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BULGARIA

HEALTH AND RECREATION (1600)

Mortality (1604)

Diseases (1609)

Child Mortality In Bulgaria

SOURCE ISTANBUL: Official statistics and data given by a Bulgarian escapee. Source escaped to Turkey in September 1952.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: 1952.

EVAL. COMMENT I: A very interesting and logically presented report on infant mortality in Bulgaria.

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In a speech held in STALIN in 1952, KOLAROV Petar, Bulgarian Minister of Public Health and Social Welfare, declared that due to increased physical care and a high standard of living, the child mortality rate in the country has steadily decreased since 1944. He stated, without actually giving figures, that child mortality in present-day Bulgaria is less than "one-tenth of what it was 10 years ago." This is clearly a ridiculous statement, for were it true, then Bulgaria would have one of the lowest child mortality rates in the world, and this is not very probable.

According to the statistical year book of the League of Nations, the infant mortality rate, that is deaths of children under one year of age per 10,000 living births, was 1,500 in Bulgaria in 1937. Death rate for children between the ages one to four was 299, and that for children between the ages five to nine was 39. These figures are calculated as deaths per 10,000 of population in the respective age groups.

Taking into consideration Minister KOLAROV's statement, the infant mortality rate in Communist Bulgaria should be down to about 150 deaths per 10,000 living births, which is far below the mortality rate in such medically advanced countries as England, Sweden and Denmark.

It is impossible that in a country where pregnant women are forced to work in the fields and in industrial

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enterprises until one month before delivery, child mortality rates should be lower than in highly civilized countries where expectant mothers are given all the care known to the medical world. Simultaneously, KOLAROV declared that "importance will be given to the distribution of foodstuffs so that the Bulgarian people will no longer have to suffer from diseases caused by improper nutrition."

It is known from the reports of Bulgarian escapees, that malnutrition exists in many parts, especially in the mountainous regions of Bulgaria. Prior to 1940, when Bulgaria was a prosperous self-sufficient country, rickets, pellagra and anaemia were common diseases. It is therefore unexplainable how child mortality can decrease when KOLAROV still speaks of proper food distribution to be introduced in the future. In addition to this, a young escapee midwife from YAMBOL declared that the doctor in charge of the maternity ward often exclaimed that he had never witnessed such a high infant mortality rate as he had in the years 1948 to 1951.

The child mortality rates given here correspond to times when the Bulgarian adult had a much better diet than today. In those years, the average consumption of an adult male worker per year amounted to the following: 281.5 kg of bread and cereals, 37.5 kg of meat and fish, 9.5 kg of fats and oils, 30.7 liters of milk, 0.5 kg of butter, 70 eggs, 19.1 kilos of potatoes, 113.2 kg of vegetables and fruit and 11.5 kg of sugar.

For Minister KOLAROV's statement to be correct, it is necessary that the diet of a Bulgarian industrial worker be at least as good, if not better, than the diet listed above. And it is a known fact, that no person - except perhaps high-ranking Communist officials - can receive more than a small part of these foodstuffs.

It is a known fact, that in the Balkan countries the supply of vitamin B and C is inadequate, and both these vitamins play a vital part in child mortality. During the years immediately after the war and again in the period 1948 to 1950, in the era of collectivization and deportations, child mortality in Bulgaria reached colossal figures. After that the number decreased.

A refugee from KUSTENDIL, whose wife works as midwife-nurse in the maternity ward of that town, stated that in 1952 child mortality figures had dropped but also underlined the high 1948-1950 figures. Source gave a description of the KUSTENDIL maternity ward, which is typical of the many which were opened in Bulgaria after 1948, when private hospitals were nationalised.

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The KUSTENDIL maternity and gynaecological wards are separated from the state district hospital. These wards, officially known as the "M.N.S. rayonna bolnitsa - ginekoloshko otdeleniye i rodilen dom" (gynaecological department and maternity ward of the district hospital of the Ministry of National Health) is located in the center of the town, opposite the "Chifte hamam" Turkish baths. The infirmary occupies a two-story stone house measuring 16 by 10 meters, and which was built in 1939 by Dr. ALEKSIEV (fnu), an operator and former chief surgeon of the KUSTENDIL hospital. The building has five rooms on the top floor which were formerly occupied by the doctor and his family, who had his private clinic, complete with consultation and operation rooms, on the ground floor.

When doctors were forbidden to practice privately, Dr. ALEKSIEV moved out of the house which was then attached to the district hospital. The top floor was turned into a maternity ward and the ground floor houses the gynaecological ward.

Treatment at the wards is free of charge for all patients coming from KUSTENDIL and its surrounding area. Medical care given to the patients is very good and even well-off women who can afford to pay for a delivery, prefer to have their children at the maternity ward. The wards have 16 beds each, and on the average there are three to four children born daily. Infant mortality at the maternity is low due to expert medical care.

There are three specialist doctors at the hospital dependency, who are assisted by four midwives, two assistants, and six qualified nurses. A number of apprentice nurses are also active at the hospital. The administration of the two wards is affiliated with the directorate of the district hospital. In case of an emergency, specialists are flown in from SOFIA.

EVAL. COMMENT II: The matters exposed in this report are based on statistics of the year 1937 and on personal observations, and conform with previous information. No information is available here on the speech of Petar KOLAROV in STALIN and on details on the maternity ward in KUSTENDIL.

First-rate maternity wards in Bulgaria exist only in the big cities and in some of the larger towns, comprising about 20 per cent of the Bulgarian population. And even there most of the Bulgarian mothers deliver their babies at home with the help of a midwife. The other 80 per cent of the

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mothers are living in villages and very rarely have even a midwife's assistance. As a rule, an older woman from the village or the patient's mother attend at the birth. Considering today's living, work and food conditions in Bulgaria, there is no doubt that the mortality rate of infants has increased compared to that of before the pre-Communist era.

End.