Resistance to Authoritarianism in Poland's Recovered Territories, 1945-1950

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In the aftermath of World War II, Poland underwent a number of radical changes, not least of which were the imposition of a communist-dominated government and the annexation of the "Recovered Territories" from Germany. Throughout the postwar period, resistance to the emerging communist regime was prevalent across Poland, but the Recovered Territories are often dismissed as the exception to this trend. However, it is erroneous to believe that resistance was absent from the Recovered Territories. It could be found in many different forms, from political resistance and other nonviolent means to violent resistance, and was conducted by people from a wide variety of backgrounds. While there were a number of reasons that resistance activity in the Recovered Territories was less prominent than in other regions of Poland in the postwar period, it is incorrect to portray it as of no consequence or absent from the region.

In the aftermath of World War II, particularly in the immediate postwar period of 1945-1950, most nations of central and eastern Europe underwent an incredible number of changes, including economic reconstruction, political reorganization, and a shift in both borders and populations. One of the countries most affected by these changes was Poland, as it sacrificed its eastern territory to the Soviet Union in exchange for Germany's easternmost regions, with these new regions becoming known as the Recovered Territories (RT). Like the rest of Poland at the time, the RT were the subjects of increasing levels of authoritarian control from the Soviet-backed Polska Partia Robotnicza (Polish Workers' Party, PPR) and its satellite parties. The exertion of communist control and Soviet influence led to people resisting the regime in various ways throughout Poland in this period. However, there is little mention of such resistance in the RT in narratives of Polish history. Many academic works about Poland in the postwar period either dismiss dissent in the RT as a non-issue or fail to mention the RT at all in discussions of dissent. While there are a number of potential reasons that would explain why compliance with the communist regime may have been higher in the RT than in other regions of Poland at the time, there were in fact a variety of modes of resistance throughout the region, rather than an absence of resistance in its entirety. In order to demonstrate the presence of resistance in the RT, this paper will examine political, nonviolent, and violent forms of dissent in the region, as well as address potential explanations for compliance in the RT being higher than elsewhere in Poland.

Before exploring the topic of resistance in the RT further, it is necessary to establish greater historical context. First and foremost are the circumstances of Poland acquiring the RT, and exactly what territory comprised it. At the Yalta Conference, the Allies decided that the Soviet Union would be allowed to annex Polish territory east of a boundary known as the Curzon Line. This border stretched from Lithuania down to Czechoslovakia, thereby allowing Poland to keep the area around Białystok but forcing the cession of Lwów (today known as Lviv), essentially cutting off the eastern half of Poland. While Poles represented an ethnic majority in a number of these highly agricultural areas, they were generally a large minority compared to Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians. However, the Soviets wanted to ethnically homogenize the regions under their control as much as possible, and sought to remove the Poles from Soviet borders.

The Allies reached a solution with the Potsdam Agreement, where it was decided that Poland would be granted Germany's easternmost territory, specifically East Prussia, Silesia, and Pomerania, and that the German population of these territories would be expelled and the territory resettled by Poles from the east. These areas were far more industrialized than the rural east, but also far more damaged by the fighting of the war, as the retreating German army employed scorched earth tactics in the region. For these reasons, the RT saw greater reconstruction efforts than many other areas of Poland, alongside a great shift in population over the course of a few years. This process required the implementation of an entirely new state apparatus in place of former German systems. All of these factors would contribute to resistance and compliance with the regime in the RT.

Political Resistance

Before 1948, political opposition to the regime was

one of the most prevalent forms of resistance in the RT, and its inherently vocal nature and international prominence provides some of the strongest evidence for dissent in the region. This opposition primarily came through the actions of, and support for, the Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, literally the Polish People's Party but colloquially known as the Peasant Party, PSL)—the only opposition party of any real significance—and its leader Stanisław Mikołajczyk. While the support of Mikołajczyk and his party was initially necessary for the communist-led Provisional Government to have a semblance of legitimacy, the PSL quickly became a thorn in the side of the communists. This led to the systematic disenfranchisement of the PSL and its supporters, and to the use of the PSL as a scapegoat for many of the RT's problems.

Working with the Communist Regime

From 1945 to the summer of 1946, the PSL was generally in agreement with the regime, working towards its own non-communist goals while not drawing the ire of the communist-dominated regime. Mikołajczyk directly expressed his full support for the annexation of the RT, the expulsion of the German population, and the transfer of the Polish population from east of the Curzon Line to the RT (1). He expressed gratitude towards the United States and United Kingdom for agreeing to have the RT placed under Polish administration in the Potsdam Agreement, stressing the importance of having new territory for the eastern Poles to move to, even if it required a great deal of reconstruction (1). At this point, the PSL was more or less an accepted part of the regime, which allowed it the opportunity to establish support in the RT amongst Polish émigrés who were supportive of the annexation of the region yet suspicious of or hostile to the PPR and its satellite parties. The PSL even held sway over at least some of the decision-making, such as when the party successfully advocated for the individual parceling out of land from formerly German estates to settlers in the RT rather than keeping the estates intact for conversion into collective farms (1). Even though it would not last particularly long, this period was marked by PSL compliance with the regime, not conflict.

Standing in Opposition to the Regime

In June of 1946, there was a referendum held across Poland, and its contentious nature led to the first serious point of conflict between the PSL and the regime. This referendum had three key issues on the ballot: the abolition of the Senate, agricultural reform and industrial nationalization, and Poland's retention of the RT (2-3). The PSL was in accord with the other parties on the issues of the RT and nationalization, but advocated for keeping the Senate (2). Diverging from the other parties in such a way led to a great increase in hostility from the PPR, but voting "no" on the abolition of the Senate was a significant enough issue that the PSL expelled high-ranking members who insisted on voting in the affirmative for all three issues (2).

Causing a division between the PSL and the other parties may have been intentional on the part of the communists, as the communist Acting Foreign Minister Zygmunt Modzelewski directly told US Ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane that the referendum was created in part "to ascertain the positions of the various parties" (3). If the intent of the communists was truly to only ascertain the parties' positions, they could have simply asked the PSL. Instead, a nationwide referendum provided an opportunity to paint the PSL as the outsider and dissenter in Polish politics compared to the other five parties, who were all in agreement (3). The attempt to have the PSL join in lock-step with the other five parties was seen by some as a violation of the Yalta Agreement's terms of a free and fair election, even sparking debate in the British Parliament (4). In communist newspapers, the assertion was made that reactionaries were insisting that people vote no in the referendum, and that all "true democratic parties" were saying yes to every point on the referendum (5). Such statements were clear attacks on the PSL, meant to degrade their status as a party worthy of participating in the government.

The referendum was rigged, an indication of both the communist fear of effective opposition as well as opposition itself. At the time, official government statistics stated that 68% of voters voted yes on all three questions, but documents found after the collapse of the communist government decades later revealed that the actual number was 29% (6). The matter of keeping the RT as part of Poland was simultaneously the most important yet least controversial measure on the ballot, particularly for those living in the RT (7). While that may have driven more people living in the RT to the polls than other areas of Poland, the government's claim that there was at least 85% voter turnout in Silesia is still extremely dubious (8).

Aside from clear ballot falsification, other forms of election manipulation were present as well. Several months beforehand, the government barred Polish émigrés who disagreed with the annexation of the RT from returning to Poland, both fortifying referendum results in favor of their annexation and using the RT as a political wedge to exclude some opponents from participating in Polish politics entirely (9). Within the RT, Mikołajczyk claimed that PSL members in Wroclaw and surrounding regions, as well as every single member of the PSL Wroclaw County Council, were arrested by

the secret police in the runup to the referendum (7, 10). These arrests accomplished two goals: first, they made it harder for the PSL to get its message of voting no on the abolition of the Senate out to people sympathetic to the larger PSL cause. Second, they made it easier for the PPR and its satellite parties to falsify results without PSL election officials around to check them.

The government's meddling in the referendum was likely a manifestation of the fears of at least some communist officials that the PSL was far more popular than the PPR. According to Mikołajczyk, these fears were proven correct in the actual election results, before they were tampered with (10-11). In fact, Modzelewski even admitted to the British ambassador that the communists only had the support of about 20% of the Polish population, a number thought by British and American diplomats to be still too optimistic (12). Meanwhile, the communist press spread the view that the referendum was evidence that Poland was a free democracy (13). The 1946 referendum was the first major division between the PSL and PPR, and the beginning of both significant political opposition and oppression. Rather than quietly complying with the regime, there were people in the RT willing to take a political stand, with some even being arrested for their opposition.

Growing Political Oppression

In the aftermath of the 1946 referendum, the divide between the PSL and the communists grew larger and political oppression became more prominent as time progressed. Very shortly after the referendum, Mikołajczyk expressed his belief that election law could be amended to make similar election tampering harder (7). However, the introduction of new election laws would not be effective or possible as the regime began to crack down on the political opposition, arresting 10,000 PSL members across Poland in connection with "illegal organizations" (14). The PSL's decline was not wholly the doing of the regime, however. Because the PSL was the pro-Western party, anything that the US or UK did that negatively affected Poland would translate into a loss of support for the PSL. This came to a head when US Secretary of State James F. Byrnes gave a speech in Stuttgart, Germany, in which he claimed that the Oder-Neisse Line was not necessarily permanent. Since the retention of the RT was one of the few issues nearly universally agreed upon in the Polish political sphere, Byrnes' speech invoked negative feelings amongst much of the Polish population. This led people to question their alignment with the PSL, despite its consistent advocacy for the retention of the RT, and allowed the communists to use it as a powerful propaganda tool (15).

Around the same time, the communist press ran a story about a high-ranking PSL representative arguing for the preservation of voting rights for those connected with "fascist" underground groups while protesting against granting 100 seats in the Sejm (the single chamber of the Polish Parliament) to the RT (16). While such stories may have a basis in truth, the timing and direct connection to fascism was undoubtedly meant to paint the PSL as antidemocratic, fascist-sympathizing, and against the interests of the people of the RT. Since the Polish government was nominally built on the foundation of democracy and anti-Nazism, such accusations were clearly intended to undermine the PSL's legitimacy. Despite clear support for the PSL in the RT, and the PSL's continuous support for the RT, the region itself also became a means of further discrediting the PSL.

The parliamentary elections of January 1947 were both the culmination of political oppression and resistance, and the end of legitimate political opposition. Bielsko, a region of the RT that had strong support for the PSL, was among a number of regions throughout Poland that saw the regime ban lists of PSL candidates for the election, effectively making it impossible to vote for the opposition (17). This was representative of a larger trend throughout Poland. Security forces disrupted PSL meetings, over 100 PSL candidates were arrested, and some were even murdered. Meanwhile, even the PPR and its "democratic bloc" saw a number of its own candidates and supporters murdered by underground groups (18).

More traditional means of election manipulation were present throughout Poland as well. For example, the communist newspaper *Glos Luda* reported weeks before the election that over 70% of voters in Silesia had already signed up to vote for the democratic bloc (18). Such a claim is not only evidence of election manipulation, but it also served to make support for the PPR—specifically in the largest individual region of the RT—appear higher than it was. This means that the PPR held a special interest in appearing popular in the RT, and the need to fabricate support clearly shows that the PPR was not confident that the general voting population of the region supported them. Despite complaints over the unfair circumstances of the election, the efforts of the PPR and its allies were ultimately successful, as official election results saw the democratic bloc win the vast majority of the vote while the PSL was relegated to irrelevance.

Decline of the PSL

After the PSL's defeat in the election, overtly political resistance in Poland was effectively over. Immediately afterwards, the communist press declared the election

a resounding victory for democracy over reactionary elements, directly naming the PSL and its "exposed ties" to the "bandit" underground as the embodiment of reaction (19). According to what many Poles told American embassy officials—including those from Wroclaw, Szczecin, and Olsztyn in the RT—the notion of free elections was more of a vain hope among those who opposed the government than an actual expectation of reality. Election interference, such as intimidation at polling places and the inability to even vote for the PSL in many districts, was extremely widespread (20-21). Although there is an inherent selection bias in the political opinions of Poles willing to speak frankly with American embassy officials, the lengths to which the regime went to manipulate the election lends credence to their claim that many Poles did want to support the PSL in the election, but were either unable to vote for the PSL or had their pro-PSL vote go uncounted.

With intensifying oppression against the PSL and underground groups, the subsequent flight of Mikołajczyk from Poland out of fear for his life, and the merger of the PSL into the democratic bloc, official political resistance in Poland was dead in the water after the election and completely over by 1948 (22-24). The PSL, and Mikołajczyk in particular, became scapegoats for problems in the RT. They were blamed with extremely Stalinist language for packing positions in governmental and rural organizations with "hostile elements" such as kulaks, delaying reconstruction efforts with their supposed greed (25). However, the PSL did not have meaningful control over government appointments after its split from the rest of the government, which occurred in 1946, less than a year after control of the RT was handed over to the Polish government. This would have provided little chance for the PSL to "clog" these positions. In fact, American embassy officials recognized as early as 1945 that positions in the RT were not being filled by regular Poles, but by those loyal to the communist cause. (26-27). Furthermore, influential members in the RT and elsewhere in Poland had been under threat of arrest for years. These truths did not stop the PPR from using such accusations as justification to purge any even remotely hostile elements from the RT (26-27).

In the end, the RT were emblematic of the crushing of political resistance in Poland at the time, not an area where people were so compliant that their resistance was not worth mentioning. Communists often used the RT as a political bludgeon against opponents of the regime, and as a tool to strengthen their own position. Based primarily on the activity of and support for the PSL, political resistance to the regime was present and prominent within the RT.

Nonviolent Resistance

There were many Poles who held opinions against the communist regime both within and outside of the PSL, and these opinions often manifested outside of formal politics, such as in the form of nonviolent resistance. Unlike the political resistance of the PSL, the people committing these acts of nonviolent resistance are often unknown to us today. The only defining feature amongst these people and groups is that, for one reason or another, they were unhappy with the prospect of communist rule.

Vocal Dissent

Early on in this period, nonviolent resistance mostly manifested itself in the form of vocal dissent, explicit declarations of disapproval and disagreements. Many members of underground groups like the Polish Underground State's Home Army (Armia Krajowa) and the Freedom and Independence Association (Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość, WiN) refused to reintegrate back into Polish society and continued living in the hinterlands. Meanwhile, underground newspapers raised awareness about Soviet oppression and criticized the forced population transfers to the RT (28). In this regard, the stance of the underground groups is in direct contrast with that of the PSL, which supported the transfers. The RT therefore presented a wedge issue between two groups which otherwise held a similar distaste for Soviet influence and communist rule. In the runup to the referendum, the division in thought between the underground groups and PSL only furthered, as members of the underground encouraged voters to vote "no" on all three questions, including the annexation of the RT (29). This distinction was meaningful to the communists, as they barred any Pole who voiced the opinion that Poland did not have a claim to the RT from returning to the country, effectively using that viewpoint as a marker for those with anticommunist sentiments (9). That attitude was reaffirmed when the communists announced that anyone associated with the "reactionary" underground was liable to have their voting rights revoked (16). Denying the Polish claim to the region was a serious form of nonviolent resistance to the regime.

Incidents of more severe forms of nonviolent resistance rose in conjunction with the removal of legitimate forms of political opposition. This is perhaps partially due to the communists using resettlement in the RT as a means of separating dissenters from the underground groups they supported, such as when 10,000 Ukrainians were forcibly resettled in Olsztyn because of their connection with anti-Soviet groups

and refusal to move to Ukraine (30). If anything, being forcibly resettled would strengthen the anticommunist sentiment of these people, and while they may no longer have had contact with the underground, it is conceivable that they would participate in less overt acts of resistance in the RT.

Olsztyn appears to be a city to which the regime relocated many dissenters. A reporter for the New York Times conducted interviews throughout the area and found that most of the population was from southeastern Poland, a region known for its inhabitants' opposition to communism and the Soviets (31). This noteworthy because unlike many of the other inhabitants of the RT, these people were forcibly relocated from an area still within Poland's borders, a fact which further indicates that Olsztyn was a dumping ground for dissidents. The residents of this region also provide insight into the reasons of why people were displeased with the regime, as some interviewees specifically pointed to preexisting anticommunist sentiments, the political oppression of the PSL, and a depressed economy as the main reasons for their antipathy (31). The region also represents the extent to which political resistance was truly dead after the 1947 elections, as special taxes were levied on those unaffiliated with a political party, the vast majority of political offices were occupied by communists, and PSL offices were closed and their members arrested (31). In the words of one farmer, "everybody [was] too busy hating the government to engage in political activity" (31). Olsztyn, due to the predominance of anticommunist sentiment in its population, was a microcosm of resistance in a post-political RT.

Instability, Strikes, and Anti-Collectivization

Nonviolent resistance was not limited to merely voicing dissent, but also translated into very noticeable, practical action. The very idea that Poland may be stripped of the RT was a destabilizing factor for the regime, so much so that anyone caught spreading the rumor that the RT would be returned to Germany could be sentenced to as much as a decade in prison (32). Not only does this display the continued importance of the RT in the legitimacy of the regime, but it is also an example of how a seemingly small act of deviation could be punished severely.

There were around twenty strikes in the city of Wroclaw alone between 1946-1947, and this number was considered low compared to the rest of Poland (33). The regime blamed resistance activity for lagging industrial production in the RT, usually in very Stalinist terms. In one instance, three coal miners in Lower Silesia were put on trial for sabotaging the efficiency of their mine, while in another case the managers of a Wroclaw rayon factory were charged with destroying the entire factory by running the machinery without repairs "under the cloak of zeal and uprightness" for communism (34). Both of these instances bear close similarity to Stalinist accusations of "wreckers." The latter case in particular echoes the tendency of the Stalinist regime to blame the failures of the party on middle management and bureaucrats, as well as the sense of paranoia surrounding deviations from established procedures.

In either case, it is impossible to take the PPR at its word on such accusations, but there is also likely some truth to them. As time progressed, Silesian coal mines saw a steady increase in absenteeism, a fact communist officials attributed to drunkenness and low participation in work competitions (35). More realistically, it is likely that this was a form of passive resistance, as the refusal to work and produce for the regime they opposed was likely one of the only options for resistance available to the miners. This became enough of a problem that within the following year, the government passed a law imposing harsh penalties on absentees (36). The resistance activity of miners in the RT was likely a significant contributor to this nationwide crackdown, a demonstration of the level of nonviolent resistance that could be found there. The most important part of acquiring the RT for the communists was in its industrial capacity, and the ability of those living there to hinder that industry gave them a voice not enjoyed by many elsewhere in Poland.

The communists experienced a similar degree of trouble in their efforts to collectivize the countryside. The PSL had hindered these efforts from the very beginning by setting the policy that land in the RT should be distributed individually, not in the form of collectives. With the PSL gone, the communists felt emboldened to continue with their collectivization efforts. To some degree, this might have been fueled by the increasingly watchful eye of the Soviets, who encouraged the ouster of moderate communist leader Władysław Gomułka in favor of the hardline Stalinist Bolesław Bierut. This came at a height of Soviet paranoia over the loyalty of its satellites, as Josip Broz Tito and his country of Yugoslavia had defected from the communist bloc the year before, an incident cited by the PZPR in its decision to purge its membership of "rightist deviation" (37). Failure to collectivize at a sufficient pace may have been seen as a sign of disloyalty by the Soviets.

The PPR voiced its dissatisfaction at the slow rate of collectivization, and in true Stalinist fashion blamed that failure on kulaks (38). The communists claimed that the kulaks were also withholding grain, while the kulaks argued that the government would never pay them a fair price for it (39). This was a development happening across Poland at the time, and while it

is emblematic of the increasing Stalinist grip upon the country, it is also indicative of the power farmers managed to hold over the government. Since land was parceled out to individual farmers in the RT, it can be assumed that those farmers were part of this national trend. In both the industrialized and agricultural parts of the RT, workers had the ability to resist the regime through their work, at least temporarily denying the communists their material and ideological goals.

The Role of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church's opposition to communist rule was one of the most renowned aspects of Polish resistance throughout the Cold War, and its influence on the people of the RT was almost immediately apparent. Whereas the original inhabitants of the RT were predominantly Protestant, the population transfers made the region around 96% Catholic, and actions the regime took against the Catholic Church angered many in the region (40). In ethnically homogenizing Poland, the communists had also made the overwhelming majority of the population Catholic, as opposed to a mix of different religions and sects such as Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy. This put the ideologically atheist communists in an uncomfortable position when dealing with the Church. They wanted to rid Poland of its influence yet could not take radical action without significantly angering the populace, both in the RT and throughout Poland.

One of the few excuses the regime had for oppressing the Church was the connections many clergy had with the underground, and that pretext was often used to do away with more troublesome priests, such as when 350 were arrested across Poland (41). In Olsztyn, a priest and another man were condemned to death by a military court—alongside six others who were given prison sentences—on the accusation of membership in WiN (42). Propaganda also worked to try to delegitimize the Church, as a letter from the Pope calling out religious persecution was met by the communist press with the accusation that he was fomenting dissent in Poland (43). Likewise, his decree that all members of communist parties in Poland were to be excommunicated was reported as being an outrage to the Polish people, even if that claim of outrage was almost certainly untrue (44).

Despite similar attempts at international condemnation, oppression continued, such as when the largest Catholic welfare charity in Wroclaw was seized under the pretext that it was engaging in anti-government activity and being run by "aristocrats…and former Hitlerite spies" (45). As this tension continued, the RT became a specific point of contention between the Church and regime. Communist representatives hinted that they might be willing to give concessions to the Church, such as enshrining the right to religious education in the constitution, in exchange for the Church redrawing its diocesan boundaries to match the new Polish-German border (46). This would, whether directly stated or not, be a formal recognition by the Church of Poland's claim to the RT, and a strong legitimizing factor for the regime. This also served as an attempt to disrupt the influence of the Vatican on the Polish bishops, since at the time the communists proposed this deal, the Pope had recently given a speech in Germany decried by the communist press as sympathetic to German claims on the region (46). This strategy was ultimately successful, as the clergy of the RT met in Wroclaw, Szczecin, and Gdańsk to support the redrawing of diocesan boundaries, while most of the clergy in the rest of Poland, as well as the Vatican, continued to oppose the idea (47). The Catholic Church was therefore a vehicle through which the people of the RT carried out resistance, as in other areas of Poland, but when it came to the issue of legitimizing their new home, they broke with the Church's direction.

German Expellees

One particular form of nonviolent resistance that ran parallel to, yet stands out from the others, is that which came from the German expellees of the RT, as they worked outside of Poland to express and act upon their discontent. Unlike Poles, who were now considered to be the owners and rightful inhabitants of the RT, the German population was put in the unique position of attempting to resist being forced out of their homes while also being expelled from the area in large percentages. One could argue that the Germans already had their opportunity to resist this outcome by fighting the war, particularly with the German military's use of scorched earth tactics to make the area as undesirable as possible. However, it is important to remember that not every German living in the RT was a supporter of the Nazi regime, and even if they were, the process of ethnically cleansing an area via forced relocation is morally ambiguous at best (48).

This distinction was not lost on contemporaries, as one editorial in the *Times of London* pointed out the hypocrisy in using the example of Germany perpetrating the Holocaust to claim moral superiority in the war, and then upon victory turning around and carrying out ethnic cleansing in the RT (49). For most, however, the removal of the German population from the RT was a matter of world security, with some arguing that an extant German minority can become a justification for future wars, as it was with WWII (50). Others even went as far as to say that the German population should

be expelled to the US and USSR, so that the extra population would not strengthen Germany (51). With anti-German sentiment at its highest at the end of the war, the German population of the RT could count on no legitimate means of resisting their expulsion nor could they find allies in their struggle.

Despite the original agreement between the Allies that the Germans would be expelled in a humane matter, this was not the case. Many Germans starved on the way, such as in the case of one mother who had just recovered from typhoid being forced out of her home alongside her two children, and many died on the way to Germany (52). Those who were engaged in reconstruction work were allowed to stay temporarily before being expelled themselves, likely fostering even more resentment (53). This resentment translated into a movement by German expellees to have the RT returned to Germany. Polish officials complained to American diplomats that radio stations in the American occupation zone of Germany were broadcasting propaganda advocating for the return of the RT, which they claimed violated the Potsdam Agreement (54). The American diplomats responded that the radio broadcasts were in line with their conception of freedom of speech, essentially giving implicit approval of such messaging, since at the time censorship was fairly prominent as part of denazification (54).

As the Iron Curtain began to materialize, the US sought to forge a better relationship with what would become West Germany. Hinting that the US was amenable to a return of the RT to Germany was one method of doing so. Byrnes' Stuttgart speech was met with applause in Germany but hurt the reputation of the US and PSL in Poland (55). It also increased the restiveness amongst Germans still in the RT, who distributed leaflets calling for the return of Germany's 1937 borders and the expelled population and called on those already expelled to pressure the Allied government in Germany to restore the borders (56). Nonetheless, the majority of Germans were expelled by 1947, but these efforts certainly increased concerns that Poland might lose the RT (57). As the Soviets were the only major power backing the Polish claim to the RT, some Poles would have been inevitably driven towards accepting Soviet dominance as the only option with their interests in mind (58). Despite some efforts at supporting the PSL, and attempts at maintaining friendly relations with Poland, the stance of the other Allies on this matter was likely one of cold pragmatism. Poland was behind the Iron Curtain while West Germany could still be made an ally.

Efforts by German expellees to have the RT returned continued as the expellees grew in prominence in Germany as more of the population was expelled. Polish officials planned to have all of the remaining Germans expelled by 1950, and by the end of that year, expellees made up approximately one-fifth of the West German population, having a great impact on elections in the states of Schleswig-Holstein and Bavaria (59-60). Their political influence was great enough that Konrad Adenauer, the West German Chancellor, made numerous criticisms of the treatment of expelled Germans and the permanence of the Oder-Neisse Line, which also became a policy issue for Adenauer's Christian Democratic Party as a whole (61). This development greatly concerned the Polish government, and West Germany was widely criticized in the communist press, as German revanchism was one of the greatest fears concerning the RT (61). The desire of many Germans to see the RT returned persisted, but as Soviet control solidified, the project became wholly untenable. As the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov pointed out, the Allies agreed to the expulsion of the Germans from the RT, and it would be absurd to think that such a measure was only temporary (62). The issue was further put to rest by a treaty between East Germany and Poland which recognized Poland's claim to the RT (58). The German expellees engaged in their own form of nonviolent resistance to the communist regime in the RT, and it was their resistance that garnered more support from the Allies than that of the Poles.

Violent Resistance

Perhaps the most easily identifiable form of resistance is that of violent resistance, and just as the RT played host to other kinds of resistance, it saw several incidents of violence as well. Violent resistance was fairly common in Poland in the postwar period, particularly due to the persisting underground organizations, but was relatively uncommon in the RT. It is even harder to identify who was behind any given act of violent resistance than acts of nonviolent resistance. While it is likely that they were typically perpetrated by Polish or Ukrainian underground organizations, sources do not often identify who they were, as the government usually referred to them with titles such as "terrorists" or "bandits." In any case, the general motivation behind acts of violent resistance is clear: disrupting the rule of the communist government.

Early in the postwar period, underground groups had little opportunity to establish themselves in the RT. The Allies stopped recognizing the Polish Government in Exile—and by extension the Polish Underground—with the establishment of the Provisional Government in 1945. They made it clear to exiled Polish leaders like Władysław Anders that they were in no way interested in violent rebellion (63). This meant that underground

groups could no longer hope for outside assistance. Furthermore, the communist press disavowed non-communist underground movements as "fascist" and "reactionary," effectively making them enemies of the new Polish state (64). The entire underground movement was crippled when the Soviets, under the pretense of inviting them for postwar talks, instead arrested, tried, and imprisoned sixteen of the highest-ranking members of the Polish underground (65). This did, however, entrench anti-Soviet feelings amongst the underground and made many wary of coming out of hiding.

One of the largest waves of violence against the communist authorities came with the 1946 referendum. Throughout Poland, there were widespread attacks against PPR members and threats of violence against election officials (66-67). The official goal of this campaign of violence was to convince people to vote "no" on all three questions of the referendum, including the incorporation of the RT. But the larger goal was likely to undermine the legitimacy of the communist-led government by making the elections appear undemocratic and Poland unstable in general. This wave of referendum-related violence was reported to be most prominent in the eastern and northern areas of Poland (29). That likely means that violent resistance activity was not only present in the RT, but since Poland's northernmost territory was almost entirely made up of land from the RT, it was actually more prominent there than in most of the rest of the country. This seems to be the case, as a separate report states that two election officials were wounded in Olsztyn, and in Stagowidy, a town outside Szczecin, an armed group seized control of the polling place and destroyed the ballots that had been cast (14). It is possible that was the result of the previously discussed policy of moving dissidents to the area around Olsztyn, but it is unclear if that policy was in effect as early as 1946. It is also possible that these actions were carried out by Germans, in an attempt to stop Poles from voting to keep the RT in one of the regions most likely to vote that way. There were also reports of referendum-related violence in the Silesian towns of Ilita and Zlotoria (10).

Despite these instances, the outcome of the referendum was unaffected and generally regarded as peaceful and orderly, with even Mikołajczyk telling US officials in private that the referendum was carried out without any serious disruptions (7). The communist press, for its part, chose to focus on the peacefulness of the day and how it was a victory for democracy (5). Nevertheless, even if the resistance was ineffective, that does not change the fact that violent resistance was not only present in the RT, but even more prominent there than in many other areas of Poland.

While violent resistance perhaps peaked in the RT around the time of, that does not mean that it disappeared afterwards. Only a few months after the referendum, fifteen Germans, part of a supposed "Fries Deutschland Organization" were sentenced to death on charges of murder, sabotage, and attempting to free Lower Silesia from Polish control, a rare example of violent resistance from Germans (68). The government claimed that it was engaging in warfare with underground groups across Poland, and the communist press reported that these organizations were "reaching 'dirty paws'" at the RT (69-70). This reporting suggests that incidences of violent resistance increased, but instead mentions of such acts in the RT by the press and American officials decreased precipitously. It is possible to make conjectures about certain incidents. For example, when the priest from Olsztyn and an associate were condemned to death for membership in an underground group while others were only imprisoned, it can be inferred that they engaged in a more serious crime, perhaps violent in nature (42).

With the lack of mention of violence, however, it is most likely that underground groups chose instead to pursue lower-risk, nonviolent forms of resistance, recognizing that it was impossible to uproot the communist regime. This view was also shared by American diplomatic officials, who believed that the correct course of action was "not to excite the masses to open rebellion, which would be disastrous and futile at this time, but rather to strengthen hope and discourage apathy" (71). Since most underground groups were wiped out in the 1950's, yet anticommunist sentiment persevered in the Polish populace, forgoing violent forms of resistance certainly seems to have been the wiser option.

Reasons for Compliance

Thus far, it has been clearly demonstrated that resistance was present and significant in the RT, and this information contradicts the notion that there was very little, if any, resistance there. It is therefore pertinent to discuss what reasons people in the RT might have had to be compliant with the regime and resist less than in other regions of Poland.

In some cases, people agreed enough with the regime that they felt resistance was unnecessary. From the beginning, plans to extend the Polish border westward were welcomed by peasant farmers who needed more land to properly grow crops (72-73). As previously mentioned, there was an initial willingness to participate in the political system while it still had a veneer of democracy, as even the moderate PSL was in favor of the annexation of the RT and the population transfers (74). With PSL leaders like Mikołajczyk advocating for the acceptance of the Yalta and Potsdam

Agreements, and land distribution being an incredibly popular measure amongst the peasants, many found no reason to resist in this period. It is likely that at least some people aligned themselves with the communists at this time, while others simply experienced a sense of gratitude for their new lot in life (75-76). Even after the referendum, many still might have believed they were in a democracy, as according to the communist press, one reporter from Reuters remarked that they could see no evidence of an Iron Curtain (5). These sentiments were unique to the RT, because nowhere else in Poland were people given new houses, land, and other benefits to such a degree as the settlers replacing the German population.

For many other Poles in the RT, the decision to comply with the regime was a matter of their unique suffering. Many of the Poles in the RT were there because they were expelled from their former homes. The RT were utterly destroyed by the war, and the new Polish settlers had to try to make a life out of rubble and poverty. Even worse, these were people completely separated from their communities, and they had no one to rely on but themselves and whatever family they had with them. They might have been optimistic about the future, but for many their main concern was having a place to sleep and food to eat, not who was running the government (77). The same set of circumstances that led many to resist the regime also led many to comply for the sake of their own safety, survival, and comfort.

This same poverty may also have led people to comply with the regime once the economy began recovering, such as in the case of Wroclaw. As early as 1947, it was clear to international observers, and even British Members of Parliament invited to visit the city, that it was experiencing a robust economic recovery (78-79). A 1948 exposition in the city, meant to show off the industrial capability of the Soviet system, displayed the remarkable recovery of a city that was 75% destroyed only a few years prior (80). If even international skeptics were convinced by Wroclaw's recovery, it is very likely that many Poles in the RT warmed up to the idea of communism, thinking it could help save them from their plight. This is to say nothing of those Poles who were already believers in communism, a group particularly prominent amongst the trade unions in cities like Wroclaw (81). Some Poles in the RT might have complied because they believed that the success of communism was in their own best interest.

If some Poles were not won over by the example of economic success in Wroclaw, then they may have been swayed by the nationalist propaganda expounded by the communists. Before the RT were even captured by the Soviets, claims were made that the return of the RT represented a rightful restoration of historically Polish lands to Poland (74, 82). This is where the "Recovered" in "Recovered Territories" comes from; the idea that Poland has recovered its long-lost land. This was also framed in decidedly anti-German terms, as communist historians made claims that Poland and Germany were locked in a centuries-long conflict over the Baltic, and that Poland lost this conflict because it was subverted by a German aristocratic class, particularly German industrialists in the RT who helped the German invasion in 1939 (83-84). Similar appeals to historical claims on the RT were repeated ad nauseum by communist officials and the press, culminating in a "Congress of Polish Historians" in Wroclaw, which attempted to unify these historical claims with a Marxist-Leninist approach of dialectical materialism and class struggle (85). While these claims did have a basis in medieval history, it is hard to tell how many Poles truly believed they provided justification for annexing the RT, but at least some likely began to believe in the inherent Polish right to the RT. Either way, most Poles were in favor of annexing the RT regardless of historical claims, and this historical propaganda likely did more to solidify the communists' commitment to Polish retention of the RT than anything else.

Finally, most forms of resistance likely seemed futile to the people of the RT more than anyone else in Poland because of the extremely heavy Soviet military presence. The Soviets viewed the Oder-Neisse line as not only important for ideological and propaganda purposes, but as part of the first real line of defense against invasion. This was so important that Stalin sent war hero and Marshal of the Soviet Union Konstantin Rokossovksy to become Poland's Minister of Defense in 1949 with the express purpose of safeguarding the Oder-Neisse line (86). With a figure as renowned as Rokossovsky explicitly called the "guardian" of the Oder-Neisse, and with a sizeable army of Soviet troops at his command, attempts at resisting communist rule likely seemed bleak for most in the RT (87). While Poles may have had other reasons for resisting the regime than those listed, there are few more compelling arguments against resistance than seeing the might of the Soviet military every day.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is patently false that resistance was absent from the RT. It was present in many forms, at many times, and in many places. While it is likely that there was less resistance in the RT than in other areas of Poland at the time, to simply discount it would be to misrepresent the history of anticommunist resistance in Poland. Decades after this period, the defining anticommunist movement of Poland, Solidarity, would

rise primarily out of shipyards and coastal cities, places which are almost entirely part of the RT. Rather than this representing a historical incongruence, in which a region with no history of resistance became the cradle of the movement that would overthrow the communist regime, it is instead part of a larger historical narrative. From the very beginning of their incorporation into the Polish state, resistance was present in the Recovered Territories.

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