

“1945: liberation without freedom”

In 1945, the Polish nation, hugely impacted by the Second World War, with other victims of two totalitarianisms in Central and Eastern Europe, witnessed what we call today “liberation without freedom”. In Poland, left behind the Iron Curtain, Josef Stalin implemented his policy of building a communist empire.

When the Soviet Union defeated the Third Reich, contrary to other Allies in 1945, it did not bring freedom to Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, but imposed another period of enslavement that lasted almost 50 years.¹ As distinguished British historian Professor Norman Davies pointed out, “thoughtful people need to reflect on what actually happened in Poland, both in 1939 and in 1944-1945, and to draw their own conclusions”.² During the 20th century, Russian or Soviet armies invaded Poland four times. In many ways, the second Soviet occupation of 1944-1945 resembled the first Soviet occupation of 1939-1941. At the end of the Second World War, Stalin’s forces took complete political control of all Poland, whilst annexing the eastern borderlands. The new statehood was based on manipulated referenda and rigged elections (1947), which resulted in the presence of nearly fifty NKVD agents and 140 members and supporters of the anti-Polish Communist Party in the new parliament.³ The economy, agriculture, industry and brutal repressions were modelled on similar policies implemented in the Soviet Union. For several post-war decades, the subject was suppressed by the elaborate censorship of the Soviet Bloc, and it is only relatively recently that people have been able to write and talk about it openly.

The ousting of German troops by the Red Army, beginning in January 1944, effectively ended the bloodiest occupation that Poland had to endure throughout its history. Germans killed 5.5 million Polish citizens. In 1945, the people wanted to be free and safe, but neither liberty nor safety was forthcoming.⁴ Poland, abandoned by the former allies, was again conquered by the Soviet Union, the same aggressor, who had carried out the secret anti-Polish conspiracy with Hitler (the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact) and, on 17 September 1939, co-divided Polish territories with Nazi Germany and finally destroyed the Polish statehood.

Poland’s conquest by the Red Army in 1945 was one of the key elements in the Stalinist plan to introduce communist dictatorship in the post-war Europe. The takeover of the ruins of left-bank Warsaw in January 1945 by the Red Army and the Polish People's Army let communist security services install themselves in the capital⁵, having earlier operated on the right bank of Vistula river. In August and September 1944 the Red Army stationing on the Vistula River watched passively the heroic fight of the Warsaw insurgents, who had taken up arms and demanded free, democratic and just Poland. These aims of the Poles were in glaring contradiction with the ideological assumptions of the Stalinist communism.⁶

The totalitarian communist system imposed on the Poles led to violent sovietisation and terror aimed at both civilians and members of the Underground Poland. In the years 1944-1945, when the territory of Poland saw one regime replace another, Polish communists and their Soviet mentors took over persecution and torture sites previously used by the Germans – and set up new ones. To understand the true face of the so-called liberation, one should remember, that at the very same time in January 1945 when the surviving inmates of Auschwitz were being released in full view of the cameras, the NKVD, now running Majdanek (Lublin), were secretly filling it with another set of inmates regarded by Stalin as traitors and

¹ Dr K. Nawrocki, director of the Museum of the Second World War, Wellington, 12 Feb 2020 (www.gov.pl/web/newzealand and <https://muzeum1939.pl>).

² Prof. N. Davies: Auschwitz and the so-called Soviet liberation of Poland (<https://notesfrompoland.com>).

³ Dr K. Nawrocki, *ibidem*.

⁴ On 17 January 1945, the Red Army entered the ruins of the left-bank Warsaw (<https://muzeum1939.pl>).

⁵ The red map of Warsaw (<https://ipn.gov.pl>).

⁶ On 17 January 1945..., *ibidem*.

spies.⁷ This time, the ex-Nazi German camp housed Polish war-time patriots, thousands of members of Poland's wartime resistance, the Home Army (AK), who were allies of the Western powers. Many of these resistance fighters were Britain's allies, inspired by democratic ideals and flown into Poland in 1942-1943 by Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE).

One must not forget Poles' significant contributions to the Allied effort throughout the war. Poles fighting on land, sea and air, were in fact the fourth largest Allied army in Europe, after the Soviet Union, United States and Britain. In 1940, the Polish Armed Forces took part in the battles of the Norwegian Campaign (Narvik), France and Great Britain, with Polish pilots as the largest foreign contingent alongside the New Zealanders. The Poles who battled in North Africa (Tobruk, Cyrenaica) fought later in the Italian Campaign as the Polish II Corps, commanded by General Anders, to capture Monte Cassino and liberate Bologna, to say the least. The Polish soldiers, along with the Allied Forces, liberated the Western countries in the aftermath of the Normandy Landings, whereas others fought alongside the Red Army in the East. We remember their merits and bravery, e.g. General Maczek's Armored Division in France and in the Netherlands, General Sosabowski's parachuters in the operation Market Garden. After the war dozens of thousands of Polish veterans who had fought on Western fronts remained in the UK and the Commonwealth countries, including New Zealand and Australia, thus they were saved from communist persecutions. Nevertheless, Polish veterans, one of the crucial allies in campaign against Nazi Germany, were not included in the London Victory Parade in 1946 after pressure from the Soviet Union.

Despite many people welcoming liberation from German Nazism, institution of the Soviet order, lacking social support in Poland, was only possible by means of mass terror, that faced wide resistance by 200,000 people, including 20,000 armed members (until 1947). The final number of victims of the communist crimes of 1944-1954 may total 50,000 – equal to the losses suffered by the Home Army under German occupation until March 1944. When we add thousands of political prisoners, deportees to the Soviet Union and those persecuted on account of belonging to an undesired social group (Catholic Church adherents, farmers, private entrepreneurs and others), we begin to comprehend how repressive the whole system was.⁸

Professor Davies says that “in the minds of most Westerners, the lessons of the so-called liberation were never learned”. “Liberation”, a term of shocking vitality, was a key word in the Communist arsenal of lies.⁹ It became the foundation for all further falsifications leading to apparent legitimisation of power forced down on the Polish nation. Poland was not liberated, but became the subject of aggression and conquest at the hands of the Soviet Union. From this simple observation come far reaching consequences abolishing historical duality. In many areas calling things by their names, aggression – an aggression, conquest – a conquest, allows us, among other things, to accurately describe the reality of the “post-Yalta” Poland ruled by the Soviet nominees, and being thus an element of the Soviet imperialist traditions and not an expression of Polish statehood.¹⁰ It also enables us to clearly assess the Red Army (and other Soviet services) as an aggressor. The last Soviet army units did not leave Poland until 1993, in the Yeltsin-era.

To Poland, and to the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, freedom came much later than to Western Europe and other parts of the world. The real beginning of the road to freedom was the pontificate of the Polish Pope John Paul II, and then the rise of the “Solidarity” social movement in Gdańsk - many years after the war.

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⁷ Prof. N. Davies, *ibidem*.

⁸ Dr K. Nawrocki, *ibidem*.

⁹ F. Musiał: A conquest called liberation (<https://przystanekhistoria.pl>).

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.