

ITEM No.10514/54

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POLAND

WOMEN (3400)  
Motherhood (3405)

YOUTH (3500)  
Children (3508)

BABY AND CHILD CARE IN POLAND

SOURCE BERLIN : A 22-year-old woman from TRZEMESZNO, Voivodship BYDGOSZCZ. She followed her husband to the West in September 1954. Her husband had escaped about eight months earlier.

DATE OF OBSERVATION : Up to September 1954.

EVALUATION COMMENT : This report is one of a series dealing with the tragic story of a woman outcast in Poland, discriminated against because of her husband's flight to the West (for the rest of the story please see BERLIN Item Nos. 10513 and 10515/54.) To all appearances, the "insurance firm" source refers to is a health insurance branch. Attention Women's Program Editor.

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Only working women who belong to the trade union or women whose husbands are working have the right to State aid in childbirth. At the time source's child was born, she herself had stopped working six months earlier and her husband had fled to the West. Thus, in her case there was no hope for any financial assistance from the State. She had no health insurance and therefore would have had to pay the full fee for a hospital delivery. Patients from TRZEMESZNO, where source lived, were always assigned to the hospital in the District city of MOGILNO (Voivodship BYDGOSZCZ).

At this hospital all of the patients who are not insured pay 25 zl. per day. Thus source would have had to pay 250 zl. for her ten-day-confinement. As she could not raise this amount of money, she decided to have the  
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child at home with the help of a midwife. At that time two of the three midwives in TRZEMESZNO were in prison for illegal abortions. Therefore the third one had to serve the whole town. Incidentally this midwife held a steady job with the insurance firm. She attended both insured and uninsured women in childbirth. Those who were not insured paid the midwife a fee of 140 zl. for the delivery. All necessary medicaments were extra. Source was given two injections which cost 30 zl. The midwife turns over the money she receives to the insurance firm. She herself receives a fixed salary of 600 zl. per month.

### The Layette.

In order to obtain the layette for the expected baby at a reduced price, either the mother or her husband has to have a steady job and have been a member of the trade union for at least six months with dues fully paid. In the case of someone who has a job, but does not belong to the union or the reserve, he is not entitled to a layette.

Such a layette consisted of the following:

two meters of flannel, six meters of plain white cloth called "linen", six undershirts, two jackets, six diapers, powder and a rubber pad.

One pays about 100 zl. for such a layette, but this is much less than it would cost if bought in the store.

As mentioned above, source had no claim to any of these privileges. She had to buy various things for her baby at the retail prices. The rest of the things the baby needed were given by her relatives who were aware of her poverty. Below are a few prices for the things she bought:

an undershirt	6 zl.
a sleepers	24 zl.
a cotton jacket	39 to 49 zl.
100 grams of wool yarn	49 zl.

Undershirts are said to be available in any quantity. "Sleepers" are also well stocked but so poor in quality that after the first

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washing they stretch that much out of shape that they could easily fit a one-year old child. The cotton jackets reacted in the same way to the first washing. The jackets are supposed to take the place of knitted sweaters, but they do not warm the child at all. Wool yarn is not for sale in any of the stores. One has to look for it at the market where the farmers bring their home-made goods to sell. The wool yarn is already dyed when one buys it, but the dye is so inferior that it even rubs off when dry. Therefore it is not advisable to wash woollen articles made from this yarn. The farmers bring the wool to market in a damp condition so that it weighs more, and the buyer is thereby cheated.

A meter of "linen" (the simple sheeting mentioned above) costs 32 zl. in the store. According to Source, there was no scarcity of such material. Flannel, on the other hand, is impossible to obtain. This material can only be purchased by those who have turned in rags or scrap iron to a salvage center (Punkt skupu złomu is szmat). The salvage goods is weighed, evaluated, and paid for. The person who has brought the scrap goods, receives a certificate indicating the value in zlotys of the material he has delivered. With this certificate he is allowed to buy flannel in the amount noted.

#### Feeding.

The mothers who have insurance are provided with milk for their baby up to one year by the Maternity Center (Poradnia) - that is, when they cannot nurse the baby themselves or have too little milk. The child welfare center in TRZEMESZNO is located on the First of May street in a little two-story building shared with the ZMP. Everyday the mothers pick up their milk rations from here. The ration consists of seven portions each in an extra bottle varying with the age of the child. During the first months the mothers receive a ready-to-drink preparation made of powdered milk and flour. Later they receive fresh pure cow's milk. Source said that up until 1952 insured women received soap, sugar - and - for intestinal difficulties - rice for their children. However, these practices have been discontinued. After one year the insured mother receives no more milk rations. The uninsured mother has to provide for her child from the very first.

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Soon after the birth of her child, source had to face the problem of what to give her baby to drink as her own milk lasted only a few weeks. She was living as a guest with her sister-in-law and her husband who were themselves extremely poor. The whole household, consisting of three adults and source's two children, had to live on 380 zl. per month. Therefore the new baby could not always have milk and there were many days when the infant was given water mixed with flour. Source had no other choice but to begin very early with vegetable feedings as vegetables were the one thing that she did not have to buy, but could take from her mother's-in-law garden as much as needed. From the third month on the child was fed mostly mashed vegetables and potatoes. Source could not even afford to add a tiny piece of butter to her baby's diet.

Medical Care.

Up to one year after the birth of the child, all mothers, whether insured or not, could make use of the medical services at the child welfare centers without cost. The insured mothers were not obliged to pay for any medicines the child might require while the others had to pay for each item. When the child reaches the age of one year the insured mothers may continue to make use of the medical services without cost, whereas the other mothers have to pay 30 zl. for each subsequent visit to the welfare center.

Source remembered that when her first son was born in 1950 the child welfare center provided the infants with vitamin tablets and liver extracts. Today nothing of the sort is done.

The child welfare center employs two doctors, a younger man and a 40-year-old woman. Source has a negative impression of these doctors, particularly of the woman (NU). In the fall of 1953, source asked the latter to give her a certificate for assignment to a somewhat less strenuous job on the basis of her pregnancy (she was in the fourth month at that time and did not feel well). The doctor, however, claimed that she found no evidence of pregnancy and therefore refused to make out the certificate. Source returned to her work at the starch factory where she had to tend a gigantic machine and was on her feet the whole day. A short

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time afterwards she left TRZEMESZNO but returned shortly before the birth of her child. Although she was not insured, as mentioned above, she had the right to bring her baby to the child welfare center for examination. She showed her new-born to the female doctor, who made a wry face as she had not forgotten her previous diagnosis. Yet even then, to save face, the doctor claimed the child to be a "six-month baby." One can imagine the indignation of the mother, as she described her "gruby Macius", full of pride and love, as a normal term baby obviously not underweight (she could not weigh the baby at the time of the birth as she had no scale.)

Every mother of a new baby is visited each month by a social worker from the child welfare center, whose purpose it is to observe the living conditions where the child will be raised. Particular attention is paid to the physical condition of the baby and the cleanliness of the home. Source said that these social workers tend to be very severe in their judgement yet take no steps to improve the situation of the needy family, thereby helping the child. The mother who apparently is "neglecting" her child, is reprimanded but given no milk or clothing for the child - if she is not insured.

#### The Nursery School.

When the children are a little older they may be put into a day nursery. The nursery in TRZEMESZNO is located on Generala Dabrowskiego street. According to source, all children of persons not belonging to the Party have to pay a fee of 40 zl per month for the care of the child.

Source, who has a four-year-old son, could have sent the latter to this nursery. She said, however, that the facilities were not favorable in any respect. First of all she could not have paid the 40 zl, but she heard other mothers complain that the children were often asked to bring extra donations. For every celebration -- and they were frequent -- the children were asked to bring sugar or other foodstuffs from home. But the most important reason source had for keeping her son at home was as she said "Pacierza dzieci nie uczyli; nie chcialem Malego posylac, bo by mi go

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juz w takim ich duchu wychowali." (They did not teach the children to pray. I did not send my son because they would have educated him in their spirit.)

Epilogue.

Today, information was received that source's youngest child, who has already been mentioned as the rebust "gruby Macius", died one month after his mother's flight. His illness was short and evidenced in numerous abscesses appearing on the head of the child. As the sister in Poland wrote, "the doktorowa" in the child welfare center gave the five month old baby a blood injection, but it died a few days later. The parents believe that the child died of malnutrition. The female doctor from the "Poradnia" registered the cause of death as pneumonia.

The despair of the mother, who blames herself for having left her child in Poland, is beyond description.

End.