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PUNO W LONDYNIE

FRAMING A POLICY FOR THE RESETTLEMENT OF THE POLISH POLITICAL REFUGEES IN BRITAIN (OCTOBER 1945 – END OF MAY 1946)

It was agreed that the Polish Armed Forces must be demobilized.

The only question was how it was to be done.

Politically, the Polish Question is full of dynamite¹.

1. DEMOBILISATION OF THE POLISH ARMED FORCES

The Parliamentary announcement on the formation of the Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC) on 22 May 1946. In order to obtain a clear picture of the development of the British Government's policy-making apparatus, it is important to provide a short summary of the events of the spring and summer of 1945. The historical, chronological narrative here aims to inspire better understanding of the difficulties faced by, and the very fragility of, this apparatus during the creation of the first large foreign settlement in Britain as well as the complexity of the political environment.

By the end of 1945, it had become abundantly clear that the majority of the Polish troops which remained outside the borders of their homeland after that year would not be returning to Poland. They experienced the supreme irony of being on

¹ Public Record Office – The National Archives (further: PRO – NA), Kew, FO371/56627 (N3100), 2 III 1946.

the winning side militarily, whilst becoming political losers. The estimated number of Polish Armed Forces under British command fluctuated around 250 000². Although the British Government assumed that a considerable proportion of these troops, not all of whom were stationed in the UK, were expected to return to Poland, or migrate to third countries, a significant element would nevertheless remain in Britain. In the light of political events being played out in Poland, the decision not to return home became increasingly common among the Poles. Although by 1945–1946 it was estimated that there were about a quarter of a million Poles, including dependents, in Great Britain itself, incredibly, apart from the political debates within the British Government and the Foreign Office, no decision had been made on a demobilisation and resettlement policy.

During the Yalta Debate in the House of Commons on 27 February 1945, the British Prime Minister, Winston Spencer Churchill, made an extraordinary statement:

In any event His Majesty's Government will never forget the debt they owe to the Polish troops and for all those who have fought under our command I earnestly hope it may be possible to offer citizenship and freedom of the British Empire should they so desire. I am not able to make any declaration on that subject to-day because all matters affecting citizenship require to be discussed between this country and the Dominions [...], but so far as we are concerned, we should think it an honour to have such faithful and valiant warriors dwelling among us as if they were men of our own blood.

This would later be called Churchill's „pledge” which would ultimately lead to offering refugee status to Polish soldiers. It needs to be added that not all ministers shared Churchill's views.

On 6 March 1945, in a speech to the House of Commons, Churchill confirmed his intentions that if all else failed, he would offer the Poles safe accommodation within the British Empire. During the next few months the necessary plans were drawn up³.

Winston Churchill's statement to the House of Commons in February 1945, was never given any specific interpretation, but the Poles put their own rather „optimistic” gloss on his words, which were later picked up by Ernest Bevin, the Labour Foreign Secretary. According to Bevin, the statement should be *interpreted as implying no guarantee of settlement in British territory, or of British naturalisation for all members of the Polish Armed Forces under British Command*⁴.

Although Labour politicians sought to narrow Churchill's „guarantee”, they were aware of the huge responsibility they had for the fate of these exiled Poles. They understood clearly that any appropriate solution would have an impact on

² PRO – NA, Kew, ED128/10, Education in Exile, Ministry of Education, HMSO, London, 1956, p. 9.

³ PRO – NA, Kew, FO371/51177, „The question of British nationality for Polish soldiers, sailors and airmen”, Memorandum by the Home Secretary, dated 5 III 1945, London, p. 1.

⁴ K. R. Sword, „*Their Prospects will not be Bright*”. *British Responses to the Problem of the Polish „Recalcitrants” 1946–1949*, „Journal of Contemporary History”, 1986, 21, p. 368.

the everyday life of post-war British society and that the outcome had to be for the long term. In addition, leading British economists pointed to the financial burden of maintaining these Polish units: according to Lord Keynes, the Polish army was costing British taxpayers £ 2,5 million a month, which was deemed to be far too much. For that reason, he believed that the Polish army should be disbanded⁵.

Undoubtedly, these currents of opinion flowing through British governmental circles were a harbinger of the significant challenge that British society was about to meet head on. From a sociological point of view, Britain was now facing an influx of Polish people, who would without doubt have an enormous and largely unforeseen impact upon almost every field of British social life. Thus, in the words of the Foreign Office, this wave of Polish refugees would increase the „alien” population of Britain by 70 per cent, and when their dependents were included this increase could rise to over 150 per cent⁶. Undeniably, then, confronting this problem would seriously tax the brains and imagination of the officialdom.

In the process of finding „durable solutions” to the question of Polish settlers, the British Government had to keep some serious economic factors in mind. With no doubt, post-war Britain did need additional labour to be deployed for reconstructing the country’s infrastructure, particularly in agriculture, coal-mining and the construction industry. As will be evidenced later, Poles would be directed *to the heaviest, least attractive, least secure or lowest paid sectors of industry, where the local labour shortages were most acute*⁷.

Between the autumn of 1945 and the spring of 1946, the British Government began to work on possible temporary settlement which would suit the British post-war economy and from which British society could also benefit. Simultaneously, negotiations between London and the newly-recognised authorities in Warsaw were slowly reaching their first conclusions. On 22 October 1945, the Foreign Secretary announced in the House of Commons that arrangements had been made for volunteers for repatriation to collect in transit camps. It was stressed that the scheme was entirely voluntary and no Pole would be repatriated against their will. As a result, during the winter of 1945/1946, 23 000 troops from Britain, 14 000 from Italy and the Middle East, and 400 from Germany returned to Poland. Those troops returning from Italy and the Middle East arrived home before Christmas 1945⁸.

Those who did not want to be sent back were anxiously watching the political events unfold in the new Poland, particularly the preparations for the forthcoming

⁵ K. Sword, N. Davies, J. Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939–1950*, London, 1989, p. 239.

⁶ K. R. Sword, „*Their Prospects will not be Bright*”..., p. 368.

⁷ S. Patterson, *The Poles. An Exile Community in Britain*, in: *Between Two Cultures. Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, ed. James L. Watson, Oxford, 1977, p. 220–221. Also P. Panayi, *The Impact of Immigration. A Documentary History of the Effects and Experiences of Immigrants in Britain Since 1945*, Manchester, 1999, p. 18–19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

referendum in June 1946, and the elections⁹, and in effect they adopted a „wait and see” attitude. For their part, the first steps taken by the British Government were aimed primarily at the dispersal of the Polish troops. This resulted in the forming of the Cabinet Foreign Labour Committee under the chairmanship of the Lord Privy Seal, Arthur Greenwood in February 1946¹⁰. The committee’s role was to handle the many employment issues facing Poles. A month later, a follow-up decision was taken by the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, to supervise the whole question of the dispersal of the Polish troops¹¹. This resulted in the creation of the Cabinet Polish Forces Committee; it was to be chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton¹².

The importance of resolving the question of the status of Polish Armed Forces was detailed in a Cabinet note dated 2 March 1946:

⁹ See K. Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland 1943–48*, Berkeley – Los Angeles, 1991.

¹⁰ One of the oldest offices in the British Government which has no particular function today. The office has generally been used as a kind of Minister without Portfolio. Since the premiership of Clement Attlee, the position of Lord Privy Seal has frequently been combined with that of Leader of the House of Lords or Leader of the House of Commons.

Arthur Greenwood (February 8, 1880 – June 9, 1954) was a prominent member of the Labour Party from the 1920s until the late 1940s. He rose to prominence within the party as secretary of its research department from 1920 and served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health in the short-lived Labour Government of 1924. In 1940, when the wartime coalition Government was formed, Winston Churchill appointed him to the British War Cabinet as Minister without Portfolio. During the Attlee Government, he served successively as Lord Privy Seal and Paymaster-General. The Lord Privy Seal (or, more formally, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal) is the fifth of the Great Officers of State in the UK; headword *Greenwood, Arthur*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹¹ Clement Richard Attlee, 1st Earl Attlee (January 3, 1883 – October 8, 1967) was a British Labour politician who served as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1945 to 1951, and as the Leader of the Labour Party from 1935 to 1955. He was also the first person to hold the office of Deputy Prime Minister, under Winston Churchill in the wartime coalition Government, before leading the Labour Party to a landslide election victory over Churchill’s Conservative Party in 1945. He was the first Labour Prime Minister to serve a full Parliamentary term, and the first to command a Labour majority in Parliament. Bridges, Lord (1968); headword *Clement Richard Attlee First Earl Attlee. 1883–1967*, „Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society”, 14, p. 15–10; Internet site: 10.1098/rsbm.1968.0002.JSTOR_769437, retrieved on 9 VII 2012.

¹² Edward Hugh John Neale Dalton, Baron Dalton (August 16, 1887 – February 13, 1962) was a British Labour Party politician who served as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1945 to 1947. He nationalised the Bank of England in 1946. Budgetary policy under Dalton was strongly progressive, as characterised by policies such as increased food subsidies, heavily subsidized rents to council house tenants, the lifting of restrictions on house-building, the financing of national assistance and family allowances, and extensive assistance to rural communities and Development Areas. Dalton was also responsible for funding the introduction of Britain’s universal family allowances scheme. Alongside Clement Attlee, Ernest Bevin, Herbert Morrison and Stafford Cripps, Dalton was initially seen as one of the „Big Five” of the Labour Government; N. Timmins, *The Five Giants. A Biography of the Welfare State*, London, 1996.

*We cannot tolerate any longer either the grave political embarrassment, or the financial commitment involved by our maintenance of these forces under arms, the problem must be tackled*¹³.

The intention of the British Government was now quite transparent and in effect the fate of the Polish Army had been sealed. The pressing issue now for the British was a demonstrable demobilisation of the Polish troops, which would bring an end to the political humiliation and significant savings for the post-war state of austerity.

The Cabinet Polish Forces Committee, which met for the second time in early May 1946, eventually approved the conception of the Polish Resettlement Corps. However, all arrangements for the establishment and administration of the PRC were from now on to be in the hands of the Polish Forces (Official) Committee, based at the Home Office. On 20 March 1946, the Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin announced his controversial solution to the repatriation question in the House of Commons. Bevin's statement had encouraged Polish people to return and help rebuild their own country. Sadly, as a consequence of the decisions made earlier during the Yalta Conference, for a large majority of the Polish soldiers their pre-war homes were now situated on the territory of the Soviet Union. This statement was translated into Polish and included a statement of reassurance from the (Communist-dominated) Polish Provisional Government regarding the treatment of those Polish troops who chose to return home¹⁴.

Bevin also stated that the British Government would give assistance to those who had fought for the Allies and wished to start a new life outside Poland, along with their families and dependents. However, no guarantee was given establishing the right to settle on British territory for those who refused repatriation.

Two months later, on 22 May 1946, after consultation meetings with General Anders and Prime Minister Attlee, Bevin revealed his plans for the demobilisation of Polish forces to the House of Commons. The new arrangement referred to those serving overseas, starting with the troops in Italy, who were to be brought to Britain. In order to help these soldiers start their life anew on British soil, it had been decided to enrol them in the previously mentioned resettlement corps. The Polish Resettlement Corps was set up specifically to help Polish troops who did not wish to return to Poland, but who instead wished to stay in Britain and settle into civilian life there. The term of service in the Corps was to be two years. However, after receiving adequate education and training, these Polish soldiers could choose to enter the labour market earlier. If, on the other hand, a particular job turned out to be unsuitable, the serviceman concerned could always return to the Corps.

It was agreed with the trade unions that prospective Polish employees could only be recruited from the PRC and would be placed in Ministry of Labour „approved” jobs.

¹³ PRO – NA, Kew, FO371/56627 (N3100), 2 III 1946.

¹⁴ K. Sword, N. Davies, J. Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community...*, p. 246.

Members of the Corps were still considered to be military personnel and subject to British military discipline and military law. They were accommodated in military camps and paid at the normal British Armed Forces rate for their rank.

Service in the Corps was intended to be an opportunity for retraining and education. Naturally, as well as learning the English language, gaining basic training and practical qualifications became important factors in the process of preparing soldiers for their new lives, whether in the United Kingdom or abroad. These matters remained in the hands of the Educational Branch of the Interim Treasury Committee.

2. THE ROLE OF THE INTERIM TREASURY COMMITTEE AND ITS EDUCATIONAL BRANCH IN EARLY 1946 AND THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF THE COMMITTEE

As mentioned above, matters relating to the provision of educational and training facilities for Poles immediately after the war rested in the hands of the Educational Branch of the Interim Treasury Committee (ITC). In the spring of 1946, about one fifth of the expenditure of the Committee was directed to education¹⁵. The Committee had also been brought into being in order to supervise the orderly dismantling of the Polish machinery of state now in exile after the withdrawal of its recognition in July 1945. Apart from the management of home and foreign affairs, diplomatic activity and information services, tasks of a less political nature also had to be carried out. Thus, the care of refugees, the sick and disabled and educational provisions all played a vital role in the everyday lives of Poles and their leaders. Undoubtedly, the imminent liquidation or significant reorganisation of this mechanism would result in further hardships.

It has to be stressed that the extant Polish non-political and voluntary organisations had already taken on substantial social and welfare responsibilities for the Polish refugees¹⁶. Apart from offering assistance to their fellow citizens in everyday tasks they provided reassurance to ease the adjustment process. Undoubtedly, they played a significant role in the emerging post-war Polish community, particular-

¹⁵ PRO – NA, Kew, ED128/143, Note of an interview with Mr. Eggers on the question of transfer of certain of the Educational Functions of the Polish Interim Committee, dated 29 IV 1946, p. 2.

¹⁶ Among the Polish bodies aiming to provide social assistance to their displaced citizens were religious, military and civilian organizations. According to J. Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, Hague, 1956, there were 42 bodies which belonged to the Federation of Poles in Great Britain (1947) in 1953. The Polish Institute of Catholic Action and the Association of Polish Protestants represented the religious organisations. The Polish Ex-Combatants Association (originated in 1945 and formally created in 1947) was the best-known military organisation; it helped its members adjust to the new civilian life in exile. Zubrzycki and Sword emphasised that the British were aware of how important the existing Polish organisations were in terms of sustaining discipline and morale among the Polish refugees; K. Sword, N. Davies, J. Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community...*, p. 441.

ly in the years to come¹⁷. However, the main duties in 1945–1946 were performed by the Interim Treasury Committee¹⁸. The threat of being separated from the basic means necessary for everyday life would put a considerable strain on the mental and physical state of the exiles, contributing towards their post-conflict misery.

These gloomy assumptions and fears on the part of the Poles had been confirmed and noted since early 1946 in minute papers and departmental correspondence within the British Government. By then it had become clear that the ITC's existence was gradually approaching its end¹⁹. The post-war climate and pressure on the British Government from the Provisional Government of the Polish Republic in Warsaw had without a doubt influenced the fate of the Interim Treasury Committee. The Communist-dominated Polish Government openly demanded the liquidation of the ITC, seeing it as a continuation of the „derecognised London Government”. From that perspective, the presence of the Interim Treasury Committee and all its branches was seen by its opponents as highly controversial, if not provocative. Thus, its existence and associated activities were under threat²⁰.

From the British side, maintaining a stable relationship with the Provisional Government in Poland also contributed to more stable relations with the Soviet wartime ally. The avoidance of any putative provocation or cause for discontent to the Soviet leadership became a very important factor in British politics. This became most evident during the Victory Parade in June 1946, where Polish troops were excluded from participation in this most prominent event to mark the end of the war. Instead, the Labour Government invited representatives of Communist Poland to take part in the parade, again ostensibly to avoid aggravating Stalin²¹.

It has to be emphasised that at that time, Attlee's and Bevin's key aim in terms of foreign policy was to maintain a satisfactory peace settlement with Russians. Although Bevin had a clear understanding of the nature of Stalin's regime, he firmly believed that it was in Britain's interests to avoid any confrontation with the Russians that could consequently provoke the scenario of a division of Germany. Bevin believed that any Anglo–Russian antagonism would be catastrophic for Europe²².

¹⁷ P. D. Stachura, *The Poles in Britain 1949–2000. From Betrayal to Assimilation*, London, 2004, p. 14; R. Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, Warszawa, 1999, p. 58.

¹⁸ At the end of 1945, The Citizens' Committee for the Welfare of Polish Refugees founded in 1940 received £ 100 000 from the Interim Treasury Committee to help Polish organisations; *Komitet Obywatelski Pomocy Uchodźcom Polskim w Londynie [The Citizens' Committee for the Welfare of Polish Refugees in London]*, 25th Anniversary Brochure, London, 1965, p. 9–10.

¹⁹ PRO – NA, Kew, ED128/143 p. 1, Note OF.91/4/1 „Poles” from 23 III 1946.

²⁰ PRO – NA, Kew, see Collection FO371/56595, 1946.

²¹ In the end, the Polish provisional Government and the Soviet Union refused to send their representation; L. Olson, S. Cloud, *For Your Freedom and Ours. The Kościuszko Squadron. Forgotten Heroes of World War II*, London, 2004, p. 397; N. Davies, *Rising '44. The battle for Warsaw*, London, 2004, p. 505.

²² A. Bullock, *Ernest Bevin. Foreign Secretary 1945–1951*, London, 1983, p. 117.

In this atmosphere of prevalingly pro-Soviet sentiments on the part of the British Government, for whatever motives, the ITC and its activities appeared as an evident obstacle and could provoke further complications for the British Government. This view was clearly confirmed by the Foreign Secretary's departmental correspondence in the early spring of 1946. Bevin made clear his wish to dissolve the Committee immediately:

*On the 13th March, the Foreign Secretary expressed a desire that the Interim Treasury Committee for Polish Questions should be wound up as soon as possible and its functions de-centralised, since the continued existence of this Committee constituted a constant source of friction between H.M. Government and the Polish Provisional Government*²³.

Although there was no evidence of a Foreign Office directive insisting on the Committee's dispersal, it soon became apparent that the ITC's existence could be coming to an end. This impending demise, however, was the cause of great concern between the two sides, that is, the British Government and representatives of the Poles in Britain. According to existing documents in the Ministry of Education collection from March 1946, it was plain that the Committee's dissolution could cause practical difficulties, linked to either the decentralisation or indeed liquidation of the ITC and putting a financial strain on both sides. These potential problems were clearly expressed by the Foreign Secretary himself when presenting his concerns along with his determination to dissolve the Interim Treasury Committee and its branches. Undoubtedly, for British officials, all these problems linked to the existence of the ITC provoked a number of discussions and comments among certain ministers and within particular departments.

Although there were many debates and controversies concerning the future of the ITC, everyone within the relevant Government departments followed the official line of British foreign policy. Any sign of objection or doubt could be seen as inappropriate with respect to the official political decision:

For reasons of policy, which I do not pretend to question or to assess, the Foreign Secretary is most anxious to dissolve the Interim Treasury Committee and to distribute its several pieces of work among the appropriate Departments.

As is evident from the official record in a note quoted verbatim, dissolving the Interim Treasury Committee could cause unnecessary chaos and place additional burdens on many governmental departments:

At first approach, I and my colleagues concerned rather recoiled; we have no wish to add to our burdens here, or to inflate our Vote. Moreover, though this was rather outside our sphere of judgment, we believed it was probably undesirable to break up the existing machinery for handling the „Polish Question” as a whole. However, the Treasury spokesman makes it clear that

²³ PRO – NA, Kew, ED128/143, „Decentralization of the Interim Treasury Committee for the »Polish Question«” – Report, spring 1946; also see: ED128/143, Letter to Dr Burness, 4 IV 1946.

*the Foreign Secretary is insistent, and I do not see that we have any good grounds for moving the Minister to offer any resistance*²⁴.

There is no doubt that this matter caused considerable turbulence in all the functioning branches of the ITC, including the educational branch. Any interruption in their activities could place further strains on the refugees' uncertain lives, disorganising their everyday plans, and finally putting their very futures at risk. It was indisputable that the potential psychological and social consequences could not be gainsaid. Both played a crucial role. Uncertainty and fear, along with the prospect of losing the opportunity to become fit and able to participate fully in the life of society, could once more harm the self-esteem and self-confidence of individuals. Moreover, it could also rock the very existence of the whole educational system to its core. Consequently, certain concern and even sympathy were expressed in the correspondence of Mr. W. R. Richardson, Principal Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Education, and Mr H. H. Eggers, representing the Treasury Chambers:

*I can assure you that there is nothing but sympathy and generosity in official quarters, even in very high quarters*²⁵.

By the spring of 1946, the ITC's main functions in the area of education were mainly linked to the upkeep of the existing and well-performing Polish schools and educational institutions. Having been carefully preserved and tended in exile, they were now bedded in and able to guarantee not only basic education for young Poles, but they could also equip them with professional qualifications.

At that time, the ITC's main education activity was concentrated around:

1. Maintaining and supervising the five Polish Faculties, that is: The Faculty of Law in Oxford, the Faculty of Medicine in Edinburgh, the School of Architecture in Liverpool, the Board of Medical Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh, and the Board of Academicals Studies in London;
2. Supervising the School of Foreign Trade and Port Administration in London, along with the Maritime School, the Radio Technical School in Glasgow, and the Agriculture School, also in Glasgow;
3. Providing premises and staff in connection with education in the Polish Armed Forces;
4. Running of a Higher Teachers' Course at Hammersmith and the establishment of short English Language Courses;
5. The provision of grants to individual students at the Polish Faculties and Schools, British Universities, commercial and technical schools;
6. The provision of grants to students on various types of residencies and internships, that is, students doing research work or serving as apprentices;
7. The provision of grants to Polish scientists, musicians, artists, etc;
8. The provision of grants to clergymen;

²⁴ PRO – NA Kew, ED128/143, Minute paper dated 8 V 1946, p. 1.

²⁵ PRO – NA, Kew, ED128/143, Letter to Sir E. Barker, dictated by Mr. W. R. Richardson on 8 V 1946.

9. The publication and distribution of textbooks for use in faculties and schools;
10. Maintaining primary schools for children of both sexes;
11. The provision of grants to parents to assist in the education of Polish children at British and Polish schools;
12. Maintaining the Polish Merchant Navy College at Landywood in Staffordshire;
13. Maintaining schools and providing limited educational facilities in refugee colonies in the Middle East, India, Africa and the Dominions²⁶.

It should be noted that the staff engaged on the Committee's educational work amounted to around 70 Polish employees. In addition, there were almost 500 people working in schools and other educational institutions. The number of English staff dealing with the Treasury Committee's work remained very small and consisted of Mr. Eggers, representing Treasury Chambers, and his three temporary principals. Thus, the work was devolved largely to the Poles, directed by Professor Tadeusz Sulimirski²⁷.

It was estimated that the total educational budget of the ITC Educational Branch was around £ 100 000 per month, of which overseas expenditure accounted for about £ 40 000²⁸. Among those who received grants were students, individuals serving in the Armed Forces, civilians, teachers and administrative staff. Regardless of whether they received military pay or the civilian relief allowance, the expense still remained the burden of His Majesty's Government. Nevertheless, given that a substantial sum was being spent purely on education, the money was seen, in British eyes, as being spent wisely and for the benefit of the Poles.

The investment was carefully thought through and by no means haphazard and was seen to be both justified and valuable to all concerned. Indeed, as noted before, from the British point of view, promoting of and investing in the education of Poles would ensure that they obtained desirable employment, keep them suitably occupied, and it would also leave positive memories of their time in exile in Britain. This attitude was clearly expressed in an explanatory letter from Mr. Eggers, as early as 23 March 1946:

In general, our policy has been founded on the principle that so long as Poles reside in the United Kingdom it is better, both in their own and in the national interest, that they should be mentally occupied and we have always felt that this consideration justified the expenditure involved. [...]

Moreover, in framing our policy we have had in mind that it is in the national interest that Poles returning to their homeland should carry with them agreeable memories of their stay in the United Kingdom and that those who remain here or settle overseas should be enabled to pursue studies from which both they and we would benefit later²⁹.

²⁶ PRO – NA, Kew, ED128/143, Letter, OF.91/4/1 written by H. H. Eggers of Treasury Chambers in London, dated 23 III 1946, p. 1–2.

²⁷ PRO – NA, Kew, ED128/143, Note of an interview with Mr. Eggers on the question of transfer of certain of the Educational Functions of the Polish Interim Committee, dated 29 IV 1946, p. 1.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

3. CONCLUSION

Parliamentary documents from March 1946, show that establishing any future policy with regard to the education of Poles remained a difficult task for the British Government. There was, however, an awareness of the fact that the British Empire could possibly absorb and consequently grant asylum to tens of thousands of Poles in addition to those already in the country. Therefore, additional educational facilities would have to be provided for this larger numbers of Poles.

At the same time as the future of the ITC was being tackled, work on the formation of the Polish Resettlement Corps was also proceeding apace. The two initiatives occupied British minds in equal measure. During the months that followed, all correspondence and documents held at the Ministry of Education and Science and relating to the Polish Interim Committee's educational functions seemed to point to a finalisation of its activity. At the same time, as noted above, all work within Government departments was focussed on the formation of the Polish Resettlement Corps, the body that was to assist and support the Polish people until they became fully adjusted to their new lives in exile.

Both these British initiatives and enterprises, the ITC and the PRC, remained significant for the future of Polish exiles. All attempts made by the British side to find reasonable and acceptable solutions to the problems of adapting Poles to British civilian life grew out of the establishment of these two institutions, which may be seen as the foundations for the new resettlement policy tailored to the Poles. However, this was only the beginning of an arduous task, which aimed to find a long-term strategy that would be satisfactory to both sides.

From the minute papers of May 1946, it is also apparent, and this bears repeating, that the British Government was fully aware that it would probably have to absorb a great number of Polish people within the British Empire. The final decision was still pending, but it was perceived as an issue relating to much wider policy. The following is fairly self-explanatory:

Indeed, we must, I imagine, face up to the prospect that we have got to absorb and to nationalise a considerable Polish element. Ultimately, no doubt, this special expenditure will disappear as the Poles remaining with us become part of the citizen body and, therefore, are dealt with by our normal public services.

If you agree that we should not resist taking over this particular baby, I will at once get down to details³⁰.

There is no doubt that the British side was progressively working towards resolving the Polish Question. This entire task appeared to be interspersed with a myriad of complex challenges. For political reasons, the existing machinery for handling the Polish Question in its entirety in the shape of the Interim Treasury Committee, which had functioned so well to date, had to be disbanded or replaced

³⁰ PRO – NA, Kew, ED128/143, Minute paper, Education, 8 V 1946.

by another organisation. There was also no doubt that the complexity and magnitude of the problems faced by the British side would significantly increase with the eventual disbandment of the Polish Armed Forces.

Moreover, any eventual solution was being eagerly awaited by the Poles, who clearly needed to know what lay in store for them and where they might be headed.

AGATA BŁASZCZYK

PROCES KSZTAŁTOWANIA SIĘ POLITYKI OSIEDLEŃCZEJ RZĄDU BRYTYJSKIEGO W STOSUNKU DO POLSKICH UCHODźCÓW POLITYCZNYCH W WIELKIEJ BRYTANII (PAźDZIERNIK 1945 – MAJ 1946)

STRESZCZENIE

Na podstawie dokumentacji zgromadzonej w brytyjskich archiwach narodowych w Londynie autorka ukazuje plany, strategię oraz formowanie się polityki osiedleńczej rządu brytyjskiego w stosunku do polskich uchodźców politycznych po II wojnie światowej.

Ich zawartość, a także sam fakt istnienia, wyraźnie wskazuje na to, że rząd brytyjski był świadomy konsekwencji wynikających z postanowień konferencji w Teheranie w 1943 roku w tzw. kwestii polskiej.

Artykuł wyjaśnia początkowy etap prac parlamentu brytyjskiego nad powołaniem do życia pierwszych ważnych instytucji mających na celu pomoc Polakom w przystosowaniu się do życia na obczyźnie, a jednocześnie tworzących zleпки polityki migracyjnej dla uchodźców polskich, które w konsekwencji przyczyniły się do ukształtowania się polskiej emigracji powojennej.

Słowa kluczowe: polscy uchodźcy polityczni, demobilizacja, Polskie Siły Zbrojne, Polski Korpus Przesiedleńczy (Przysposobienia i Rozmieszczenia)