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Carlisle

I Saw Poland Betrayed

AN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR
REPORTS TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



by ARTHUR BLISS LANE

UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO POLAND, 1944-1947

"They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin." —JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, *"The Present Crisis"*

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the press by the Department of State, was permitted publication in the Polish press.

The hypocrisy of the phrase "free and unfettered elections" was tragically obvious.

At a press conference in Washington in November 1946 I had urged the representatives of the various press associations and newspapers who were covering activities of the Department of State to send trained observers to Poland so that the forthcoming elections would be fully and accurately reported. Gratifyingly, at least fifteen correspondents were in Warsaw at election time. Among the well-known writers who came were Dorothy Thompson, Ralph Ingersoll, formerly editor of *PM*, and Liston M. Oak, managing editor of the *New Leader*. These were in addition to the correspondents regularly assigned to Warsaw.

As I had done at the time of the referendum, I arranged to send out fifteen teams of observers from our Embassy staff and invited the correspondents to accompany them to whatever parts of Poland they considered particularly interesting.

I gave general instructions to our various teams on the nature of information which we desired—intimidation, if any, prior to the elections, the procedure adopted in voting and in counting ballots, the general reaction to the elections in the different districts, and any other data that they might consider pertinent. I suggested that election officials, members of the various parties, including the opposition, should be interviewed, but I made one reservation: contact with the underground should be scrupulously avoided. Although it represented a political element of importance, we felt that the Embassy should have no contact with it, because of the danger of our being accused of connections with an element which presumably was planning—or at least hoping for—the overthrow of the Polish Provisional Government, and because of the danger to the persons interviewed.

I had good reason to be apprehensive, because of a case involving

the British Ambassador, Mr. V. Cavendish-Bentinck. His family had known the aristocratic Grocholski family of Warsaw for over thirty-five years. During his first assignment to Warsaw in 1919 he and Count Grocholski had become warm friends, and a cordial relationship had continued over the years. When Bentinck returned to Poland in 1945, it was natural that he should seek out his old friend and invite him to the British Embassy from time to time. Undoubtedly they discussed topics of the day, including the intolerable conditions existing in Poland. On one occasion while the Ambassador was paying a visit at Count Grocholski's country house, the villa was surrounded by the U.B., and the inmates, including Mr. Bentinck, were prohibited from leaving. By insisting on his diplomatic prerogative of immunity from arrest, Bentinck was finally able to get away. Grocholski was arrested, charged with association with the underground and with having communicated information to a foreign ambassador. (Like all patriotic Poles who had been forced to remain in Poland as a result of the war, he had been connected with the underground Home Army during the Nazi occupation.)

At the public trial Grocholski "confessed" to guilt on the two charges. Then, on January 14, 1947, five days before the elections, the verdict in his case was announced: death. The sentence was immediately executed.

The severity of his sentence was the government's brutal way of warning the Polish people of the risk they ran if they talked to foreign emissaries about existing conditions. The announcement of the verdict on the very eve of the elections had a sinister connotation: the government would probably consider treasonable the imparting to the American and British embassies information about frauds and repressive measures in connection with the elections. Had not the Polish Government's note of January 14 said that no further consideration by us of the election question was warranted?

The elections were held on January 19, 1947, in bitterly cold weather. On that Sunday afternoon my wife and I, accompanied by