COMMENTS ON POLISH AFFAIRS

Published by:
Polish Gov't Information Center
745 Fifth Avenue
New York 22, N. Y.

Editor:
MARJORIE PITMAN HOINKO

34

No. 6 November 27, 1944

POLISH CONSTITUTIONS

Since one of the points of disagreement between the Soviet-sponsored Polish Committee in Lublin and the Polish Government concerns the Constitutions of 1921 and 1935, some facts about them seem in order.

The Government of the restored Polish Republic, as established by the Constitution of March 1921, was basically much like that of the United States. There were three departments--the Legislative, consisting of two houses, the Sejm and the Senate; the Executive, including a President and his ministers; and the Judiciary. Members of both houses of Parliament were elected by universal, secret, direct vote of citizens, both men and women. The President was elected by joint assembly of both houses of Parliament, and had no veto power. In fact, the President was really hardly more than a figurehead, actual Executive power being vested rather in the Premier, who was responsible to, and could be removed by, Parliament, as is the case in most European countries.

Supplementing the Constitution was an electoral law which contained qualifications for electors and details of such matters concerning elections as in the United States are left to the states themselves by the Constitution. The law provided that representatives from any constituency, instead of all being of the party which had the most votes, were proportionately distributed. Thus, if a party got 51% of the votes in any district, it would send up only 51% of the representatives from that district for Parliament, instead of sending all on the strength of a majority, as is the case in the United States. For parties too small to rate a representative from any district, there was representation on the basis of the total votes polled by that party in the country.

COMMENTS ON POLISH AFFAIRS

No. 5 November 27, 1945

POLISH CONSTITUTIONS

Since one of the points of disagreement between the Soviet-sponsored Polish Committee in Lublin and the Polish Government concerns the Constitution of 1921 and 1935, some facts about them seem in order.

The Government of the restored Polish Republic, as established by the Constitution of March 1921, was basically much like that of the United States. There were three departments--the legislative, consisting of two houses, the Sejm and the Senate; the Executive, including a President and his ministers; and the Judiciary. Members of both houses of Parliament were elected by universal, secret, direct vote of citizens, both men and women. The President was elected by joint assembly of both houses of Parliament, and had no veto power. In fact, the President was really hardly more than a figurehead; actual executive power being vested rather in the Premier, who was responsible to, and could be removed by, Parliament, as is the case in most European countries.

Supplementing the Constitution was an electoral law which contained qualifications for electors and details of such matters concerning elections as in the United States are left to the States respectively by the Constitution. The law provided that representatives from any constituency, instead of all being of the party which had the most votes, were proportionately distributed. Thus, if a party got 51% of the votes in any district, it would send no only 51% of the representatives from that district for Parliament, instead of sending all on the strength of a majority, as is the case in the United States. For parties too small to vote a representative from any district, there was representation on the basis of the total votes polled by that party in the country.

Since there were, in addition to the four major parties, a great number of smaller ones covering the whole range from extreme Right to extreme Left, including a Conservative Peasant and a Radical Peasant group and Labor parties of various shades of nationalistic and international leanings, it is readily seen that this system of proportional representation offered possibilities for an infinite number of party combinations in the Parliament.

Under the Constitution of 1935, the President was made the head of the State and the other branches were subordinate to him. He replaced the Premier as actual Executive with increased power. The President was given a veto power which was hard to reverse and he could dissolve the Sejm. The new electoral law, by further diminishing the power of Parliament and placing restrictions on suffrage, destroyed, to a great extent, the democratic nature of the Government of 1921.

It was in accordance with the provisions of the 1935 Constitution, covering an emergency, that the Polish coalition government was formed in France in 1939 and on its authority that the Government has continued to function as the legal government of Poland in exile. It is paradoxical that the Lublin Committee is asking the Polish Government to set aside the 1935 Constitution in favor of that of 1921 on the grounds that the later Constitution is undemocratic, when such an action would exceed entirely the powers granted to the Government by the Constitution and would, in itself, be a clearly dictatorial and utterly undemocratic action. The Government bases its refusal to agree to the proposals of the Lublin Committee on the contention that only a duly elected Parliament has authority to set aside one Constitution and adopt another.

This does not mean, however, that the Polish Government is undemocratic. On the contrary, the pronouncements of Government officials both in London and in the Underground in Poland, regarding plans for the future, all point toward a broader basis of democracy and the abolishment of such ills as arose in the years just preceding the war. In fact, at the very beginning of his incumbency, while still in France, President Raczkiewicz officially announced that he would relinquish many of the powers vested by the Constitution in the President and that during the emergency regime he and his designated successor would act only in collaboration with the Premier and on advice of the National Council, which acts in war-time in lieu of Parliament.

On February 24, 1942, the Polish National Council issued a Charter which declared for a truly democratic republic

of Poland "fully representative of the common will of the people," for sound agricultural reform and the just partition of land among the peasant population, for a national economic policy guided by the principle of right to work for fair wages and to choose occupations in conformity with the necessity of planned post-war reconstruction, and which reaffirmed the guarantee contained in the Constitutions of both 1921 and 1935 of rights and liberties of citizens, regardless of national, religious or racial differences. The Charter concludes "In these principles the Polish Government will work out detailed projects concerning the future political and economic structure of Poland for submission to Parliament immediately after its convocation."

In the past two years the Government has made definite progress in fulfilling these promises. Specifically, they have set up the machinery for speeding up agrarian reform and have prepared revision of the education law to provide greater possibilities for free public education. Most important, they have drawn up new electoral regulations which lay the basis for the enactment of a new, more democratic, Constitution when the Legislative bodies have been chosen.

This new electoral law provides: (1) Universal, equal, direct, secret, proportional, suffrage to all citizens over 21 years of age, (2) The right of all sections of public opinion to run candidates, (3) Proportional representation, thus insuring representation to small parties and non-Polish minority groups, (4) Supervision of the technical organization of elections by groups completely independent of the Government or administrative authority, (5) Decision of contested results by the Supreme Court, which is independent of the Government.

The detailed division of the country into districts and apportionment of representatives cannot, of course, be made now, because the population is in a fluid state. Who can answer the tragic question "How many seats should be allocated to Warsaw?" since that city, according to the latest information, has at present no inhabitants at all.

Premier Mikolajczyk made a significant speech in this connection at a Peasant's Day celebration in London on June 2, 1944. He stressed the importance of the part played by the Peasant Party in the Underground and went on to say "We have two Constitutions--the first a formal legal one, and the second that which is written in the blood of our soldiers and of the citizens fighting in the Underground." The elements of the second democratic Constitution are embodied, he explained, in the declarations of the Polish Government since 1939 both

in London and from the Polish Underground. "I must state," he concluded, "that there will be no return to the military form of government which a politically conscious majority of the Polish nation would not tolerate.....The new Poland will be better and more just.

POLISH-SCOTTISH FRIENDSHIP

In their long wanderings in evil times, the Polish soldiers never found more friendly hospitality than in Scotland.

Two films which show the life of the Polish Army in Scotland are available from PIC Films, Inc., 745 Fifth Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

"SCOTTISH MAZURKA" - 2 reels, 35 & 16 mm.sound-18 mins. in Cinecolor. The film includes a song by the Polish Army Choir and Polish dances done by the Anglo-Polish Ballet.

"STRANGERS" - 1 reel, 35 & 16 mm. sound - 10 minutes. This film is dedicated to Polish-Scottish relations and it ends "We must some day say farewell, but we shall never be strangers again."

If Scottish societies are interested in devoting a meeting to Poland, centered around these films, the Lecture Department of the Polish Government Information Center will be glad to help with supplementary material or to send a speaker if the trip is not too long.

EDUCATION THE BASIS OF DEMOCRACY

One of the proudest achievements of Poland in its 20 years of freedom was the development of its free public school system. To appreciate the magnitude of that undertaking, one must remember that they started with nothing. Schools had to be built, text books written and published, courses of study planned and teachers trained, for during the partitions the limited educational opportunities afforded the Polish people provided instruction in a foreign language by foreign teachers.

What the Poles built, the German occupants have done their utmost to destroy. Poland had before the war 125,000 teachers, of whom 50% must be considered as definitely lost. They have been killed by the Nazis. They died in concentration camps or from exhaustion. About 60 thousand in a school

in London and from the Polish Minister round. "I must state," he concluded, "that there will be no return to the military form of government which a politically conscious majority of the Polish nation would not tolerate.....The new Poland will be better and more just.

POLISH-SCOTTISH FRIENDSHIP

In their long wanderings in evil times, the Polish soldiers never found more friendly hospitality than in Scotland.

Two films which show the life of the Polish Army in Scotland are available from Pic Film, Inc., 745 Fifth Avenue, New York 22, N.Y.

"SCOTTISH MAZURKA" - 2 reels, 35 m.m. sound, 13 mins. in Polish. The film includes a song by the Polish Army Choir and Polish dances done by the Anglo-Polish Ballet.

"STRAMBERO" - 1 reel, 35 m.m. sound - 10 minutes. This film is dedicated to Polish-Scottish relations and it shows "We must some day say farewell, but we shall never be strangers again."

If Scottish societies are interested in receiving a meeting to Polish, acquired around these films, the Department of the Polish Government Information Bureau will be glad to help with supplementary material or to send a speaker if the trip is not too long.

EDUCATION THE BASIS OF DEMOCRACY

One of the greatest achievements of Poland in its 20 years of freedom was the development of the free public school system. To appreciate the magnitude of what materializing, one must remember that they started with nothing. Schools had to be built, text books written and published, courses of study planned and teachers trained, for during the partitions the limited educational opportunities afforded the Polish people provided instruction in a foreign language by foreign teachers.

When the Poles built, the German occupants have done their utmost to destroy. Poland had before the war 125,000 teachers, of whom 50% must be considered as definitely lost. They have been killed by the Nazis. They died in concentration camps or from exhaustion. About 60 thousand in a school

population of 5 million are left in poor health. 25% of all school buildings are gone. During the past four years no institution for teacher training has been operating. All physical training equipment, work shops, tools, libraries, in thirty thousand schools are destroyed.

This is part of the skillful pattern followed by the Axis aggressors for destroying the inner life of occupied nations, and the restoration of strong, democratic educational institutions is the quickest and safest way to bring back the normal life of democracy, freedom and prosperity to the liberated countries. Another phase of the educational program facing the occupied countries after freedom is restored is the problem of the psychological readjustment necessary to bring the young children back to a peaceful world. What we see in our war films and illustrated magazines, the children in the war-stricken countries see with their own eyes. They live it. The liberation inevitably will increase the horror of war so that the young generation will take into the time of peace the impressions of human brutality which may hurt the minds of millions for a life-time. Nothing is more essential than that teachers be ready to bring into play all the skill and science available in education, to help eradicate the unpleasant memories and to cast out fears born of terror exactly as has been successfully done for the bombed-out children of Great Britain.

The foregoing is based on, and partly quoted from, the report of the World Education Service Council on Education in Axis Occupied Countries, dated June 1944. The challenge to Americans it sums up as follows: "When one of the soldiers of our Allied Armies is brought wounded from the battlefront, assistance is prompt and efficient. We do not pass by asking 'Am I my brother's keeper?' We bind up the wounds, give blood transfusions, food, rest, care, security, friendship.

"When after liberation we find that one of our Allied nations has suffered breakdown of its educational system, shall we excuse our failure to lend aid on the grounds that we need so much in our own country for improving education? Or are we ready to appeal to all governments to do whatever is possible for the restoration of educational systems? And are we willing as individuals to give some of the essential things which the teachers, the pupils, the students in the liberated nations may need in order that they may be conscious of a sympathetic personal interest on our part? Educational life must be quickly restored if a democratic way of life is to live." Concrete projects suggested by the World Education Service Council which may be undertaken by schools or communities immediately are outlined later in this issue of Comments.

[illegible] of [illegible] on the [illegible] or health. [illegible] of all school buildings are [illegible]. But in the past, [illegible] years to in-stitution for teacher training has been [illegible]. All physi-cal training equipment, work shops, tools, libraries, in-dustry instruments and schools are destroyed.

This is part of the sadistic pattern followed by the Axis aggressors in destroying the higher life of occupied na-tions and the restoration of strong, democratic educational institutions is the quickest and surest way to bring back the normal life of democracy, freedom and prosperity to the liberated countries. Another phase of the educational problem is the [illegible] after freedom is restored is the problem of the psychological readjustment necessary to bring the young children back to a peaceful world. What we see in our war films and illustrated magazines, the children in the war-stricken countries see with their own eyes. They live it. The liberation inevitably will increase the horror of war so that the young generation will take into the time of peace the impressions of human brutality which may haunt the minds of millions for a lifetime. Nothing is more essential than that teachers be ready to bring into play all the skill and science available in education to help eradicate the unpleas-ant memories and to cast out fears born of terror exactly as has been successfully done the boarded-out children of Great Britain.

The foregoing is based on, and partly quoted from, the report of the World Education Service Council on Education in Axis Occupied Countries, dated June 1944. The challenge to Americans it sums up is forthright: When one of the soldiers of our Allied armies is brought wounded from the battlefront, assistance is prompt and efficient. We do not pass by saying "I am prosperous, healthy". We bind up the wounds, give blood transfusions, food, rest, care, security, friendship.

When after liberation we find that one of our Allied nations has suffered breakdown of its educational system, shall we excuse our failure to take all on the grounds that we need so much in our own country for improving education? Or are we ready to appeal to all governments to do whatever is possi-ble for the restoration of educational systems? And are we willing, as individuals to give some of the essential things which the teachers, the pupils, the students in the liberated nations may need in order that they may be conscious of a sympathetic personal interest in our part? Educational life must be quickly restored if a democratic way of life is to live. Concrete projects suggested by the World Education Service Council, which may be undertaken by schools or communi-ties immediately are outlined later in this issue of Comments.

ART IN HIDING

Two famous paintings by the Polish historical artist Matejko were taken, in 1939, from the museum where they belonged and buried in eastern Poland to save them from the German marauders. Word has been received that recently, after the expulsion of the German armies from that area, the pictures were unearthed amid great rejoicing.

These paintings represent two events, of great import to the Poles, which the Germans were not pleased to recall. It is not, therefore, hard to believe the report that the Nazis, who took pains to destroy whatever possessed patriotic value in Poland, offered 10,000,000 marks for the recovery of these paintings. One pictures the Victory at Grunwald, where Polish and Lithuanian armies defeated the Teutonic Knights in 1410. The second shows Duke Albert of Hohenzollern swearing homage and fealty to Poland in his name and that of his successors, before the Polish King Sigismund I in 1525. The latter, which is a huge canvas, measuring about 13 by 25 feet, is probably Matejko's most decorative work.

Matejko was first of all a student of history, and his pictures grew from that interest. They are correct in every small detail of costume and setting, yet have a majesty and power which are remarkable when you recall that the artist was so nearly blind that he was unable to see the whole sweep of an entire painting, but only each small part as he worked on it. By the Poles, Matejko's works have been cherished as the visual expression of the entire history of their country. For the world they are magnificent works of art, which like all art, belong not to one nation but to mankind. It is to be hoped that these are not the only paintings of Matejko to survive, but it is heartening to know that these at least are safe.

CHILDREN OF WAR

How far has family life been destroyed?
How far has child health been undermined?
What have the aggressors done to education?
What have the people done to preserve education?

The answers to these questions, for the thirteen countries which have been completely or partially occupied by aggressors, together with plans for reconstruction, are concisely set forth in a pamphlet "Today's Children Tomorrow's Hope" just issued by the United Nations Information Office, 610 Fifth Avenue, New York 20, N. Y. Anyone who would like a copy can get it by sending $.25 to the United Nations Information Office.

ART IN RUINS

Two famous paintings by the Italian historical-artist Mateijko were taken, in 1939, from the museum where they be- longed and buried in eastern Poland to save them from the Ger- man vandals. Word has been received that recently, after bur- ying them in one of the German camps from that area, the pictures were unearthed and found perfectly.

These paintings represent two events, of great importance to the Poles, which the Germans were too pleased to recall. It is not, therefore, hard to imagine the pains that the Nazis, who took pains to destroy everywhere possessed patriotic values of Poland, offered 10,000,000 marks for the recovery of their paintings. One picture was the Victory at Grunwald, where the Lithuanian armies defeated the teutonic knights in 1410. The second shows Duke Albert of Hohenzollern swearing homage and fealty to Poland in his name and then of his ancestors, before the Polish King Sigismund I, in 1525. The latter, which is a huge canvas, measuring about 12 by 25 feet, is undoubtedly Mateijko's most decorative work.

Mateijko was first of all a student of history, and his pictures grew from that interest. They are crowded in every small detail of costume and setting, yet have a compelling and power which are remarkable when you recall that the artist was so nearly blind that he was unable to see the whole canvas of an entire painting, but only each small part as he worked on it. By the Poles, Mateijko's works have been considered as the visual expression of the entire history of their country. In the world they are magnificent works of art, which like all art, belong not to one nation but to mankind. It is to be hoped that these are not the only paintings of Mateijko to sur- vive, but it is heartening to know that these at least are safe.

CHILDREN OF WAR

How far has family life been destroyed?
How far has child health been undermined?
What have the agreements done to education?
What have the people done to preserve education?

The answers to these questions, for the thirteen coun- tries which have been completely or partially occupied by ag- gressors, together with plans for reconstruction, are concise- ly set forth in a pamphlet "Today's Children Tomorrow's Hope" just issued by the United Nations Information Office, 610 Fifth Avenue, New York 20, N. Y. Anyone who would like a copy can get it by sending $.25 to the United Nations Information Office.

PROJECTS OF THE WORLD EDUCATION SERVICE COUNCIL

1. Kits for Students
2. - Tell-the-People Reports
3. - Book Parcels
4. - Tool Chests
5. - Chests for Physical Fitness
6. - Child Health Centers
7. School Sponsorship
8. - International Teachers Centers

GOAL

To establish personal and direct relationships between the schools, students, and teachers of all freedom-loving countries.

To add these private efforts to whatever the governments do in this field, as the new unity of the world can be strong and effective only if governments and private efforts march forward together.

To give to the millions of American youth an opportunity for direct participation in the restoration of education in occupied countries and in the establishment of world knowledge, world friendship, and lasting peace.

Details of these projects are published in a monthly bulletin, THE KEY, published by the Student Committee for Workshops in International Education, 2 West 45 Street, New York 19, N.Y., the yearly subscription to which is $1.00. Several schools are already at work collecting material for Kits for Students. These include paper, notebook, pencils, water color paints, crayons, and other standard school materials. It is also suggested that an envelope of cancelled US stamps be added. This might be the beginning of an exchange of correspondence. Photo of school or of individuals who prepare kit may be included and the name of the sender.

Tell-the-People reports are scrap books containing pictures and articles to show something about life in America.

The school or organization preparing such kits as well as the other projects, may designate the country to which they are to be sent.