

Statement by Head of British Intelligence about gas-chamber stories

Public Record Office Document, FO 371/34551

This Foreign Office document was declassified ages ago, after the 30-year period, and yet David Irving seems about the only British historian who has wanted to comment upon it.

27 August, 1943

“In my opinion it is incorrect to describe Polish information regarding German atrocities as ‘trustworthy.’ The Poles, and to a far greater extent the Jews, tend to exaggerate German atrocities in order to stoke us up. They seem to have succeeded.

Mr Allen and myself have both followed German atrocities quite closely. I do not believe that there is any evidence which would be accepted in a Law Court that Polish children have been killed on the spot by Germans when their parents were being deported to work in Germany, nor that Polish children have been sold to German settlers. As regards putting Poles to death in gas chambers, I do not believe that there is any evidence that this has been done. There have been many stories to this effect, and we have played them up, in P.W.E. [Psy Warfare Executive] rumours without believing that they had any foundation. At any rate there is far less evidence than exists for the mass murder of Polish officers by the Russians at Katyn. On the other hand we do know that the Germans are out to destroy Jews of any age unless they are fit for manual labour.

I think that we weaken our case against the Germans by publicly giving credence to atrocity stories for which we have no evidence. These mass executions in gas chambers remind me of the story of employment of human corpses during the last war for the manufacture of fat, which was a grotesque lie and led to the true stories of German enormities being brushed aside as being mere propaganda...”

(signed) V Cavendish-Bentinck

As a result of this statement, a telegram was sent off from the Foreign Office to Washington the same day, copied to Moscow, requesting that no allusion be made to 'gas chambers' re German atrocities in Poland. It was sent by the head of the British Psychological Warfare Executive, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck:

‘On further reflection we are not convinced that evidence regarding use of gas chambers is substantial enough to justify inclusion in a public declaration...’

A copy of this message is kept in the Public Record Office, in the file PRO FO 371/34551, dated 27 August, 1943.

David Irving Irving commented on this, in his Foreword to the Leuchter Report 'The Leuchter Report: The End of the Line? The First Forensic Examination of Auschwitz (Focal Point Publications, 1989:

As late as August 1943 the head of the PWE [Psychological Warfare Executive] minuted the Cabinet secretly that despite the stories they were putting out, there was not the slightest evidence that such contraptions existed, and he continued with a warning that stories from Jewish sources in this connection were particularly suspect.

The BBC had started broadcasting its gassing stories in 1942, and thus Anne Frank in her Diary recorded in November 1942 that she had heard about the mass gassing of Jews from listening to the BBC. She only heard about it from the BBC. So why was the BBC putting out this ultimate atrocity story, even when the head of British intelligence was not believing it?

The issue re-surfaced in the big Irving-Lipstadt trial of 2000 at the Old Bailey, discussed by Van Pelt in his *The Case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving Trial*. 2002, p. 126, where he tries to claim that the statements by Cavendish-Bentinck do not have the plain meaning which Irving claimed.