Sumner Welles Papers
Box 165 Folder 12
Europe Files
Poland 1938-1942

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DATE: March 14, 1938.

SUBJECT: Jewish problem; European situation.

PARTICIPANTS: The Polish Ambassador, Count Jerzy Potocki; the Under Secretary.

COPIES TO: S, A-B, PA/D, Eu

The Polish Ambassador called to see me this morning. He told me that he was being received by the President at noon today and desired to have an opportunity of talking with me before he spoke with the President with regard to the Jewish problem which he had earlier discussed with me at the request of the President.

I told the Ambassador that since I had last talked with him on this subject there had been no new developments of which I was aware other than the information given to me by Ambassador Biddle with regard to the possibility of a visit to Poland by Mr. Szymczak. I said

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that I knew the Ambassador had been fully advised of this possibility by Mr. Biddle and that, consequently, I knew of nothing to add to the consideration of the problem as the Ambassador had first approached it.

The Ambassador said that he and Mr. Szymczak had discussed the latter's possible visit to Poland and that he had told Mr. Szymczak of his own very strong belief that there was nothing whatever to be gained by such a trip unless Mr. Szymczak went to Poland with positive and concrete assurances on the part of certain Jewish organizations in the United States that they were willing to make a financial contribution towards either the properly financed emigration of Jews from Poland or towards the development of certain projects within Poland for the benefit of the Polish people, including the Jews. Mr. Szymczak had replied to the Ambassador that he had not been in touch with any of the Jewish organizations other than that headed by Mr. George Backer and that he did not feel that this was enough inasmuch as he had received no positive assurances or commitments of any kind from that group. Mr. Szymczak had added that he was very anxious to obtain such concrete assurances as the Ambassador had in mind either from Mr. Bernard Baruch, Mr. Mortimer Schiff or members of the Warburg family, but that he had not been able to have any satisfactory

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contacts with these individuals.

I expressed to the Ambassador my own personal opinion that the advice he had given Mr. Szymczak was very sound. I said that I did not see that Mr. Szymczak would accomplish very much if he merely went to Poland in order to talk generalities with the highest officials of the Polish Government, but that if he went with a sound program which could be backed up in a material manner, it seemed to me that some real progress could be made.

I took occasion to say that necessarily the Jews in the United States were deeply and profoundly concerned with the course of events in Europe during the past weeks and particularly the tragedies which they now envisaged as likely to take place in Austria. I said that the Ambassador was fully familiar with the very strong feeling which had been created as a result of the policies of the Goga Government in Rumania and that the spread of anti-Semite activities which are now anticipated in Austria would provoke even greater anxiety in this country among that element of our population. I said that I hoped that the policy of tolerance which had been pursued by the Polish Government would not now be modified and I said that it seemed to me unquestionable that if that policy of tolerance and of a desire to solve the Jewish problem in Poland in a conciliatory manner were continued by the

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Polish Government, it would undoubtedly be welcomed by public opinion in the United States with very beneficial results to Polish-American relations.

The Ambassador told me that he was confident that his Government would not modify the policy to which I had referred. He said, however, that the Jewish problem in Poland was a very real problem and that his Government felt that some start at a solution must be made in the near future. I then inquired if the Polish Government had made any investigation of possibilities for Polish immigration to the Latin American republics as a result of the information I had given him during the course of our first conversation on this subject. The Ambassador said that he had not heard from Warsaw with regard to this matter, but that it seemed to be evident that his Government was concentrating on the possibilities of immigration to Palestine more than on the possibilities of immigration to South or Central America, primarily because of the fact that the expenses involved were so much less if immigration to Palestine were undertaken. He did say, however, that his Government had informed him that the Government of Venezuela had granted certain agricultural concessions for Polish-Jewish immigration and that he would be grateful if I could ascertain from Venezuela whether that Government would look with favor upon the utilization

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of such concessions under present conditions. I told the Ambassador that I should be glad to do this in an entirely personal and informal way and that upon the return of the Minister of Venezuela to Washington I would make inquiry and then let the Ambassador know accordingly.

The Ambassador discussed with me at some length the European situation very much along the lines of his talk with the Secretary of State a few days ago. He seemed to feel that no general European war would result from the amalgamation of Austria into the Reich and that Germany would not now pursue actively the problem of the German minorities in Czechoslovakia. He stated that he thought the only element of danger was the possibility that the new French Foreign Minister, Paul Boncour, would endeavor actively to bring Russia into the Western European picture and that if that were done of course Poland would not remain aloof and disinterested. He said that up to the present time Poland had made no representations whatever to Germany with regard to the Austrian adventure and intended to remain completely to one side. He said that, of course, the relations between Poland and France were very close but that Poland could not regard with equanimity any policy on the part of France which endeavored to make of the Franco-Russian alliance a live issue insofar as the Central European situation was concerned.

U:SW:DMK

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: October 10, 1938.

SUBJECT: General European situation.

PARTICIPANTS: The Polish Ambassador, Count Jerzy Potocki; the Under Secretary.

COPIES TO: S, A-B, Eu, PA/D

The Polish Ambassador called to see me this morning upon his return to Washington after a vacation in his own country. He said that he had left Poland on September 21 and had had a long conference with Foreign Minister Beck just before leaving Warsaw.

The Ambassador spoke at some length and in some detail about recent events in Europe without mentioning anything not already known to this Government. He then went on to say that his Government now took it for granted that the danger of war between Germany and Italy and Great Britain and France had been averted, at least

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for the time being and in all probability for some time to come. He said the real dangers were now beginning for Poland and her neighbors. He said that unquestionably Germany would continue her thrust through Southeastern Europe and that her immediate objective would presumably be the control of the military passes in Carpathian Ruthenia which were of enormous strategic value to Germany since to a large extent they would ensure Germany's safe access to the Ukraine. The Ambassador went on to say that upon Poland were directed the brunt of Germany's moves for expansion. He said that if Germany obtained territorial access to Russia the day of independent Poland would be over. He believed that Czechoslovakia was now doomed to a position of a vassal state to Germany and that there was grave danger that Hungary would be the next to fall into that same position. He stated that the one security that could now be evolved against German hegemony over continental Europe would be a strong cohesive group of buffer states between Russia and Germany, namely, Poland, Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia. To make this possible, the Ambassador continued, a common frontier between Poland and Hungary was indispensable as only in that way would the Carpathian Ruthenian area be prevented from falling under German control either through direct territorial acquisition or through German control of a Czechoslovakia still retaining that territory.

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The Ambassador went on to say that Rumania was but a broken reed, that its military strength was fantastically inadequate and that the Government itself was honeycombed with corruption and completely incapable of confronting any crisis. He said that Hungary was capable of becoming strong and self-sufficient, but that at the present time Yugoslavia was the strongest member of the group, both actually and potentially, next to Poland. The Ambassador said that his Government knew as a positive fact that the Soviet Government had never had the slightest intention of coming to the assistance of Czechoslovakia no matter what had happened; that the Russian Government had done its utmost to persuade Czechoslovakia to go to war but that it was in no position to do anything to support Czechoslovakia other than the possible sending of a very few bombing planes. The Ambassador stated that there had been no military preparation of any kind whatever on the Russian side of the Polish frontier and that in the recent altercation between Russia and Poland as a result of the Polish ultimatum to Czechoslovakia the Russians had not dared to provoke any controversy with Poland. He spoke with great pride of the state of Polish military preparedness and of the large munitions factories which were developing rapidly within Poland.

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The Ambassador then went on to say that while it may have appeared that Polish aggression against Czechoslovakia had been concerted in Germany because of the fact that action was taken simultaneously, he was instructed to inform me that the Polish action had been taken entirely independently and had in fact been taken counter to the desires of the German Government. I took occasion to state that no matter what the facts might be, the world at large had unquestionably gained the impression that Poland had taken advantage of a neighbor who was prostrate and that the effect on the average man and woman in this country could hardly be considered as a very happy one. The Ambassador said he was sorry for that but that the fact was that Poland had had this controversy with Czechoslovakia, as I knew, for eighteen years; that Czechoslovakia had frequently been offered the opportunity of settling it in an amicable and just manner and that Polish public opinion would not permit the Polish Government to defer rectification when the opportunity had recently been offered. I made no further comment.

The Ambassador, in response to an inquiry from me, said that Polish public opinion would never countenance the absorption by Germany of Danzig and that for the time being at least, particularly after Hitler's recent

speech, he thought that Germany would not take up the question of Danzig, the Corridor nor the Baltic states. He said he felt their entire effort, as he had said before, would be concentrated on the movement through the Southeast.

The Ambassador said that his Foreign Office was in close touch with the internal situation in Russia and that things were going from bad to worse. He said that in the opinion of the Polish Government Russia was in an advanced stage of decomposition. He said nevertheless that Poland desired to maintain as good relations as possible with Russia; that she had no disputes with Russia; that the common frontier was remarkably free from incidents and that all Polish energy would now be directed towards the closest kind of understanding with Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia. I asked what attitude the Italian Government might have taken with regard to this latter question. He said that Italy had informed his Government that they heartily favored it and that the Poles were of the opinion that the moment had now come when Italy would attempt to throw her weight in every possible manner against further German expansion. He believed that Italy was seriously desirous of seeking an appeasement of her controversies with France and Great Britain and would attempt to develop closer relations with Poland and the other Central

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European states.

After this general discussion the Ambassador again brought up the question of Polish interest in the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees. The Ambassador once more said that it would seem as if countries like Germany which abuse and maltreat their Jewish population were being given greater consideration in the treatment of refugees than countries like Poland which were attempting to get rid of their Jewish minorities in a peaceful and orderly manner without resort to brute violence. I reminded the Ambassador of what I had said to him before he left for Europe, namely, that the question of German refugees was one of such urgency as to appeal to the humanitarian instincts of an enormous number of people throughout the world; that so far as the policy of the Polish Government to deal with her minorities in a humanitarian manner was concerned, he himself must have appreciated the happy effect which such a policy had had on public opinion in this country. I said that the Intergovernmental Committee was now dealing with a question of the utmost urgency and that if the German Government could make it possible for the Committee to function effectively, as time passed the Committee would undoubtedly be enabled to undertake the survey of a broader policy as to migrations which was one of the chief reasons for which the President had called the Committee into being. I said, however, that obviously the

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present moment was not one when the Committee could possibly undertake to deal with the question of Polish emigrants and that I hoped his Government would understand that this was the situation. The Ambassador seemed to be satisfied with this statement and at my suggestion said that he would be glad to have a talk with Mr. Myron Taylor, now in New York, with regard to the functioning of the Committee.

U:SW:DMK

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: June 20, 1941

SUBJECT: Recent visa regulations

PARTICIPANTS: Polish Ambassador, Mr. Jan Ciechanowski;
Acting Secretary, Mr. Welles

COPIES TO: S, A-L, VD, Eu, PA/D

The Polish Ambassador called to see me this morning. The Ambassador expressed great concern because of the issuance of the recent visa regulations restricting the entrance into the United States of individuals coming from Germany, Russia or occupied countries of Europe who had close relatives remaining in those countries. The Ambassador urged that allowances be made in order to take care of the situation of many Polish exiles now in Portugal awaiting passage for the United States. I told the Ambassador that every possible consideration would be given to such cases and that every case would be reviewed upon its individual merits.

U:SW:DMK

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: November 5, 1941

SUBJECT: Utilization of Polish man-power in Soviet Russia;
Relief for Polish refugees in the Soviet Union;
Transfer of personnel of Polish Embassy in Tokyo to Chungking.

PARTICIPANTS: The President,
Mr. Jan Ciechanowski, Polish Ambassador;
Mr. Welles, Under Secretary.

11-5-41

COPIES TO: S, A-A, Eu, PA/D

The President received the Polish Ambassador this morning.

The President discussed at some length with the Ambassador the contents of the aide memoire which the Ambassador had left with Mr. Atherton on October 30. After considering the various problems presented in this memorandum and the requests made of this Government by the Polish Government, the President requested me to have a meeting with the Ambassador and with Averill Harriman and Ed Stettinius in order to discuss more fully the Lease-Lend aspect of the request of the Polish Government. The President further stated that he thought the most practical solution of the basic problem pre-

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sented would be for Mr. Harriman to send a personal message to Stalin pointing out that the failure of the Soviet Government to utilize fully the man power represented by the 100,000 Polish troops available for service in the Soviet Union was operating to the detriment of the interests of the Soviet Government itself and that these troops could be used to great advantage at the present moment either by the Soviet Government or by the British Government.

With regard to the question of relief for Polish refugees in the Soviet Union, the President suggested that Mr. Ciechanowski discuss this matter further with the Chairman of the American Red Cross. In response to a specific request from the Polish Ambassador that a portion of the President's fund be used for clothing or feeding these refugees, the President said that he believed the only effective way in which this could be done would be through the American Red Cross, and emphasized the fact in that connection that the real difficulty was the shipping difficulty.

The Ambassador further mentioned to the President the recommendation he had made to his Government to transfer the personnel of the Polish Embassy in Tokyo, which has now been closed by order of the Japanese Government, to Chungking.

U:SW:IJ

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: May 1, 1941.

SUBJECT: Situation in Poland.

PARTICIPANTS: Polish Ambassador, Mr. Jan Ciechanowski;
The Under Secretary, Mr. Welles.

COPIES TO: S, A-B, PA/D, Eu, FE

The Ambassador called to see me at his request. The Ambassador spoke first of reports that he had just received from his Foreign Minister indicating that a new wave of terrorism was being undertaken by the German occupying authorities in Western Poland. He gave me a memorandum giving details which is attached herewith. In the name of his Government, he stated that it would be most appreciated if the President, possibly on May 3, the Polish National Holiday, could make some statement regarding the desire of this Government that a free and independent Poland might again be created which would by its nature stimulate Polish morale, not only in occupied Poland but among Polish nationals in other parts of the

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world. I told the Ambassador that I should be very glad to take this request under consideration.

The Ambassador then brought up the question of Polish refugees in Japan. He said that the Polish Government fully understood the reasons for the orders issued by the Department stopping or limiting greatly the issuance of visas to refugees who had crossed the Soviet Union with their ultimate destination the United States because of the fact that many of these individuals seeking to enter the United States were believed to be acting under pressure as Soviet or German agents. The Ambassador said, however, that in certain individual cases the Polish Government and the Polish Embassy in Japan could assure our authorities that these individuals were entirely reliable and reputable and he trusted that in certain specific cases of this character, if the Polish Embassy in Japan vouched for the good behavior of these individuals, exceptions would be made and visas would be granted. I told the Ambassador that I should be very glad to refer this request to the appropriate authorities in the Department for their consideration.

The Ambassador also stated that he had just heard from his Foreign Minister that the German Government had ordered the Hungarian Government to return to German

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jurisdiction Poles who had escaped from Poland at the time of the occupation and who had taken refuge in Hungary. He hoped that the United States Legation at Budapest might be instructed to interpose in behalf of these refugees. I told the Ambassador that I was afraid the situation had reached a point where the Hungarian Government was so dominated by Germany that it would not be able to refuse any requests that Germany might make of it, but that I should be glad to do what we could in this respect.

U:SW:PK

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MEMORANDUM

on the conduct of the German Authorities
of occupation in Poland.

- - - - - - - -

April 30, 1941.

The Polish Government is authoritatively informed that a new wave of terrorism, of mass arrests and executions is now being applied by the German authorities in Poland. The Gestapo makes use of the most brutal methods, ranging from starvation to bestial beating of the population and torture. In concentration camps starving of prisoners, inhuman beating, is taking place, and a very high percentage of mortality is recorded. The German authorities subject private homes and travellers to search and violence. They also loot all personal property, this being accompanied by violence and maltreatment.

Polish villages are the scene of terror, reprisals, punitive expeditions, requisitions, mass beatings and violence of every kind. Special concentration camps for Polish peasants have been instituted. Large numbers of the population are being moved within the cities and from territories incorporated to the Reich total deportation of Poles is being effected.

In

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In connection with the establishment of the "Jewish ghetto" in Warsaw, 90,000 Christians have been forcibly expelled from that part of the city. Hunger is becoming acute and widespread over the entire country.

With the advent of Spring Polish youth is being drafted for compulsory labor. Schools are being closed by decree. Employers, including enterprises of public utility, are required to dismiss all younger employees. Young people from the intelligentsia are being incorporated into special labor battalions mostly composed of criminals.

Likewise, with the advent of Spring, agricultural and industrial workers are forcibly drafted for compulsory work in Germany.

In daytime man-hunts are organized on streets and at night people are dragged out of their homes.

In spite of the above, the entire nation perseveres in its resistance, but even superhuman resistance has its limits. Therefore moral support from the outside is becoming an urgent necessity.

The

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The Polish population, suffering this unprecedented tyranny, has not received for some time past any moral support or encouragement on the part of other civilized nations. This attitude of indifference to their criminal behavior in Poland, undoubtedly encourages the Germans to believe that they can pursue the application of inhuman and sadistic methods of extermination to the Polish population with impunity.

It is, therefore, urgent that allied and neutral public opinion should take a firm stand on behalf of the oppressed Poles whose lot is by far worse than that of the populations in occupied Belgium, Holland, Norway and France.

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December 6, 1941

Eu - Mr. Atherton:

I do not feel very strongly about this one way or the other. However, in view of the previous instructions sent to Mr. Biddle, I agree that the Polish Ambassador here be informed that we will maintain the same position.

U:SW:IJ

Polish Ambassador re joint statement by allied Governments in London protesting violent treatment of civilians in occupied countries. M. Atherton, 12-5-41

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE:
March 28, 1941.

SUBJECT: Poles in Concentration Camps in Rumania.

PARTICIPANTS: Polish Ambassador, Mr. Jan Ciechanowski;
Acting Secretary, Mr. Welles.

COPIES TO: S, A-B, PA/D, Eu, NE

3-28-41

The Polish Ambassador called to see me this afternoon.

The Ambassador asked very urgently that the American Embassy in Ankara be authorized to receive reports concerning Poles now in concentration camps in Rumania from Mr. Brown, agent of the Y.M.C.A., who, the Ambassador informed me, was attending to relief matters involving these Polish citizens. The Ambassador said that Chile was nominally taking care of Polish interests in Rumania and that the Chilean Government had instructed its Legation in Bucharest with regard to Polish matters to refer all reports and communications to Santiago, Chile; hence in turn they were

referred

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referred by the Chilean Foreign Office to the Chilean Embassy in London, and thence to the headquarters of the Polish Government in London. The Ambassador stated that this gave rise, of course, to an interminable delay and that it would be greatly appreciated by the Polish Government if the arrangement he had requested could be agreed to by this Government. I told the Ambassador that the matter would be given immediate consideration and that I would let him know what attitude we could take.

See also:

Visit of General Sikorski to the United States;
Creation of Baltic Institute in New York to discuss post-war problems involving the Baltic States, the Ukraine and Poland.

U:SW:GEB

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March 29, 1941

Eu
Mr. Atherton:

I wish you would look into this request and let me know what you think we should do.

U:SW:DMK

Rumania - Notes in Concentration Camps in Rumania
Memo. of Conv. 3-28-41

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POLAND

General Sikorsky
Prime Minister,
12-12-42

German treatment of Polish Jews

December 14, 1942

A-B - Dr. Berle:

Eu - Mr. Atherton:

For your information.

Please have some reply drafted for my signature.

U:SW:IJ

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

~~SECRET~~

DATE: December 4, 1942

SUBJECT: Survey of German propaganda and the activities of German refugees in England and other United Nations

PARTICIPANTS: Prime Minister of Poland, General Sikorski; Ambassador of Poland, Mr. Jan Ciechanowski; Under Secretary, Mr. Welles

COPIES TO: S only

12-4-42

*** 1—1493

The Prime Minister of Poland, accompanied by the Polish Ambassador, called to see me this afternoon.

The Prime Minister handed me a document, attached herewith, which contains a secret survey and analysis by the Prime Minister of German propaganda and the activities of German refugees in England and in other countries of the United Nations.

Declassified
E.O. 12958 Sec 3.5
State Dept. Guidelines

By RG NARA, Date 11/9/95

U:SW:GES

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COPY

MOST SECRET

Notes on German Propaganda presented by the Polish Prime Minister to the President.

I was asked by the heads of all the Continental Governments of the Countries overrun by Germany to attract the President's attention to the aims and methods of the German propaganda.

Whatever may be the internal division among the German organizations in Britain and especially in the U.S.A., with extremely few exceptions all of them aim to retain the political and economical primacy of Germany in post-war Europe.

The few exceptions are, the small group led in America by prof. Wilhelm Foerster, and in Britain W. Loeb's group called "Fight for Freedom".

Another exception is to be found among German Communists, who, surrendering to the dictates of the "Komintern" are advocating the unification of the world according to communistic lines.

All the other extremely numerous groups, be it Bruening and Treniranus, Strasser or the socialists - even those who accept the unilateral demilitarisation of Germany - aim at retaining part of the conquered territories by Hitler or at least are anxious to retain the political primacy in Europe by extending her spheres of economic and cultural activities.

Just as good organization and cultural activities permitted Germany to initiate the war with Denmark in 1864, with Austria in 1866, with France in 1870, the war of 1914 and the present war was initiated by them with the help of good economic organization.

The Continental Allies are convinced that many German industrial plants must be shared out to her neighbours especially those which are based on raw material (timber, skins and leather, agricultural products) supplied by them.

The Continental Allies are staggered by the amount of pro-German and German propaganda in the U.S.A., and their ambiguity as well as penetrating faculties.

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They realize of course that the masses are following the lines taken by Mr. N. Chamberlain at the beginning of the war - do not realize how great is the German national discipline in matters relating to the aggrandisement of their Fatherland, and how deep these are penetrated by Hitler's propaganda.

The Continental Allies believe sincerely that Hitler's views are shared by 95 percent of the German population inside Germany.

Outside of the claims of the Germans, that they have a special natural gift to lead the European population, - the main weapon of the German propaganda is based on the argument that if Germany is not the dominant power in post-war Europe, communism will overrun it.

November 24, 1942

A-L
Mr. Long:

Please let me know what the status of the food parcels for Poland may be. Dr. Wise was talking with me this afternoon and informed me that the Treasury Department was willing to release the funds required, but didn't wish to appear to favor either the Joint Distribution Committee or the Jewish World Congress, in as much as both organizations had asked for the release of funds for this purpose--$12,000 a month.

Dr. Wise stated that his organization would be entirely willing to join with the Joint Distribution Committee or to do it alone, and that what they were anxious about was to have the money released quickly without further delay. Will you be kind enough to take this up with Mr. Pehle of the Treasury Department and see what can be done to expedite a decision?

U:SW:PRH

Dr. Wise re food parcels for Poland
11-24-42

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October 29, 1942

A-L
Mr. Long:

In view of the fact that the President has indicated, I am told, the view that this Government should do more than what is stated in your draft letter attached herewith, I suggest that we leave this in abeyance until either the Secretary or I have a chance to obtain personally the President's decision.

U:SW:DMK

Evacuation from unoccupied France to U.S. of Polish refugees