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## COVER UP FOR THOSE WHO CARRIED OUT MASS MURDER

By Herbert Romerstein

When the Nazis announced on April 12, 1943 that they had found the bodies of thousands of Polish officers who had been murdered by the Soviets in Katyn forest, most Americans did not believe them. The Nazis were known to commit mass murder and the extensive propaganda campaign in the United States in support of the Soviet Union had affected the thinking of most Americans.

But the Poles knew the truth. They had been asking the Soviets about the missing men for almost two years. And some Americans knew the truth because they understood the Soviet Union and its history. But, it took some time before these voices of truth could be heard.

The Soviets broke relations with the Polish Government in exile in London because the Poles had asked for an International Red Cross investigation. The Soviets claimed to have been insulted. And they used that as an excuse for recognizing a puppet Polish government that the Soviets set up in Lublin.

The American communists joined in the Soviet propaganda campaign. Corliss Lamont, a millionaire communist propagandist, wrote "Soviet Russia's severance of relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile, over the Nazi-inspired charge that the Russians murdered 10,000 Polish army officers, shows clearly the danger to the United Nations of the splitting tactics engineered by Hitler and definitely helped along by the general campaign of anti-Soviet propaganda carried on during recent months in Britain and America. According to the London Bureau of the New York Herald Tribune, 'It is a safe assumption that the Poles would not have taken so tough an attitude toward the Soviet Government if it had not been for the widespread support Americans have been giving them in the cases of Henry Ehrlich and Victor Alter.'"

The reference was to the widespread protests by Jewish and trade union organizations when the Soviets admitted that they had executed Ehrlich and Alter who were leaders of the "Bund", the Jewish trade union organization. According to the communist Lamont, "The shameful anti-Soviet agitation around the Alter-Ehrlich case was followed by the collaboration with Goebbels' propaganda around the German mass murders of Poles." The Polish government had protested to the Soviets about Ehrlich and Alter.

Lamont also quoted from "Professor Lange at the University of Chicago" in support of the communist line. We now know that Oscar Lange had been recruited as an agent of the NKVD by Boleslaw Gebert.

Gebert himself wrote communist propaganda in support of the Soviet Union's false story. In one of his pamphlets, he attacked the commander of the Polish forces fighting in Italy against the Nazis, General Marjan Kukiel. According to Gebert, who was sitting safely in the United States, General Kukiel, who was leading troops in combat against the Nazis, was "Siding with the Germans in their accusations that the Soviet Union was responsible for slaughtering Polish officers and soldiers in the forest of Katyn. The world knew that this unspeakable crime was the work of the Germans...." His pamphlet was published by the communist front "Polonia Society of the International Workers Order". He was the head of that organization, which, of course, did not speak for the majority of Polish-Americans.

Not only did communists and NKVD agents carry out the propaganda campaign but, unfortunately, the United States government helped them. The Office of War Information (OWI) tried to intimidate the Polish-American radio stations and newspapers when they told the truth about the Soviet atrocity against the Poles.

Alan Cranston was head of the Foreign Language Division of the OWI and later a U.S. Senator from California. He called a meeting of OWI officials because the Polish-American radio stations "had taken a rather antagonistic attitude toward Russia" on the Katyn forest issue. Cranston felt that this "was inimical

to the war effort and should be straightened out". The radio stations and newspapers were contacted and threatened with being closed down if they continued to tell the truth about the Soviet Union.

In 1952 the U.S. Congress held hearings on Katyn. More Americans learned the truth. When the Soviets recaptured the Smolensk area, they organized their own tribunal to "investigate" the murder of the Polish officers. The American press in Moscow was invited to observe. The American ambassador, Averell Harriman, sent his young daughter to represent the American Embassy. Years later she was asked by the Congressional committee investigating Katyn why her father had sent her instead of someone who was older or was a medical authority. She answered that the Soviets might not have allowed someone more experienced but it would be difficult for them to refuse her. She had believed the Soviet propaganda line; but by 1952 when she testified before the committee, she knew that the Soviets had committed the crime. She testified that she had thought that the Germans did it because the bodies were laid out in methodical manner. Apparently, she thought that the Russians could not do anything in an orderly way.

At the time of the German announcement of Katyn the American ambassador was William Standley. He understood the Soviet Union and did not trust them. He made the mistake of speaking openly to the American correspondents in Moscow. One of them represented the "Daily Worker", the Communist Party USA newspaper. She was called Janet Weaver. She was actually Janet West Ross, the wife of the American Communist Party representative to the Comintern. She regularly reported Ambassador Standley's comments and other information gleaned from conversations with American officials to Dimitrov, head of the Comintern. He passed them on to Molotov. We found a collection of her reports in the Comintern Archives in Moscow. On March 8, 1943, she reported to Dimitrov that Ambassador Standley had revealed to the American journalists that the Soviets were concealing from the Russian people the truth about the massive amount of American war materials supplied. Two days after her report, Harry Hopkins pressed President Roosevelt to remove Ambassador Standley. Hopkins succeeded, and Standley was replaced by the naïve Averill Harriman, who was much more acceptable to the Soviets. It was only in the 1980s that we learned of the evidence that Hopkins was an NKVD agent.

President Roosevelt had heard from Winston Churchill the truth about Katyn. Churchill shared with Roosevelt the information he had received on the Soviet responsibility for the murders. However, when Roosevelt heard from his own representative, George Earle, former governor of Pennsylvania, that he had information that the Soviets had committed the crime, he refused to listen. Earle had been sent by the President to Turkey and Bulgaria under diplomatic cover to report directly to the President, about the Balkans. Before seeing the President, Earle spoke to his friend Joe Levy, of the "New York Times". Levy warned him that "Harry Hopkins has complete domination over the President and the whole atmosphere over there is 'pink'." He advised Earle to be careful when he told the President the truth about Russia. Later, Earle told the President that he wanted to go public about Katyn, Roosevelt wrote to him "I specifically forbid you to publish any information or opinion about an ally that you may have acquired while in office or in the service of the United States Navy."

Lt. Col. John Van Vliet, Jr. was an American prisoner of war in Germany. He was one of the Allied officers brought by the Germans to Katyn in 1943. When he returned to the United States in 1945, he wrote a report for the United States government revealing his knowledge of the Soviet responsibility for the murders. His report was marked "Top Secret".

The Polish-American community continued to speak out on the truth about Katyn. After the war, they got two valuable allies. One was Arthur Bliss Lane, the U.S. ambassador to Poland 1944-1947. His book "I Saw Poland Betrayed", published in 1948, was the first time many Americans heard the truth about Katyn. The other was Julius Epstein. He was an Austrian born Jew who had escaped from the Nazis. He was now an American citizen and a prominent journalist. Epstein opposed both the Nazis and the Communists. During the war, he had worked for the Office of War Information and was horrified by the pro-Soviet propaganda he saw that agency promoting.

In 1949, Epstein joined Ambassador Lane in forming the "American Committee for the Investigation of the Katyn Massacre". The Committee in coordination with the Polish-American community published pamphlets and articles telling the American people the truth about Katyn.

The Voice of America, the official voice of the American government, briefly mentioned the formation of the Committee, but refused to broadcast former Ambassador Lane's speech. When Epstein visited officials of Voice of America in New York and Washington, he demanded to know why they were not telling the truth about Katyn. They answered "We are playing down Katyn, because it would create too much hatred against Stalin among the Poles." When Epstein asked whether they wanted to create love for Stalin among the Poles at the American taxpayer expenses, he got no answer.

Count Joseph Czapski, a Polish officer had been imprisoned by the Soviets with the other Polish officers. He was released when the Soviets thought that he would be valuable for their propaganda to the West. Instead he represented General Anders in investigating the whereabouts of the missing Polish officers. He was the source of much of the information about the Soviet attempt to cover up before the bodies were found. When Count Czapski visited the United States, the Voice of America asked him to make a broadcast. He submitted the text in advance. Voice of America officials crossed out any reference to the Soviet crime. He could not even mention the word Katyn.

When Julius Epstein learned of the existence of the Van Vliet report, he and Ambassador Lane asked Congress to obtain the report. Representative George A. Dondero of Michigan began a campaign to get the Army to release the report. After many excuses, it became apparent that the report was missing. Finally the Army revealed that immediately after Col. Van Vliet submitted his report, it was sent to the State Department. There were no carbon copies kept by the Army. The State Department claimed to know nothing about it. It is interesting to note that the report went to that part of the State Department headed by Alger Hiss. We now know that Alger Hiss was a Soviet spy. So we can understand the disappearance of the document.

It was only in May 1951 that the Voice of America would allow some discussion of the subject. But even after that, the cover up of the Soviet crime continued, with only occasional mention of the Soviet crimes.

In 1978 at a writer's conference in Poland, the prominent writer and poet Andrzej Braun spoke out against the censorship of the truth about Katyn. The Voice of America Warsaw correspondent, Ron Pemstein, sent a report on Braun's speech to Washington. Pemstein reported that the poet cited as an example of censorship the refusal to tell the truth about "the murder of Polish officers by the Soviet Union at Katyn forest in 1940". A half an hour after the story reached Washington, the Voice of America had edited out the words "by the Soviet Union" and the date "1940". The story simply said "Braun cited the murder of Polish officers in World War II." Eleven Polish-Americans working at Voice of America sent a protest to the head of the Voice's European Division. He called a meeting and scolded them for complaining. Remember, this happened during the Jimmy Carter Administration in 1978. When this story appeared in the press, Voice of America director Peter Straus said that the censorship was a "error in judgment by the news editor." But more and more Americans were learning the truth. By the 1980s during the Reagan Administration most American knew the truth about Katyn.

In the years between 1945 and 1991, the KGB carried on numerous disinformation campaigns to conceal the guilt of the Soviet Union for the murders. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, more and more information became available about Katyn. We now even know that Stalin himself, together with Voroshilov, Molotov, and Mikoyan, signed the report from Beria ordering the murders of the Poles at Katyn.

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