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THE AUSTRALIAN LEGATION AND CARE
FOR POLISH CITIZENS IN THE SOVIET UNION
DURING WORLD WAR II

Two events are regarded as the breaking point in Polish–Soviet relations: the end of direct care by the Polish government–in–exile in London for the Polish civilian population resettled in the Soviet Union from 1939 to 1941 and the departure of the workers of the Polish Embassy. The network of relief activities that had been organized locally had already been liquidated. Few today remember that the Polish government never resigned from direct efforts to help Poles in the Soviet Union. Such an action was organized thanks to the Australian Legation¹.

On May 22, 1943, less than a month after Ambassador Tadeusz Romer and his personnel left the USSR, the Australians faced an unusually difficult challenge. The care of ‘Polish interests in the Soviet Union’ was entrusted to them, which was understood to mean primarily help for those Poles finding themselves in that country². One cannot speak about care for all Poles living at this time in the USSR, but only for those individuals,

¹ The British, in the name of relations with the Soviet Union, did not want to represent in any way the interests of the Poles. The Americans and Canadians demurred for the same reason. Only Australia, in the person of John Curtin, the premier, undertook such a difficult task. For more information on the relationship of the Anglo–Saxon states to the affairs of Poles remaining in the USSR, see Magdalena H u ł a s, *Państwa anglosaskie wobec problemu reprezentowania interesów polskich w ZSRR po 26 kwietnia 1943 r. (Anglo–Saxon States and Representing of Polish Interests in the Soviet Union after April 24, 1943)*, “Dzieje Najnowsze” N° 1/2001, vol. XXXIII, pp. 107–122.

² The Australians announced that they were ready to represent Polish interests in the Soviet Union earlier, on May 13th, but the Poles still held out hope that the Canadians would represent them.

who, in accordance with the defined position of the Soviet government on January 16, 1943, were formally recognized as Polish citizens³. The situation was extremely complicated and the Australians faced an especially difficult task.

This was already the second time there had been the problem of Polish interests being represented in the Soviet Union and, as earlier, success was not guaranteed⁴, all the more because formally the Australian Legation had existed for only three months⁵. This does not mean that the help that was given was bad or that it did not in fact exist. Simply, the situation of the Polish population in the Soviet Union and general relations between Poland and the Soviet Union were complicated, and the Australian Legation had only begun to learn how to deal with the powers in the Kremlin. However, as the former second secretary of the Australian Legation Peter Heydon wrote in his memoirs, the personnel of the legation were satisfied if they could make contact directly with the highest powers at the Kremlin. The Legation undertook to strengthen their relationship with the Kremlin, and its staff was 'up to date' on international politics⁶.

The Australian Legation in the Soviet Union was in charge of the formal care for Polish citizens until August 1944, when the Polish National Liberation Committee (PKWN) began its activity, with consequences for the international situation for the Polish leaders in London. The Legation, representing the Polish govern-

³ Withdrawn as of the August 1941 decision granting Polish citizenship to persons of Polish nationality living in the eastern districts of the Second Republic, which the Soviets incorporated on November 1-2, 1939. Only persons living before the war in the central and western regions of Poland were recognized as Polish citizens. See Daniel Boćkowski, *Czas nadziei. Obywatele Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w ZSRR i opieka nad nimi placówek polskich w latach 1940-1943 (Time and Hope. Care of Polish Citizens in the Soviet Union by Polish Institutions in 1940-1943)*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 338-339.

⁴ The first time occurred in September 1939, when Ambassador Wacław Grzybowski turned to William Seeds (HM Ambassador to Moscow) to request assistance for the building of the Polish Embassy in Moscow as well as for Polish citizens in the Soviet Union. In light of Soviet opposition and the unclear position of the British, promises of help did not materialize.

⁵ Australia sent its diplomatic mission to the Soviet Union in January 1943. William Slater led the mission.

⁶ Maria Danilewicz Zielińska, *Australia w roli opiekuna spraw polskich w Sowietach w latach 1943-1944 (Australia as Protector of Polish Interests in the Soviet Union, 1943-1944)*, "Zeszyty Historyczne" № 28, Paryż 1974, p. 227. See also Peter Heydon, *Protecting Polish Interests in the USSR, 1943-44: An Episode in Australian Representation*, "Australian Journal of Politics and History" № 2, XVIII, 1972.

ment, worked on an equal basis with the Union of Polish Patriots. The Polish communists were not the only ones involved with care for the Poles in the Soviet Union at that time, but the Australians had neither the financial means nor the same possibilities as the Polish Communist Party, supported by the Kremlin. In spite of this lack of support, the tasks of the Australian Legation included providing financial aid to the Polish refugees, offering assistance in obtaining visas and permission for travel outside the Soviet Union, and caring for the abandoned property of the Embassy and its documents as well as the archives of the diplomatic delegation returned by the Soviet Union.

Poles living in the Soviet Union found out that the Australian Legation had been entrusted with these tasks only if they had access to the press. A short note appeared in "Izvestia" after the intervention of Keith Officer with the Vice Commissioner of Foreign Affairs, Aleksander Kornijczuk, on July 3, 1943. Formally the mission of the Australians started earlier that year on May 25th. The next day this information appeared in the "Sydney Morning Herald"⁷. Edward Raczyński, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, also informed Romer, who was staying in Teheran, about the development⁸. That same day approximately 3.6 million rubles⁹ in 16 bags were transferred to the Australian Legation and the Australians were informed about the financial resources in the bank accounts belonging to the former Polish embassy in the Soviet Union. Transferred also to the Australian side was the abandoned property of the embassy in Kuibyshev¹⁰. The money was placed in a new bank account, 'The Australian Legation to the USSR Account N° 2', initially in the State Bank of the Soviet Union in Kuibyshev, and then in the Bank of Foreign Trade in the Soviet Union in Moscow¹¹. The following individuals worked

⁷ M. Hulas, *Państwa anglosaskie*, p. 117.

⁸ E. Raczyński to T. Romer, tel. N° 307, May 26, 1943, the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, A. 11.49Sow.26. The communication from the Polish Telegraph Agency (PAT) came out the same day.

⁹ This was only a part of the funds at the disposal of the Polish Embassy in Kuibyshev, not including the money sent before the liquidation of the post as well as those who funds held by local Polish representatives.

¹⁰ The Soviet authorities took part of this property (this was mainly borrowed furniture); the remainder was divided between the Australian and Canadian legations.

¹¹ *Cash Receipts and Statement of Expenditure on behalf of the Polish Government 1st August to 31st October 1943*. Archiwum Akt Nowych — Archives of Modern

in the Australian Legation on behalf of Poles: Keith Officer as chargé d'affaires; William Slater as first secretary; Peter Heydon as second secretary; and James Joseph Maloney and J. M. McMillan. Officer supervised Polish affairs and maintained formal contact with the Polish diplomatic post in Teheran. In 1944, Maloney replaced him and assumed the unfortunate obligation of finishing the relief mission and safeguarding the financial resources and documents still on the Australian side.

The beginnings of this activity were unusually difficult, as the Polish side pressured to include in the personnel of the Legation several Poles acquainted with the situation, for which the Australians most definitely did not want to agree, saying that they could manage excellently themselves. The eventual presence of the Poles would only complicate the entire action¹². Further problems appeared when stabilizing the means of communication of the Polish side with the Australian Legation initially in Kuibyshev and then in Moscow. The Poles wanted all of the correspondence to go through Teheran, where Romer could coordinate its circulation¹³. The intention was to use the British diplomatic post for the sending of letters. It was finally established that contact would take place through the Australian House in London. The possibility of direct contact between the Australian Legation and the Polish post in Teheran was conditionally accepted¹⁴.

The first serious obstacle was the establishment of a group of Australians who could offer help and determine what that help could look like. From the start it was clear that help could be provided only for those the Kremlin recognized as Polish citizens. This group could number from ten to thirty thousand people, depending on the position of the local Soviet government and the final results of the requirement for passports, to which fell victim deportees formally recognized by the Soviet note of January 1943 as Polish citizens. The group also included the staffs of the

Records (henceforth: AAN), Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP w Londynie — Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Government of the Republic of Poland in London (henceforth: MPiOS), sygn. 43, pp. 19–21. *Australian Legation to the U.S.S.R. Account N° 2*, attachment to *Report N° II on the Protection of Polish Interests. From 1st August to 31st October 1943*. AAN, MPiOS, call N° 43, pp. 14–15.

¹² See also M. Hułas, *Państwa anglosaskie*, pp. 118–119.

¹³ Romer was supposed to fulfill also an advisory function in Polish concerns.

¹⁴ M. Hułas, *Państwa anglosaskie*, p. 121.

institutions over which the Soviets had not yet established control. However, this was a small group of only a few individuals. The greatest problem turned out to be the extent of Soviet territory. People with the right to expect aid were spread out from Arkhangelsk to the settlements of Kazakhstan or Kyrgystan. The Australians learned the geography of the Soviet Union quickly. The distances made quick contact with the deportees impossible, and this was the fundamental factor on which care depended. The requirement that help could be dispensed exclusively only after the confirmation of an individual's identity, together with a written answer to the address of the Legation, turned out not to be feasible. Initially, the Australians were not able to manage both the system of communication within the Soviet Union and the other difficulties: financial; the distances they had to overcome in order to get to a functioning postal-telegraph office; and matters of insurance. The NKVD could consider each of these types of activity as anti-Soviet, and in strict cases even as espionage activity with all the implied consequences.

The Australians should not be blamed for this situation; they acted only on the recommendations of the Poles, who from the very beginning reserved for themselves the right of deciding who would receive aid, the method of transfer (after previous confirmation that a given person exists), and the amount (400 rubles). The hands of the Legation were tied, especially when it came to making up the list of deportees, a task that would list individuals according to highest priority and which from the very beginning met with immense difficulties. During the first few months of the Australian assistance of Poles, further telegrams went from Officer to Romer with requests for an explanation on the following issues: how many Poles the Australian Legation was expected to assist; for how many individuals did the Poles have actual addresses; the criteria to be applied after negotiations with the Russian side concerning the organization of evacuation of Polish families from the Soviet Union¹⁵. The Australians feared, rightly, as it later turned out, that the information they received from the Polish authorities was often incorrect¹⁶, especially when ad-

¹⁵ *Odpowiedź T. Romera z 14 czerwca 1943 r. dla K. Officer'a na jego telegram z 7 czerwca 1943 r.* (T. Romer's Answer of June 14, 1943 to K. Officer's Telegram of June 7, 1943). AAN, Poselstwo RP w Teheranie — Legation of the Republic of Poland in Teheran (henceforth: *Poselstwo*), 93, pp. 112–113.

¹⁶ Keith Officer wrote about this in his reports to the Polish Legation in Teheran. See *ibidem*.

dresses did not result from the factual knowledge of the workers of the former Polish Embassy in the Soviet Union but only from oral information written down and transferred by the military or the Jewish Agency. An additional difficulty was the transfer of the Legation from Kuibyshev to Moscow, which occurred in October 1943 and paralyzed the organization of activity for a further period of time¹⁷.

In the middle of 1943 a special evacuation list was drawn up for Officer in Teheran, a list with 13,419 names, those who, in the opinion of the Poles, should be the first to be evacuated from the Soviet Union¹⁸. This was the so-called Kuibyshev List, compiled from the data of military files. This list included information about 6,989 Poles. Because of immense pressure from the Jewish community, a special Jewish Committee was formed with the aim of explaining the matter of evacuating the Jewish population from the Soviet Union; this Jewish Committee added information about 6,430 Polish Jews to the list¹⁹. Unfortunately, this information was not only incomplete, but eighty per cent of the list was completely useless. The list included altered names as well as names of places in phonetic English transcription. More than half of the addresses were from the pre-amnesty period; many of them also indicated that the individuals were not and never had been Polish citizens²⁰. In spite of further reminders, Jewish officials did not verify this information; the obligation then fell to the Central Bureau of Evidence²¹.

¹⁷ *Report N° II*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁸ In spite of numerous attempts to make corrections, the information given on this list was wildly incomplete.

¹⁹ *Nota Poselstwa RP w Teheranie do MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie w sprawie listy ewakuacyjnej* (Note of the Polish Legation in Teheran to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London on Evacuation Lists), AAN, *Poselstwo*, 93, pp. 33–37.

²⁰ *Pismo Kierownika Ambasady RP w ZSRR (w likwidacji) i Sekretarza Zbigniewa Jakubskiego z 14 września 1943 r. do Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych w Londynie w sprawie przebiegu prac nad listami ewakuacyjnymi* (Letter of September 14, 1943, from Head of the Polish Embassy in the Soviet Union (in liquidation) i Secretary, Zbigniew Jakubski, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in London on Progress of Preparing Evacuation Lists), AAN, *Poselstwo*, 93, pp. 33–34.

²¹ T. Romer initiated the Central Bureau of Evidence of Polish Citizens in the East (CBE). Funds for his initiative came from, among other sources, the treasury of the Polish Embassy in the Soviet Union (in liquidation). Fifteen people worked on the task of preparing a special file for the department of Help of the Polish Legation in Teheran based on the materials and records transferred from Kuibyshev. In the files was supposed to be found information on all Polish citizens remaining

Because the list of individuals prepared by the Jewish Committee was so inaccurate, the entire evacuation list was divided into three parts. Part A (9,302 names) included the most complete and, according to the Polish authorities, the most accurate information. Part B (2,900 names) included those names that demanded further explanation. In Part C (1,217 names) were found the names of Poles who possessed valid exit visas as well as passports before the Polish Embassy left the USSR and who for these reasons were not abandoned by the Soviets and who should as the first priority be evacuated²².

The majority of Jewish names were in Part B, which the Jewish Committee regarded as repression of Polish citizens of the Jewish nationality. Nobody had the courage to state that in the introductory letters for individuals leaving the Soviet Union, the goal was to smuggle out Jews who were not Polish citizens²³ but who had contacts with Zionist organizations in Palestine and the United States²⁴.

The first attempt which proved the unreliability of the list was the package action, or the sending of packages of food and goods to known and certified addresses of Polish families living in the Soviet Union with the help of specialized companies²⁵. Because many addresses were not correct, they were addressed to Officer with a request for correction. This turned out to be unworkable, because the Soviets did not always respond to the corrections. In such a situation, the former Polish Embassy in the Soviet Union arranged the so-called 'List of 5,000', those names with the most correct addresses to which food and goods could eventually be sent²⁶. The list was made based on information from the evacu-

in the Soviet Union in 1943 and registered by the Polish Embassy in Kuibyshev; see *Notatka w sprawie wykonania przez CBE prac przewidzianych w budżecie nadzwyczajnym Biura Poselstwa RP w Teheranie (Memo on Completing the Works Included into the Extraordinary Budget of the Polish Legation's Bureau in Teheran by CBE)*, AAN, *Poselstwo*, 94, p. 9.

²² *Telegram Poselstwa RP w Teheranie z 14 września 1943 roku do chargé d'affaires Australii K. Officer'a w sprawie list ewakuacyjnych obywateli polskich (Telegram of September 14, 1943, from the Polish Legation in Teheran to chargé d'affaires of Australia, K. Officer, on Evacuation Lists of Polish Citizens)*, AAN, *Poselstwo*, 93, pp. 38–40.

²³ For example, Lithuanian, or from Bessarabia.

²⁴ *Pismo Kierownika Ambasady RP w ZSRR (w likwidacji) i Sekretarza Zbigniewa Jakubskiego z 14 września 1943*, p. 43–46.

²⁵ For more on the package action, see D. Boćkowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 350–352.

²⁶ Numbering 9,302 names in August 1943.

ation of the Polish army from the Soviet Union in August 1942. The addresses sent from London by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare were submitted for clarification in the newly created files of the Embassy as well as in the files of the military families in the office of the Military Attaché at the Polish Legation in Teheran. Because the Central Bureau of Evidence rewrote the files of the Embassy, this delayed the process of checking the information. The confirmation of identity and address was a fundamental condition allowing for the placement of a person (or family) onto the package action list, which was then sent to expediting firms, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and the Australian Legation in the Soviet Union.

At a certain moment information reached Teheran from the Australian Legation that packages with aid for Poles living in Dzhabul were being delivered to addressees by the local department of the Union of Polish Patriots. This raises the justified suspicion that authorities applied a similar procedure in other areas of Polish concentration²⁷. Whether the Soviets applied a similar procedure in other cities is not known, but there is information in the same report that packages sent from Teheran to Bukhara went to addressees without the intervention of the local Polish Communist Party.

The action of sending financial subsidies began after some delay. In accordance with the agreement, the Legation was supposed to send a one-time subsidy in the amount of 400 rubles, taken from the resources in its account after the liquidation of the Polish Embassy, to those individuals indicated by the Polish authorities. From the very beginning both the method of transfer and the limitations on the amount of the subsidy raised some surprise among the staff of the Australian Legation²⁸. In the matter of determining how to disperse the money, the Legation began from the position that subsidies should be sent to already confirmed addresses in a regular manner, and not just once, especially since they almost never received confirmation

²⁷ *Pismo I Sekretarza Poselstwa RP w Teheranie Zbigniewa Jakubskiego do MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie z 3 lipca 1944 (Letter of July 3, 1944, from the First Secretary of the Polish Legation in Teheran, Zbigniew Jakubski, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London)*, AAN, *Poselstwo*, 93, p. 118.

²⁸ See further reports (I, II, III, IV, V and VI) sent by the Australian Legation to the Polish Legation in Teheran, AAN, *MPiOS*, 43, pp. 12–15, 36–37, 74–75, 81–82 and 100–101.

that the money had actually reached its destination²⁹. Therefore the Australians also established the principle that 400 rubles should be sent to all Polish citizens who made a formal request for aid³⁰. This was justified because the procedure imposed by Polish authorities made practically impossible any relief activity. As a result, the Polish authorities first sent the Australians a special list of individuals entitled to a subsidy, made up of those names for whom they had addresses sent to them that were to some degree correct. Next the Legation was supposed to send telegrams to these addresses with a request for confirmation that such a person is actually there and that he/she is a Polish citizen³¹. The one-time 400-ruble subsidy could be sent to an individual only after confirmation of these facts was received by telegram. Because very many money transfers never made it to the addressees, even if a given address was correct, the Legation intervened with the appropriate authorities, most often with less than satisfactory results³².

The workers of the Legation noticed that the maintenance of such procedures meant that from the first list sent by Teheran at the beginning of 1944 and numbering 200 names, only five could be confirmed and receive aid; from the second list, only six could be confirmed³³. In the case of the next lists, sent successively from Teheran every month, the situation was similar³⁴.

²⁹ The situation became even more difficult when Poles informed the Australian Legation that the one-time payment was supposed to be made available to the greatest number of Polish citizens, though earlier reports made clear that the few resources left behind in the Soviet Union were to go to the neediest deportees. See *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/1/44 z 14 sierpnia 1944 r. do Ministerstwa Pracy i Opieki Społecznej* (Letter of August 14, 1944, No U/312/Sow/IV/1/44, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 152.

³⁰ M. Danilewicz Zielińska, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

³¹ *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/2 z 8 lutego 1944 r. do Ministerstwa Pracy i Opieki Społecznej* (Letter of February 8, 1944, No U/312/Sow/IV/2, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 47.

³² *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° V.312/Sow.IV/45 z 19 marca 1945 r. w sprawie pisma Poselstwa Australii z 3 listopada 1944 r. N° 11551/44/Sow/2* (Letter of March 1945, No V.312/Sow.IV/45 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London on the Letter of November 3, 1944, from the Australian Legation), AAN, MPiOS, p. 66.

³³ *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/2/44 z 27 kwietnia 1944 do MPiOS* (Letter of April 27, 1944, No U/312/Sow/IV/2/44, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 91.

Throughout the entire period during which subsidies were sent, the most effective method turned out to be individual contact with the interested parties, along with a regular (that is, continuing) 400-ruble subsidy, rather than a one-time payment of 400 rubles. This situation changed only in June 1944, when the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare decided to free the Australian Legation from the requirement to confirm each address by telegraph. Unfortunately, this decision came many months too late for many waiting for aid. Still, though, the Ministry took the position that the financial subsidies should only be one-time³⁵.

Realizing that the possibility of confirming the addresses was not great and also that the great need continued, the Australian Legation decided to send one-time subsidies of a higher sum — from 500³⁶ to 1,000³⁷ rubles. The financial aid was dispersed over practically the entire territory of the USSR — from Namangan and Komi to Kazakhstan and the Altai region. In exceptional cases, hospital stays of Polish citizens were also covered by the funds held by the Australian authorities³⁸.

Throughout the period discussed here, the Australian Legation dispersed 3,601,000 rubles for individual subsidies as of May 24th, 1943. This total includes the costs of sending the money. The monthly totals follow:

25 May — 21 October 1943 - 31,779 rubles³⁹

³⁴ It is known for certain that such letters sent from Teheran numbered at least five, the first sent in January, the second in February, and so on. See *Spisy polskich obywateli w ZSRR, którym należy udzielić zapomogi 400 rubli, wysyłane przez MSZ do Poselstwa Australii (Lists of Polish Citizens in the Soviet Union, Who Are to Be Granted 400-ruble Subsidy Sent by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Australian Legation)*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 48–51 (List N° 2), 57–60 (List N° 3), 62–65 (List N° 4), 95–98 (List N° 5).

³⁵ *Pismo MPiOS N° 7002/Sow/2 z 17 czerwca 1944 r. do MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie (Letter of June 17, 1944, N° 7002/Sow/2, from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London)*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 121–122.

³⁶ *Statement of Expenditure on Behalf of the Polish Government June–July 1943*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 24–25.

³⁷ *Cash Receipts and Statement of Expenditure on Behalf of the Polish Government 1st to 30th Nov 1943*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 40–42.

³⁸ *Notes on Expenditure on Behalf of the Polish Government by the Australian Legation in Kuibyshev, USSR, May June and July 1943*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 26.

³⁹ *Pismo MPiOS Rządu RP w Londynie N° 344/44/Sow/2 z 4 stycznia 1944 r. do Ministerstwa Skarbu (Letter of January 4, 1944, nr344/44/Sow/2, from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Finance)*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 28.

November 1943	- 26,257 ⁴⁰
December 1943	- 30,531 ⁴¹
January 1944	- 27,594 ⁴²
February 1944	- 46,890 ⁴³
March 1944	- 58,278 ⁴⁴
April 1944	- 97,183 ⁴⁵
May 1944	- 60,399 ⁴⁶
June 1944	- 73,411 ⁴⁷
July 1944	- 31,299 ⁴⁸
August 1944	- 96,088 ⁴⁹ .

In total, 579,529 rubles⁵⁰, not quite 16% of the resources were earmarked for the goal of assistance. The number of individuals who could receive monthly subsidies varied from 60 to 240. This

⁴⁰ Pismo MPiOS Rządu RP w Londynie N° 4299/44/Sow/2 z 17 kwietnia 1944 r. do Ministerstwa Skarbu (Letter of April 17, 1944, nr4299/44/Sow/2, from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Finance), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 86.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Pismo MPiOS Rządu RP w Londynie N° 4299/44/Sow/2 z 23 kwietnia 1944 r. do Ministerstwa Skarbu (Letter of April 23, 1944, nr4299/44/Sow/2, from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Finance), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 88.

⁴³ Pismo MPiOS Rządu RP w Londynie N° 5637/44/Sow/2 z 25 maja 1944 r. do Ministerstwa Skarbu (Letter of May 25, 1944, nr5637/44/Sow/2, from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Finance), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 106.

⁴⁴ Pismo MPiOS Rządu RP w Londynie N° 6400/44/Sow/2 z 13 czerwca 1944 r. do Ministerstwa Skarbu (Letter of June 13, 1944, nr6400/44/Sow/2, from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Finance), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 120.

⁴⁵ Statement of Cash and Expenditure on behalf of the Polish Government for month of April 1944, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 137-139.

⁴⁶ Statement of Cash and Expenditure on behalf of the Polish Government for month of May 1944, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 165-168.

⁴⁷ Statement of Cash and Expenditure on behalf of the Polish Government for month of June 1944, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 175-176.

⁴⁸ Statement of Cash and Expenditure on behalf of the Polish Government for month of July 1944, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 181-182.

⁴⁹ Statement of Cash and Expenditures on behalf of the Polish Government for month of August 1944, AAN, MPiOS, 43, pp. 190-193.

⁵⁰ Indeed in September and October 1944 the Australian Legation carried out further expenditures, to the sum of 131,156 rubles; however, it is not known what part of this sum was marked for direct assistance. See Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U.312/Sow.IV/45 z 19 marca 1945 roku do MPiOS (Letter of March 19, 1945, N° U.312/Sow.IV/45, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 67.

was only a small fraction of the actual need. How many people in general received financial support from the Legation is unknown. This number is difficult to establish on the basis of the paid sums; the amounts and frequency and nature of payments (whether a regular or one-time subsidy) do not provide enough information. To attempt a generalization, it may be possible to suggest that such persons numbered around a thousand. A majority of this aid went to Polish Jews, who had fled in the summer of 1940 as so-called *bieżeńcy*, or refugees from the territory occupied by the German army. Even more interesting, in the lists sent from Teheran to the Australian Legation, the situation was reversed. There one finds a majority of Polish names.

Along with the action of providing subsidies, the Legation attempted, to the extent of its own limited capabilities, to supervise the dispersal of material goods from the abandoned contents of the Polish Embassy. It turned out very quickly, however, that the Soviets prevented control over these goods and warehouses. Indeed, on July 2, 1943, Keith Officer telegraphed to Teheran that the Soviets had initiated the opening of eleven warehouses belonging to the Embassy and carried out the distribution of goods among Poles in regions aid had not yet reached. However, each of the warehouses was under the supervision of a special director, chosen by local authorities, and the so-called Polish committee recently established and fully controlled by the Union of Polish Patriots. Goods belonging to the Polish government were given out exclusively on the strength of the decision of the committee and representatives of the local authorities. The actual state of the warehouses remained unknown; unknown also was their actual contents. As the deputy commissioner of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs Aleksander Kornijczuk assured Officer, the Soviets intended to return to the Polish government the value of the aid in kind, respective to its cash value. All goods in transit at the moment of liquidation of the Embassy were supposed to go to the warehouses.

The Soviet authorities organized a special department at the People's Commissariat of Trade, which was supposed to have the task of occupying itself with locating the material goods in each warehouse and regularly informing the Australian Legation about the number of Polish citizens receiving help from each operating warehouse. This department was the Office of Provisions for

Evacuated Poles from the Western Territories of Ukraine and Belarus (*Uprawlenije po snabżeniju Polakow ewakuirowannyh iz zapadnych obłastiej Ukrainy i Bielarusi*, henceforth *Uprosob-trog*)⁵¹. The department supervised a number of warehouses in, among other places, Arkhangelsk, Kirov, Krasnoyarsk, Bernaul, Semipalatynsk, Samarkand, Pietropavlovsk, Pavlodar, Czkalov, Ashkhabad, and Syktyvkar⁵². Many of them had operated earlier for several months as warehouses of the Polish Embassy in Kuibyshev. A. Kornijczuk was at the head of the department. His coworkers were Andrzej Witos and Bolesław Drobner. However, after the first attempts to control the help received by the Soviet authorities, Drobner requested that Wanda Wasilewska be removed from this function⁵³. In order to make the dispersal of gifts more efficient, an order was given regarding the equal treatment of Poles and other Soviet citizens as regards the rationing of food.

That the Soviet authorities and Polish Communist Party disposed of Polish goods themselves deeply disturbed the Poles, and they informed the American and British authorities as well as the Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs about this development⁵⁴. The Polish government-in-exile in London did not have anything against further help, but they doubted that this help would actually reach Polish citizens. The fears of the Polish authorities also brought forth the statement of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs about the delayed regulation of financial questions. This was essential, because if the Soviet authorities wished to settle the accounts of the goods that were

⁵¹ Andrzej Korzon, *Losy darów z zachodu dla Polaków w ZSRR po zerwaniu polsko-radzieckich stosunków dyplomatycznych w kwietniu 1943 r.* (Fate of Western Gifts for Polish Citizens in the Soviet Union after the Break of Polish-Soviet Diplomatic Relations in April 1943), "Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 1998, v. XXXIII, p. 117.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 118.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Informacja MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° 738/Sow/43 z 2 lipca 1943 r. do Ministerstwa Skarbu, Ministerstwa Pracy i Opieki Społecznej oraz Ministerstwa Informacji i Dokumentacji w sprawie noty chargé d'affaires Australii K. Oficera o rozdziale pomocy z magazynów b. Ambasady RP w ZSRR* (Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London, N° 738/Sow/43, July 2, 1943, to the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and to the Ministry of Information and Documentation on the Note of the Australian chargé d'affaires, K. Officer, about relief distribution from the warehouses of the former Polish Embassy in the Soviet Union), Hoover Institution on War Revolution and Peace, Acts of the Ministry of Information and Documentation of the Polish Government in London, box 95, folder 5.

taken at fictional state prices, the sum received would be laughably low⁵⁵.

The first and probably the greatest success of the workers of the Legation turned out to be the evacuation from Ashkhabad of the children and workers in Polish orphanages who had been waiting there for many months. This was a group chosen for evacuation when the Polish embassy was still in Kuibyshev. Included were the children and staff of the so-called collective orphanage, in which were gathered orphans and half-orphans from the southern Soviet Union. They were supposed to leave the USSR with a contingent of 400 Polish children, for whom the Soviets had granted permission to leave the country after negotiations with the Embassy. From the moment of the break in mutual diplomatic relations, the orphanage, already prepared for evacuation, was delayed at the border by the Soviet authorities 'for explanation'. The Australian Legation intervened at the highest levels of the Soviet authorities to evacuate these children from the Soviet Union⁵⁶. Finally on July 22, 1943, the orphanage left the territory of the Soviet Union. 310 Polish children as well as eight caretakers left at that time. In spite of the efforts of the Australians, seventeen staff members and children remained behind in Ashkhabad in prison⁵⁷.

The second achievement was the evacuation of thirteen people at the end of 1943, a group of local relief workers of the Polish Embassy as well as their families⁵⁸. An additional group of twenty individuals, in spite of having received Soviet assurances as to the possibility of immediately leaving the country and the repeated efforts of the Australians, remained in the USSR.

⁵⁵ Especially since the majority of goods found in the warehouses were inaccessible and their market value was several times higher.

⁵⁶ Among others, the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs commissar Alexander Kornijczuk.

⁵⁷ *Pismo Kierownika Ambasady RP w ZSRR w likwidacji Zygmunta Zawadowskiego do Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych Rządu RP w Londynie Tadeusza Romera z 13 września 1943 roku (Letter of September 13, 1943, from Head of the Polish Embassy in the Soviet Union [in liquidation], Zygmunt Zawadowski to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London, Tadeusz Romer), AAN, Poselstwo, 93, pp. 31–32. See also Report N° VI on Protection of Polish Interests, February 1944, MPIOS, 43, p. 100.*

⁵⁸ *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/1/44 z 5 stycznia 1944 do Ministra Pracy i Opieki Społecznej (Letter of January 5, 1944, nr U/312/Sow/IV/1/44, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare) AAN, MPIOS, 43, p. 7.*

In accordance with the agreement, the Australians were also supposed to work for the evacuation from the Soviet Union of individuals who were supposed to have been assured visas for Australia, Great Britain, India, Palestine, the United States, and Africa; former delegates of the Embassy; members of the families of workers at the Embassy who had left the Soviet Union in April 1943; families of soldiers serving in the Anders army; and children from Polish asylums and orphanages⁵⁹. In the first phase of its existence, the Legation noted that they received 1,000 requests for assistance⁶⁰. From the very beginning, the Australian efforts to assist these individuals met with the stubborn resistance of the authorities, who stated that such persons were not Polish citizens (according to the note of January 1943) or that they had lost the right to leave (because of the lack of a valid passport, visa, lack of local permission, or other factors)⁶¹. The notes and questions the Australians sent in this matter were most often entirely ignored. The direct intervention of the Australians ended in a similar way. The only concession was the formal acquisition in October 1943 of the permission of the Russians for the embassy to intervene in the matter of the exit of Poles living west of the Curzon Line before 1939.

The intervention of the Australian Legation in Polish concerns, which began already in May 1943⁶², lasted until the Soviet decision in August 1944 taking away the Legation's right to act on behalf of Poles⁶³. At this time, several meetings with high Soviet officials, including Stalin and Molotov, took place⁶⁴. Most

⁵⁹ M. Danilewicz Zielińska, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ An additional difficulty was the lack of the possibility of prolonging these documents by the Australian Legation without the official authorization of the Soviet authorities that they regarded a given person as a Polish citizen. See *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/1/44 z 4 października 1944 roku do MPiOS (Letter of October 4, 1944, nr U/312/Sow/IV/1/44, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare)*, AAN, MPiOS, call N° 43, p. 179.

⁶² *Report N° 1 on Protection of Polish Interests from 24th May to 31st July 1943*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 11. See also *Report N° II*, p. 13.

⁶³ The withdrawal of the right to represent the interests of Polish citizens in the Soviet Union was motivated by the fact of the establishment of the PKWN and its subsequent obligation to care for Poles in the Soviet Union. See *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/1/44 z 7 listopada 1944 roku do MPiOS (Letter of November 7, 1944, nr U/312/Sow/IV/1/44, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare)*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 184.

conversations were with the vice commissar of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs Aleksander Kornijczuk⁶⁵ as well as Valerian Zorin who was responsible for the Fourth Department of European Affairs⁶⁶. Finally, on March 20, 1944, the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs refused the Australian Legation the right to accept further and act on the evacuation lists of Polish citizens deported to the Soviet Union, in accordance with internal regulations, which placed directly on the citizen the obligation to obtain the right to go abroad and determined that the place of submitting such petitions should be the offices of the militia in the place of residence⁶⁷. From this moment, all exits were suspended. As the Legation found out two months later, the Soviet authorities did not grant even one Polish citizen permission to leave the Soviet Union, even on the basis of their own regulations⁶⁸. The situation changed only in June 1944, when four people received permission to exit⁶⁹. All left the Soviet Union and went to Palestine through Iran⁷⁰.

The People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs note from August 23, 1944, taking away the Australian Legation's right to care for Polish citizens in the Soviet Union, did not in fact mean the end of this care. Correspondence from individuals seeking help continued to arrive at the Legation long after the care was to have ended. Unfortunately, the Australians could not take any official actions, though in exceptional situations they took some indispensable steps⁷¹. Still remaining was only the arranging of formal

⁶⁴ M. Danilewicz Zielińska, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁶⁵ *Report N° I*, p. 11 and *Report N° II*, pp. 13–14.

⁶⁶ *Report N° VI*, p. 100.

⁶⁷ *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/1/44 z 27 maja 1944 do Ministerstwa Pracy i Opieki Społecznej (Letter of May 27, 1944, nr U/312/Sow/IV/1/44, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare)*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 114.

⁶⁸ The Legation attempted to send a special letter to the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs with the request to examine each petition. See *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/1/44 z 26 lipca 1944 r. do Ministerstwa Pracy i Opieki Społecznej (Letter of July 26, 1944, nr U/312/Sow/IV/1/44, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare)*, AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 134.

⁶⁹ Two tried to exit via the Legation earlier; the other two did not take advantage of the Legation's assistance.

⁷⁰ *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U/312/Sow/IV/1/44 z 14 sierpnia 1944 (Letter of August 14, 1944, nr U/312/Sow/IV/1/44, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London)*, p. 173.

⁷¹ M. Danilewicz Zielińska, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

matters connected with the liquidation of the account as well as the transfer of money and correspondence gathered till this time. In spite of the suggestion of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare that the Australian Legation transfer the 3,016,197 rubles⁷² in pounds to Polish authorities in a third country⁷³, the money was sent to the Polish Embassy in Moscow⁷⁴.

The aid of the Australian Legation, though minimal, was for many Polish deportees unusually important. This aid may have even saved someone's life. Though the efforts of the Australians were from the beginning not destined for success, this work cannot remain unappreciated today. The acts of the Australians deserve great respect. The difficulties they encountered after arrival in the Soviet Union, the understanding they displayed for the situation of the Poles and the granting to them of crucial aid, often against the absurd recommendations of the Poles in London, obligates us to preserve these people in our Polish national memory — all the more because the Polish authorities in emigration never thanked them for their work. The saddest part of this story is the fact that — as Peter Heydon recalls — when Stanisław Mikołajczyk and Tadeusz Romer arrived in Moscow at the end of July 1944, the Australian Legation found out about their visit only from the BBC broadcast⁷⁵.

(Translated by Sean Martin)

⁷² Balance as of September 1, 1944. See *Pismo MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie N° U.312/Sow.IV/45 z 19 marca 1945* (Letter of March 19, 1945, nr U/312/Sow/IV/1/45, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London), p. 67.

⁷³ *Pismo MPiOS N° 4186/45/Sow/2 z 31 marca 1945 r. do MSZ Rządu RP w Londynie* (Letter of March 31, 1945, nr 4186/45/Sow/2, from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government in London), AAN, MPiOS, 43, p. 70.

⁷⁴ This was in the sum of 2,916,197 rubles. See M. Danilewicz Zielińska, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 230.