

**The Fight For Poland, The Fight For Freedom:
The Work of Representative Alvin E. O’Konski in the Years 1945-1952**

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Figure 1. Alvin O’Konski During His First Year in Office ca. 1943

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To my parents Bernhard and Shelly Hedstrom without your support this would not have been possible.

Abstract

Alvin Edward O’Konski was a representative from the state of Wisconsin from 1942 until 1972, and during his time in Congress he was known for his strong anti-communist stance. This paper will cover the work that O’Konski was a part of during the years 1944 until 1956. O’Konski was a key player in the fight against communism, due to his strong ties to a lot of European countries, and to Poland, as he had a strong Polish heritage. O’Konski was a defender of democracy in America and beyond, and when one examines his work through bills and resolutions, as well as speeches he made to the American public, the importance of O’Konski’s role becomes apparent.



Alvin O'Konski During His First Year in Office ca. 1943
<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM48080>.

Introduction

We talk about the Atlantic Charter; in my judgement the Atlantic Charter is no longer a living document. The stabbing in the back of Poland and the partitioning of Poland, the sixth partitioning of Poland in her history, but the first partitioning with the consent of the greatest Nation -- the United States of America, I am sorry to say -- the sixth partitioning of Poland is a definite denunciation of the Atlantic Charter. I do not see how anyone can speak of the Black Sea Conference (Crimea) and the Atlantic Charter in the same breath or in the same speech, because the two just do not "jell". The Atlantic Charter states: We desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned. What Pole was ever consulted when the Big Three met at the Black Sea Conference and partitioned Poland?¹

How do you protect the freedom of a country that is not yours? How can one individual fight communism? What do you do when your own country helped create the problem, in the case of Yalta? These are some of the questions that faced Representative Alvin O'Konski from the 10th district of Wisconsin as he took office in 1942. He questioned how a Representative from a small district in Wisconsin could help fight for democracy worldwide and help the people of Eastern Europe enjoy freedom from the Soviet Union after World War II. Yet, it would be difficult to find someone that did as

¹ Alvin O'Konski to House of Representatives, February 13, 1945, box 22 folder 4, Alvin E. O'Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

much as O’Konski did in that fight. While O’Konski may not be the most well-known politician of his era, the important work he did to bring attention to the plight that faced Eastern Europe because of the spread of power and communism from the Soviet Union, will prove that O’Konski is a person worth remembering.

O’Konski was a part of many important projects throughout his illustrious career including: his work on the GI Bill, his work in the House of Representatives: housing and development committee, and his work back home with Wisconsin’s many different Native American tribes.² But perhaps O’Konski’s most important work has been his strong stance against communism in Eastern Europe, and the efforts he took because of that stance. Of importance to O’Konski was Poland, a country in Eastern Europe that held a special place in the heart of O’Konski because of his strong Polish heritage; of which is he was truly proud. This fondness for Poland is evident in the correspondence between O’Konski and many other Polish Americans across the country, and became a driving force for O’Konski to expose what was happening in his ancestors homeland in regards to the communist takeover.³ This paper will look at the work of Alvin O’Konski through some of his more important speeches, the bills that O’Konski was a part of creating and passing during his tenure with the House of Representatives, and how those actions were so important to him and the people he was fighting for.

The importance of examining the speeches O’Konski gave during this era is that they provide an intimate look into what he was trying to advocate for, and the people he was fighting for. Speeches provide historical context, as well as O’Konski’s thoughts,

² H. Res. 3717, 79th Cong., 1st sess.

³ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, February 13, 1945, box 22 folder 4, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

opinions, and his vision for the future with regards to political issues addressed. The reader can learn more about O’Konski when they examine the speeches, he made during this era than you can by looking at the bills he advocated into passing into law alone. This is in part because of the Republican party was in the minority for most of his career making it harder for O’Konski to get his legislation through the Senate. Speeches for O’Konski were something that no one had control over except for himself.

The speeches provide insight into O’Konski’s mind and how he worked to inspire others to join his fight. It was very meaningful to the people O’Konski was fighting for to hear his speeches; it reminded them that they were not alone in their fight for freedom and democracy, and that they had advocates for them in America and beyond. It is clear from the responses of audiences that O’Konski’s speeches were an important aspect of the fight against communism. Not everyone agreed with him of course, but the response was more positive than negative, and people would often ask O’Konski for copies of his speeches so that they could hand them out to people in their own communities, thereby increasing the reach of O’Konski’s message.⁴

Additional correspondence between O’Konski and American citizens demonstrates how they appreciated that someone was advocating for Poland, and the other Eastern European countries alike.⁵ Not only did O’Konski boldly stand up for freedom in those countries, but he also brought up ideas that others would not, which included as the reader will see later his thoughts on the Soviet Union. While these

⁴ Alvin O’Konski, Correspondence, 1945, box 12 folder 4, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

⁵ Alvin O’Konski, Correspondence, 1944, box 10 folder 7, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

speeches were, for the most part, warmly received, not everyone agreed with O’Konski’s message. In those cases, his opposition criticized him for being a fascist or a Nazi sympathizer because his such strong opposition of communism occasionally led him to side with Germany over the allied Soviet Union on certain issues.⁶ This made O’Konski a target for anti-German sentiments. This claim was even made by the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, one of the biggest newspapers in the state of Wisconsin.⁷ This idea deeply hurt O’Konski, as his was neither a Nazi sympathizer or fascism supporter, rather he was opposed to the ideals of communism and the actions of the Soviet Union. Understanding the criticism, O’Konski regularly addressed this criticism in his speeches.⁸

O’Konski used his speeches to spread his message and inspire other, but words are nothing without action, and examining the bills O’Konski wrote and/or supported during his time as a United States Representative show the actions O’Konski took in his fight against communism. Through these bills and resolutions, the readers can see just exactly what O’Konski was able to accomplish for Poland. They were also of great variety because he was very creative in his attempts to help the Polish and others alike. Examples of this creativity include efforts to grant asylum to many different Polish immigrants who had left Poland in an attempt to escape communism and the Soviet Union, most notably Franciszek Jarecki a famous pilot for Poland during World War II, and resolutions to try and get more financial aid to fight the Soviet Union from politically

⁶ Alvin O’Konski, Correspondence, 1945, box 11 folder 1, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, February 13, 1945, box 22 folder 4, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

taking over many Eastern European countries, and to giving a conclusion to those who were killed during the war at the Katyn Forest. O’Konski’s bills and resolutions highlight O’Konski’s true work and accomplishments. These different bills and resolutions show that no matter what path he needed to take, O’Konski would do what he could to help those in need, whether it be a singular individual or whole country. If O’Konski believed an action could be taken to halt communism and aid those caught in its grasp, he would do it.

Histography

The topic of Alvin O’Konski may not be well examined by very many historians as of yet, but the topic of the historical relationship between Poland and United States has been. Some of the historians that have delved into this topic are Richard C. Lukas, who wrote the book *Bitter Legacy: Polish-American Relations in the Wake of World War II*, and Piotr S. Wandycz, who wrote the book *The United States and Poland*. In the book *Bitter Legacy*, Lukas focuses on the immediate relationship the two countries had after the ending of World War II. *The United States and Poland* book examines the larger history between the two countries overall. To understand the history of America and Poland together is important in being able to understand the dynamics of the relationship between the two countries, because what has happened in the past affects what will happen in the future. Examining the historical relationship between America and Poland gives us a deeper understanding of the political climate when O’Konski was in office.

With his book, *Bitter Legacy*, Richard C. Lukas goes into detail on what was going on in America regarding its relationship with Poland starting near the end of World

War II, and what the United States was doing with the Soviet Union at the same time. This book discusses the relief that the United States gave Poland after the war, and how the relationship between all the countries involved contributed to the beginning of the Cold War era. The motives and intentions of the United States towards the end of the war directly affected its relationship with Poland, and the Soviet Union as well. An example of this, as the reader will see later, is how the handling of the Polish people and its land changed how Poland viewed it contemporary, in the United States.

Bitter Legacy begins by examining the path that led towards Potsdam, which was the last of the meetings between the victorious leaders of World War II: The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Potsdam did not include representatives for Poland, and as such, the fate of Poland was decided without much input at all from the Polish people.⁹ An important outcome of the Potsdam meeting was that the three victors of the war would split up the land for Poland. The Polish land would end at the Oder-Neisse line on the western front while the Poland's eastern frontier would be greatly pillaged by the Soviet Union in a land grab by the communist leaders.¹⁰

The structure of Poland's government was also effectively decided by outside forces, which lead to Poland effectively becoming a satellite country for the Soviet Union, and ending any chance that the Polish Democracy Party had of becoming the main system of government of Poland.¹¹ The issue of how Poland's election of government post World War II was going to happen, was of great importance for the

⁹ Richard C. Lukas, *Bitter Legacy: Polish-American Relations In the Wake of World War II* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 1

¹⁰ Lukas, 11-17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

Polish citizens. The majority of the Polish people were not communist yet, but with the pressure coming from the Soviet Union it was near impossible for the other political parties to have any chance of gaining power.¹²

The issue of how to re-establish Poland, as well as other Eastern European countries, was one of the most important points in the negotiations between the three countries because the governments of the United States and of Great Britain were opposed to the idea of Poland becoming effectively as satellite country to the Soviet Union. As the negotiations continued however, it became more and more clear that the Soviet Union would not relent on this issue and the other two countries, United States and Britain, were becoming eager to end these negotiations at Potsdam, so they relented. The Lublin Poles party was installed by the Soviet Union, because they had the influence and power, in regard to their army, to be able to govern Poland. This decision was not popular by some of the American officials that were close to this situation including the US Ambassador to Poland at the time, Arthur Bliss Lane.¹³ Ambassador Lane, and those alike, all thought that agreeing to a deal with the Soviet Union before setting up the parameters of an election to ensure the Soviet Union could not interfere was a mistake.

After Potsdam, Poland became more and more communist, and the United States began to send less aid to Poland, despite the fact that the Polish people were in great need. With the lack of aid and the appointments of two new ambassadors, the relationship between the United States and Poland started to greatly deteriorate. Stanton Griffis, the new United States Ambassador to Poland stated during his first trip to Poland in 1947:

¹² Lukas, 20-29.

¹³ Ibid., 44.

“Although the atmosphere is surcharged with nervousness and fear and walking through the streets of Warsaw at night one almost has the feeling that the planes should be overhead any minute now.”¹⁴ By 1947, the United States shifted their attention towards aiding Germany in their rebuild, and Poland was, for many in the United States, a cause no longer worth fighting for.¹⁵ As Lukas concludes in *Bitter Legacy*, the “United States postwar relations with Poland were conditioned by the agreements reached at the Potsdam Conference. By agreeing to an imprecise understanding which provided no enforcement mechanism to ensure that an expanded provisional government in Warsaw would hold “free and unfettered elections,” the United States took a major step in dissociating from Poland and Eastern Europe.”¹⁶

Piotr Wandycz with his book, *The United States and Poland*, gives the reader a larger perspective on the relationship between the United States and Poland. Unlike *Bitter Legacy*, which looked at a small period regarding the two countries relationship, *The United States and Poland* affords the readers to know its entire history. This book leads to further understanding as to what had been transpiring between Poland and the United States while Alvin O’Konski was in office, and the history of Poland. Compared to *Bitter Legacy*, Wandycz focuses more on Poland, Poland’s development and how it affected the United States and its relationships. The two time periods that were especially critical understanding O’Konski were the years immediately before World War II, as well as the years immediately following the war. These time periods are important

¹⁴ Lukas, 81.

¹⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹⁶ Ibid., 135.

because they provide insight to the political climate and United States and Polish relationship right before O’Konski took office. This provides better insight to O’Konski’s work and passion.

In World War II, Germany took control over Poland almost immediately and the relationship between the governments of the United States and Poland became strained of the new circumstances with the former Polish government in exile.¹⁷ President Roosevelt did recognize the old Polish government in exile stating that although they may not control the lands they used to, the United States would not recognize the Polish land taken aggressively to be part of Germany.¹⁸ This would be the case for the rest of the war, but with some important events happening in the meantime. The Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam Conferences were meeting where the leaders of the “Big Three” allied countries of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union decided the future of Poland. The main conclusion of the Tehran Conference was the continuation of all three agreeing to continue to have a united front in the war, and how they would divide German land following a victory. This agreement included what lands would be returned to Poland after the war had ended. In the Yalta Conference continued discussion of how Poland would be returned was discussed between the “Big Three” as well as how the politics of Poland would be determined.¹⁹ The outcomes of this conference were that Poland was effectively under Soviet and communist control because of what the United States and Great Britain agreed to. The reasoning Roosevelt used was that if the United States and

¹⁷ Piotr S. Wandycz, *The United States and Poland* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, Harvard University Press, 1980), Pg. 247

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 278, 292-293, 303-304.

Great Britain “demand that the ‘Lublin Poles’ alone be forced to cease (existence)” that they would lose any chance of being able to negotiate with the Soviet Union in the future.²⁰ This is where the relationship between the United States and Poland began to deteriorate. As the Polish began to become more and more communist, the United States was more reluctant to give aid to the Polish. While the United States did still help some sections of Poland that were trying to become free, including the leaders of the PSL party. What was hard for the United States was that Poland itself did not know what it was during this time. Poland was going through a lot of changes and as Wandycz puts it, Poland was becoming a whole new nation.²¹ It had a whole new border, economy, and maybe most importantly a new population, so before the United States could fully commit to supporting Poland, they had to figure out what Poland was first. Wandycz, in his book, concludes that while the relationship between the United States and Poland has had its ups and down it was an impactful for both sides in their respective history.

To help better understand where Alvin O’Konski stood in America regarding his policies it is important to look at how his party, the Republicans, reacted to events that shaped his career. The Yalta Conference in particular had a major impact on O’Konski. The journal articles *The Republican Party and Yalta: Partisan Exploitation of the Polish American Concern over the Conference, 1945-1960*, helps the reader give a look at the evolving stance the Republican party took regarding the Yalta Conference and the Polish American population. For many Polish Americans, the Yalta Conference represented a betrayal of their homeland by President Roosevelt because of the partitioning of Poland’s

²⁰ Wandycz, 300.

²¹ Ibid., 307-312.

land and because of the lack of accountability that the United States had put on the Soviet Union to hold free elections. This is something that the Republican Party took and started to use to their advantage in their attempt to gain the Polish American vote which, up to that point had been predominately Democratic. Starting with the 1946 elections Republican congressman across the nation, but predominately in higher concentrated Polish American cities, started to campaign for the Polish Americans by criticizing the Democratic administration by focusing on the Curzon Line decision, which was the basis of the decision on Poland's border.²² Alvin O'Konski was one of the congressman that was at the head of this movement as he would go to large Polish Americans cities like Chicago and campaigned for the "Democratic betrayal" of Poland. While the Polish Americans were sympathetic to what the Republicans were arguing, the support with votes came slowly because of their disagreement with the majority of the rest of the Republican's policies. This started to change in 1951, as the Republicans were gaining more support by the continuation of their work against Yalta agreement, and because of this you can see the Democratic party start to change their stance on it as well. The two parties differed on what was wrong with it, as the Democratic party denounced the Soviet Union for violating certain policies and with the Republicans primarily criticizing what the United States had agreed to at the Yalta Conference. This all came to head, with the 1952 Republican National Convention and with the subsequent election of President Eisenhower, as the denunciation of the Yalta agreement with a main sticking point in the Republicans new foreign policy.²³ While in office the Republicans did not fulfill their

²² Athan Theoharis, "The Republican Party and Yalta: Partisan Exploitation of the Polish American Concern over the Conference, 1945-1960," *Polish American Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring, 1971): 7 accessed December 15, 2018. <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.uwec.edu/stable/20147828>.

promise of repudiation, and they were in fact strongly partisan in their policies toward the Yalta agreements. As the author Athan Theoharis puts the Republican party's reaction to the Yalta agreement is just another "irresponsible exploitation by the political elites" to better themselves in those ethnic communities' eyes.²⁴

Biography of Alvin O'Konski

Born in Kewaunee, Wisconsin on May 26, 1904. Alvin Edward O'Konski was a well-respected man in his community. After growing up on a farm, O'Konski a man of education, attending Oshkosh State College, now University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, the University of Iowa, and finishing out his academic career at the University of Wisconsin.²⁵ After finishing college O'Konski initially went on to become a high school teacher, as well as a professor at Itasca Junior College in Coleraine, Oregon State College in Corvallis, and at the University of Detroit, now the University of Detroit Mercy.²⁶ O'Konski was also a diversified business owner, at different times owning a newspaper, the *Iron County Miner*, a multitude of radio stations as well as multiple TV stations.²⁷ He even helped bring television to the Northern Wisconsin when he started the WAOW-TV in Rhinelander, Wisconsin.²⁸ In his political career Alvin O'Konski served the House of

²³ Theoharis, 13.

²⁴ Theoharis, 19

²⁵ "Alvin E. O'Konski, 83, Former Congressman, Dies," *Washington Post*, 1987, accessed November 10, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1987/07/09/alvin-e-okonski-83-former-congressman-dies/d4699ad4-20d8-44ba-8be4-3adf68992838/?utm_term=.0ef0e91501a3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ US Congress. *Congressional Record*. 100th Cong., 1st sess., 1987. Vol. 133, No. 117, Pg. H6370.

Representatives as a Republican for thirty years from 1942 until 1972. When Wisconsin's district boundaries were changed, and the 10th district disbanded as when Wisconsin had a seat from the House taken from them, O'Konski lost his seat to Representative Obey. Alvin O'Konski accomplished many things during his time in office but was especially proud of was his work on the GI Bill, which helped bring aid to the veterans of World War II. O'Konski was a member of many different committees during his time some of which include the Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, Public Works, Education and Labor, and many others.²⁹ To those close to Alvin O'Konski many cannot think of a man who tried harder for both the people he represented and human rights worldwide. He was always fighting for other rights and their life improvement. Alvin O'Konski died on July 8, 1987 in his hometown of Kewaunee, Wisconsin, and was buried at St. Hedwig's Commentary.³⁰

Work for Poland Years 1945-1950

In terms of O'Konski's work towards Poland, two time periods offer the most resources. The time just after World War II, 1944 to 1950, and the beginning of the Cold War, 1951 to 1956. The work that O'Konski was doing currently was critical for Poland, because how much attention O'Konski was bringing to their plight. During the years of 1944 to 1950, the focus of Alvin O'Konski's work looked at the aftermath of the Yalta Conference and what it meant for Poland as well as other countries. This is also the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Alvin E. O'Konski, 83, Former Congressman, Dies," *Washington Post*, 1987, accessed November 10, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1987/07/09/alvin-e-okonski-83-former-congressman-dies/d4699ad4-20d8-44ba-8be4-3adf68992838/?utm_term=.0ef0e91501a3.

³⁰ Ibid.

beginnings of his troubles with the Soviet Union and his first ideas on how to deal with them. The speeches and bills that I will focus on during this time period are a speech titled *Yalta Crime of the Ages, Speech given to Congress in 1945 Regarding the Comments Made by the Pravda Newspaper*, and a speech and subsequent bill proposal called *Put Teeth in the Monroe Doctrine*.

Yalta Crime of the Ages

This is one of the most important moments in Alvin O’Konski’s tenure as a member of the United States Congress. With this speech he goes against what much of the nation was feeling and personally criticizes President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill for what they have agreed to with the Soviet Union. This speech was given during the House of Representative meeting on February 13th, 1945. The biggest complaint O’Konski has about this conference between the three victors of World War II was the treatment of Poland and how they were blatantly taking advantage of it. Poland at the time had no control of its future. The leaders of the Allied countries from World War II had met at different times, once in 1943 and twice in 1945 to discuss what the outcomes would be at the end of the war. These meetings include the Yalta Conference, as well the Tehran Conference and the Potsdam Conference. It was after the Yalta Conference that O’Konski would write and began his fight for the Polish people, who, he felt, were stabbed in the back by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill. He felt this way because the Yalta and subsequent Potsdam Conference in effect gave away Poland’s chance to have free elections, and because of the partitioning of Poland’s land, which was mostly given to the Soviet Union without any input from Poland itself. These

he says are some of the greatest injustices of the war saying, “I think the greatest tragedy on the face of the earth is the fate that has befallen Poland. Where the fight for freedom in this war has taken place, you have always found the Poles.”³¹ O’Konski looked at the past and what happened to countries where situations similar to that of Poland, like that of Lithuania, as he predicted what the fate of Poland was going to be with newfound Soviet Union influence. They were always there for the Allies, never stopping the fight against the Nazis and yet as soon as the war ended Poland was treated in a way that completely broke the heart of O’Konski. In this speech it is clear that O’Konski was not just doing this to make himself more famous and bring himself into the spotlight more, but because it truly meant a lot to him, and that he could not ignore the plight of the Poles. He knew he had to fight somehow, and he knew that he had to do all he could to make sure Poland would not be forgotten. This was a “crime of the ages” for what was decided for Poland and its future and O’Konski was someone who knew that he could and should try to make a difference for the Polish people.³²

Speech given to Congress in 1945 Regarding the Comments Made by the Pravda Newspaper

After the speech given to congress regarding the Yalta conference, Alvin O’Konski was becoming more well-known regarding those politicians opposing communism and the Soviet Union. This is an important step in O’Konski’s journey

³¹ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, February 13, 1945, box 22 folder 4, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

³² Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, February 13, 1945, box 22 folder 4, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

because it shows just how much his speech and sentiment meant for all those involved. One of the major players of this conflict was the Soviet Union who, in February 1945 was considered one of the United States biggest allies in Europe and in World War II. This shows just how pure O’Konski’s intentions were when it came to his complaints, this was not something that just everyone did, but it was something that O’Konski felt was necessary to help the freedom of Poland. The background regarding O’Konski’s speech to Congress was that the official Soviet Union newspaper, *Pravda*, had attacked O’Konski in their Sunday February 18th edition because of his criticisms towards the results of the Yalta Conference. With this, the fight and disagreements between O’Konski and the Soviet Union began.³³ This is also the start of some of the personal attacks that O’Konski faced because of what he was doing for the Polish people. *Pravda* was writing about O’Konski and making multiple different claims about the allegiances that O’Konski had, with the biggest criticism of O’Konski as being fascist, or even going as far as being a Nazi-sympathizer. This was just seven days after the Yalta Conference had ended and just five days after O’Konski’s speech to Congress. This timeline is important to note because it explains why a Russian newspaper would attack a United States congressman. The Soviet Union was trying to implement the new government, the Lublin Poles party, in Poland as smoothly and quickly as possible. *Pravda* needed to discredit people like O’Konski and Stanislaw Mikolajczyk the President of the exiled Polish government, because they were providing negative attention to the Soviet Union

³³ PRAVDA TURNS FIRE ON MIKOLAJCZYK. (1945, Feb 19). *New York Times (1923-Current File)* accessed December 15, 2018. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/107295068?accountid=14790>

plan. They said that O’Konski “had repeated ‘a dirty insinuation of fascist propaganda concerning liberated Poland and the Baltics,’” and that he “spoke like (Joseph) Goebbels.”³⁴ While this particular speech is O’Konski response to what *Pravda* had written about him, they were not the only ones to make similar claims and attacks towards him. These include some American citizens as well as the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, which as mentioned earlier questioned O’Konski’s allegiance towards the United States.³⁵ O’Konski was deeply hurt by some of these claims and in this speech, you can tell just how hard he took them.

To my mind, there is no difference between fascism, Nazi-ism, and communism. All three are products of perverted minds. Fascism, communism, and Nazi-ism to me are just different trade names of the same parcel. With all my being, with all my heart and soul, I despise all three. The gears that make these three perversions tick is identical—make no mistake about that.³⁶

O’Konski would continue in this speech describing how it was not him who was like Nazi propaganda creator Joseph Goebbels, but it was the *Pravda*. This is something that the Soviet Union was masterful at and if they, *Pravda* and subsequently the Soviet Union, could do it to him and even get parts of the United States to turn against him, what else could they do. He warns that the Soviet Union is doing this to a higher degree to Poland when they accused them of acting with Berlin. This is to him is another attack on Poland, almost an extension of the Yalta Conference, because it falsely acquits the “Big Three” of any wrongdoing. What makes this speech so impactful is O’Konski’s response

³⁴ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, February 21, 1945, box 22 folder 4, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

in defending Poland. He goes year by year, event by event, detailing how no matter the situation Poland itself was in, they never stopped fighting and helping the allies achieve victory.

Put Teeth In the Monroe Doctrine/ Bill Proposed to Congress

The final piece in this era that will be looked at is a speech that O’Konski gave, which turned into a proposed bill, which codified the Monroe Doctrine into law. O’Konski’s goal in the speech and bill was “Translating the Monroe Doctrine into Federal law by prohibiting through an Act of Congress, foreign nations or their agents from organizing or in betting political parties or committees in the United States or its territorial possessions: from publishing therein subversive or Fifth Column propaganda; and from influencing or attempting to influence American legislation or electoral or governmental procedure.”³⁷ A fifth column is an effort by a foreign nation to try and undermine the larger population and gain sympathizers, and in this case the Soviet Union trying to spread communism across Europe. O’Konski was trying to protect freedom from all those who endangered it. Here he is trying to protect the United States from falling into the possible Soviet Union influence that so many other countries had already been doing. He wanted to have the legal rights to punish those that endangered the United States, which is more than what the Monroe Doctrine had previously been able to do.³⁸ The Monroe Doctrine was a policy in the United States from 1823 that opposed unwanted European colonialism in the Americas. While the Monroe Doctrine had been

³⁷ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, 1945, box 22 folder 5, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

³⁸ Ibid.

the basis of many United States interventions throughout its history, but it had never been codified into United States law. O’Konski wanted to make sure that the Monroe Doctrine could be counted on to protect the United States from any future incursions or hostile acts by any foreign powers.

This is the same argument that O’Konski had been using when it came to Poland. They were not protected from outside countries from being able to influence and take over certain aspects of their lives and that’s how the partitioning and communist takeover was able to occur. O’Konski wanted freedom for everyone and if the United States was not able to protect itself how could it be able to help other countries do the same. So, by enacting the Monroe Doctrine into a law the United States could not only protect itself but would in turn be able to protect other countries from communism now and other potential threats to democracy.

Work for Poland Years 1951-1952

Through the years 1951 to 1952, Alvin O’Konski continued his fight for Poland and freedom. These years are important to look at because unlike the earlier years that were looked O’Konski was able to propose more deals and was able to do more work towards helping the Polish peoples. In doing this he was able to give the Polish people a real answer to the many people who were massacred in the Katyn Forrest, he continued to help Polish escapees by granting them asylum in the United States, and how he talked about his travels to Europe to see how the United States aid was working and where he would improve it.

Speech Given to Congress about the Massacre in the Katyn Forrest in 1941/ 83 Bill

Profile H. Res. 64 (1953-1954)/ 84 Bill Profile H. Res. 501 (1955-1956)

One of Alvin O’Konski’s greatest accomplishments, and one that many other politicians commended him for, even after his death, was his work investigating the Katyn Forrest Massacre. In 1941 approximately 22,000 Polish prisoners were murdered and buried in the Katyn Forrest.³⁹ This was part of the purge that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and the rest of his communist leadership ordered. Nazi Germany found the graves, and, initially, it was thought that they were the perpetrators. Both the Nazis and the Soviet Union would use this massacre as propaganda against each other during World War II to drive up support for their war efforts. Incredibly, this idea would hold all the way through the Nuremberg Trials, where Germany would be convicted of it, because of the pressure coming from the Soviet Union to charge the Nazis, as well as a false confession.⁴⁰ While there was always an underlying feeling that it was the Soviet Union that committed this massacre it was not until Alvin O’Konski and a few other United States politicians, including Representative Ray Madden, led the charge to investigate the incident. What they would were able to look at is certain records for the United States State and War Departments, as well as interviews with some of those involved with the discovery from both the Soviet Union and the Germans. This speech and subsequent

³⁹ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, 1952, box 22 folder 8, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI; H. Res. 64, 83rd Cong., 1st sess.; H. Res. 501, 84th Cong., 2nd sess.

⁴⁰ Alderman, S. S., “Negotiating the Nuremberg Trial Agreements, 1945”, in Raymond Dennett and Joseph E. Johnson, ed., *Negotiating With the Russians*, Boston, Massachusetts World Peace Foundation, 1951, 96.

bills and investigations by O’Konski led him to find that it was in fact the Soviet Union who committed the massacre. This work is important to consider because it allowed all those who were affected by this to get closure on what really happened. Not only did it mean justice for those who died, but it allowed their loved to finally put a face on the ones who killed them.

Throughout his fight for Poland and his fight against communism, O’Konski was someone who was always willing to do whatever it took to make sure that everyone’s rights were protected. Because of his findings about the Katyn Forrest Massacre O’Konski would attempt to get the House of Representatives to start putting forth legal action towards putting the Soviet Union and put them on trial in International Court. Although, even with the evidence found by O’Konski and others, it would not be until 1990 that the Soviet Union would admit guilt to committing the terrible massacre of 15,000 Polish prisoners.⁴¹

The Granting of Asylum to Escaped Polish Peoples

Much of what O’Konski did with his work was too help as many people as he could, but in some cases, he could be found helping just one person at a time. He liked being able to do this, and it is something that he would do as often as he could. He would often help people with granting asylum in the United States when they needed it after escaping from Soviet controlled Poland. Some of these people included former military

⁴¹ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, 1952, box 22 folder 8, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.; H. Res. 64, 83rd Cong., 1st sess.; H. Res. 501, 84th Cong., 2nd sess; “Russia to Release Massacre Files.”, BBC UK, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4102967.stm>

like Franciszek Jarecki, who was a pilot in the Polish Air Force.⁴² O’Konski would help any Polish person he could if it meant he could help them reach their freedom. The list of all those who O’Konski helped in this way is long, just some of the list of names include: Stanislaw Tomaszewski, Nicholasde Lorence Pigulewski, Wlodzimierz J. Denkowski, Jerzy Hoffman and Jamina Maria Hoffman, Zbigniew Jan Dunikowski, Maria and Zygmunt Kadzidlowska, Julian Marymont. Each of these people needed help and each of these people had different circumstances, but the common factor between them all, is that Alvin O’Konski helped them at some point.

What Have We Bought in Europe? We Have Squandered Billions in Europe on the Theory That Money Can Buy Friends and Allies; Billions for Britain Haven’t Been Enough to Keep Her From Carrying on a Thriving Trade With the Reds

By the time Alvin O’Konski made this speech in 1952, he had, for nine years, been trying to get the United States to better their policies towards Europe. By now he was becoming very critical of how the United States tried to buy their allies in the European theater. He thought they should be trying harder to counteract what the Soviet Union was doing, and that we should be offering more help to the countries under the control of the Soviet Union. During this time period O’Konski, along with Representatives Kersten and Machrowies tried to push President Eisenhower to make firmer resolutions against the Soviet Union, especially with regards to freedom in neighboring nations.⁴³ President Eisenhower would occasionally listen to O’Konski.

⁴² Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, May 28, 1953, box 22 folder 8, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI; H. Res. 5238, 83rd Cong.

⁴³ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, 1952, box 22 folder 8, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

One such occurrence happened when he proposes that the United States should help finance and equip the Polish “Freedom Army”.⁴⁴ The Polish Freedom Army consisted of exiled and escaped Polish peoples. But, even though O’Konski felt that Eisenhower did listen to him, and shared similar sentiments, nothing did ever come of it. In this speech O’Konski laments over the United States’ lack of opposition to Soviet domination and land grabbing. He continues by saying that this is what he predicted happening as soon as the deal at the Yalta Conference was signed, and now that it is happening. The United States appears to be doing nothing to stop the Soviet Union, and it enrages him. He says that the United States has spent five billion dollars a year, from the Marshall Plan, to try and stop the spread of communism, but did not feel that it was actually doing anything, so, he by his own accord went to Europe to meet with local officials and those he knew be leaders of anti-communist movements to see if anything was actually having a positive effect.⁴⁵ He travelled through many different countries, and in each one he found that the ideas of communism and the influence of the Soviet Union were stronger than most in the United States would have believed for a multitude of different reasons.

In Great Britain, he found many sympathetic to the communist movement, and they mocked the United States’ Red Scare. He found they were quite willing to make deals with the Soviet Union on the theory that there’s no harm making some money off the poor Soviets.⁴⁶ In France, he found that they had even stronger sentiments towards

⁴⁴ "U.S. URGED TO BUILD FREE POLISH ARMY." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 01, 1953, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/112815861?accountid=14790>.

⁴⁵ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, 1952, box 22 folder 8, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

the Soviet Union. Even before the war France had a strong communist movement, and it was just as strong after the war. Unlike other countries there were no anti-communist movements in France. The money that the United States had been giving the French was never reaching the middle to lower class population, which made fertile ground for the communists to add more followers.⁴⁷ In West Germany, O’Konski blames the United States for setting the stage for the communists to grow stronger. The laws they laid down and the way that they let the communist have such a strong presence in some aspects of their life, including twenty-five percent of the press, could only lead to communism growing there.⁴⁸ In his conclusion, O’Konski said that the money the United States is giving to Europe is only helping the Soviet Union, and that in order for Europe to grow stronger the aid needs to be more strategically handed out, and that Europe in general needs to get stronger on its own.

Conclusion O’Konski’s Legacy

Alvin Edward O’Konski fought for Poland and fought for freedom. He was a longtime Representative from the state of Wisconsin who thought that there was nothing more than a politician can do than help those in need and to protect the rights of everyone. He did this both at home and for people across the world. He was known for

⁴⁶ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, 1952, box 22 folder 8, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

⁴⁷ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, 1952, box 22 folder 8, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

⁴⁸ Alvin O’Konski to House of Representatives, 1952, box 22 folder 8, Alvin E. O’Konski Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Ashland, WI.

being a part of the team that helped write the GI Bill which gave many returning veterans aid, to helping the Native Americans in Wisconsin gain more rights than they ever had before, and finally the work he did in Europe especially concerning the country of Poland.⁴⁹ O’Konski was also well known for his fight against communism. Through his work Poland and the Soviet Union, it is important to recognize the importance of O’Konski work. O’Konski was someone that represented what it truly meant to be an American. He showed some of the best ideals that people in the United States try to put forth, because nothing meant more to him than freedom and rights for not only his own countrymen but for everyone in the world. The work O’Konski accomplished cannot continue to go unnoticed because of the effect that it had on those who were involved. As seen above, O’Konski fought for Poland any way he could through speeches which helped get the word of Poland’s struggles out, and through bills and resolutions which helped legally secure and protect and aid those stuck in Poland as well as those who had escaped. The effects of his work are hard to quantify from an outsider looking in but to those many that it helped, Alvin O’Konski is someone that changed their lives for the better.

⁴⁹ H. Res. 3717, 79th Cong., 1st sess.

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