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HUNGARY
CZECHOSLOVAKIA

REEMIGRANTS

COMMUNICATIONS

Waterways

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Exploitation

Delivery Quotas

ARMED FORCES

Air Force

Story Of A Slovakian Refugee

SOURCE TRIESTE: Source description is in the body of this report.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: 1951.

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Our source tells the following about his life:

"I was born in the village SARI, in Hungary, province PEST, on 27 May 1925. My parents, peasants and landowners, were of Slovak origin, and we always spoke Slovakian at home but I went to Hungarian schools. Most of the villagers were Slovaks and Catholics. My mother died in 1937 and my father in 1939; after their death the family was scattered about; my younger brother and sister went to work in the factories of BUDAPEST; I remained in the village working as a servant for the rich landowners. Our own land, which we had inherited from our parents was administered by the organization in charge of orphans' property (ARVASZEK,) as I was not yet of age, and sublet the land against payment of small rents. My life was not too easy, and, therefore, when in 1947 the emissaries of the Czechoslovakian Government came to our village making propaganda for the repatriation of the villagers of Slovakian origin, I was one of the first ones to enlist. Also our priest, who was Slovakian himself, was all for repatriation and went off with a convoy to Slovakia even before I left. At the date of our departure from Hungary the Czechoslovakian authorities promised us all sorts of things: land, houses, well-being - and told us that, if we did not leave of our own free will we would be obliged at a later stage, anyway, by the Hungarian authorities to abandon Hungary according to the prospected exchange of populations between Slovakia and Hungary.

"I left my native village in September 1947 in a

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convoy, and took with me an old plough which was all I owned and which I considered to be useful for my work on the land. In Slovakia I had been promised compensation for the property I left behind in Hungary. After a journey of some days, together with the other villagers who were carrying their furniture and belongings with them, we reached BRATISLAVA. As we had been promised we were distributed houses and land which had formerly belonged to Hungarians who were repatriated to Hungary. I myself received a small house and 25 hectares of land, which had belonged to one KALMAN Marton, a repatriated Hungarian who came into possession of my uncle's house at PESTSZEBTERZSEBET, which I would have inherited if I would have remained in Hungary.

"The inhabitants of the SOMORJA village where we landed were in part Hungarian born and raised there, in part Slovaks who were repatriated from Rumania. We were received and treated better by the Hungarians of this community than by the other villagers; the Hungarians helped us whenever we asked them a favor; we all found this very particular, especially as we had come from Hungary to take the place of the repatriated Hungarians and we did, therefore, not expect to be treated so kindly.

"During the first year (1948) which we spent in CSR, all of us did nothing but mind our agricultural work; I cultivated my 25 hectares of land, which had been ploughed with the tractors of the state tractor station, and through sheer hard and never stopping work I managed to make a good harvest; by the end of the agricultural year I had produced 47 quintals of wheat and rye, and 15 quintals of barley. As I was obliged to deliver 56 quintals of mixed cereals to the collecting centers, I was left with six quintals of wheat only, a quantity scarcely sufficient to cover my requirements for sowing and myself. The price paid by the collecting centers for each quintal of wheat was 380 Kcs. per quintal while on the free market 1,500 to 2,000 Kcs were paid. Therefore, even with an abundant harvest, I personally would never profit by all the hard work employed during the year.

"The same thing happened to all the other Slovaks who were repatriated together with me. In 1949 when the first kolkhoz was being organized in the village, nearly all the peasants who had come with me to the CSR became members of the kolkhoz, for the very simple reason that in nearly all cases they could not possibly realize the production norms set by the government with their individual work alone, and also because the land did not give them any reward for their work. Others simply renounced the land they had been assigned on their arrival and went to work at the BRATISLAVA factories as common laborers.

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"Thus, I too handed back my land and went into military service in October 1949. I was assigned to an air force unit (LETECKA POSADKA) in the town JICIN in Bohemia. After the preliminary instruction I was transferred to another unit (anti-aircraft artillery) on 23 December 1949, at FRENSTAT in Moravia. I remained with this unit until 1 March 1950, on which date I was demobilized. On my return to the community of SOMORJA where I intended to do some agricultural work for the few peasants who were still in possession of their land, I could not find anything suitable so I got employment with the state farm SAMOT. Here I had to work also on Sundays and other holidays. The salary was insufficient, and therefore I made an application in the fall of 1950 to the Ceskoslovenska Dunajska Plavba (Headquarters of the Danubian Mercantile Navy) asking for a job. My application was favorably considered and I was appointed to work in the BRATISLAVA port. After having worked for only three weeks I received my navigation license and embarked on the tugboat "Lipto" as junior fireman. This tugboat went back and forth between BRATISLAVA and ORSOVA. During my first trip while we entered into Hungarian territory after having passed the border station SZOB I was arrested by the Hungarian Customs Police for the simple reason that in the firemen's cabin near by cupboard bicycle tires for about 1,500 Forint were found. In the course of the following enquiries the Hungarian officer in charge slapped my face because I had denied having had anything to do with this smuggling business. However, I was only telling the truth, and, in fact, later the senior fireman finally admitted to be the culprit. The Hungarian officer made me understand, however, by his whole attitude and behavior that he considered me a renegade because I had repatriated to the CSR from Hungary.

"After this incident the tugboat continued her journey and we reached BUDAPEST, at the UJPEST harbor, where the ship was anchored for two days. Profitting from this stop and in spite of the prohibition to get farther than five kilometers away from the harbor, I took time off and went to visit my native village SARI. I made the 27 kilometers on foot and I really was so happy to see all the places of my childhood again. But here I also found the same misery and desperation I had left behind in the kolkhoz in CSR. I was, therefore, not quite so unhappy about having left Hungary. When I returned to BUDAPEST I found that the tugboat had already left for ORSOVA. Police made me pay a fine of 50 Forint for having surpassed the five kilometers zone in which we were permitted to move. My fortune was a leather bag which I sold for 80 Forint, which sum I used to pay the fine. I departed with the motorship "CSR Ondava" for the purpose of rejoining the tugboat "Lipto." We succeeded in reaching her only at ORSOVA, where we remained for two days loading 15 shallops with Rumanian wheat and started on our return journey to BRATISLAVA.

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In spite of the fact that during my absence the commander believed that I had escaped, he did not punish me at all after I had explained the situation to him. On my return to BRATISLAVA I was transferred to the tugboat "Saris" and later on to the "Turgjec." I travelled backwards and forwards from BRATISLAVA to ORSOVA. On every trip we transported wheat and oil from Rumania to the CSR. The journey from BRATISLAVA to ORSOVA lasted about four to five days and the return journey some nine to ten days. Whenever we touched Hungarian territory and Yugoslavia, we had occasion to note that the Hungarians were much more hostile toward us than the Yugoslavs. In Hungary we could not go ashore except for five to ten minutes, and always under police escort. The Hungarian custom house officers were much more rude than their Yugoslav colleagues. In Hungary as well as in Yugoslavia two custom-house officers used to come onboard ship as soon as we touched the territorial waters. One of them boarded the tugboat and the second one the shallows and they accompanied us right to the border line.

"In Hungary we only stopped at UJPEST and MOHACS, in Yugoslavia at BEZDAN and VUKOVAR.

"In my capacity as junior fireman I received a salary of 3,500 Kcs. for food etc. I had to pay approximately 1,500 Kcs. During the whole time of my service I could buy myself only one suit having saved for some months in order to put together the amount of 2,800 Kcs. We worked in shifts of three hours on the tugboat, resting in between six hours. As I found out after my first trip each member of the ship's crew did some smuggling, because nobody earned enough. In Hungary there was great demand for connecting tubes for bicycle pumps, pneumatic tires and boots; in Yugoslavia for combs and threads; in Rumania for tennis shoes.

"The crews on the Czechoslovak tugboats, as of the "Turjec" included, were very discontented because we considered ourselves sort of "prisoners afloat." In fact we were not allowed to go ashore in the various ports after heavy work which was poorly rewarded, and had, therefore, no entertainment at all. For this reason I made up my mind and decided to escape. On 29 August 1951 after having spoken with one of the Yugoslav custom-house officials at BEZDAN, who was of Hungarian origin, I left the tugboat at nighttime, leaving behind all my belongings. I hid myself in a forest till dawn and after having seen the tugboat taking off, I reported to the Yugoslav authorities; I was hoping that, according to the statements made by the custom-house official once escaped I would be permitted to take up service on a Yugoslav ship, but instead I was sent to work to the town SREMSKA MITROVICA, having been detained for two and a half months.

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"At SREMSKA MITROVICA I found other Czech and Hungarian emigrants and worked together with them in a forestry enterprise. From there I escaped in December 1951, taking the road to TRIESTE, going by train as far as LUBLJANA, and from LUBLJANA by foot, taking the back ways until I reached TRIESTE on 23 December 1951."

EVAL. COMMENT: Issued for information only. Parts of this report dealing with the repatriation procedure in line with previous reports of the same nature apart from the fact that usually the reemigrants are faced with much bigger disappointment.