Record of meeting at Spiridonovka House between Stalin, Molotov, Churchill, Eden and the representatives of the Lublin Committee, 13 October 1944[[1]](#footnote-1)

RECORD OF MEETING AT SPIRIDONOVKA HOUSE

M. MOLOTOV introduced the Polish delegates present and told them of the earlier meeting with M. Mikolajczyk, M. Romer and M. Grabski. M. Mikolajczyk had communicated the contents of his memorandum of the 29th August[[2]](#footnote-2) and had suggested it as a basis for discussion.

MARSHAL STALIN intervened to say he did not think it was necessary to go over the ground again. The question had been discussed of a compromise between the National Council and the Polish Government in London. That was the question.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he was glad to have the opportunity of meeting the representatives of the Lublin Committee. British aims were well known. They were to unite all Poles in the fight against the Nazis and to create a decent country for them to live in. He was glad to see all Poles who had the same desire to give their people a chance of existence and freedom to govern themselves and to put Poland in the ranks of the States of Europe. He had been upset with the differences between the Poles. All Poles seemed to be against each other. It was painful to see such bitter divergences among men who had lost nearly everything, to see differences at this moment when, instead of being comrades, they had hatred against each other. The world would get tired of these Polish quarrels. He had said so to his Polish friends that afternoon. He was there to try and create unity, an entity of Poland as a living thing. This had been made possible by the Red Army’s victories. He wanted to save suffering and to end the war. But if the Poles refused to work together the world would get tired of it. Many men were tired of it already. The British Government wanted unity and compromise. The British Government stood by their Soviet Ally on the basis of the Curzon Line. He hoped the Polish Committee realized the position of the British Government. Britain had gone to war with Germany because Poland had been invaded. It was not the cause, but one of the occasions of the war. Great Britain rallied and helped the Poles with equipment; there were those Poles who came out of the French debacle, and Marshal Stalin had also sent some 80,000 Poles to Persia whom Britain had equipped. Those men had been fighting bravely in Italy and now in France. The British Government had received in Great Britain the Polish Government formed by General Sikorski. Great Britain had worked with them and had abided by the ties formed in those days. Everywhere the Poles had been in the United Kingdom they had won a good reputation and people liked them. There was a warm feeling from the Poles in Great Britain. The British Government, of course, recognized the Polish Government that came to England five years ago. He thought it was also the position of the United States Government. They could not desert the people with whom they had worked. Great Britain tried to make loyalties endure to the end of the struggle. As he had said to M. Mikolajczyk and his colleagues, Britain took pride in adhering faithfully to her friendships and he hoped Marshal Stalin would say that Britain deserved credit for adhering to her friendship so far as his country was concerned. The Soviet Union’s friendship with Great Britain would be all the stronger because of the unity of a Poland friendly with the Soviet Union.

M. BERUT[[3]](#footnote-3) replied that he was grateful to Mr. Churchill for his kind words. On behalf of the Polish State which was being restored he wanted to thank the Prime Minister for his friendly feelings towards the Polish people. The Polish people connected all their hopes with the victory of the three Allies and wanted to do all they could to help in that victory. The unity among Poles was the basic need for Poland. It was the slogan of the National Council[[4]](#footnote-4) of which he was President. During their five years’ struggle with the Germans it had been their main idea. It was not only a condition of victory but also a condition for the future of Poland. The Polish people connected their future with democratic principles which united all the nations fighting against Germany. In Poland, before the war, those principles of democracy had been departed from. In 1933 Poland’s neighbouring State had declared against democracy and this influence of those tendencies had had a strong influence in Poland. This had been expressed by the introduction by the Polish Government of the new Constitution of 1935. That Constitution had been forced upon the Polish people. The nation had not approved it and had struggled against it because it was deprived of all its rights. The Polish Government had departed from democratic principles.

THE PRIME MINISTER remarked that General Sikorski and M. Mikolajczyk and their supporters had opposed the 1935 Constitution and had been thrown out.

M. BERUT agreed but claimed that the Polish *émigré* Government was based on the 1935 Constitution.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether it was true that General Sikorski and M. Mikolajczyk were against it.

M. BERUT said they had been but they had been under the influence of those circles which governed until 1939. If it were not for the anti-national principles of the 1935 Constitution, there would have been no division between the Poles. Division had come about owing to Mikolajczyk’s Government being based on that Constitution. The first condition, if sincere unity was desired, was the abandonment by M. Mikolajczyk and his supporters of the anti-national Constitution of 1935. That was the wish of very many Poles.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he understood that that was a matter for discussion. The British did not want to interfere in a purely Polish question. He had gathered from Marshal Stalin that he too thought it was a matter for the Poles to settle for themselves.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that Mikolajczyk had publicly declared that he was against the 1935 Constitution. He hoped that it would be removed.

M. BERUT admitted that Mikolajczyk had said this and that the 1921 Constitution met the interests of the Polish nation. Yet all the juridical and political relations on which the programme of Mikolajczyk’s Government was based were founded on the 1935 Constitution.

THE PRIME MINISTER said the first thing was to drive out the Germans. The Constitution might be improved if all the Poles worked together.

M. BERUT said that in this question they had fundamental difference with M. Mikolajczyk because of the policy of the *émigré* government, which failed to help in the struggle against the Germans. The policy was to sow discord between the Allies and to spread the belief that the enemy was not only Germany but also the Soviet Union, the most active participant in the struggle against Germany. Within the country the groups fighting against the Nazis were now united under the National Council and were fighting as partisans: this was contrary to M. Mikolajczyk’s policy.

THE PRIME MINISTER hoped M. Berut appreciated that he, the Prime Minister, was trying to remove the obstacles. Anyone could make obstacles, especially in a country which had been devastated, but he did not think that the Constitution was not susceptible to reasonable argument. If that was the only trouble, it would be easy.

M. BERUT admitted it was not the only obstacle, but it was a big one. The second obstacle was Mikolajczyk’s attitude to the Soviet Union. The Poles wished to have friendly relations with their neighbours, especially with Soviet Union.

MARSHAL STALIN suggested the two parties might work out a joint program of certain basic principles taken from the Constitution of 1921 and other documents.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he was convinced that the future of Poland depended on that State being friendly with the Soviet Union. The policy of His Majesty’s Government was to help in that direction.

M. BERUT said he would draw his conclusions. The question of the Eastern frontier should be decided with the Soviet Union not by war, but a friendly Treaty. Poland could not claim the Ukraine and White Russian land which, by its national status, had been the cause of disputes within Poland for the past 20 years. As Poland wanted independence, so they wanted the Ukraine and White Russia to be independent. The Poles wanted to settle the question by recognizing the Curzon Line as the true frontier between basic Poland and the Ukraine and White Russia, but they asked the Great Powers to help Poland to get back the territory which in historic times Germany had taken away. They asked for the support of this just claim.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that M. Berut was knocking at an open door, as this had already been agreed, although the Polish Government, or, as M. Berut preferred to call them, the Poles in London, had not yet been able to accept the proposal. He associated himself with the Soviet Government. That was another obstacle removed.

M. BERUT accepted this with gratitude. Two months ago he had had talks with M. Mikolajczyk about the unity of the Polish nation and a compromise between the Polish Committee of National Liberation and the Polish Government. During those talks he had put before M. Mikolajczyk the conditions under which they might combine the two parts of Polish political life. These conditions were: (1) Recognition of the 1921 Constitution, and (2) Recognition of the principles set out in the Manifesto of the Polish Committee[[5]](#footnote-5) concerning foreign policy and certain necessary internal reforms, especially the land reform for which the people had been waiting 200 years.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that if they had waited so long, they might wait another few months until the war was over. M. Mikolajczyk had made a statement with full proposals about land reform, but, of course, before you could reform the land the enemy had to be driven from it.

M. BERUT agreed. First the enemy had to be driven out. However, land reform had been promised by various Governments but had never been realised. The nation was now asking whether it was realisable. Mikolajczyk two months ago had agreed to the principles discussed and had promised to influence his supporters within the country in order to unite them in the struggle against the Germans. He said he was returning to London to obtain agreement on the questions discussed and promised to take decisions on them. But two months had passed and Mikolajczyk had not carried out his promises.

MR. EDEN observed that land reforms had been on Mikolajczyk’s programme.

M. BERUT said that many parties had had land reform in their programme, but the question did not lie in the promise, but in the deed. The Polish Committee would agree with Mikolajczyk if he agreed that reform was to be put through at once as the country was being liberated.

THE PRIME MINISTER said it was very hard to make a change in the system while the armies were still there. He thought a few months hence would be a more appropriate time for a reform of such a magnitude. But he thought there could be no difference in principle about the reform. What form it would take he could not say.

MR. EDEN observed that this was not a big point of difference. The question was whether it be done now or when Poland had been liberated.

M. BERUT said they had in mind land reform in the liberated territories and as territory was being liberated. This question was not in principle a major source of difficulty – the differences were small. In general, during the earlier talks, M. Mikolajczyk had recognized the slogans about democracy and admitted the questions which had been put up. But while recognizing them he seemed to hope for something else. He had agreed in principle two months ago, but had not carried out his promises. Now he appeared ready to talk. But would he be sincere with his promises? Mikolajczyk agreed in words, but he hesitated to put them into effect. He had not recognised the Committee. He claimed that the only Government was that which was based on the Constitution of 1935. He had meanwhile organized his supporters for a struggle against the Polish Committee. He had the support of the National Army (Armja Krajowa)[[6]](#footnote-6). This army was fighting cruelly against the Committee. Mikolajczyk hesitated because he hoped by subversive ways to achieve his success. That was the main difference between them and made unity between them very difficult. There was a difference between words and deeds.

THE PRIME MINISTER declared that if there was civil war he would be against anyone who started it. It was the last thing he wanted. He would do everything to prevent it.

M. BERUT said the people wanted unity, but it did not appear to be Mikolajczyk’s policy. If he had agreed to a compromise two months ago, then agreements would have been possible.

THE PRIME MINISTER emphasized that M. Berut must see that it was bad for Poland and the larger interests of the United Nations if Great Britain recognized one Government and her sworn Ally and Treaty-bound friend another. The advantage would go to the Germans and it would be vexatious for the Allies. They were sick of the Polish problem. He hoped the Poles from Lublin would arrange to meet M. Mikolajczyk with a view to finding common ground to work together. A united Polish Government would be supported by the three Great Powers. He felt sure Marshal Stalin would be glad to have this settled.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed. He wanted the rear of the Red Army in Poland to be secure, for which unity was necessary. There must be no civil war.

As regards land reform, it was not quite so simple. If they waited a few months and passed the reform after the liberation of Poland, it would be unacceptable to the Polish peasants. What did the Polish politicians know about the peasants? The Red Army had driven the Germans to the Vistula and, in some parts, beyond. Some of the landowners had gone with the Germans. Some had remained. Those owners who had remained were afraid of cultivating their land because they feared that the harvest might be taken away. In addition, they had no labour for tilling the soil. The peasants were not going to work for the landowners, because they expected the land for themselves. As a result, a good part of the land had remained uncultivated. The peasants were asking: “Why wait? Give us the land. You promised it.” Because of this situation the question of land reform was a practical problem. Strife might break out. The peasants would seize the land. The authorities should issue a decree giving it to them in a legal way[[7]](#footnote-7).

THE PRIME MINISTER agreed that the greatest possible amount of food should be grown. He asked whether the peasants were pressing for land of the collective farms or of the landowners.

MARSHAL STALIN explained that there were no collective farms in those parts. The peasants wanted to take the land and divide it among themselves[[8]](#footnote-8).

THE PRIME MINISTER admitted it was a difficult question for the Poles as a general issue, but for the purposes of the war all arrangements should be made to cultivate the land, if necessary by means of instructions from the military authorities. Of course it would be better if the Government did this. But food had to be produced. However, he did not think it was a matter which should divide the Poles. The Poles should settle it themselves. This was not an obstacle, provided there was agreement on other matters.

MARSHAL STALIN observed that agents of the London Government had threatened to introduce “terror” and had actually killed many people who had tried to put through this land reform. It disturbed him deeply[[9]](#footnote-9).

THE PRIME MINISTER said there was all the more reason for the two parties to get together. He would do his best to press the Polish Government to reach agreement with the Polish Committee, and soon, on a temporary basis if necessary pending the appearance of a new Constitution.

M. MORAWSKI[[10]](#footnote-10) wished to explain the reasons for lack of unity. The Polish Committee wanted unity – Mikołajczyk did not. The Committee had stated the principles for reaching agreement – Mikołajczyk had not replied. The Committee wanted friendly relations with the Soviet Union and so did Mikołajczyk, but while the Committee maintained those relations, officers of the National Army were shooting soldiers of the Red Army and of the Polish forces. The Committee wanted a strong army and had given orders of mobilisation. Mikołajczyk had boycotted the mobilization.

MARSHAL STALIN asked if that was true.

M. MORAWSKI said it was.

THE PRIME MINISTER pointed out that M. Morawski was being very unkind to the Poles who were dying in various theatres of war.

M. MORAWSKI went on to say that the Committee wanted to have an army to fight for Poland’s freedom, and had organized the equipment of that army. Mikołajczyk had tried to prevent it. The Committee wanted to rebuild the factories and workshops, but Mikołajczyk was putting obstacles in the way. The Committee wanted to rebuild the schools, but Mikołajczyk thought they were unnecessary.

THE PRIME MINISTER interjected that the Committee had all the virtues and Mikołajczyk all the crimes.

M. MORAWSKI said that he could produce documents showing how the London Government’s agents were organizing a struggle between Poles in Poland.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that that each side had a hard case against the other. He was not there to encourage the quarrel. He had hoped to hear words of peace. When a country was trampled down, all sorts of diseases appeared. It did not help the world of them. They had all these questions in the British Parliament. People called some of his friends “Tory Landlords” and his friends had called the other side similar names[[11]](#footnote-11).

M. MORAWSKI claimed that to explain the need for peace it had been necessary to explain the differences between them so that they could be overcome. In the eyes of Mikołajczyk, Bor, who had caused so many sacrifices in Warsaw, unnecessary sacrifices, was a hero. With the Committee he was a criminal[[12]](#footnote-12).

THE PRIME MINISTER said he had won the admiration of millions not by his wisdom but by his courage.

MARSHAL STALIN said he disagreed with the Prime Minister

THE PRIME MINISTER said it had been a mistake to appoint Bor in place of Sosnkowski

M. MORAWSKI said the Committee admired the people who fought in Warsaw, but Bor had different aims.

He went on to say that Mikołajczyk claimed to have the support of four Polish parties[[13]](#footnote-13). The Congresses of those parties had voted for the Committee and against Mikołajczyk. Mikołajczyk said he was against the “Sanacja” (followers of Pilsudski), just as the Committee was against it, but the difference was that the London administrations contained names like Raczkiewicz, Bor and others. Land reform was necessary immediately, otherwise the peasants would seize the land. The Committee wanted to do it in a legal way. The Committee wanted unity and if Mikołajczyk wanted it he could have it but so far he had not shown any willingness.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether M. Berut thought unity was possible if an effort were made to achieve it.

M. BERUT said it was possible but only on condition that the democratic Constitution of 1921 was adopted and the reforms of which they had spoken introduced immediately. If Mikołajczyk supporters in Poland acted in favour of Polish unity the struggle between them would stop.

MARSHAL STALIN said that there should be no civil war. He asked whether they could meet Mikołajczyk and whether they thought it desirable

M. BERUT said it was desirable.

A meeting was decided upon for the following day, M. Molotov and Mr Eden to preside in turn and Mr Harriman to be present.

[TNA, PREM 3/434/4]

Key words: Poland

1. Also in attendance: Pavlov – on the Soviet side, Kerr and Birs – on the British side, Harriman and Stevens – on the US side, Rola-Żymierski - on the Polish side. Soviet record of the conversation published in: Rzheshevskiy O.А. Stalin i Cherchill’. p. 448–454. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As the British historian D. Williamson notes: “The essence of this was that the PPR [communist Polish Workers’ Party] and the four parties represented in the London Government [nationalistic Stronnictwo Narodowe (National Party), Christian-democratic Stronnictwo Pracy (Labor Party), Polish Socialist Party, peasant Stronnictwo Ludowe (People’s Party)] should each be given an equal share in a new Polish Government to be formed in Warsaw after the defeat of Germany. In foreign affairs, the aim was to negotiate a durable Polish-Soviet alliance, but the final Polish eastern frontier could only be decided by a ‘Constitutional Diet in accordance with democratic principles’” (Williamson D.G. The Polish Underground 1939–1947. Barnsley, 2012. p. 175). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bierut, Bolesław (1892 – 1956) – Polish statesman and politician, President of Krajowa Rada Narodowa (1944 – 1947), President (1947 – 1952), Prime-Minister (1952 – 1954) of the Republic of Poland. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Krajowa Rada Narodowa. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Manifesto of the Polish Committee, issued by the Polish Committee of National Liberation, declared the Committee the only legitimate executive authority and the “London Poles” illegal. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The armed forces of the Polish Resistance in occupied Poland subordinate to the Polish Government in London. The Home Army was formed in February 1942 and officially disbanded in January 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Soviet version of the conversation has an additional phrase: "It is better if the land was distributed to the peasants, at least [that belonging to] those landlords who had gone with the Germans". [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In the Soviet minutes, Stalin, referring to the events of the French Revolution of the 18th century, pointed out: "What is happening in Poland, is what happened in France". [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In the Soviet minutes, no mention is made about killings, but only about the threats: "... people who carry out land reform are being threatened". [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Osóbka-Morawski, Edward (1909 – 1997) – Polish statesman and politician, Chairman of Polish Committee of National Liberation (1944), Prime-Minister of the Provisional Government of National Unity in Poland (1945 – 1947). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Soviet minutes omit Churchill’s last two phrases. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In the Soviet minutes, Osóbka-Morawski statements about Bor- Komarovskiy were less categorical, as he was not called a criminal. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In the Soviet minutes Osóbka-Morawski’s speech was rendered less concrete: there is no mention of the four parties. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)