

STANISLAV SWIANIEWICZ (1899-1997)
(Eulogy delivered at Canadian Martyr's Church on 14 June, 1997)

Stanislaw Swianiewicz was for ten years a Professor of Economics at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. He was born in 1899 in what was then the Russian Empire. His birthplace today is in the independent Republic of Latvia. There was a Polish family and his father was director of a railroad station. I recall Prof. Swianiewicz telling me that one of his earliest memories was of masses of apparently cheerful Russian soldiers boarding trains which would take them across Siberia to Port Arthur in the Far East. It must have been 1903, and they were on their way to fight in the Russo-Japanese War.

In the autumn of 1917, he began the study of law at the University of Moscow where he joined the Polish Student Union. This was during the eight month interim that the liberally inclined Provision Government governed Russia between the abdication of Emperor Nicholas II in March and the Bolshevik seizure of power in November. So the young man was witness to momentous events, the consequences of which have so strongly influenced our century.

In the summer of 1918, he moved deeper into Russia to Orel where his family had been relocated, and then to Dunaburg in Eastern Latvia. Early in 1919, after the end of World War I, the victorious powers negotiated a Versailles Treaty which redrew the map of Europe. At the end of the eighteenth century, Poland had ceased to exist after being divided up between Austria, Prussia and Russia. Now it was restored, and the Swianiewicz family were among its citizens.

In Poland, Swianiewicz attended the University of Vilna. He studied economics. In time, he focused on soviet economic policy. His master's thesis addressed the subject of "Lenin as an Economist". Finally, still at Vilna, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Jurisprudence. And so he began lecturing there, eventually becoming a Professor of Political Economy.

In these years, he married Olimpia who held a degree in ethnology. Four children were born to them. He served in the reserves and was made an officer in 1922.

The years after World War I were difficult ones for Europe in general. Poland in particular was caught geographically and ideologically between two great totalitarian

regimes, both of which had designs on its territory and intended to dominate its people and to exploit its resources. To the east was the Russian dominated USSR. Much as its ideologues despised the former tsarist autocracy, they and their leader Stalin were determined to take back all the lands which had ever been part of the tsars' empire. To the west was Germany whose Nazi leaders aimed to expand eastward for the sake of *lebensraum*.

In August 1939, Foreign Ministers Molotov and Ribbentrop signed a non-aggression pact on behalf of Stalin and Hitler respectively. They started by agreeing to divide Poland between them. Thereafter, each state would allow the other one to expand, dividing Europe between them. And so it was that on 1 September, Nazi forces invaded Poland from the west, precipitating a declaration of war on the part of the United Kingdom and of France. On 17 September, the Red Army crossed the frontier from the east, occupying the region where the Swianiewicz family lived.

The Poles fought gallantly but hopelessly. It is from here that one hears stories of Polish lancers on horseback charging German tanks. Thousands of Polish officers were captured and deported to special camps in Russia. Professor Swianiewicz was among some 5000 men who ended up in Kozielsk camp which was located on the grounds of an Orthodox monastery in what today is the republic of Belarus. His memoirs have been, ever since, an important source of information about life in the camps.

A general winding up of the camps started the following April. Under the control of the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, the men were crowded on trains and transported - they knew not where. On 30 April, 1940, Dr. Swianiewicz was ordered off one such train and locked up in an NKVD prison in Smolensk. He recalled hearing, in the distance, gunfire which went on for hours and days, and especially at night. Six days later, he was removed to the infamous Lubianka prison in Moscow. Here someone handed him a document which charged him with espionage. It was signed by the Procurator-General of the USSR. He was sentenced to eight years of hard labour in a penal labour camp. As it turned out, he was lucky!

In June 1941, Nazi Germany broke its 1939 treaty with the USSR and invaded it. The allies were now enemies. Professor Swianiewicz was released from the labour camp. He went to the Polish embassy in the city of Kuibyshev on the Volga River. From there

he sailed south to the Caspian Sea and onto Iran. Eventually he ended up in Jerusalem where a Polish Committee was set up, ostensibly to discuss economic terms for a future peace treaty with Germany.

In April 1943, German soldiers in Katyn Forest near the Russian city of Smolensk came upon a shallow mass grave containing the bodies of many Polish officers. All of them had been killed by a shot to the back of the head. Many of them had their hands bound. These were the gunshots which Swianiewicz had heard from his prison cell three years earlier. It turned out that he had been one of about 400 POWs who had been separated from their fellow officers and so survived the massacre. In spite of much speculation, no one ever learned for certain just why those particular men were spared. Dr. Swianiewicz speculated that in his case, it was because someone deemed his knowledge of political economy to be potentially useful.

The Nazis declared that the executions must have been the work of the USSR. Soviet officials denied the charge vehemently. They claimed that the Germans must have committed the murders in August or September of 1941.

Mrs. Swianiewicz rejoined her husband at the end of World War II. For a time, he taught economics in the Polish University College in London. He was appointed a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Manchester where he studied the agricultural problems of Eastern Europe. In 1956, the UNESCO appointed him to serve for two years in Indonesia where he advised the government and did some teaching. In the meantime, his wife immersed herself in the study of the local society, especially the peasant culture of the area.

In 1958, Prof. Swianiewicz was awarded a Fellowship in International Studies in the London School of Economics. He came to Saint Mary's University in 1963 and stayed with us for most of what remained of his ten years of teaching. These were, of course, the years in which many of us here came to know him. He took two years off between 1966 and 1968 to work at Notre Dame University in Indiana. These were productive years and he published widely. While he was at Saint Mary's, for example, he published two important books: *Forced Labour and Economic Development: an Inquiry into the Experience of Soviet Industrialization* and *World Economic Growth and the Soviet Challenge*.

The death of his wife in 1972 saddened and, I think, aged him rather quickly. A year later, he retired. Appropriately, the university appointed him Professor Emeritus. He lived much of the rest of his life in London, although he frequently returned to Halifax while he was still strong enough to do so.

On many occasions after the war, he and his fellow survivors of the Katyn massacre were asked to testify before investigative commissions which undertook to answer questions surrounding the executions and to establish finally who had perpetrated them. Repeatedly he testified that on the basis of his experience and information, it was the work of the NKVD. One day in London, he was attacked and seriously injured but not robbed of any money. He put it down to a bungled attempt to keep him from testifying before such a commission which was to convene shortly.

Interestingly, about ten years ago, when Mikhail Gorbachev was head of the USSR, that regime finally admitted responsibility for the death of nearly 15,000 officers in Katyn Forest in the spring of 1940.

During the very difficult years of imprisonment and forced labour, as in the rest of his life, Professor Swianiewicz was sustained by a strong Christian faith. He spoke often of how this had helped him and many other persons to survive the experience of prison camps and of war. He remarked that as barbarous as was the Communist regime, and as dehumanizing for the officials who ran its dungeons, he was often touched by the small kindnesses of individual guards who tried to be as helpful and as sympathetic as their circumstances permitted. He felt compassion for them, for like him, they were victims of a soul destroying ideology.

Those of us who knew Professor Swianiewicz during his years at Saint Mary's University remember him as a generous man and in every sense a gentleman. We appreciated his wide experience, his knowledge, and his good humour. He was a source of inspiration to his younger colleagues and to his students. Saint Mary's is fortunate to be able to count him as one of its own

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