

ITEM No. 10588/56

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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THE VIR HYDROELECTRIC POWER STATION.

SOURCE ATHENS: A 45-year-old Greek repatriate worker.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Until August 1956.

EVALUATION COMMENT: More information on the construction of the VIR dam is available in this office. This report is generally in line with available information. About 300 Greek workers have been reported to have worked in 1950-1951 on the construction of this dam /ATHENS Item No. 2190/55./ Extensive information on this subject was also given in ATHENS Item Nos. 2494/55 and 3299/56.

The hospital in "NOVIMESTO" is in fact in NOVE MESTO in the JIHLAVA region. VIR is located in BYSTRICE NAD PERNSTEJNEM District in the BRNO region.

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Source, a farmer from Macedonia who was kidnapped by the guerrillas, worked as an unskilled worker in the construction of the large dam of the VIR hydroelectric power

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station from 1950 until August 1956. As source heard, the construction of the dam had begun in 1940 but stopped during the war. In 1950 the Communist regime decided to continue the work, which when source left had not yet been completed. The dam proper had been completed, but the station would not be in full operation before 1957.

The station has two turbines, one of which functions from time to time, supplying electricity to the factories in the area. As source knows from hearsay, the installation, which cost a great amount of money, will be the largest in Europe and should make Czechoslovakia self-sufficient in electricity, whereas now the Czechs are obliged to resort to Polish power plants. However, source heard from the Czech workers that the water supply with which the station will be powered will not be sufficient and that the turbines will function only four hours out of 24. The Czech workers said that profits from this would never cover the expenditure on its construction.

In source's estimate, about 800 to 1,000 workers and employees worked on the VIR project. The dam, which is made of concrete, is 250 meters long, 70 meters high and 70 meters wide at the base. It will retain the water of a small lake that exists in the area.

The power plant is constructed at a distance of 300 meters from the small village of VIR, which has a population of about 100 families, and the plant, with the workers' houses, occupies a large area. The workers' houses are made of brick and have two stories. They are supplied with electricity, water and central heating, and are well furnished, all exactly the same. The plant's management furnished the houses and supplied blankets and house linen for the workers against a retention from their wages or salaries. From source's monthly wages of about 1,200 Kcs, a sum of 270 Kcs was retained for rent, water, electricity, central heating, social security and bachelor's tax. About 500 workers and employees lived on the site. The others lived in the neighboring villages and commuted by bus.

The plant's offices were housed in small wooden

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buildings. There was a restaurant at the site where the workers and employees could have their meals against payment. Source did not like Czech cooking, so he did his own. The restaurant was also used for meetings, from which source was excused, as he was not familiar with the Czech language. A large hall, which would be used as a club, was being built near the restaurant when source left.

In the summer the work was carried on in three shifts, but in winter time the working hours were from 0700 to 1500 hours. The workers worked on the basis of a norm, which source could not define. The most which a worker could earn was seven Kcs an hour, however. Source, working on the basis of cubic meters, managed to earn up to 1,200 Kcs monthly. Technicians and skilled workers earned more. Source heard that the salaries of the employees ranged between 2,000 and 2,500 Kcs. The engineers and electricians earned between 2,500 and 4,000 Kcs. According to rumor, the engineers who were Party members were paid more.

For every group of 15 workers there was a superintendant who was very strict with the workers and watched their work closely. For all matters pertaining to work, the workers dealt with the superintendant, but for private affairs the Greek workers, amounting to about 300, applied to a Greek who was the chief of the Greek personnel. It was through him that source managed to be repatriated.

The workers on the dam were not allowed to enter the plant proper. Persons who visited the plant were supplied with special permits. Many times German engineers visited the plant and examined all the sections under the supervision of a Czech guide. High officials from PRAGUE also visited the plant frequently in order to follow the progress of the work.

Source said that among the workers there were many Party members who pretended to work but who actually spied on the other workers, following their conversations. If a worker said anything against the regime, the "spies" would report it to the Party "responsible" of the plant, and without any forewarning the worker would be sent immediately to the coal mines where the work was much harder.

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Source did not know the names of the plant's directors or engineers, as he never came into contact with them. He lived a very restricted life, going occasionally with some other Greeks to one of the two taverns that existed in the village of VIR, where many Czech workers sat drinking.

Source bought his food and other basic items from a cooperative that was located near the house in which he lived. The cooperative belonged to the plant.

During his six years in VIR source did not visit any other village or town, as he could not afford the expense. In 1954 when he fell ill with pneumonia, he was sent to a hospital nearby called "NOVIMESTO," or so source believes. All the personnel of the VIR project were sent there when they fell ill. Source was well treated and was completely cured within 15 days. He was then granted a 15-day convalescence leave with full pay.

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