Satellite in the Making


By OSCAR HALECKI

WHEN Hitler invaded Russia in 1941 he sealed his own doom—and he sealed the doom of Poland. Russia's Joseph Stalin had refused to join the West in the face of the Soviet-British alliance of that same year, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had prepared to recognize that Russia had a right to claim most of her former empire back from other powers on other grounds, and he was unable or unwilling to realize that Russia might also convert the rest of Poland into a Soviet satellite. A pattern in dealing with Poland was thus established, which, even after America's entrance into the war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was unable or unwilling to change. That pattern was strictly followed after the war by President Churchill and British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, and goes back to the period before World War II, to the United Nations negotiations in 1943, and to the Yalta Declaration of Poland's dependence on the Soviet Union. Britain and the United States withdrew recognition from the Polish government and granted it to Russia. All of this was recalled to us in Edward J. Rozeck's "Allied Wartime Diplomacy." That dark chapter in history is certainly not unknown. Churchill's own memoirs reveal the basic facts no less clearly and dramatically than do the memoirs of Polish military and diplomatic leaders. But it is only now, thanks to this book by Mr. Rozeck, a former Polish citizen and currently the chairman of Political Science at Stanford University, that the voice of the victims has been heard in its own form of personal recollections, but through documentary evidence. Extracts from six important volumes, the story is illustrated by the full text of diplomatic reports, confidential letters, official records and private notes of secret conferences. Far from making the book less readable, such a method makes the presentation more convincing and absorbing.

MUCH of this rich material has been taken from the papers of Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, former Prime Minister of Poland, and from his oral comments. The authors believe that Mr. Rozeck's "Of- ficial Government Documents" of Poland—until Mikolajczyk's resignation from the Premier- ship in November, 1943—were or naturally they are a primary source for the sixteen-month period when he was in office. His "private files" have been used for the study of the following period until his escape from the Soviet-controlled regime in October, 1947, but they add comparatively little to the sad story of the "emasculation of the Rape of Poland," in which ten years ago Mikolajczyk tried to justify the collapse of his government and his personal premiership in the Communist regime.

The decision, contrary to the policy of the Polish Government, was made under the strongest pressure of Churchill and the British Mission. The United States officials had more violent than that pressure in 1943 and 1944, when Mikolajczyk still defended his country to the best of his abilities the rights of Poland against allies and enemies.

The testimony of the man who went through such an ordeal is not likely to blame British and American wishful thinking that Stalin could and should be appeased. But it does not mean that this should not have been blamed for acting without such illusions as that of the Yalta Agreement in 1945. And Churchill's involvements, which questioned the Polish constitution, and the "overstraining" of that effort, would appear even more shocking, if the author (who has preserved a complete war record) mentioned at least the Polish part in the Yalta agreement. Poland was not concentrated so exclusively on Mikolajczyk's experience.

I HAT experience is indeed extremely instructive as far as British policy is concerned, but the American side of Allied diplomacy is illustrated in this book rather by rumors and personal glimpses than by new facts. For Poland, the Polish side, there remains much research to be done in the papers which have been preserved by other members of the wartime Polish Government and in the rich collections at the Rockefeller Institute in London.

Even so, Mr. Rozeck has made an outstanding contribution to the history of the Second World War according to William Y. Elliott's excellent foreword, might be called "The Betrayal of Poland". Mr. Rozeck avoids writing in a spirit of bitterness, but in his conclusion he rightly refutes the often used phrase "that the Yalta Agreement had been carried out by the Soviets, there would not have been any bet rayal of Poland". His contribution preempts the countries which are now under Soviet control would still be free.

Any thoughtful reader must agree with him that "this argument is indefensible, at least in the case of Poland." He writes: "One group of leaders had established their own brand of government inside Poland, it was obvious that it would have to be recognized wherever Soviet purposes, which were clearly defined in Communist writings with one exception: the Yalta, as were Hitler's objectives in "Mein Kampf."