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Witness

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Report of Interrogation:
P/W : von RINTELEN, Emil
Rank : Ambassador at large
Unit : Foreign Office, Berlin
Captd: 7 May 1945 - Garmisch-Patenkirchen.

14 August 1945
Interrogated by:
Capt. BOLLWEG.

Veracity: Believed reliable.

Report : Answer to questionnaire submitted by Political Branch, MIS, dated 7 August 1946. (Answers to POLAND; a. b. and c.), (Other answers to follow in later reports).

I. POLAND:-

P/W's Introduction:

Although P/W was on the staff of the German embassy in Warszawa (Warsaw) as councillor from 1929 to 1932, he has had nothing to do with the Polish question officially since that time. From 1932 to 1940 he was chief of section for western Europe in the Foreign Office, thus having nothing to do with Poland. After 1939 the Foreign Office no longer had jurisdiction over Polish matters as the Generalgouvernement in Krakow, with the General-gouverneur Reichminister Frank as chief, was not subordinate to the Foreign Office but was immediately under Adolf Hitler. The Foreign Office had a representative with the Generalgouverneur in Krakow (Ambassador von WUEHLISCH, who died during the war, and later Councillor of the Embassy SCHUMBURG). These representatives submitted only occasional reports to the Foreign Office treating matters relative only to foreign policy and not to the situation within Poland. P/W seldom saw these reports. For this reason P/W can express himself on Polish questions only on the basis of an acquaintance with this country which he knew 13 years ago. Accordingly, the following statements on later developments have only the value of suppositions.

a. Q: Estimate relative strength of four most important Parties during 1920's 1930's, and during and after the war.

A: The four most important Polish Parties at the end of the 20's and the beginning of the 30's were: The Pilsudski-Block (Blok Bezpartijni - non-party block, abbreviated as BB), the Peasant Party, the Social Democrats, and the National Democrats (the so-called Endecja). In addition, the Ukrainians formed a special group, i.e. the representatives of the so-called UNDO of the Ukrainian population of eastern Galicia, and a smaller number of representatives of the German minority. P/W no longer remembers details on the strength of the various parties. During the first years of the Pilsudski regime the Pilsudski Block controlled only a minority of the seats in the Polish Sejm. It did not achieve a majority until the new election about 1930, an election, however, which can in no wise be considered as a free election in the western European or American democratic sense, but one held under heavy pressure by the regime. Polish parties had noticeably strong regional ties.

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This was particularly true of the National Democrats, the middle class party which sharply opposed the Pilsudski regime. The National Democrats were recruited chiefly from those parts of Poland which had formerly belonged to Prussia, i.e. the districts of Poznan, Torun, and Katowice, with the city of Poznan as focal point. The Social Democrats naturally were laborers from the industrial centers of the country, i.e. first of all Silesia as well as the Warszawa district. The Peasant Party and the Pilsudski Block were both represented in "Kongresspolen", i.e. the former Russian part of Poland (in the partition of 1813) and western Galicia, while eastern Galicia returned chiefly Ukrainian representatives. The Peasant Party, the Social Democrats, and the National Democrats represented the 3 principal factors in the Polish population, i.e. the farmers, the industrial workers, and the bourgeoisie, with the condition in respect to the latter that the National Democrats were principally from former Prussian territory and had a pronounced chauvinistic and clerical trend. Naturally all those directly dependent on the regime, such as government officials, voted for the Pilsudski Block, but the Block also had assured support among other parts of the population, in the Wilna area and all those parts of Poland which had suffered in the Soviet attack of 1920. In these regions Marshal Pilsudski's popularity as "Liberator from the Bolsheviks" was still strong.

b. Q: Estimate the degree and nature of opposition to Pilsudski's coup d'etat, passage of the 1935 constitution, and the Beck-Smigly-Rydz-Moscicki regime. Describe political orientation and methods of this regime.

A: Pilsudski's coup d'etat in 1926 was decided by the street fighting in Warszawa. Of great importance for its success was that part of the Polish officers corps which had disliked the previous parliamentary system and saw in Pilsudski the great Polish patriot and national hero. The nucleus of his supporters was formed principally of officers who had belonged to the Polish Legion, that legion which Pilsudski put together, in Austrian Galicia during the first World War to fight the Russians. The old legionnaires were the main support of the Pilsudski regime; a considerable part of the so-called top group which played the chief role with in the Pilsudski Block was recruited from this group. Opposed to Pilsudski, on the other hand, were those officers who had belonged to General Haller's army in France during World War I. Sikorski and Zeligowski were the best known of the opposition generals. In his time, the latter had secured Wilna for Poland as a surprise and against the vote of the Allied and associated chief powers of those days. When the military decision in Warszawa went in favor of Pilsudski, this opposition was condemned to oblivion. General Zagorski, notorious for his opposition, was called to Warszawa by Pilsudski for a conference; he vanished on the very day of his arrival without leaving a trace. The people of Poland accepted the coup d'etat. Pilsudski was clever enough to allow them a vent in the Sejm where the opposition could blow off steam without being able to change the accomplished fact.

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Pilsudski's art of governing consisted chiefly of most cleverly disguising with legal camouflage what was in actuality a real dictatorship. In contrast to Mussolini or Hitler, who placed themselves at the head of an unequivocally dictatorial regime as Duce or Fuehrer, Pilsudski was satisfied with the position of Minister of War and allowed Parliament to go peacefully on, although he hated it. When he was nominated for president, he declined the honor. It sufficed for him to be Minister of War of the army ^{by virtue of} that office, to have the actual power of the State in his own hands. The office of president and the ministerial posts he turned over to trusted friends. Of course he quickly purged the army of all the elements in the officer corps which he did not deem reliable. Parliament was forced to comply with this fact and did so finally despite much criticism and complaining. Some years later when the opposition became too open, Pilsudski took strong measures against it. The leading representatives of the opposition were seized in their beds at night and carried off to the prison of Brest-Litvsk where it might be supposed they did not receive the best treatment. This broke the backbone of the opposition. The victorious election for the Pilsudski Block confirmed this and the Polish constitution of 1935 was just the final blow to the newly created forces.

The foreign policy of the Pilsudski regime was characterized by a strong mistrust of Moscow and a striving to throw off ^{the} guardianship of French. Pilsudski's anti-Moscow position was the result of his past as a revolutionary and conspirator in former Russian Poland, of the many years which he was forced to spend in Russian prison, and of the belief he had held from his youth on that Russia was the arch-enemy of Poland. He was decidedly cool towards France. He once ~~announced~~ ^{cancelled} the agreement to the presence of French military mission in Poland in a decidedly ~~too~~ brusque form. He threatened the Lithuanian government with war from time to time. He regarded the existence of a special Lithuanian State as completely unjustified; in his opinion Lithuania belonged to Poland. He liked to call himself "Lithuanian" (he came from the region of Wilna). Relations with Germany were always strained as a result of the effects of the Versailles treaty (the corridor question, Upper Silesia) although Pilsudski personally did not share the anti-German attitude of the National Democrats. His readiness to effect better relations with Germany was shown when he immediately agreed to Hitler's suggestion for German-Polish conferences (Erklaerungsaustausch). Polish relations with Hungary and Rumania, in which Pilsudski probably saw allies against the Russians, were good. The Moscicki-Rydz Smigly-Beck regime, in office from 1935 to 1939 in Poland, naturally lacked the great personal prestige of Pilsudski. For that reason it enjoyed less respect than the Marshal's regime among the population and exhibited a correspondingly greater readiness to listen to the opposition and particularly to National Democratic ideas. President Moscicki was personally esteemed but possessed little authority after the long years of being overshadowed by the towering personality of the Marshal. Beck was a typical representative of the top group which had succeeded in pushing the former Foreign Minister Zaleski out of his post during the Pilsudski regime. He too had little authority of popularity among the people. A story about Marshal Rydz Smigly which was being told about 1930 in Warsaw circles in the neighborhood of Belvedere, the Marshal's estate, deserves mention here.

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At that time the Marshal (Pilsudski) said to his two most faithful and devoted generals, Rydz Smigly and Orlicz Dresser: "Naturally you both want to be my successor but you will never succeed. You will see, my successor will be that pig, Sikorski!" Soon after, Orlicz Dresser crashed in a plane. Rydz Smigly did indeed become Marshal of Poland after Pilsudski but a few years later Moscicki's successor called upon General Sikorski to head the Polish Emigre Government in London. This development was a clear sign of how far removed from the spirit of Pilsudski that Polish political circle which was based on the constitution of 1935 had come.

At first Beck's foreign policy followed the lines set down by Pilsudski but disclosed a growing uncertainty in its relations with Germany. When in 1939 Hitler approached Poland with a categorical demand for a settlement of the Corridor question, Beck sought a counter-balance in the western European powers. The English-Polish reciprocal aid treaty determined the Polish attitude and they refused to comply with the German demands. In the interior, the Rydz Smigly regime pursued a moderate course, hoping to gradually win over the opposition to the 1935 constitution. P/W does not know to what extent this was successful.

e. Q: Degree of Polish opposition to the U.S.S.R. by classes from 1928 to the present time.

A: In 1930 the Polish people were unified in their opposition to Soviet Russia. This was true of all classes of the population. It must be remarked in this respect that in the former Russian territories the feeling of the threat of the Soviet Union was considerably stronger than in those parts of the country which had formerly belonged to Germany and Austria. The memory of the past and the experience of the Soviet attack in 1920 which was not stopped until the "miracle on the Weichsel" account for that. The industrial workers followed the line of the Social Democratic Party which looked to the west and not to Moscow. The country population and the bourgeoisie were strongly under the influence of the Catholic clergy who naturally saw great danger in the threat of Bolshevism. The Soviet Union might well have counted on the land-hungry agricultural workers of eastern Poland for support but, aside from the influence of the Clergy, the Russian Kolkhoz system frightened the Poles away, for what they wanted was land of their own. There is no reason to believe that there have been any considerable changes in this matter since 1930. On the contrary, the Russian march into the whole eastern part of Poland in 1939 and the popular vote instituted thereafter doubtless have considerably strengthened the anti-Soviet attitude of the major portion of the Polish population. If the National Socialist regime had created a sensible and moderate occupation government in the so-called Generalgouvernement, Germany would without a doubt have been able to capitalize on the situation.

P/W does not know to what extent Soviet propaganda and the promises of the Lublin liberation committee may have changed the situation described above. It can be assumed that the promise of a radical agrarian reform will find sympathetic ears among the rural population and that the industrial workers particularly in Upper Silesia will show themselves much more favorable than formerly to the influence of Moscow in view of the present prestige and dominating might of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe.

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Therefore, it can be expected that the unified dislike of Russia among the Polish people will begin to crumble. The advance of the western borders of Poland to the Oder and the Neisse will give the new Poland more territory - at German expense - than the chauvinistic Polish Nationalists ever dreamed of. For the present, however, it is very doubtful whether that will remove the opposition to Moscow by nationalist circles of the Polish bourgeoisie and other parts of the Polish population.

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