

PIOTR ŁOSSOWSKI

## RAPORTY GILBERTA REDFERNA PISANE Z WILNA W OKRESIE STYCZEŃ–KWIECIEŃ 1940 R.

Gilbert Redfern był przed wojną korespondentem pism angielskich i amerykańskich, głównie tygodnika „Time”, w Warszawie. Nawiązał tu wiele znajomości. Polska stała się dla niego bliskim krajem. Po wybuchu wojny zechciał w jakiś sposób pomóc znajdującym się w opresji Polakom. Odegrał czynną rolę w powstaniu Amerykańskiej Komisji Pomocy Polakom (American Commission for Polish Relief) w Nowym Jorku. Z ramienia tej Komisji, jako jej stały przedstawiciel, znalazł się na początku 1940 r. w Wilnie.

A właśnie w Wilnie, i przylegającym do niego stosunkowo niewielkim obszarze, wytworzyła się wówczas złożona i specyficzna sytuacja. Wilno na mocy układu litewsko-sowieckiego z 10 października 1939 r. przyłączone zostało do Litwy. Władze litewskie poprowadziły na przyłączonym obszarze politykę forsownej litwinizacji, która nie była przychylna wobec ludności polskiej. Znalazła się ona w trudnej sytuacji politycznej i materialnej. Z drugiej jednak strony Litwa pozostawała krajem neutralnym, w którym elementarne prawa człowieka były brane pod uwagę. Trzeba powiedzieć, iż mimo całej swej uciążliwości rządy litewskie odróżniały się dodatnio od totalitarnych reżimów okupacyjnych, które zaprowadziły na zajętych ziemiach Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej władze hitlerowskie i sowieckie.

Stąd też zaistniało tam miejsce dla charytatywnej działalności, której poświęcił się Redfern. Z raportów jego pisanych do Maurice Pate, sekretarza Commission for Polish Relief, w Nowym Jorku wynika, że zajmował się on nadzorem i koordynacją pomocy, która napływała z różnych źródeł z zagranicy. Ważną jego czynnością było interweniowanie wobec władz litewskich, wobec Litewskiego Czerwonego Krzyża w sprawie uchodźców wojennych polskich, którzy w zmieniającej się liczbie, ale wynoszącej kilkanaście tysięcy osób, znaleźli się w Wilnie i Kraju Wileńskim.

Z raportów Redferna można się dowiedzieć, iż niejednokrotnie interweniował on u władz np. w takich sprawach, jak zamiar przesiedlenia uchodźców polskich z Wilna na odległą prowincję podczas trzaskających mrozów, jak próby wydawania w ręce władz sowieckich uciekinierów z zajętego przez ZSRR obszaru. A pamiętać należy, iż był to właśnie czas masowej deportacji ludności polskiej przez władze sowieckie, która przeprowadzona została w lutym 1940 r. Te wysiłki Redferna przyniosły określony skutek. Władze litewskie odstąpiły od swych tak bezwzględnych zamiarów. Redfern wyrażał też oburzenie, że uchodźców polskich, przeważnie inteligentów, chce się zatrudniać przy budowie dróg lub pracach leśnych.

Działając z jednej strony wobec władz litewskich, docierając nawet do ministra spraw zagranicznych, Redfern z drugiej strony ściśle współpracował z polskimi organizacjami pomocy — komitetem Zagórskiego–Petruszewiczowej oraz komitetem profesora Kazimierza Pelczara. Zwłaszcza o ofiarności tego ostatniego Redfern pisze z wielkim uznaniem. Podaje, że aby móc służyć swym rodakom w Wilnie, Pelczar odrzucił ofertę wyjazdu do Włoch, gdzie, jako wybitnemu onkologowi, proponowano mu znakomite warunki pracy. Dodajmy tu, iż profesor Pelczar w 1943 roku rozstrzelany został przez okupantów w Ponarach.

Walorem raportów Redferna jest ich konkretność i bogactwo zawartego materiału. Rozszerzają one bardzo naszą wiedzę na temat sytuacji wytworzonej na Wileńszczyźnie i wojennych losach Polaków. Są jednocześnie relacją bezstronnego obserwatora, który obiektywnie przedstawił widziane wydarzenia.

Redfern nie może się jednak powstrzymać przed przedstawieniem ciężkiej sytuacji uchodźców. Pisze m.in. o ścieśnieniu w 30-osobowych, nieogrzewanych pomieszczeniach przy silnym mrozie, o braku ciepłej odzieży, o groźbie epidemii.

O przedstawicielach władz litewskich pisze krytycznie, ale wystrzega się łatwych uogólnień. Słowa potępienia kieruje pod adresem T. Alekny — komisarza do spraw uchodźców. Określa go mianem bezwzględnego biurokraty, „jakimi tak obfitowała carska Rosja”. Ale np. o Adalbercie Staneice, radcy ministerstwa spraw zagranicznych, pisze z przychylnością i nadmienia, że z jego strony znajdował zrozumienie i pomoc. Pisze też, a jest to ważny przekaz, że Litwini znajdowali się pod silnym naciskiem Niemców i Sowietów, ażeby postępowali wobec Polaków w sposób bezwzględny.

Praca Redferna była bardzo nerwowa i wyczerpująca. W jednym z raportów przyznaje, że „zbielały mu włosy”. Tym niemniej w warunkach srożącej się zimy nie chciał „opuścić Polaków”. Mimo, że z redakcji „Time” otrzymał propozycję wyjazdu na Bałkany, pozostał w Wilnie aż do wiosny.

Reasumując, należy raz jeszcze podkreślić, że przedstawione tutaj w wyborze raporty Redferna odsłaniają nam sprawy mało znane, pozwalają lepiej poznać i zrozumieć wytworzoną w Wilnie sytuację. Stanowią ważny, godny publikacji przekaz. Dowiadujemy się o zapomnianym przyjacielu Polski i Polaków, który w ciężkiej godzinie udzielał im bezinteresownej a tak potrzebnej pomocy.

Raporty Redferna zaczerpnięte zostały z akt Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, zespołu Ambasady Rzeczypospolitej w Londynie, do którego zostały włączone po otrzymaniu kopii z Wielkiej Brytanii.

C O P YH. Z. Poliak AmbassadorLETTER NO. 6.Zaulek Tartaki 2/5,  
Vilna, Lithuania.

January 17, 1940.

Mr. Maurice Pate, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief, Inc.,  
37 East 56 Street, New York.

Dear Maurice:

I saw Mr. Galvanuskas, the Finance Minister, in Kaunas on the 13th, and Mr. Bisalskas, Vice-Premier and Governor of Vilna, here today regarding - among other matters - the intention to "depopulate" Vilna and Kaunas of refugees. Preparatory to "depopulation", the authorities are now registering refugees throughout Lithuania, and providing each refugee with a certificate bearing his or her photograph and finger-print. The registration will be completed by the end of this month, but both Ministers assured me that there would be nothing "irrational" in the moving of refugees, and that it would not begin until the spring - except in the case of a few hundreds who are now being rounded up as political agitators. These are mostly adult students who have been housed in buildings belonging to the Stefan Batory University. About 200 have so far been taken into custody, but I think this is a precautionary action and not one based on definite evidence of revolutionary intent. As you know, when trouble begins in these parts, it usually begins with university students. Mr. Bisalskas said the authorities were certainly not trying to "start something", but, on the contrary, were simply making precautionary moves.

They have no definite plans yet for moving refugees in large number from Vilna and Kaunas, but localities are now being chosen - chiefly near the Latvian border, - and it is likely that by spring camps will be ready to receive several thousand refugees. I asked if "camps" meant "concentration camps", and the answer was "certainly not in the German sense". I explained that it would be quite impossible to expand our relief facilities in order to help refugees scattered all over Lithuania, and presumed that, when the authorities begin moving refugees to distant localities, they will assume full responsibility for their proper housing and feeding. "Nothing irrational", I was told, would be done.

To date, we have actually registered in the City of Vilna over 26,000 refugees, 40 per cent of whom are Jews. This figure includes nearly 4,000 Lithuanian refugees from Polish territory in the Vilna region now occupied by the Bolsheviks. The Lithuanians, of course, will easily find work in the spring. They are mostly young peasants. Apart from the City of Vilna, there are about 6,000 refugees (including some 2,000 Lithuanians mostly from the Mamel district) in Kaunas, and an unknown number - amounting to several thousands (including military still "at large") - already scattered throughout the country. There are also, of course, the interned soldiers.

The Lithuanians will begin the gradual transfer of government departments to Vilna in the spring, and, eventually, office space and dwellings

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will have to be found here for some 40,000 officials. That is one important reason for "refugee depopulation" in Vilna. Another is that, with the present congestion (we have many cases of 50 or more refugees now sleeping in one room, and, with the temperature now minus 35 deg. Fahr., they are unable to go out because, for the most part, they have neither overcoats nor warm clothing) there would be serious danger of epidemics when the weather gets warm. Mr. Bisalakas told me that 48 cases of scarlet fever were reported today.

Most of the refugees now in the City of Vilna belonged to the white-collar class or are Jews. It would not, therefore, be easy to find them work building roads or in the forests; and certainly not until they have been "fattened up" and given suitable clothing. Apart from a shipment of clothing from the Dutch Red Cross, which was mostly light clothing for women, we have received no clothing from abroad yet, and none is in sight. A shipment of overcoats and warm clothing from the Danish Red Cross was distributed in Kaunas. This shipment was accompanied by a cash donation of about 40,000 lits, of which only 10,000 lits was made available to our refugee committee here. Refugee needs, however, are no less in Kaunas than they are here, though the percentage of Lithuanian refugees is much greater there than it is here - and their Lithuanian refugees are mostly from the Memel district.

It would ease our relief problem considerably if the Lithuanians find suitable refugee camps, when the weather improves, in the outlying districts. Our financial resources (including the J.D.C. and contributions from the Polish Relief Fund in London) are nothing like adequate to provide even the barest existence for 28,000 refugees, and the authorities will not allow them to work in Vilna. More than half the refugees are now "living on" the local population of Vilna; but at least half the local population of Vilna is, in turn, quite destitute. The situation of the other half, however - that is, manual workers, domestic servants, dentists and doctors, shopkeepers, etc. will be improved as more and more Lithuanian officials move in. There is not the slightest intention on the part of the Lithuanian Government, however, to try to find suitable employment for all the white-collar workers of Vilna (numbering, with their families, nearly 100,000) who now constitute the "quite destitute" class here. If we are ever able to get "caught up" with refugee relief, we really must do something for the Vilna people who are in such a hopeless and tragic position. We now have a complete register of those needing immediate relief, and they have been helped a little by donations from the Polish Government in France, but this problem remains too vast even to contemplate with the financial resources now in sight.

I am sending copies of this to Dorsey Stephens in Paris and John Hynes in London, in accordance with the suggestion made in your letter No. 1 of Dec. 28.

Please give my greetings to Mr. Adamski.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Gilbert Redfern)



*Polish Embassy*~~OK~~

## AMERICAN COMMISSION FOR POLISH RELIEF

Zaulek Tartaki 2/3,  
Vilna, Lithuania.LETTER NO. 14.

February 8, 1940.

Mr. Maurice Pate, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief, Inc.,  
57 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y.

Dear Maurice:

You were good enough to send me copies of several exchanges of letters which you have had with M. Zadeikis, the Lithuanian Minister to the United States.

I do not know whether His Excellency's primary interest in writing you was sympathy for the Poles or a desire to obtain for Lithuania as much foreign exchange as possible. In either case, however, perhaps no harm would be done in suggesting to His Excellency that his next letter might be addressed to the Foreign Minister in Kaunas with the request that the Minister of the Interior be asked to adopt different methods in dealing with the Poles. If the Lithuanian Government expects the United States to contribute towards the support of destitute Poles in Lithuania, I suppose it is not improper for an American relief organization to ask that the relief problem be not aggravated by inhuman police methods.

The main grievance is against M. Alekna, the Commissar for Refugees appointed by the Minister of the Interior. Alekna is a typical police official: the type that flourished in Czarist Russia. He sees a rebel behind every tree and a plot on every street corner. His method seems to be the time-honored one of "discovering" a revolutionary plot, then the throwing into jail of scores of alleged terrorists. His secret police "discovered" a terrorist plot in Vilna a week or so ago. A day or two later at least one hundred "suspects", all refugees, were rounded up and given 24 hours to quit Lithuania. The idea was to rush them across the frontier into Soviet Russia - or into the "no-man's-land" between the Lithuanian and Soviet frontiers: the thermometer at the time registering about 35 degrees of frost. Prompt intervention by the French Minister and the British Charge in Kaunas, and by the representatives of foreign relief organizations supported by the Lithuanian Red Cross, stopped last week's move. But there will be more, if it is left to Alekna. Indeed, if it is left to him he will eventually drive the Poles to revolt.

It is true that thousands of refugees now in Vilna entered Lithuania illegally - across "the green frontier" - after the Soviets nominally turned over the territory to Lithuania last October. But, under the conditions now existing, it would be sheer barbarity to attempt to drive these refugees back to Soviet Russia. In due course, no reasonable exception could be taken to the Lithuanian authorities moving all refugees out of Vilna. But they must wait a few months until the weather is suitable, and in any case they should not be moved until suitable reception areas have been established. If it is left to Alekna, 20,000 or more refugees will simply be scattered all over the Lithuanian country-side without any

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preliminary arrangements being made to clothe, shelter and feed them.

Officials of the Foreign Office and the Lithuanian Red Cross, which is really an official institution under the Foreign Office, are definitely out of sympathy with Alekna's ideas; but their position would be greatly strengthened, if it could be made quite plain to the Lithuanian Government that relief funds from abroad will be shut off if police terrorism and stupidity are not put in their proper place.

After the authorities have "de-populated" Vilna of refugees, it is known to be their intention to "de-populate" Vilna of its so-called war victims - that is, the many thousands of former officials, pensioners and white-collar workers now unemployed and penniless. The Lithuanians do not seem to understand that when they acquired a territory the liabilities as well as the assets were theirs. No matter what the history books say, the Vilna Poles and their ancestors built Vilna. It is no more Lithuanian than I am. Before their ideas for the "de-population" of Vilna begin to take practical shape, they ought to be warned that the adoption of Nazi and Soviet "de-population" methods would sooner or later involve a small country like Lithuania in very serious trouble. It is now widely known that Nazi and Soviet pressure on the Lithuanians to "treat the Poles rough" is strong, but surely something can be done from the other side to let them know that brutality brings its own retribution sooner or later.

I am sending copies of this letter to Mr. Gufler, our Charge in Kaunas, and John Hynes in London.

Yours sincerely,

(Gilbert Redfern)

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COMMISSION FOR POLISH RELIEF INC.Zaulek Tartaki 2/3  
Vilna, Lithuania.

February 19, 1940.

LETTER NO. 16.

Mr. Maurice Pate, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief Inc.,  
57 East 36 Street, New York.

Dear Maurice :

Many thanks for your cable transfer today of \$17,500 covering our February quota. I paid immediately to the Zagorski Refugee Committee, through the Lithuanian Red Cross, 100,000 lits, as the Committee was "in the red" (to suppliers) for almost that amount. Partly due to hoarding caused by political misgivings, and partly to German and Soviet purchases in Lithuania, prices are now rising rapidly here, but the dollar is "pegged" at 5.92 lits. Zagorski is feeding nearly 8,000 refugees daily, and we are no sooner out of debt than we get in again. But we have about 60,000 lits due from the L.R.C. on the 50 per cent exchange adjustment, and Zagorski will receive in a day or two about 60,000 lits, plus 30,000 for exchange adjustment, from the \$20,000 recently received by the L.R.C. from the American R.C. for Vilna relief. We are also expecting contributions this month from the British and the Poles, some of which will go to Zagorski. So the immediate outlook is not bad. The J.D.C. is also feeding about 8,000 refugees daily (Jewish, of course) for which they have \$50,000 monthly from New York, plus about \$25,000 a month for the relief of Vilna Jews.

Our big problem is still the destitute Polish population of Vilna, numbering about 90,000. We had hoped to provide the Pelczar Committee this month with 500,000 lits for the relief of Vilna Poles, but the money is slow in coming in, and in any case Pelczar needs at least 600,000 lits to do an effective relief job. There are about 10,000 refugees, not fed either by Zagorski or the J.D.C., who somehow or other manage to live on the Vilna population. What amazes me about this Vilna situation is how thousands and thousands of people, not allowed to work and having no cash resources, can somehow manage to exist. Half the population of Vilna is unable to buy fuel, while the temperature throughout the last two months has averaged about 20 degrees of frost. The Lithuanians will not allow us to open any more refugee feeding stations, so, even if we had the money, we could not provide for more than 8,000 refugees, plus the 8,000 being taken care of by the J.D.C. But I do wish we could do more for the Vilna Poles. The J.D.C. by the way, spends per refugee per day, almost twice as much as the Zagorski Committee: but, of course, they get more for it. The J.D.C., for instance, pays rent for Jewish refugees living with Vilna families, and also buys them fuel. We cannot afford to do this. But apart from food and shelter, and Zagorski Committee has provided (for Polish refugees) bathing facilities, shoe-repairing, medical service, schools, and laundry. We also have a tailoring department. It is, indeed,

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extraordinary how much they have been able to do from the funds so far received.

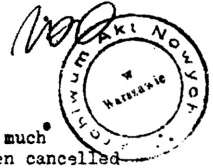
We are still in a very bad way for clothing. Nothing has been received here yet from Britain or the United States, though we have had some very helpful shipments (mostly used clothing) from the Scandinavian countries - one each from Denmark, Sweden and Holland. Herman Holmborg, of Gothenburg, advised me a few days ago that the 15 bales and 3 cases from the Polish National Council shipped per s.s. "Mauritz" had gone forward by rail to Stockholm, with instructions to forward, by the quickest route, to suitable Latvian port. Olson and Wright, of Stockholm, also advised me today that your shipment of 166 bales of used clothing ex s.s. "Goteborg" from London, is expected to leave Stockholm this week per s.s. "Estonia" for Tallinn. Mr. Mowinckel advised me about a week ago from Bergen of the arrival of the "Mormactide" shipment, and I have left it to him to pick out the quickest route for getting Bergen shipments to Vilna. As I turn over your cash immediately to the Zagorski Committee for feeding refugees, I have no balance for paying freight and shipping charges, so I am asking the various forwarding agents to send their bills to you or the Polish National Council in New York. If it is absolutely necessary to make payments from this end, however, I will do so out of my own funds and then cable you - if necessary - for reimbursement.

I am sorry there has been such a delay in these British and American clothing shipments - we have even not received the \$15,000 worth of new clothing sent by the American Red Cross in November. The winter, I suppose, will be over before it is received, and the heavy goods will then have to be stored for next winter. The Lithuanians will give us free entry, but, naturally, they will take precautions to see that gift clothing does not get into the market-place.

The rumpus we made last week has stopped the forcible deportation of "illegal" refugees to Soviet-occupied territory. The intention was to deport, regardless of climatic and other adverse conditions, all refugees who entered Lithuania after the occupation (by Lithuania) of the Vilna territory last October. We have now got this changed so that all refugees who registered with the police up to the time the police registration of refugees was completed on January 20, 1940, will be allowed to remain in Lithuania. The Soviet-Lithuanian frontier, since January 20, has been practically impassable, and only odd stragglers are now coming across. We are not allowed to feed and house refugees who have not been registered by the police.

We have also received assurance from the authorities today that the evacuation of refugees from Vilna will not begin until the weather is suitable, and not until proper reception areas have been established. Many refugees received orders last week to go to different parts of Lithuania - chiefly near the Latvian border - but our intervention has brought a stay of execution. It is understandable that the Lithuanian authorities want most of the refugees out of Vilna, and it is in everyone's interest that work - but not, of course, forced labor - should be found for them. Suitable arrangements, however, must first be made to receive them

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elsewhere. One of our main troubles here is that there is so much confusion in "high places". Orders are given, changed and then cancelled in bewildering fashion, and it is often hard for us to appreciate that the Lithuanians, too, have their troubles. I am sending a copy of this to Mr. Hynes for his general information.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Gilbert Redfern)

COMMISSION FOR POLISH RELIEF INC.LETTER NO. 18.

Mr. Maurice Fats, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief, Inc.,  
37 East 56 Street, New York.

*H.Z. The Polish Ambassador*  
Zaulek Tartaki 2/3,  
Vilna, Lithuania.

February 22, 1940.



Dear Maurice :

As I have already reported, the Lithuanians intend, as soon as the weather improves, to move most of the refugees away from the City of Vilna for the three-fold purpose of (1) putting them to work, (2) lessening the political risk, and (3) making room here for Lithuanian officials and workmen. As it will probably be necessary to get a cable reaction from you on this matter before long, I am giving you this outline of the situation as it stands at present so that lengthy explanations by cable will then not be necessary. I am also sending a copy of this to Mr. Hynes, in London, by air-mail.

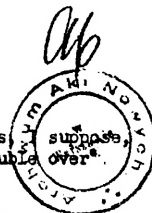
The Zagorski Committee in Vilna has registered nearly 27,000 refugees from former Polish territory, of whom nearly 4,000 are Lithuanians and over 10,000 Jews. Many of these, strictly speaking, are not refugees because they came to Vilna before September 1st, 1939; but, as there were no relief facilities for non-refugees, we gave all border-line cases (those who came a few days or weeks before the commencement of hostilities) the benefit of the doubt and listed them as refugees. The number of "border-line" cases is about 1,000, and we will be able to shift them over from the Zagorski Committee to the Pelczar Committee for assisting Vilna Poles, when Pelczar is able to care for them.

The police registration of refugees, which closed on January 20, included only those who came after September 1st, and did not include Lithuanians from former Polish territory because they will now receive Lithuanian passports. Every refugee registered by the police received, or will receive in due course, an identity card. No refugee without an identity card - after the final delivery of cards have been made, which will be in about a week - can receive help from Zagorski or the J.D.C. All refugees not registered by the police will, in theory, be deemed to have entered Lithuania illegally after January 20, and thus, when and if they fall into the hands of the police, be eligible for forcible deportation to Soviet-occupied territory. For the present, however, we have been given the most solemn assurances that there will be no more forcible deportations.

I was, however, given the very disquieting news by the Lithuanian Red Cross today that the police registration in the City of Vilna showed "only about 13,000 refugees". Even without those who came before September 1st and after January 20th, and the nearly 4,000 Lithuanians, the number should be much more than 13,000. Many, no doubt, failed to register with the police because they entered, illegally, after the

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Lithuanians took over Vilna from the Soviets last October. Others just didn't bother. But I now see we are going to have much trouble with them.



Our next problem, however, will be the evacuation of refugees from the City of Vilna to other parts of Lithuania. The J.D.C. is already moving out Jewish refugees, but the problem for them is simpler because the authorities are permitting the J.D.C. to move Jews into the small towns in the Vilna territory. The J.D.C. will thus be able to continue its relief work, and perhaps even save a little money because food is cheaper in the villages. Most of the small towns in the Vilna territory have Jewish communities, some are even 100 per cent Jewish, so there will be no serious difficulty in arranging reception.

The Poles, on the other hand - doubtless for Political reasons - are to be moved to the northern part of Lithuania, in small towns near the Latvian border. Reception arrangements have not yet been made, and I have been assured that the evacuation of Polish refugees from the City of Vilna will not begin until such arrangements are made, and the weather is suitable. I have told the authorities that, if they expect Comporal to continue to provide relief for Polish refugees, they must at least not make it impossible for us to do so. I have explained that we have not an organization able to assist refugees scattered all over Lithuania, and that we can do a much better job in the City of Vilna than in small towns near the Latvian border.

The Foreign Minister and his wife have invited Blanca and me to dinner in Kaunas tomorrow night, and I will have an opportunity while there to learn something about their evacuation ideas. But I've already warned the Lithuanian Red Cross not to start any "evacuation action" without fully consulting Zagorski and me - unless, of course, the authorities are prepared to relieve us entirely of assisting refugees. I have told them that, before we could undertake to assist refugees scattered throughout the northern part of Lithuania, I should have to submit a full report to you and get your decision by cable. All the Lithuanian Red Cross seems able to say is that "nothing irrational will be done".

If they were able to take much of the refugee relief off our hands by finding work and paying wages to refugees, that would enable us to give much-needed help to the Pelczar Committee for Vilna Poles. Their plight now is tragic in the extreme, and daily grows worse because they are not allowed to work in regular employment - except as manual laborers. I very much fear that after the "evacuation action" has been completed in respect of refugees, the authorities will then start on the Vilna population. In any case, I will keep you informed by cable of any urgent developments.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Gilbert Redfern)

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COMMISSION FOR POLISH RELIEF INC.

LETTER NO. 21.Zaulek Tartaki 2/3,  
Vilna, Lithuania.Mr. Maurice Pate, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief, Inc.,  
37 East 36 Street, New York.

March 2, 1940.



Dear Maurice:

With much head-shaking and signs of anguish, the Lithuanian Red Cross informed us on February 22 (see my letter No. 18) that the police registration completed on January 20, 1940, showed "only about 13,000 refugees" in the City of Vilna. The Chief of Police, however, stated today that "the total appeared to be about 23,000". The registration, mind you, was completed on January 20, and by the end of that month it was expected that every refugee would have received his registration certificate and relief card without which no relief could be given. The figure of 23,000 would about tally with the Zagorski registration of 27,000, which includes nearly 4,000 Lithuanians who did not need to register with the police.

We asked the L.R.C. and the police not to begin the evacuation of Polish refugees from Vilna until the registration certificates and relief cards had been distributed, suitable clothing given to the refugees, and reception areas arranged for. The first batch, however, was sent from Vilna today to a small town near the Latvian border. I arranged a few days ago for a former land-owner, named Bohdan Soltan, who is well known here and in Kaunas, to go to Kaunas in order to draw up with M. Stansika an official of the foreign Office and now "Relief Coordinator" for all Lithuania, a plan for the evacuation and reception of Polish refugees from the Vilna region. Soltan is now in Kaunas and having a hard time of it.

Stansika is a reasonable and rational official who talks sense and means well, but behind him stands Alekna, the Commissioner for Refugees, who has orders from the Minister of the Interior to clear Vilna of refugees as quickly as possible, and then to begin the evacuation of all other "Polish elements" from Vilna. We have tried to make it plain to the officials that we will be glad to co-operate with them in an orderly and rational evacuation of refugees from Vilna, when conditions for large-scale transfer are suitable, but that we would protest strongly against a purely police handling of the problem. Their ideas, I am sure, are mass evacuation, concentration camps and forced labor.

The problem is complicated because of bureaucratic confusion and



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a general atmosphere of political fear and administrative incompetence. The Minister of Finance, for obvious reasons, wants the good-will and co-operation of foreign relief organizations. So too, but for other reasons, does the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. But the Minister of the Interior is directly interested neither in foreign "valuta" nor in foreign reactions. He is obsessed with the idea of political security and the discovery of revolutionary unrest. And the police and Commissar for Refugees work under the Minister of the Interior.

I am still hopeful that Staneika will prevail over Alekna, and that, as soon as the weather improves and we have ample clothing on hand, we will be able to work out an orderly and rational evacuation of refugees: but the Zagorski people are very tired of it all - Dr. Maria Petrusiewicz, our chief worker, has been in bed for the last three weeks - and I can see where we may soon have to threaten the authorities again with a withdrawal of American support.

I am reporting to you at length on this evacuation business because, as already stated, it may become necessary to get a cable reaction from you on it.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Gilbert Redfern)

P.S. I am sending a copy of this to Mr. Hynes in London.

The next time you see Ron Allen, I wish you would tell him that I much appreciated his letter of January 31, just received. It is impossible for me to write him, or Mr. Adamski, at present, but I hope very much that circumstances will make it possible for me to see them in New York before the end of 1940. Your occasional designation of me as "our permanent representative in Lithuania" has already turned my hair completely white.

O D P I S .COMMISSION FOR POLISH RELIEF INC.Zaulak Tartaki 2/3  
Vilna Lithuania.LETTER No.35.

March 29, 1940.

Mr. Maurice Pate, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief, Inc.  
37, East 36 Street, New York, N.Y.

Dear Maurice,

We were very glad to learn from your cable No.26 that Mr. Hugh Gibson is going to Paris and London as general European representative of Comporal, and that food shipments from the United States should soon be reaching the German-occupied territory.

Professor Pelczar, of the Vilna Relief Committee, and Dr. Zagorski, of the Refugee Committee, feel that I ought, as soon as possible, to see Mr. Gibson and Polish Government officials, as well as the people in London, about the situation in Vilna. It is, as you know, extremely complicated but if relief work is to continue here, Pelczar and Zagorski must soon begin to plan for next winter. Many of Vilna's 100,000 jobless and destitute Poles have gone through hell in the last six months. Most of them have now sold - chiefly to Lithuanians and Jews - everything saleable they possessed, from wedding rings to children's dolls, and Pelczar's organisation is now swamped with relief calls.

On a present budget of about 300,000 lits / approximately \$50,000 / a month - mainly from the Polish Government plus the 50 per cent " exchange adjustment " from the Lithuanian Red Cross - they are trying to provide some 50,000 people with lunches or food packages. And there another 50,000 waiting for relief. Even with an assured monthly budget of 600,000 lits from April onward, Pelczar would have the utmost difficulty getting his people through another winter. It would be quite hopeless, beginning say with October, to attempt it on less than 600,000 lits monthly. Although Pelczar has a wife and three young children, he has recently refused a good appointment in Italy in order to carry on with relief work here. He lives on the proceeds of a cancer hospital which he has in Vilna.

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Until the evacuation of refugees from Vilna, now in progress, has been completed, and we know how many will eventually return to the German and Soviet occupied territories, and what will be expected of us in respect of feeding those evacuated to the Lithuanian countryside, it is difficult to estimate how much will be needed for refugee relief. We have, moreover, still to reach a clear-out understanding with the Lithuanian authorities about evacuation and the subsequent care of refugees, and whether they will be allowed to work for wages. But under the most favourable circumstances our refugee requirements will not fall below 200,000 lits a month and next winter they will almost certainly be 300,000 lits. Comperel's \$17,500 / approximately 150,000 lits, with the 50 % / a month goes entirely for refugees.

If you agree that these matters ought to be discussed as soon as possible in Paris and London, and an attempt made to find out what Pelczar and Zagorski can count on next winter, I am willing to go by air, at my own expense, at about the beginning of May. We ought to know by then how we stand on refugee evacuation and whether we will be able to get along without too much Lithuanian Red Cross and police interference. Blana and I must go to London anyway pretty soon. We have been living here like refugees for the last five months, and there are many things we need to bring from England - if we are to stay indefinitely in Vilna. The journey, in any case, would cost Comperel nothing beyond our present maintenance allowance; and not even that, if you felt that you ought to "drop us" for a few weeks.

Please let me know by cable how you feel about this.

I am sending copies of this letter to Mr. Hynes in London and Dorsey Tephens in Paris. One or both of them, in the meantime, will no doubt be in touch with Mr. Gibson.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

/-/ Gilbert Redfern.

P.S. The following wire just came from the London office of "TIME":-

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" Are you interested possibility fulltime correspondent  
job roving Balkans Italy nearest. Not definite yet  
but would like know what salary you would want how  
long assurance of job which obviously would be experiment  
for us. Appreciate reply earliest. All best ".

I am replying:-

"Thanks tempting suggestion but unfortunately impossible  
quit Poles now. Hope see you London early May when  
perhaps situation different. Greetings ".

If you see any likelihood of the situation being "different"  
in May, please let me know " toot sweet ".

Note for Mr. Hynes.

Many thanks for your wire of yesterday about  
the "Neemi" insurance.

Cordially,

G.Redfern.

O D P I S .COMMISSION FOR POLISH RELIEF INC.

Zaulek Tartaki 2/3,  
Vilna, Lithuania.

LETTER No.36.

March 30, 1940.

P R I V A T E .

Mr. Maurice Pate, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief, Inc.,  
37 East 36 St. New York, N.Y.

Dear Maurice,

I saw today the figures of the Lithuanian Red Cross on contributions received by the various relief organisations during the present month.

The total for the Jews / chiefly J.D.C./ was about 900,000 lits - original contributions plus the 50% " Exchange adjustment". The Jews are taking care of about 8.000 refugees of the Vilna territory and perhaps another thousand or two elsewhere in Lithuania. This means that the figure for each refugee is about 100 lits for the month, or approximately three times as much as the Zagorski Committee spends on about the same number of refugees.

Everybody in Vilna, of course, knows that Jewish refugees are better fed and housed than Polish refugees; while the attitude of the Lithuanian authorities towards Jews and Poles is influenced by the fact that the former bring in at least twice as much foreign "valuta" as the latter every month. I have little doubt, however, that some part of the Jewish money is used - directly or indirectly - for buying the wedding rings and other cherished possessions which many Poles in Vilna are now selling, at cut-throat prices, in order to buy bread. If you hear of anti-Semitic outbreaks in Vilna some day, you might have this background to the picture in mind.

My main purpose in writing you about this, however, and in sending copies to Mr. Hynes and Dorsey Stephens, is that the Jews have been "cut in" on the two contributions so far received from the British Fund - the first time for 100,000 lits and the second

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for 15,000, including the 50%. I understand that the first contribution, however, included two thousand pounds from exclusively Jewish sources, so that counting the 50%, the "cut in" on the first lot was about 35,000 lits. But the important point is that the Jews, already relatively well supplied with funds, got 50,000 lits that the Poles needed badly. I had nothing to do with the allocation of British money /x/ to the Jews, and, quite likely there were considerations involved that I know nothing about. But it was characteristically short-sighted of the Jews here to accept British money when the Poles need it so badly.

Yours sincerely,

/ - / Gilbert Redfern.

/x/ Mr. Hynes - Preston handed out the first lot;  
Anderson the second.

G.R.

O D P I S .COMMISSION FOR POLISH RELIEF INC.Zaulek Tartaki 2/4.  
Vilna, Lithuania.LETTER No.40.

April 4, 1940.

Mr. Maurice Pate, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief Inc.  
37 East 36 Street, New York, N.Y.

Dear Maurice,

Some idea of the magnitude of the Vilna non-refugee relief problem and what is being done to meet it, is shown by the following figures given me today by Professor Felczar:

The number of families now registered for relief is 31, 447,- 28, 870 in the City of Vilna and 2,577 in the District of Vilna. These 31, 447 families comprise 91, 285 persons - 57,599 adults and 33, 686 children.

The number of persons now receiving dinners daily, at a cost of 0.34 lits / about three and a half U.S. cents, at official rate plus 50% / per meal, - is 11,235. Another 12,693 persons are receiving food, in lieu of dinners, daily at a cost of 0.34 lits per ration; while 34,200 people are receiving ration cards, good for ten days, at a cost of 3.10 lits per person.

The number of children fed daily, at a cost of 0.40 lits, is 900, and 290 are fed at a cost of 0.60 lits daily. Milk is now being distributed, from 10 stations in the City of Vilna and the Vilna District, to 3,311 children: the total amount distributed daily being 9, 330 half-liter portions.

The Committee has 25 food distribution points, 12 soup kitchens of its own, and two private kitchens. It is also taking care of 160 persons in hospital, 16 in shelters, 297 in infants' school and 17 in a convalescent home. All relief is given free, of course.

Its medical service /gratis/ visited 1,230 persons in their homes during March and 3,074 received medical attention at the Committee's dispensary.

The Committee is trying to operate on a budget of 300,000 lits a month, obtained mostly from the Polish Government in France, but it needs at least 450,000 and will soon need 600,000 as hardly more than.

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half the people needing relief are at present able to get it. The Committee works on a hand-to-mouth basis, without a penny in reserve, and even a week's delay in the receipt of funds from Angers would mean the abrupt stoppage of relief. It is an appalling situation. I am sending copies of this to Mr. Hynes and Dorsey Stephens.

Sincerely,

/-/ Gilbert Redfern.



COMMISSION FOR POLISH RELIEF, INC.

Zaulek Tartaki 2/3  
Wilna, Lithuania.

Telegrams: COMPOREL.

April 20, 1940.

LETTER NO . 44.Mr. Maurice Pate, Secretary,  
Commission for Polish Relief, Inc.,  
37 East 36 Street, New York.

Dear Maurice:

I enclose herewith, for the Kosciuszko Foundation, a report from the Academic Committee on the distribution of the \$2000., plus the 50 per cent. "adjustment," received early in March.

We were much relieved today to learn from your cable No. 31 that you have cabled \$2,000 for the May and June contributions. Only this morning Professor Ehrenkreutz called to ask me if it would be possible to obtain the May contribution before the end of this month, as many of the professors are really in a bad way.

You will notice from the report that, besides the professors, a number of younger scientific workers are being helped from the Foundation's grants. The butter is being spread on awfully thin, but I can understand the desire of the Academic Committee to help as many deserving people as possible.

Please assure the Foundation that their generosity is most genuinely appreciated.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Gilbert Redfern)