

1994**Excerpts from the Memoirs of Wladyslaw Gomulka
Concerning the Polish Communist Leader's Meetings
with Stalin in 1944-1945****Citation:**

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Summary:

Gomulka describes the meeting of the KRN delegation with Stalin in 1944. He describes his personal meetings with Stalin in 1944-45, summarizing Stalin's views on agriculture, collectivization, Poland's international relations, and the communist Party in Poland.

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A turnaround in Moscow's position toward the Homeland National Council (KRN)

The arrival of the KRN delegation in Moscow had entailed many important political consequences and changes in the existing up to now state of affairs involving the above mentioned issues. In the first place, one ought to mention a positive attitude of the highest Soviet authorities both to the creation of the Homeland National Council, and to setting up by it provisional executive bodies in the country at the appropriate moment. This was reflected in a reception given for the KRN delegation by Stalin at the Kremlin, in the presence of Molotov and other party and state leaders of the USSR. Stalin held a preliminary conversation with the delegation on May 19 [1944], and on May 22 the second essential conversation was held in the Kremlin, during which the delegation briefed the top representatives of the USSR with the premises and activities of the KRN and presented the question of weapons delivery for the People's Army (AL). The course of those talks indicated that up to the delegation's arrival in Moscow Stalin either had not known at all about the setting up in Poland of the KRN,^[1] or had received on this matter very imprecise and superficial information.

One can be sure that in those days the KRN became for Stalin a gift from heaven. As only a few weeks earlier he had asked Roosevelt to give permission for a trip to the Soviet

Union for American citizens of Polish origin, prof. Oskar Lange and rev. Stanisław Orlemański, whom Moscow intended to include into a Polish National Committee or a Provisional Government as non-communist raisins in those executive bodies being created at the time and scheduled to take power in the country. Stalin understood very well how greatly unpopular in the world public opinion and in the Polish society must be a Polish government consisting exclusively of ZPP activists residing in the Soviet Union and hiding under this facade members of the CBKP.^[2] To mitigate that unpopularity, he attempted to introduce into such government the Poles residing in the West.

On the other hand, Wasilewska was instructed to search for candidates to this government in the country. As she didn't have any information on the activities of the PPR, she recommended to the proper Soviet bodies the peasant leader Kazimierz Bagiński as a proper candidate to a Polish government, which was to be set up in Moscow. Dimitrov turned to us with a request to induce Bagiński to depart for the USSR, not knowing that Bagiński was ill-disposed not only towards the PPR, but also towards the US SR, and besides he held a leading position in the central apparatus of the Delegatura.^[3] No wonder, he ridiculed the proposed trip to the USSR submitted to him, from my inspiration, by peasant leader Stanisław Bańczyk.

When the KRN delegation found itself in Moscow all those political troubles, connected with the creation by the ZPP a Provisional Polish Government in Moscow suddenly disappeared for Stalin and other Soviet leaders. That is why Stalin in a conversation with our delegation, held on May 22, acknowledged with satisfaction its statement that this homeland representation center should play a decisive role in the future in solving the question of setting up provisional executive bodies in the country and that the ZPP as a Polish emigre center should subordinate itself to the Homeland National Council. [...]^[4]

Consistent with the instructions received in Warsaw, the KRN delegation in the course of further talks declared that it wanted to return back to the country as soon as possible. This intention could not, of course, suit Stalin. Right after the arrival of the KRN delegation in Moscow he noticed in it a perfect political instrument, which he decided to use in his battle with the western allies for a victorious - from the point of view of the USSR's interests - solution to the Polish question. By then the KRN had

been already acting in the country for almost five months. The Soviet competent circles, including Dimitrov as a representative of VKP(b), had nothing to do with its creation, preparation of its ideological declaration, mapping out its objectives for today and tomorrow. The KRN's policy was fully consistent with the position that the Soviet government took on the Polish question. Regardless of the extent of KRN's influence in the society, it constituted an authentic homeland center. In a word, it was not a Soviet creature, a "Moscow's agency". And for Stalin this was most important.

Therefore, he not only advised the delegation not to return to Poland, but at the same time he thought it necessary for the whole party leadership center and KRN to relocate to the Soviet Union, to the areas liberated from the Germans, from which it could direct activities in the homeland through the remaining there comrades, constituting there a supplementary center. These suggestions the delegation promised to pass on to the country by radio codes. At the same time it didn't agree to remain in Moscow and consistent with Stalin's suggestion decided to request the PPR and KRN leadership to expand its composition by representatives of the radical wing of SL "Wola Ludu" ("People's Will") and representatives of the Supreme Command of the People's Army.

In those conversations participated also chairwoman of the Main Board of ZPP W. Wasilewska, who proposed that the KRN delegation visits Polish military units in the USSR. Stalin very warmly supported this proposal, saying: "The Homeland National Council doesn't have an army, and the Polish Army doesn't have a government." The delegation renewed further talks with Stalin 22 June 1944, visiting in the meantime the units of the Polish Military.

Prior to the first meeting of the delegation with Stalin, M. Spychalski, acting as a plenipotentiary of the CC PPR, had held talks with CBKP members. It is only then that he learned about its existence, and likewise the CBKP, the ZPP leadership and the command of the Polish Army in the USSR learned about the situation in the country, about activities of the PPR and KRN, about armed struggle with the occupant, [...]

However, change was coming slowly and with evident resistance before the CBKP and the ZPP leadership, acting under distinct pressure from Stalin, decided to recognize - at least formally - the primacy of the homeland, to give up on its independence from the CC PPR and KRN.

The first step along this road was a communique placed in the ZPP's paper "Wolna Polska" ("Free Poland") of 23 May 1944 about the arrival in Moscow of the KRN delegation and its reception by Stalin. In that communique the ZPP leadership stated that it was recognizing the Homeland National Council as a leadership center of struggle for the liberation of Poland. But nothing more. The question of supremacy over the Polish Army in the USSR was omitted with total silence, as well as the relationship between the ZPP and the KRN.

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A visit to Stalin
(August 1944)

In this period, when we made this decision, I had already had my first get-together visit with Stalin. In fact I paid it not on my own initiative, but actually fulfilling the will of the remaining members of the Politburo. After my arrival to Lublin, I had had such a multitude of work that it didn't occur to me to present myself to Stalin. This matter propped up at a Politburo meeting, at which Bierut was reporting on the above mentioned Moscow talks with Stalin and Mikołajczyk in the first decade of August. It was then that some member of the Politburo made a remark addressed to me: "It's

high time to present yourself to Stalin". Initially I reacted rather clumsily, asking: "What for," and I heard, "What do you mean what for? - don't you understand that the secretary general of the CC PPR should in this capacity pay a courtesy visit to Stalin?" To all members of the Politburo this was such a natural matter as it is for strong believers to go to church to take part in some religious ceremony. Thus, I shared the point of view of my comrades, expressing consent for this ritual of reporting to Stalin, to let him know me personally.

All formalities connected with my departure for Moscow had been arranged with the assistance of Nikolai Bulganin^[5] In the second decade of August I departed from Lublin by special plane. For me it wasn't a small experience, as it was the first air travel in my life. I withstood it very well, without any nausea or dizziness. I was observing with great interest through a round window of the plane everything what was visible on the flight's route. We landed at an airfield, which had been inoperative already for many years, almost in the center of today's Moscow. From there we drove by car to the center of the city together with awaiting for me representatives of the CPSU Central Committee, where I was located in some apartment, serving as a party hotel. It was about noon time. As my guide said, a car from the Kremlin was to be expected soon to pick me up.

I continually had a pervasive thought of what I am going to talk about with Stalin. Is he going to seek specific information on the activities of the party and PKWN - what I thought was rather doubtful - or is he just going to get acquainted with me? In case of need I put into my briefcase in Lublin various materials, which might be helpful in my talks. At the same time I also thought up the second alternative that is narrowing down my meeting to a brief visit. At that time I didn't know his customs, his norms or methods of work, I wasn't aware that he was starting substantial talks with representatives of other parties only from 10.00 p.m. and his official functions start from 2.00 p.m. I was made aware of this only by later practice.

At about 2.00 p.m. came to my place an NKVD officer, probably in the rank of a major and having been assured of my identity, he asked me to follow him to a black limousine awaiting in front of the building, whose windows were covered with curtains. I took the back seat, while my guide - the officer - took the front seat besides the driver, who was also uniformed. Soon the car pulled to a stop in front of the entrance gate to the Kremlin, guarded from both sides by NKVD guards. Beyond the watch-tower on the left side of the gate there was a wicket for pedestrians. An NKVD officer came out from the watch-tower, opened the gate in half and came up to the car. The officer sitting in the car handed him through lowered window an ID or an entrance pass. At the same time from the watch-tower on the other side also came out an officer and stood in front of the still closed second half of gate. In the course of controlling the pass the first officer just gave me a look, then turned back to the officer in the car, pulled back from the door and saluted. At this moment the officer standing in front of the closed half of the gate opened it wide and the car drove in to the Kremlin compound.

Later on this procedure kept repeating itself with this addition that when a delegation would be coming to Stalin in the evening hours - what was a steady rule - the controlled car would be under a stream of glaring lights from reflectors fastened at the gate. The premises where Stalin's cabinet was located was several hundred meters away. After my arrival on the spot, my officer-guide passed me over to the hands of guards on the main floor. Right beside there was an elevator. One of the officers from that sentry got into the elevator with me, put it in motion, and stopped on second floor. We went out into the corridor leading to a sizable room serving as a cloak-room. There I left my hat. From the cloak-room there was leading again a long corridor bending at straight angle, along which the officer stepping ahead of me led me to a large room occupied by Stalin's security guards, adjacent directly to his cabinet.

Several NKVD officers were there on guard. One of them, very short, of rather misshapen look, with a rank of colonel, later on promoted to general, as far as I recall, by the name of Poskrebishev (Stalin in irritation called him "mezhavetz" ("scoundrel"), was a commander.^[6] He knew, of course, that I was going to be received by Stalin. That is why as soon as I came in he greeted me and seeing that I am holding a leather brief-case, he ordered me to leave it at his desk. To my remark that I have in it documents that may be of some use in my talk with Stalin, he said I could take them out from the brief-case and take them with me, but I am not supposed to enter to Stalin with the brief-case. Not knowing what documents I might need, I gave up on them totally and left the brief-case in the room. Poskrebishev seized me with his look from top to bottom as if to check if my pockets don't look suspicious, then leaving me at his desk disappeared beyond the door of Stalin's cabinet. He returned after a while and leaving the door open said to me: "Tovarish Stalin priglashayet Vas" ("Comrade Stalin asks you in").

From the door to Stalin's desk was about 2-3 steps. Coming beyond the door, which Poskrebishev had closed after me, I noticed that from the depth of a long room toward the desk situated at its end, is coming by slow steps towards me, staggering slightly, a rather short man of stocky construction, dressed in military grey tunic, buttoned up to neck and military trousers of the same color with stripes. This was Stalin. We met almost exactly in the middle of the room, which was of rectangular shape of approximately 10 meters wide and 20 meters long. On the left side stood a long, massive, rectangular table, covered with green cloth and at it a row of chairs on both sides. During bilateral meetings the chairs from the wall were taken by representatives of the USSR, and on the opposite side were situated their partners. Stalin's chair stood separately at the head of the table. There were no furniture on the left side of the room, but it had several large windows overlooking the city.

As I have already said, at the rear wall of the room from the windows there was Stalin's desk, and behind it an arm-chair. Right beyond the desk on the same wall there was a door leading to other premises, unknown to me. On the left wall, right beyond Stalin's chair, there was also a door, leading to a labyrinth of corridors. One of them led to a small cinema hall with about fifteen seats. The screen was of normal, large size. There were also tables with bottles of water and glasses. Stalin was a great lover of films. He had admired the picture "Peter the Great", and liked very much his harsh judgement of his own son. If after talks Stalin suggested to us to jointly view some picture, it meant that he didn't intend to invite us for supper.

I am not sure what was reflected in my face when I was approaching Stalin, reaching out with my hand to greet him. I was made aware that I was greeting a great man of the world scale, and that it was on him primarily that the fate of Poland depended. However, I didn't know what he was going to talk about with me. That thought was still piercing in my mind. I was trying to give my face a cheerful, normal look, what - as I know - I am never able to do in moments of excitement or uncertainty.

"Zdrastvuytie tovarishch Stalin" ("Nice to meet you, Comrade Stalin") - I said keeping his hand. I never called him "Yosif Vissarionovich", like I never called any Soviet interlocutor by his name and the name of his father. Without waiting for his response I continued saying that I asked him to be received, as I wanted to be introduced to him and let him know me personally, adding that I had already seen him at close distance. With interest he asked me where and when. I explained that it had been in 1934 at a Moscow metro station, which he had visited a day prior to its opening and public use. At the same time a group of Polish communists studying at the Leninist school at Kraskov, near Moscow, was also visiting the metro. At one of the underground stations we had been disembarked and in a little while the train pulled up to a stop and Stalin, accompanied by many uniformed people got off. For us at that time it was a great moment.

He listened with interest this story and then asked when had I departed from the

Soviet Union and what had been going on with me later. I summed up my response in a few sentences, including my work during the occupation period and on this occasion I clarified the reasons why, despite the calls that we had received within the last few months from Moscow, the party leadership was unable to depart from Poland.

The conversation was going on in a standing position, without taking seats at the table. Stalin didn't invite me to do it. Thus, I realized that by giving consent to this meeting, he just wanted to meet me personally and didn't intend to discuss with me any particular matters. Towards the end I told him briefly about our difficulties and about the lack of experience of our party in building a new Polish statehood. He didn't pick up this topic, though, limiting himself to the statement: "Don't worry; you can always count on our assistance in overcoming your difficulties."

I thanked him for this very warmly, and after bidding him good-bye I left his cabinet. He must have known that I could communicate with him in Russian, as he didn't call in an interpreter. The conversation lasted between fifteen and twenty minutes, and Stalin limited himself to asking questions, leaving the rest of time for my answers.

After my return to the apartment, I learned from a CC CPSU representative, who was taking care of me, that Dimitrov was inviting me for a talk. I accepted it without enthusiasm, what I didn't even hide, but I agreed to go to his apartment. Dimitrov was behaving stiffly, as if he had swallowed a stick. Apparently he still had not come out of his role as a leader of the Comintern. He was relating to me as a superior. He was interested in justifying Kasman's activities in the Lublin area during the occupation. On other pages of these memoirs I am talking about this activity quite extensively. When I told Dimitrov that the leadership of our party evaluates negatively those activities of Kasman, he made me a declaration more or less like this: "Everything that Kasman did, good or bad, he was doing it on our instruction and we are responsible for it." The word "we" meant the CPSU. To my remark that the leadership of our party had been calling on Moscow many times with criticism of Kasman's activities and demanded his subordination to the PPR and the AL command of the Lublin region, Dimitrov justified the negative position of Moscow by saying that at that time Moscow had not had full and truthful orientation of the situation in the PPR and AL. Seeing that I don't trust it and am referring to a declaration of the KRN, which had explained to Moscow the attitude of the PPR leadership to Kasman and his group, Dimitrov renewed his statement, appealing to me as secretary general of the CC PPR not to draw any consequences toward Kasman by our party's leadership. So, I told him that the leadership of our party has no intention to deliberate over the Kasman's case and will leave him in peace. He was very glad to hear it. At farewell he was trying to be very kind and warm. I have fully kept my promise that I made to him.

My next meetings with Stalin had a different, collective character. I didn't go to him alone. As secretary general of the CC PPR I was always heading party delegations. Included in them were members of the Politburo, almost always Bierut and Mine, and later on occasionally also Berman. During the PKWN period we would sometime include W. Wasilewska, who was formally deputy to PKWN chairman Osóbka-Morawski. None of the meetings with Stalin, held on a party platform, were publicly announced. On the other hand, all official governmental or state visits to the Soviet Union, which usually had been received at the Kremlin by Stalin, were reflected in the public media. During the period of PKWN's activities I had never been included into such delegation. They were always headed by Bierut. Later on in sporadic cases I would be heading multi-party delegations being received by Stalin, what also was not made public, or I would be included formally in state delegations, which were officially received by Stalin and in such cases this was made public.

The question of oath, which I have mentioned above, was probably presented at the first meeting of our party's delegation with Stalin, which took place still before the liberation of Praga, which means more or less in the beginning of September 1944. In that meeting from our side took part, besides me, Bierut and Mine, while Stalin was

accompanied by Molotov and Mikoyan, and maybe also Beria. The above mentioned almost always participated in our talks with Stalin, sometimes there was also Malenkov and occasionally also Khrushchev. Other members of the CPSU leadership had been appearing very seldom at suppers at Stalin's villa near Moscow, given in our honor after completion of talks in the Kremlin. I don't recall precisely what the subject of our talks was with Stalin at that particular meeting. From that period I don't have any notes. I remember, though, very well particular, the most important questions that we had been putting then before Stalin, though I am unable to recall either the exact dates of those meetings, or to pinpoint which of those topics were discussed at that particular meeting. Besides, some of them had been discussed a number of times, they didn't recede from the agenda of our meetings. To such topics belongs the question of "war trophies", of which I will talk later on.

From among the questions discussed at that meeting two seem to me indisputable. They relate to an agreement concluded between the PKWN and the governments of the Ukrainian and Belorussian Soviet Republics on mutual repatriation of population, and a memorandum of the emigre government of Mikolajczyk of 29 August 1944, addressed to the USSR government, stating the terms of forming a provisional government in Poland. These questions have been sufficiently described in various historical publications, so I cannot add to it anything new. I will just mention that the Mikolajczyk's memorandum the Soviet government had passed on to the PKWN, what the TASS agency made public. This memorandum the emigre government narrowed down to Mikolajczyk's proposals, which had already been rejected in Moscow during talks held in the first decade of August 1944. So, our delegation agreed with Stalin that the PKWN would leave them without response.

After exhausting the issues on the agenda, Stalin, as usual, turned to us with a question: "Eto vsyo?" ("Is it all?"). I responded that we ask him to take position on one more matter, namely on two versions of an oath, which soldiers mobilized to the Polish Army are to take. I put before him two separate typed texts of the oath. Stalin, having read the first and second text, looking at me said: "Tshto za vopros?" ("what a problem?"), and pushing toward me my draft said: "Etot nuzhno prinyat" ("this should be adopted"), then he got up from the table, inviting us for supper to his place.

In this way Stalin settled a dispute between myself and the remaining members of the Politburo, probably not being even aware that such dispute had taken place. He must have been fully aware that introduction of the Soviet Union and the Red Army to the text of the oath taken by soldiers mobilized to the Polish Army would be a political mistake; it would narrow our socio-political base.[\[7\]](#)

Stalin and agricultural reform. The October turnaround

It wasn't always so that Stalin took the right position on Polish affairs that he showed sufficient understanding of the situation resulting from the existing configuration of political forces in Poland. And it should be emphasized that he was the chief constructor of our party's general line, he had shaped the socio-political image of People's Poland, decided on the incorporation into her new borders the western territories up to the Oder-Neisse line and the northern territories on the Baltic. Unquestionably, it resulted from his long-term political calculation, dictated by vital interests of the Soviet Union. However, it should be remembered that due to this and the PPR's policy of friendship and Polish-Soviet alliance, conducted from its very foundation, Poland sentenced to death by Hitlerite Germany has been able to take advantage the only chance in its history of such favorable configuration of her borders and ensuring her security. And independently of how great claims and charges we, the Poles, and we Polish communists may have against Stalin, nothing

can change (...) his personal and decisive contribution, which he had done for Poland in drawing her borders in the Potsdam Agreement. The Polish people in its historical development could not make a bigger mistake if it did not take this fact into consideration, and deleted it from its memory.

[.....]

September-October 1944

Stalin came to the conclusion that legalistic forms of our activity and leaving the former owners of estates in their places of residence, constitute the main source of political disorientation among the peasants, their disbelief in the stability of the state power and sociopolitical relations built by the PKWN and their mistrust to our party's policies, and that is why he decided to change the hitherto existing legalistic course of our party in the implementation of the decree on agricultural reform into a revolutionary one. As a way of accomplishing this change, he used the already described "conversation" with Bierut, which he had conducted with the participation of Molotov in his home near Moscow towards the end of a planned in advance libation, lasting the whole night.

On the basis of various publications it's not difficult to fix the date of this event. Thus, on 28 September 1944 a KRN and PKWN delegation arrived in Moscow, composed of: B. Bierut, E. Osóbka-Morawski, general M. Rola-Żymierski, A. Witos and W. Rzymowski, to conduct talks with representatives of the USSR government on

economic questions, and particularly on providing us assistance in the reconstruction of our country. This matter has already been discussed in various publications, so I am not going to deal with it here. On the following day, September 29th in the evening Stalin gave a supper in his home, inviting to it only Bierut, Osóbka and Żymierski. From the Soviet side there were, besides Stalin: Molotov, Mikoyan, Beria, and probably also Malenkov. Just towards the end of this supper, when its participants, after drinking champagne from ram horns, stood up from the table and dispersed into three groups to different banquet halls, Stalin and Molotov held with Bierut that "rughatelney rozgavor" ("scolding talk"), whose content Bierut was reporting to us upon his return to Lublin. The brutal scolding of Bierut for the methods of implementation of agricultural reform and for attitude toward the expropriated landowners was really directed at the whole party leadership. Thus, we had to make a sudden turnaround in the party's and PKWN's activities in this area. For understandable reasons the true causes of that turnaround could not be revealed. They were known only to a narrow circle from the central leadership of the party.

Already on the following day Bierut transmitted to Lublin the news on the critical attitude of the VKPB(b) leadership to the position held up to now by our party in the realization of the decree on agricultural reform, essentially not departing from the course adopted by the head of the agricultural department of PKWN A. Witos and forces supporting him in the Peasant Party. The new policy line was defined in a proclamation by the CC PPR issued on 3 October, addressed to workers and peasants under a combative slogan: "Down with the landlords' attempts to sabotage and hinder the reform", [...].[\[8\]](#)

The cited proclamation of the leadership of our party, sharply criticizing, with a mixture of demagoguery, the attitude of peasant leaders, including A. Witos, on the question of agricultural reform, was clearly in contradiction with the spirit and letter of the July Manifesto of PKWN, it constituted a glaring example of breaking up with the policy of democratic national front, proclaimed by our party at the creation of KRN, which at that time had been judged by the CBKP in the USSR as being sectarian. In October 1944, when our party, indeed, started to stray toward the sectarian path, attacking its peasant-allies for their views on agricultural reform, all members of the party leadership who had come from the Soviet Union embraced that policy right away, without the slightest hesitation. They were convinced of its rightfulness by Bierut's report on his visit with Stalin. Personally I had doubts if that new political course was right. Bierut was also aware of it, what prompted him to submit that report. In this situation I could not help but join the position of all remaining members of the Politburo.

In the beginning of October, Bierut, after his return from Moscow, sent a letter on behalf of the KRN Presidium to the chairman of PKWN Osóbka-Morawski requesting the dismissal of A. Witos from his position as head of the agricultural department and also as deputy chairman of PKWN. This demand was justified by a charge that he had been diminishing the role of social organs in implementing agricultural reform and had introduced enemies of the reform to agricultural offices as well as to positions of administrators of the post-landlords' estates. On October 8, A. Witos resigned from his position in the PKWN allegedly for health reasons - as was publicly announced. The position of the PKWN agricultural department was taken over by Osóbka-Morawski, and his deputies became: Stanislaw Bieniek from the PPR and Edward Bertold from the SL.

The dismissal of Witos from the PKWN and criticism of the right wing in the Peasant Party caused a grave political crisis in that party. Together with Witos from the SL leadership departed also Stanislaw Kotek-Agroszewski, who, on November 20, also lost the position of the department of public administration in the PKWN. Their other followers were also removed from their leadership positions. New people took over their places. According to a resolution adopted by the main council of SL on its meeting of November 22 and 23, Stanislaw Janusz from the Rzeszów Voivodship,

formerly a deputy from the SL "Piast" became a new president of the main council, and Jan Michal Grubecki (participant from the battle of Stalingrad, before the war rather closer to the nationalists than the peasants) became his deputy. The position of secretary was taken by Józef Ozga-Michalski, an authentic peasant leader from the Kielce region, cooperating with our party and with the AL during the occupation.

[.....]

Collectivization - A Demokleses' sword over the PPR

A ghost of collectivization as a weapon of struggle with our party and the people's power was used by the London underground not only in the PKWN period, but also later, after the creation of the Provisional Government and continuation of agricultural reform across the whole territory of Poland. To some degree this propaganda was aided by various intra-party leaks related to the role of the Union of Peasant Self-assistance and other agricultural organizations, and particularly pronouncements of some members of our party originating from the KPP (Communist Party of Poland) on the collectivization of agriculture in our country. Though at that time the PPR leadership was deprecating the idea of collectivization, I was personally fighting collectivization designs, appearing here and there in different forms. Nevertheless, nobody could come up against a doctrinal principle of collectivization, which sooner or later - according to the Marxist-Leninist theory - had to come.

That Demokleses' sword, in the form of kolkhozes, was always hanging over our party, but nobody could foresee when the supporting it horse hair will tear off and the sword will fall on our heads. That, in turn, depended mainly on Stalin. Wanting to learn whether this danger was close or distant, I had agreed on the Politburo that I would raise this question at the nearest meeting of our delegation with Stalin.

From Stalin's pronouncement at that meeting I prepared then an extensive note. It appears from its content that this meeting was held prior to the manifestation of the population of Warsaw on April 3, 1945, on the occasion of liberation of Gdańsk, but after submission of a statement by the Provisional Government to the governments of the USSR, USA, Great Britain and China on the admission of Poland to the United Nations Conference in San Francisco. Because in my hand-written note there is no date, so, the above mentioned circumstances indicate that this meeting with Stalin took place toward the end of March 1945.

At that meeting I put before Stalin, on behalf of our delegation (Gomulka, Bierut, Mine), several questions with a request to give us his position. To begin with, I informed him about the symptoms of sectarianism in practical activities of the KPP part of our party's activists, as evident in attempts to impose on the PPS and Peasant Party organizations our position in various matters and against this background I raised the question of collectivization of individual farms in Poland. I am going to give Stalin's response on these matters below, based on my reporting note.

Besides the above questions I presented and substantiated to Stalin my critical opinion regarding the arrest in Warsaw on March 27, 1945, of sixteen representatives of the London underground with general Okulicki at the head ("Niedźwiadek" - AK commander and commander of an illegal organization "Nie") and J. St. Jankowski (vice premier of the émigré government) by the NKVD, by the order of general Ivanov (Serov). In this connection I demanded that general Serov be recalled from Poland. Stalin's reaction regarding this matter, according to my records, I will present later.

I raised also several other questions, among others, the question of nationalization and Stalin, on the other hand, informed us about his conversation with Churchill on

the formation of a Polish government and explained the position of the Soviet government on the reconstruction of the Provisional Government. I will later discuss also these topics, based on my notes.

Below I am giving Stalin's pronouncement, relating to the first group of questions, according to my notes.

If you want to liberate yourself from sectarianism, you are right. There should be differences of opinion within the coalition. In a coalition it's hard to avoid some freedom for coalition parties. There should be a general basis on which a coalition rests: a democratic Poland, recognition of the provisional government, and renouncement of the London émigré government - these are the main rules of coalition cooperation. On other issues there may be differences among the coalition parties. There also should be no renouncement from an alliance with England and America - the people would not understand that.

There should be a clear declaration against collectivization, collectivization should be excluded. In our country collectivization was possible and timely only after twelve years of Soviet power. Collectivization of peasant farms in your country is a pure fantasy. As far as tractors are concerned, their supply to the villages mean assistance to the peasants and that is how one should explain it to them, and the state is providing this assistance for a fee. [talk was here of tractors being at the disposal of the Union of Peasant Self-assistance, whose one of the tasks was to assist in the reconstruction of agriculture through the application of modern machinery in individual agriculture for a full fee - remark by W.G.].

You do not push yourself directly to leading the Peasant Party. This is not how the leading role of the party should be understood. You have more influence among the peasants than you yourself think. You are under the influence of various gossips, whispering propaganda, and you are not able to propagate your assets, you are not able to show them to the masses and openly explain your position. If you remain silent, others will speak for you. Your propaganda is stereotype. You are doing everything according to a "mark-and-cover" formula, while you should be doing it openly. The Peasant Party should be given some latitude. Perhaps it might be proper to create a different, more flexible platform of cooperation. Let the government officially help the Peasant Party, not your party. As for the fact that the peasants are joining the workers' party, there is nothing wrong with it. Let them come.

You want to have everything ideally, to have a peasant sold out to you with soul and body. What you have already achieved with the peasant masses through agricultural reform is quite a lot. That a peasant is giving his contingent reluctantly is understandable. A peasant wants to take, he doesn't want to give. We had forced them to give contingents. It's necessary to treat contingents as a tax in nature. Then you pay only for transportation and related work, not for grain. Now when the peasant sees that we are giving him seeds, tractors, fertilizers, he has got used to it and reconciled himself with contingents. Maybe that it will be necessary to increase contingent prices a little. A peasant is greedy and you would want him to kiss you. It will take years before a peasant is convinced that there is no combination in the fact that you gave him the land. If there is anyone who lives well in a war time it is the peasants. A worker is naked like falcon. You should not be worried that the peasants are dissatisfied I have no doubt that the peasant in his heart is thankful to you. And in a year time it will be even better, when he is convinced that the land is not being taken away from him.

Give more freedom to the Peasant Party, or otherwise it will become a claqueur, not a party. The peasants, who up to now have been acting illegally, may now come to you, that is to the Peasant Party and become members not only individually, but also in groups, on the condition that they recognize the provisional government and its

political platform. Opposition on certain issues doesn't exclude loyalty, but the opposition cannot transfer the government into a (discussion) club. We are still talking about a new Peasant Party. Stop thinking about the old Peasant Party. However, you cannot allow to emerge for such people who would want to do so just to break your neck. You would be suicidal if you would permit such people to be active. In your country the situation is better than in France or Belgium. You are getting up on your feet faster.

[.....]

October 1944

On October 9, 1944, British Prime Minister Churchill and minister of foreign affairs Eden arrived in Moscow to conduct talks with Stalin and Molotov, including talks on Poland. As Stalin later informed our delegation, the initiative for this meeting had come from Churchill after his long talks with Roosevelt held at a conference in Quebec regarding the war plans of Great Britain and the U.S. Stalin had, indeed, expressed agreement for Churchill's arrival to Moscow, and already the following day, i.e. 10 October, held with him a preliminary talk in the Kremlin. During that conversation Churchill suggested to call on Mikolajczyk, Romer, and Grabski to arrive immediately to Moscow to hold with them further talks on recognition by the emigre government of the Curzon line as a Polish-Soviet border and to reach an understanding between that government and the PKWN, whose representatives had also arrived in Moscow for this purpose.

Stalin approved Churchill's proposal.

There is no doubt that prior to his departure for Moscow Churchill had agreed upon his proposal with Mikolajczyk, who, together with accompanying members of his delegation, arrived in Moscow on October 12. The PKWN delegation, invited by Stalin and composed of

B. Bierut, E. Os6bka-Morawski and M. Rola-Żymierski arrived in Moscow on October 11th.

[...][\[9\]](#)

According to Bierut's report on his talks in Moscow, submitted at the Politburo's meeting, Stalin - after the conference at the Kremlin with the participation of Mikolajczyk and after a briefing on his talks with the PKWN delegation - had formed for himself a decidedly negative opinion of Mikolajczyk and about the feasibility of reaching an understanding between him and his group and the PKWN on setting up a provisional Polish government. He informed Bierut, that, admittedly, in his talks with Churchill he had not told him this openly, but had recognized his proposal to have in the future Polish government an equal share of PKWN and London emigres with Mikolajczyk having a position of premier as baseless. The PKWN - as Stalin said - has already behind it a great record, significant achievements in all areas of life, while the emigre government and its branches in the country are pursuing sabotage, fighting the PKWN with all methods available, including murders. In those words he had made Churchill understand that in this way the Mikolajczyk group had closed for itself the possibility of introducing its representatives to the future provisional government.

"To admit the London emigres to participate in exercising power in Poland - Stalin told Bierut - might have had sense during the August talks with Mikolajczyk in Moscow on the conditions of recognizing by them the Curzon line and adoption of the PKWN political platform, what would have contributed to the expansion of its base in the society. Since at that time Mikolajczyk had rejected all of this and up to this day holds unfriendly position toward the USSR and doesn't want to recognize the PKWN - you don't need him. Now we have invited him to Moscow on Churchill's clear wish. He and Roosevelt would like, with Mikolajczyk's assistance, to turn back Poland from the road, on which the PKWN had introduced her, they would like to install in Poland a

government of London emigres, who would be at their disposal. We cannot allow this to happen; we will not yield to their pressure.

The position taken currently at conferences and meetings with Mikolajczyk's participation, dedicated to the Polish question is facilitating us to come to the next stage of building and strengthening state power in Poland. Time is becoming ripe to transform the PKWN into a provisional government. The Mikolajczyk group has rejected not only the Curzon line, but also its participation in that government, as proposed, and thus it has put itself beyond its framework. Thus, you will form a provisional government without the participation of the London emigres. You don't need to be concerned about them at all; you don't need to even talk about it during the preceding preparatory propaganda action, motivating the need to form a provisional government on the basis of PKWN. Now you should begin internal preparatory works, come to an understanding with the leadership of the remaining allied parties, and within the next few weeks take up this matter publicly. The ultimate date of forming a provisional government by the KRN we will set jointly a little later."

Perhaps I may have interspersed into the above account of Bierut, reconstructed by me from memory, Stalin's pronouncements from his other talks, conducted later and related to the formation of the provisional government. After all, there had been several such talks, also with a party delegation under my leadership. But I am certainly not mistaken that the basic decision on replacing the PKWN by the provisional government was taken as a result negative results of the October talks conducted with the Mikolajczyk group in Moscow.

[.....]

October 1 944

Probably at the same meeting, at which the decision was made to locate the Provisional Government in Warsaw after its liberation, we also approved Stalin's recommendation to have Boleslaw Bierut, after his appointment by the Homeland National Council to the position of president, make a public statement to the effect that, desiring to fulfill his duties to the best of his ability as the highest representative of the state and Polish people - he gives up his membership in the Polish Workers' Party and during the period of holding this function he will consider himself as a non-party man.[\[10\]](#)

(As is known, the Homeland National Council had adopted the Constitution of the Polish Republic of March 17, 1921 as a legal basis of its activity and, according to its provisions, in setting up the Provisional Government used its terminology: "The Republic of Poland").

Of course, Bierut's declaration on leaving the PPR was of a simulating nature. The non-partisanship of the president was designed first of all to strengthen the new state authorities, expand their base in the society, develop a national front, fighting the enemies' propaganda about a monopoly of power of the PPR. Also from the point of view of the image of political representation of liberated Poland toward the western allies a "non-partisan" president had for us positive values. These premises had decided about our approval of Stalin's suggestion on this matter.

Bierut, of course, had remained a member of the PPR Politburo. His official "non-partisanship" demanded that we organize Politburo meetings outside of the Central Committee headquarters, most often in the official residency of Bierut, which from May 1945 became the Belveder. Systematic visits by the president to the party headquarters would have been in collision with his "non-partisanship", while inviting

Politburo members to his headquarters for joint meetings was within his competence. This had lasted till Bierut took over as I secretary of the CC PPR in 1 948. Even then it didn't happen without a farce, as several members of the Politburo wrote him a letter in that form requesting him to be included again to the party work.

[.....]

September-October 1 944

Shortly after the announcement of the KRN decree on agricultural reform in Poland, Bierut together with Osóbka-Morawski and Rola-Zymierski met in Moscow with Stalin and other leaders of the CPSU and the Soviet Union. This was an official state visit, but I don't recall if it was made public. In those days even official Polish visits to the USSR were not always made public. According to Stalin's custom, after the completion of official talks, lasting usually from 8 p.m. to midnight, Bierut and accompanying him members of the delegation were invited to Stalin's private residence near Moscow. Besides Stalin there were also Molotov, Beria and Mikoyan, and maybe someone else from the CPSU leadership. Such receptions were usually an occasion for a drinking-bout and always lasted till about 6 a.m. in the morning. The reception of which I am talking here had an unusual, exceptional character. I am relating it according to a report submitted by Bierut at a PPR Politburo meeting in Lublin right after his return from Moscow.

After several hours of partying, alternated with heavy drinking, when all participants, and particularly the Polish guests got buzzing heads, Stalin proposed to drink now in a Georgian style. Mikoyan, who usually on such occasions served as a butler, called "tamada", pulled out from the dresser large sheep horns, distributed them among those present, filled in with wine and everybody had to empty it to the bottom. This act was preceded by a toast for Stalin's health, raised by someone from the participants.

After that drinking-bout, Stalin and Molotov rose up from the table, took Bierut under arms and walked together to another place in a large hall, where the reception was held. Following in their steps, other participants also dispersed in smaller Polish-Soviet groups and held lively disputes in the opposite comers of the room. Apparently Stalin still before the supper must have given a notice to his Soviet comrades what they should do when he and Molotov would leave the table, taking Bierut along.

That conversation had a particular course. Stalin immediately changed his former jovial mood and attacked Bierut in a brutal manner, using vulgar language. As Bierut subsequently related at a Politburo meeting, Stalin had started his attack from the question: "What you, son of a bitch, are doing in Poland? What kind of a communist are you, you son of a bitch?" Bierut - as he was telling us - assumed that Stalin, having drunk, was playing with him this was, was simply joking. So he was receiving Stalin's invectives with a smile. It was Molotov who opened his eyes, turning on him, similarly like Stalin, with vulgar words: "You idiot, why are you smiling? It's not a joke, it's a serious matter."

Bierut, having realized that this is really not a joke, dispirited and frightened, started to defend himself, saying that he is lost, doesn't know what it's all about, what pretensions do they have to him, if they think he is not fulfilling his duties or don't have confidence in him, he is ready to step down from the position of chairman of the KRN, as well as to immediately leave his position as a member of the Politburo. That defense - as he was telling - angered even more Stalin and Molotov. New abuses had been pouring upon him, which he didn't specify. To his readiness to leave his positions they responded that had they had the intention to lead up to this, that whole conversation would have been redundant. Finally they clarified to him what it's

all about.

Stalin's and Molotov's attack on Bierut had not been caused by his personal delinquencies. Actually it was an attack against the whole leadership of the party, it was an expression of criticism of our political activity in the liberated portion of Poland, and particularly of our conduct toward the landlords, which, according to Stalin - as he also later assessed on different occasions - was liberal, a sort of "Tolstoy-type". The chose Bierut as a transmitter, who was to present their views and position to the whole PPR leadership. Chiding him with vulgarities, they were chiding, so to say in absence, the whole Politburo of our party.

Criticizing - through the person of Bierut - the policy of our party, Stalin was concerned particularly that having announced a decree on agricultural reform we should have immediately crushed the landlords, some of them send to prisons and the remaining ones relocate from their places of residence. "But you," he was charging Bierut, "have left them in their mansions and palaces, which they occupied before the reform." According to Stalin, this was supposed to evoke fears among the peasants, their mistrust in the stability of the people's power, which had announced the reform and left the landlords in peace. This was supposed to be the reason for a rather widely spread phenomenon that the peasants didn't want to take advantage of the reform, had been dragging their feet, or just had been refusing to accept the land apportioned to them.

Here I am putting aside this false reasoning of Stalin. Peasants' mistrust in agricultural reform had resulted not from their fears of the landlords, but an apprehension of collectivization of peasant holdings, an expression of their mistrust in the new people's power.

Surely, Bierut didn't tell at the Politburo all details of that conversation, didn't express fully what he had heard then from Stalin and Molotov. There were no witnesses to that conversation. But one should exclude the possibility that Bierut had overdrawn its course. He didn't have any purpose to distort its content in his disfavor. He could not conceal it before the Politburo, as it was meant to be an order to correct the party's policy, to sharpen its course toward our political enemies, toward the reactionary underground and the London camp and in this context an immediate expulsion of landlords together with their families from their recent estates. It was unthinkable with the then existing composition of the Politburo that Stalin's orders could have been questioned. Bierut, reporting on this matter, had for its justification an argument that could not be challenged - Stalin's position, who in addition had flared up at him and insulted him for an opportunistic policy of the party. Thus, the Politburo had adopted the proper decisions and the political course was sharpened.

In some historical publications, relating to that period, their authors didn't find an answer to the question: what was the reason for such sudden change of the party's policy? They were lost in different conjectures. Of course, none of them could have assumed that this sudden political turnaround had been the result of that "rugatelnovo rozgovora" ("scolding talk") of Stalin with Bierut.

[.....]

April | 1945

Starting from the beginning of 1945, the Politburo was sending to Stalin party delegations. There were many issues, which had been solved at that level before they were formally settled in an official manner by the government. There were also issues which were settled exclusively within the party leadership. Party delegations were usually composed of Bierut, Minc, and myself. It was a usual practice that I would be

reporting to Stalin on the most sensitive issues. The formal title was my party position, but actually there were a number of issues which nobody else would dare to present to Stalin. It wasn't a pleasant mission, but I never dodged my duties.

I filed a complaint against Serov against the above mentioned events, justifying it in the same spirit. I stated there is no way we can expand our political base if these kinds of events were to repeat themselves. Stalin very much detested listening to complaints regarding the military or NKVD bodies. In such cases he was always angry or agitated. However, he was fully in control of himself. This was also true in the case of Serov. He decided to defend him.

He said to us that the arrest of the RJN (Council of National Unity) and Okulicki by the Soviet forces was justified, as those arrested had acted to the detriment of the Red Army and the Soviet Union not only on the territory of Poland, but also on the Soviet territory. He had in mind the lands beyond the Bug River, which had been cut off from the Polish state. Wanting to justify unfairness of complaint against Serov he said that only the imperialist states are using methods of pressure against weaker states, whose governments had arrested their spies. They demand straight on the release of their spies, and in cases of resistance they threaten the weaker. The Soviet Union is not a weak state, it cannot be threatened and therefore the imperialists do not use such methods toward it. If you - said Stalin - arrest our citizen for a crime on your territory, the Soviet government will not intervene on his behalf. Judge him yourself.

This rule would indeed be praiseworthy if the Soviet Union used it in practice. There had been no cases of arresting Soviet citizens by Polish authorities (which doesn't mean that there were no reasons for such acts), so it's difficult to say how the Soviet government would have behaved in case of their arrest. An example of a note of the Soviet government to the Yugoslav government relating to Soviet citizens arrested in Yugoslavia for spying provides an eloquent response. In our country, I think in 1946, the security forces arrested in Lodz a certain individual who had a transmitting-receiving radio and was using it illegally. A Soviet advisor was intervening on his behalf immediately with minister Radkiewicz. It was necessary to release him. Thus, Stalin's words could not be verified in practice.

Stalin was ridiculing western press propaganda and its attacks on the Soviet government for the arrests made in Poland. "The western powers are not going to start war with us over Okulicki - he said - and we just wanted to help you." Despite that defense of Serov, he nevertheless decided to recall him from Poland. He said of him that he was a "good Chekist", but "hardly subtle" ("chutkey"), "he catches a fish in hand, is afraid it will slip away, so he puts it fast into a net."

The recall of Serov was for us a great success. Stalin sent him out to the Soviet occupation zone in Germany, where he too was not forgetting about Polish matters.

Serov, among other, had recruited Piasecki for intelligence. The latter one didn't even hide it. In a conversation with me he had cited Serov's opinion on Osóbka-Morawski, who was then prime minister. "That s..., whenever we want, we will remove him." I didn't tell this to Stalin. I was ashamed of this.[\[11\]](#) At the same time I have been learning on the facts. The most important problem, which had weighted throughout 1945 and later on Polish-Soviet relations, was the dismantlement of factory equipment on the Polish territory. That matter had not been previously settled either in writing or orally with the Soviet government. Thus, after the Soviet Army moving forward, followed the "trofeyneh" ("looting") brigades and everything they considered valuable, they surrounded, dismantled and sent off.

[1] This is an unlikely supposition. Stalin had been informed rather in more detail than not. An agreement for arrival of the KRN delegation to the USSR and for engaging in its transportation through the front the Soviet intelligence, partisans and the air force was not possible without Stalin's agreement.

[2] CBKP - Centralne Biuro Komunistów Polskich (Central Bureau of Polish Communists).

[3] Translator's note - Delegatura in this case means the representation of the Polish Emigré Government in London for the Homeland, with its headquarters in Warsaw.

[4] Here and in the next few pages for the sake of brevity part of the comprehensive description from meetings and talks of the KRN delegation in Moscow, cited after the publications of Osóbka-Morawski and M. Spychalski, has been omitted.

[5] Nikolai Bulganin was at that time representative of the USSR at the PKWN.

[6] Alexander Poskrebishev, head of Stalin's secretariat.

[7] The form of a military oath, of which talk is here, was established by a PKWN decree on 31 August 1944. Thus, the talk with Stalin must have taken place earlier than follows from this text.

[8] An extensive quotation from the CC PPR proclamation has been omitted. It was published, among other things, in: PPR, Rezolucje, odezwy, instrukcje i okólniki Komitetu Centralnego VIII.1944 - XII.1945. Warszawa 1959, dok. Nr. 10.

[9] Over ten pages of discussion on the Moscow Conference in October 1944, based mostly on the work by Włodzimierz T. Kowalski Wielka Koalicja 1941-1945 and on memoirs of general Stanisław Tatar on Mikołajczyk's visit in Washington in June 1944, published in "Życie Warszawy" on 14 January 1981, have been omitted.

[10] Decision on the "non-party" status of B. Bierut was taken - on Stalin's recommendation - by the PPR Politburo on October 22, 1944.

[11] The term "recruited for intelligence" with regard to Bolesław Piasecki doesn't seem to be correct. It looks from published sources on Piasecki's talks with Serov in prison and his letter to the then Polish authorities on May 22, 1945, also written from prison, that Piasecki at that time proposed both the Soviet authorities, and first of all Polish communists a sort of political cooperation, but not of intelligence-spying. See "Polityka" no 39/1990 and "Integracja" no 16/1990.