at first to be chief agricultural representative," he smiled. "But that's the man who runs the land reform. I told them it wasn't proper for a man to hang himself. So somebody else was put in to confiscate my estate, while I handle questions of production and supply."

I watched Zaorski engage in a hot argument with officers of the Polish army regarding the question of who should furnish transport for army grain. They bullied each other, called each other names and then slapped each other on the back and shook hands. Zaorski knew his stuff and was clearly a good administrator. Obviously he was also a good progressive or he wouldn't have been permitted to stay. He had a reputation for knowing how to help the Polish partisans during the hardest days.

Zaorski knew every farm and landowner in the county. Confiscated lands, he said, were listed at fifty-eight estates but there were actually only twenty-eight separate ownerships. Eight of these, comprising fourteen of the largest and best farms, had been taken over by the Germans who naturally vacated when the Red Army came. The problem with these was simple.

Twenty estates were in the hands of Polish owners but only six owners were actually in possession. "That's including me," said Jan Zaorski.

The fate of the three largest Polish-owned estates shows what happened. The Milanov estate of 4300 acres was the largest. The

owner was killed in a German concentration camp, leaving his wife and minor children. These went away last May to a daughter's home west of the Vistula. Nobody was home except the overseer when the new law was issued.

The owner of the Rudmets estates of 4100 acres lived in Warsaw, which means he is either dead now or in the hands of the Germans. The Borky estate of 2000 acres belonged to a young fellow recently married, who, as war approached, fled away somewhere westward with his wife.

Of the remaining, seventeen Polish landowners are in German jails or concentration camps – I asked Zaorski what for, and he said because they were Poles. Five others fled as the Red Army approached and only six remained on their places. Two of these were later jailed for their opposition to the land reform, while the remaining four are living and working in Poland, one in the Polish army, two in Lublin and one – Zaorski – in his own home county town.

Five years of Nazi occupation winnowed out the Polish landowners and all conspicuous Poles. Those who opposed the Nazis landed in concentration camps. Those who compromised with the Nazis were naturally suspected as enemies by the Polish patriots. Zaorski thus explained his fellow landowners. "Many fled in a moment of panic, when the front approached with its casualties and turmoil. It is hard in such a moment to decide what to do." The fact remains that in this moment of panic some people stayed, and others fled. The choice was made for them not by that moment but by their actions during five years.

In any event, land reform in Poland was greatly simplified by the absence of most of the landowners, and there was no doubt that it was clearly approved by the majority of the people of war-torn Radzyn.

After the land reform, Radzyn put on one more celebration. An evening Christmas party at the high school, open again after five years. The singing and dancing were amateurish but full of vigor, the teacher apologetically explained to me, "It takes some time to learn proper dancing and singing. These are our first steps of freedom in five years."

## **VIII. POLISH TRADE UNIONS REVIVED**

Still following Osubka-Morawski's advice, I went to see what was happening among the Polish workers.

I visited some factories and city central organizations, and interviewed three leading officials of the Polish trade union movement: Witashewski, general secretary of the Central Trade Union Council, Kuszyk (pronounced Kushik), secretary of the Trade Union Federation of the Lublin Voyevodstvo – similar to our State Federations of Labor – and Cherwinski, chairman of the Lublin Voyevodstvo Federation and second secretary of the Central Council for all the liberated area of Poland.

No labor reporter could talk with these men ten minutes without recognizing that they are men with stable experience in executive trade union work. They gave me, in fact, their personal histories showing that they had held pre-war executive posts in the labor movement. However, they asked me not to publish the details for the present, lest their families and friends still in areas under German occupation be identified and killed.

All were upstanding, energetic men in their thirties, elected last November by the trade union conference meeting in Lublin and representing the five voyevodstvos already freed, including 120,000 organized workers, which number was rapidly growing.

Pre-war Polish trade unions were of many kinds, divided by political views. There were radical unions, Catholic unions, even fascist so-called unions. Sometimes all these varieties existed in the same factory. When the Germans came they abolished all Polish trade unions, whether Catholic or Socialist.

### **Under the German Yoke**

Many trade unions did not really disband. They went underground. These three leaders whom I interviewed, all continued working "in conspiracy." The two younger of them also organized partisan fighters in the woods. They kept in constant contact with the struggles of the Polish working class.

Industrial workers under the Germans were literally slaves. Girls in the Lublin tannery and shoe factory told me how the bosses beat them. "They beat till the blood came. One girl was sick and wanted to go home but was not permitted to. She died in three days."

The workers were unable to escape by leaving the factory. The Germans rounded up all the able-bodied in their homes and took them as slaves to Germany. The only way to escape this deportation was by showing a paper from the German owner of a factory, saying this was a necessary worker for his establishment.



The final threat of the Maidanek death camp hung over all workers. Anyone who failed to produce to the limit fixed by the German bosses, was simply sent to the gas chambers for execution. Under such conditions the industrial workers were especially eager for the coming of the Red Army.

The German masters, however, resolved that the Polish slaves should not benefit by the Red Army victories. Whenever they had time they destroyed the factories and deported the entire working population.

When unable to deport workers, the Germans often killed them. Girls in the Lublin shoe factory told me how the Germans took them the last day to Maidanek and forced them to dig a deep grave. "We wept all day at the digging, because the Red Army was coming and we wouldn't live to see it. But at the last moment the guards ran away because the Red Army came faster than expected. We couldn't believe that we were still to live."

Even under such terror large numbers of Polish workers survived, sometimes by chance, oftentimes by flight to the woods, sometimes by last minute organization. Wherever workers survived they also contrived in part to outwit the German masters and save precious bits of Polish industry.

### **Workers Save the Machines**

The Zamosc power plant today functions because the workers hid the most valuable equipment, so the Germans could not take it away. The large Stalowa Wola steel and munitions works has begun operating because the workers dropped all the finest precision machinery into barrels of oil which they buried deep underground, both saving and protecting it against rust. In the Lublin shoe factory, all the sewing machines were apparently looted on the final day of disorganization. But when the trade union started inquiries, practically all turned up in the homes of workers who merely had taken them to prepare for any future eventualities.

Under the chaotic conditions of German retreat, the industrial workers were usually the first to organize.

For instance, Kuszyk and Cherwinski entered Lublin as partisan fighters a fortnight before the Polish government, and even before the Red Army arrived. They immediately collected all the active workers and sent them into the factories to save the machinery and raw materials from the final chaos of retreat. During the actual hours when the

Germans were leaving, these trade union leaders were already assembling workers in the small iron and steel works, in the tannery and shoe factory and the sugar refinery, and electing emergency factory committees.

These factory committees were not yet trade unions. They were elected by a meeting of all the workers in the plant to prevent looting and destruction, and to take charge of the factory till a new manager was appointed, since the old masters were practically all Germans. Simultaneously, however, the trade union organization began enrolling members, on a strictly voluntary basis.

"Ninety per cent of the workers joined," Kuszyk told me, and this corresponds with what I myself saw in various places. "The workers are especially pleased that now every plant has only one trade union without distinctions of politics or religion, to protect all workers irrespective of creed or party, unlike the pre-war unions which separated Catholics and Socialists."

### **Elections in the Factories**

I have before me the typed report of the first meeting which the Lublin tobacco factory workers held August 2. The factory employed one thousand workers. Of these, 800 attended the meeting. They elected a nominating committee which reported forty names. Of these the meeting elected nineteen as the factory committee. These nineteen met and chose a chairman, vice chairman and secretary, and three "candidates" to the Lublin City Central Council of Trade Unions. These were only "candidates" because the City Central Council was not yet formed, and it was not yet known how many delegates each union was entitled to have.

This meeting was held ten days before the government came to Lublin. There was no city government yet, so this same factory committee of tobacco workers also elected three "candidates" to the Lublin City Council and to the Lublin Voyevodstvo Council.

The first municipal authority in liberated Lublin was thus set up by factory workers from their meetings and elections. However, they had no intention to hog the government. The City Council kept adding members chosen by various political parties and cultural organizations, pending the final freeing of all Poland.

Within three months enough trade unions were formed on the basis of individual voluntary membership so that elections for city trade

union councils and voyevodstvo federations could be held. After this the central body was formed.

Delegates to voyevodstvo congresses were directly elected by the factory trade unions on the basis of one delegate for the first 200 members, two delegates for a union of over 200 but under 500, and one additional delegate for every additional 500 members. The central body was formed by a coalition of voyevodstvo representatives, five from each, making twenty-five as of today. These were elected to a conference held November 20 and 21.

This form made it possible to add new representatives to the central body as fast as new areas are freed. Each new district forms its state federations and elects five members to the central body. When all Poland has been freed, there will then be a general congress of Polish trade unions reelecting a central body, presumably on a new basis combining large central unions instead of areas.

At the time of my visit there were already about thirty central trade unions. The largest by far was that of the railway workers, comprising 45,000 members and constituting forty per cent of the entire trade union membership. The reason for this disproportion is that the railways were rapidly repaired by the Red Army which needs them for the front, but Polish industry has been badly destroyed and hence does not yet employ many workers. Polish industry is being constructed by the help of the trade unions and the number of industrial members is rapidly rising, while the number of railway workers remains stationary.

The second largest trade union till recently was that of agricultural laborers, totaling 29,000. This number suddenly diminished, probably was cut in half, since large numbers of farmhands have now become peasant proprietors through land reform. Food workers came next, then metal workers.

I checked these facts also with Henry Altman, chief of the Department of Labor in the new Lublin government. Altman was a pre-war member of the General Council of all the Polish trade unions. I'm the only one left in Poland. All the others were either killed or went away to London." When I asked Altman whether I might use his name and former post, since other trade unionists did not wish this lest it endanger their families, Altman replied, "I have no objection to using my name. Unfortunately, all my family and relatives are already killed."

Such is the grim background from which Polish workers organize and rebuild their land, their industry, their lives.

## **IX. WHAT HAPPENED IN LODZ**

"We kissed not only the feet of the Red Army men but even the hoofs of their horses." In these words Doctor Albert Mazur, Jewish doctor in Lodz and one of 800 survivors of the Jewish population that once reached a quarter of a million, expressed the feeling he had when this great industrial city of Poland was liberated.

Mazur was preserved till the end as he was needed as a physician in the ghetto, but he was aware that his last hours would come unless he could choose accurately a moment to hide and wait for the Red Army. His hiding place was in cave built in the ghetto and covered with debris. He heard shots as Jews less fortunate in hiding were dragged out and killed before the Germans fled. Mazur knew that if the Germans had time to get police dogs to trail the hidden Jews, he was finished. However, the Germans did not have time.

The Red Army took Lodz in an amazing surprise maneuver, entering from the direction of Berlin. The city was almost intact except for what the Germans took away during the five and a half years, which was considerable. Hotels were open and factories operating. However there was a serious food shortage, complicated by the fact that almost no money existed.

The German marks, in which workers got their last pay checks had not yet been officially outlawed, but nobody would take them any more. Lublin zloty had not arrived in quantities and must be put in circulation in planned fashion as wages and payments. Imagine a city in which everybody's money suddenly becomes valueless, and you have Lodz.

Imagine also, a city in which all owners of stores fled overnight, not even troubling to lock their premises. Lodz, unlike Warsaw and Lublin, was incorporated in Germany proper and only Germans were permitted to own property, all Poles being there "temporarily" as slaves. The Poles of course were the vast majority of the inhabitants but without rights. Even the smallest shop was taken from its former Polish owners long ago.

The new German owners naturally fled when the Red Army entered. The inhabitants simply helped themselves to things in the stores. Rapidly a citizen's militia was organized to stop this looting but the stores hadn't reopened when I was there. When the Polish

owners reappear they will get their property back, but many Polish former owners are now dead.

The worst sight I ever saw in my long life as a correspondent, was the jail outside Lodz which the Germans burned down with several thousands of prisoners. There were bodies lying around in distorted poses, some bloody, some charred by the flames. Throngs of weeping onlookers were trying to find their loved ones in the great heap of bodies.

One man, Frank Zarenski, escaped by a series of miracles combined with personal daring. He told us how the prison warden spent all night killing prisoners, bringing them downstairs in batches of twenty-five and shooting them. He was thus shot but had a light wound, and feigned death when the Gestapo looked with a flashlight. When the wardens couldn't make prisoners come downstairs any more since the prisoners heard the shots, they set fire to the jail.

After the wardens left the burning building, Frank went upstairs and hid in the largest water tank, which had a concrete base. The water got very hot but he survived this, since the building burned leaving only the brick walls and concrete stairs. Frank went downstairs then and hid in a big box of blankets in the basement. Three times the wardens searched the ruins but Frank held the lid down and the searchers thought the box was nailed shut. Only when Frank heard Polish voices did he emerge.

Lodz has historic reasons for wishing close contact with the Soviet Union. The city grew up on Russian cotton from Central Asia and worked for Russian markets fifty years ago. It suffered many economic crises when this market was cut off. Meanwhile as the Red Army still drives westward, long lines of German prisoners appear in Lodz streets. I saw large groups driven along by a single Pole. The Pole seemed to me very careless with his rifle. I couldn't help thinking that any daring prisoner could grab it and shoot his way out. But apparently the Germans knew they were beaten. Five hundred shuffled meekly along under guard of this single Pole who merely wore a red and white armband and twirled his rifle carelessly.

## **X. IN WARSAW WITH THE POLISH ARMY**

No one can know the Polish people today, without knowing the Polish army.

I was the first American to crawl into dugouts and crouch in trenches and behind parapets directly facing the German fire on the

Eastern front. Not long before the final liberation of Warsaw, I spent three thrilling days with the Polish Army in possession of the part east of the Vistula bank known as Praga, which constitutes one fifth of Warsaw, connecting across the river by many fine bridges, all of them blown up now. The inhabitants claim that they live in Warsaw just as dwellers of the Bronx and Queens rightly claim they live in New York.

And in truth in that battered hulk of city one felt the undying spirit of Poland, one felt pride in the national capital more than in Lublin, which after all is a provincial town. One felt it in the nonchalance with which both soldiers and civilians accepted the constant enemy shelling, going about their business under the daily threats of death. One saw it in those two red and white Polish flags which since November 11th fluttered over Vistula from the highest girders of the broken Poniatowski bridge.

### **In Full Sight of the Enemy**

Our little jeep dashed in and out along Washington Alley – a fine boulevard leading straight to the bridge. "We don't stay on this street any longer than we can help it", explained a Polish officer. "Since it's in the direct line of fire from the Germans and the Polish The enemy is not very lively now but there is no need to provoke them by an unduly long appearance."

Zigzagging through side streets and behind houses, we finally parked the jeep not very far from the river. All along this part of Warsaw were fine riverside villas where people of wealth and culture had dwelt – professors, actors and artists. Now the beautiful yellow tiles blasted from the walls were scattered on the pavements in the midst of neglected, frost-killed gardens. From some of the bombed houses, the insides had fallen into the streets. In one place we circled around the remains of a grand piano.

All civilians were ordered to evacuate last September, but some still remained. Occasionally we met an old woman in these streets. "Orders were to clear all out", said the Polish officer. "But we aren't Germans. We made all the young folks leave with their families but these old ones would rather risk death in their home than try their fortune elsewhere. When the shelling was very bad they hid in cellars."

Keeping close to buildings we made our way to the river. Once when we had to walk a block in the open, the officer threw a chalk

colored raincoat over my dark blue overcoat. "Here we are under enemy observation. They aren't wasting shots on scattered soldiers but if they see your coat they would pot you for sure as an officer. A couple of stray carbine shots ricocheted down the street just as we left it, but in a very desultory way.

I climbed to the roof of a battered riverside villa now used as an artillery observation post. We had to bend low lest the enemy spot us over the parapet. Looking through binoculars directly across the river to that other part of Warsaw in enemy hands, it was hard to detect the slightest sign of life. There were only ruins from which the smoke of destroying fires still arose.

"See that stuff sticking up between the first two piers of the bridge on the other side of the river?" said the officer. The bridge of course was wrecked in the middle but the piers on both sides remain. "That's a double machine gun nest. What do you say? Shall we send them one?"

'Sure', I said, and handed back the binoculars to the officer. So we sent not one but four. Each time I heard the low growl of the mine-thrower two or three miles in our rear and then a faint pshpsh in the air high above us and then I plainly saw the explosion across the river where the mine hit. The fourth shot was square on the target, raising a great cloud of dust and fragments between two piers.

Then we ran hastily downstairs because the enemy also opened fire. But the artillery officer remained in his room on the upper floor because he doesn't like cellar air. His doors and windows have been repaired in a dozen places where bullets went through, but so far he himself had remained intact.

While mortar bombs rained and rifle shots popped along the river, I visited dugouts and tunnels made in the bank.

## **Polish Soldiers**

The Polish soldier boys holding the Eastern bank of the Vistula waiting for the final smash that would "set their banners in Berlin" were a gay lot, always amusing themselves with pranks against the enemy. Some serious ones, some only funny, but all asserting the disdain that these proud Polish people feel for the slower-witted "master race."

They recounted some of these exploits in the ruined villa to which they returned from the front line positions, dodging back from

dugouts and tunnels and observation posts to comparative security in the detachment's headquarters, where we chatted and had tea.

These were Poles from the First Polish Army which was formed in the Soviet Union. Many of them had travelled all over the earth. The Battalion Commander had read all my books on China. He talked well about Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser and Agnes Smedley.

The Colonel accompanying me said: "I have been a soldier for twenty-five years. I have fought in five major wars, the first World War, the war in China, the Spanish war, the Finnish War and now this one. This is the first time that I, a Pole, can fight for my own Poland."

"Too bad you weren't here last night," they told me. "A bunch of us went over the river and brought back a 'tongue' " – that is the word describing a German seized to extract information.

To my inexperience, the broad Vistula river seemed a complete barrier. I couldn't imagine how men could cross to the enemy side when the searchlights played to the slightest sound. They explained that they went by night with an old fisherman who knew every curve of the Vistula and had a life-long experience of noiseless boating without disturbing the fish.

They crossed the river without any accident and went stealthily along the bank till they reached the enemy sentry. Without waiting for the sentry's challenge, the officer spoke firmly in German: "Who goes there?" The sentry supposed it was a superior officer who spoke. This gave them the chance to seize the sentry and gag him with a first aid package whose soft bulk admirably fits in the mouth. When they returned to the boat they encountered two more Germans and had to shoot their way out, arousing the entire bank while searchlights played on the sky and the river. Despite this they got back with the prisoner. "And did he talk?" I asked them.

The Polish boys laughed: "He talked not only to us but also to the whole German army. We easily got him to make a speech on the radio megaphone which is audible across the river. He said 'Marshal Paulus from Stalingrad is now on this side and he knows much more than you. Paulus says finish the war and finish Hitler. But you folks are stupid and you are fighting to sure defeat'."

This German had an iron medal from Moscow and Stalingrad battles. I wanted to take this to America, but the captor wouldn't give it up. "I have a big collection of these iron medals. I am saving them to make a spittoon." If any American thinks that such use of the iron



medals is unchivalrous he doesn't know what the Germans have done to win them in all of this part of Europe where the murders of millions of women and children in death camps are only part of the balance sheet all Poles intend to avenge.

## **XI. THE ILL-FATED WARSAW RISING**

How the first Polish Army came into Praga and what efforts they made to contact the insurgents in the ill-fated Warsaw uprising then still in progress on the other bank, was told to me by Lieutenant General Korczyz in army headquarters not far from Praga.

No signposts led to the general's headquarters. That's the first thing you learn at the front. I hadn't exactly expected signposts but I had assumed that the commanding general would be somewhere obviously central where anyone could tell the way. It was a naive thought, for nobody was allowed to know the way to reach the general except those whose business it was to know.

Colonel Spychalski, Mayor of Warsaw, phoned General Korczyz and our chauffeur turned off the highway at a certain place and wandered through woods and fields until we met a Polish officer who got into our car and directed us. Finally we arrived at a scattered bunch of small houses that looked like something the cat dragged in. Near one of these houses was a fine auto, showed between two sheds under a tree, and there we knew we would find the commanding general.

The inside of the house was efficient and comfortable with plenty of maps, big desks and a good couch. We had a remarkably good driver. After sharing it I knew why all generals are well set-up, portly men.

### **The First Polish Army**

The First Polish army which came into Praga last September and which General Korczyz now commands, is not of course the only Polish army. The present Polish army consists of three elements: the First Army, organized in the Soviet Union which entered Poland last July a hundred thousand strong; the partisans, already on Polish territory who immediately joined this army; and a new mobilization carried out since then on Polish territory.

The exact size and total of the Polish army is a military secret. It is known to have an artillery school training fifteen hundred officers for artillery alone – I saw this myself in Chelm. It is known to have a

tank corps – I saw this in training – aviation, and every other branch that goes with a modern army.

"In fact", said General Korczys, "I have served in armies for thirty-two years now, and I have never seen an army better equipped."

"Are you better equipped than the Red Army?" I asked with surprise.

"Not exactly", admitted Korczys, "But we are equipped as well as the best Red Army division."

The First Polish Army, while today only a part of the entire army is a proud part that has seen action. It grew out of the first Kosciusko Division which took part in its first battle near Smolensk on October 19, 1943. The division was then withdrawn to the rear for expansion. Last July, the First Polish Army, a complete unit, with tanks, planes and everything, forced the river Bug, entered Polish territory with the Red Army, and drove the Germans from the Bug and Vistula, a total distance of some two hundred miles. They made the first Vistula crossing at Pulawa, south of Warsaw, establishing bridgeheads. Then in September they took part in the breaking of the German lines at Praga for which they were mentioned in Stalin's Order of the Day.

General Korczys gave me the first complete account of relations with the tragic Warsaw uprising which began August 1st under orders of General Bor, military representative in Poland for the London Polish government.

### **General Bor Avoids Contact**

"When the uprising broke out we were forty-five miles south of Warsaw, while the Red Army was also ten miles to the east, separated by the heaviest enemy fortifications and also by the Vistula. The insurgents made no attempt to inform us. We didn't even know where they were.

"Only on September 12th two women messengers finally reach us, coming by sewers and over rivers. These were not from Bor's army which from the first to the last never tried to contact us. The women were messengers from the People's Army (not under the London Government-in-Exile) which also joined in the uprising, which sent us from the northern part of the Warsaw region, Zoliborz. The largest area held by the insurgents was in central Warsaw, contacting Zoliborz only by sewers.

"The following night more than two hundred Red Army planes dropped munitions and arms to the insurgents in both Zoliborz and

central Warsaw. This continued thereafter nightly from dark until dawn for more than two weeks until capitulation. Thus as soon as they knew where the insurgents were, dozens of tons of munitions, food, rifles, automatics, even machine guns were dropped directly to the insurgents without parachutes, from planes flying only a few feet over the roof. They fell directly into their hands.

"Also we immediately dropped a radio man, with full equipment, in Zoliborz with orders to contact all insurgents forces in Warsaw and communicate their needs. They sent requests and we fulfilled them. They said to send artillery to such and such a spot and we sent it. They said, good, send more and we sent more.

"But all this time they never gave us any information. We never knew with whom we spoke. We never knew who was commanding the insurgents. We never knew whether Bor himself was in Warsaw until the Germans announced he was their prisoner."

"How then did you know that the requests came from the insurgents and not from the enemy?" I asked General Korczys, and he smiled.

"Easily. The requests reached our radio man from officers in the army who were in Zoliborz and who were connected with the center by the sewer route. They told us what they wanted but they never told us what they were doing or intending. After they surrendered we lost our radio man and never heard from him again."

To my question whether any attempts were made to force Vistula, Korczys replied in the affirmative.

### **Tragic Waste of Life**

"The First Polish Army sent several expeditions across the Vistula at heavy cost. From the military standpoint this was foolish. The conditions were incredibly bad, but we couldn't leave the Poles fighting the Germans alone. All these crossings ended disastrously because Bor's officers avoided contact with us. For instance in the Cherniakow district, south of the Poniatowski bridge, we landed and connected with a hundred and fifty men under Colonel Radoslaw from the Home Army. They were hungry, without ammunition, and we gave them food and supplies. A couple of nights later without telling us, Radoslaw withdrew his men into the center of the city by the sewer route. This was unimportant militarily, but showed their general attitude.

"At several other points along the Vistula we landed and to tried break through to the insurgents, but they made no attempt to break through to us. In one place part of our army actually reached the center of the city and joined the Home Army. We never heard from them again."

"Could joint action have affected the outcome?" I asked.

"Certainly", he said, "with joint action we might at least have held areas that the insurgents had already, even though the action was militarily a bad mistake.

"At the end of September we made an agreement through our radio man at Zoliborz to evacuate all insurgents to our side of the river – a couple of thousand men from the Home Army were there. We arranged an artillery barrage, smashing the path to the river while the boats awaited. One hour before the crossing should have started General Bor ordered them to surrender to the Germans instead of crossing to us. Only the survivors of the People's Army tried to reach us and the greater part of these arrived.

"What waste of life there was in Warsaw," the general continued, "pistols against tanks! The young boys gave their lives and only were wasted when they might have been beating Germans with us."

## **XII. THE PEOPLE OF PRAGA**

Behind the death-defying gaiety of the Polish soldiers in Warsaw lay civilian reality, incredibly grim. I gained my first insight into this reality in a women's meeting in the famous Wedel candy factory which before the war sold confections even in Paris and at an exhibition at the World's Fair in New York.

Most of its buildings were of course exploded by the Germans before retreating, but two small shops were overlooked and in these the director collected a couple of hundred women and began making candies and cookies again. Everything was very primitive, making in a month what formerly was made in two days. There was no candy on sale since it was all bought up by the government and social organizations for celebrations and children's treats.

When I arrived the factory was closing to organize the first trade union in the last light of day – after dark Praga goes dead. A simple brief meeting went on during the shelling, to which the women paid not the slightest heed. Then I said: "In America we think war is bombardment but shelling, it seems, doesn't matter in Praga. What is the worst thing the war means here?"

I thought they would say cold or hunger for both of these were bad in Praga. But they answered: "The worst thing is that the Germans took away our husbands and we don't know whether they are dead or slaves in Germany."

How many had thus lost husbands? Some ninety per cent raised their hands. Then I feared lest a storm of weeping might shake the meeting so I changed the subject and everyone began to breathe again. Later everywhere in Praga I asked the same question but more tactfully – if such questions can ever be tactfully asked. And it was true that ninety per cent of the men from Praga were simply taken away.

In the six weeks before the Germans retreated they systematically surrounded block after block in Praga, searched all houses and took the able-bodied men and many women. Some were shot out of hand to terrorize the others but most of them were taken to a concentration camp where many died from hunger while awaiting shipment to Germany. Nobody now knows who is alive or dead.

This is the great burden under which Praga labored. The Nazis had a deliberate purpose in destroying Warsaw's whole future. In that four-fifths of Warsaw across the Vistula they were still blowing up and burning blocks of houses, driving out all the people either to death camps or as slaves. In Praga they had removed the basis of Warsaw's great industry – the entire Praga working class.

Heroic women and old men and children were organizing citizens' committees, opening schools in ruined buildings and sending expeditions to the peasants to secure the winter supply of potatoes. But when I spoke hopefully of how life was returning to Praga, I was told: "Every factory is a heap of ruins. All machines and equipment have been taken. All of this might be rebuilt or bought again. But a skilled working class takes decades to reproduce and that is what the Germans destroyed."

### **The Undying Spirit That Is Poland**

While in Lublin I had met many Poles who considered that Warsaw couldn't serve as a capital for possibly ten years, in Praga one felt the authentic spirit of the great capital, one felt it was still the spiritual center of the nation. From the ruined candy factory I went to the City Hall – housed in the former high school – to hear the first concert staged by the "New Warsaw Symphony Orchestra", in honor of Rzymowski, Minister of Culture visiting from Lublin.

Forty musicians sat on the stage in what was the former high school graduation hall. Four rough gray telephone poles crisscrossed above them which prevented the bomb-weakened walls from collapsing on the stage. The musicians were middle-aged men of women who sat in their overcoats or sheepskins for it was penetratingly cold. The light was fading, for in Praga electricity works only occasionally.

I never heard Chopin's *Polonaise* played as I heard it there – in fact I never knew the meaning of that word before. And never will I forget how as dark came on and we couldn't see the faces any more, but only blurred forms against the pale window panes, that old Polish greeting "*sto lat, sto lat*"—may you live a hundred years and again and again a hundred years – thundered out to Rzymowski, who for the moment, symbolized Polish national culture.

Only afterwards did I know that the notes were written from the memory of the conductor – "There is no sheet music anywhere in Poland. I did my best but I can't remember everything, so some of this music is probably my own composition." Only afterward did I learn that the program was changed five minutes before the concert because one of the most important instruments was buried in a bombed house.

Still later I learned that the Mayor of Warsaw left the concert in the beginning. I hadn't even missed him in the dark. A nearby house had been shelled and Mayor Sychalski went personally to organize and rescue the inmates buried under the ruins. After helping lift the ruins off the victims – it was only a small house and there was only one dead and four women in shock and one baby quite untouched – Sychalski appeared an hour later in a well brushed uniform at a festive party where we all drank at least fifty toasts.

The party was given by the Democratic Party in honor of Rzymowski, who is a member of that political organization. It was just across the street from that recently ruined dwelling, whose uncleared debris we stepped on as we arrived. It was held in tastefully appointed rooms whose walls were covered by beautiful paintings – the home of a well-to-do Democrat who put it at the disposal of his party. It was the most exquisitely served banquet I have tasted this year.

Nobody mentioned the shelled house opposite except once to ask Sychalski how many were saved. Nobody seemed to consider that our house and banquet might have been ruined by a slight deflection in a shell one hour before. But they toasted everybody in Poland and

in the United Nations and gave them "*sto lat, sto lat*" – a hundred, hundred years.

With special warmth they toasted America and the Americans and Roosevelt – three different toasts. They toasted me as the first American who came to them.

It was not only in Lublin that I felt the undying spirit that is Poland. But there at the free front in that battered fifth of Warsaw whose factories were in ruins, whose men were dead or slaves, whose houses fell daily under shelling, whose women and old men organized citizens committees to maintain order, cleared the streets of debris, hauled water from wells, brought in potatoes from the countryside, sent their children to school – it was there in that broken piece of city that I knew Poland could never die.