

DESCRIPTION OF COUNTRY

Towns

Streets, Squares

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

K/D

I/10531

18 June

INDUSTRY

Textile

Food

Uranium

ADMINISTRATION

National Committees

POLICE & SECURITY

Arrests

ARMED FORCES

Army

AGRICULTURE

Mismanagement

STANDARD OF LIVING

Shortages

Criticism

Clothing

Portrait Of A Small Czech Town. Daily Life In PLANA Near The
Czech Western-Germany Border.

SOURCE FRANKFURT : 67-year-old ethnic German worker who, together with his wife lived in PLANA in the neighborhood of MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ from 1946 until they were both repatriated to Western Germany in January 1953.

Their story is told from the viewpoint of two simple people living a retired, rather lonely life, seldom mixing with either the German or Czech inhabitants of PLANA, and eking out their daily existence from their national insurance and old age pensions.

DATE OF OBSERVATION : January 1953.

EVAL. COMMENT : The description of present life in PLANA seems accurate. This report is well written and offers some possibilities of exploitation. The hospital "Nemocnice státní okresní" is confirmed at PLANA. The enterprise engaged in processing meat is most probably the "Karlovarský průmysl masný" závod O4 at PLANA. Neckties are probably produced by the "Oděvní tvorba" at Masarykovo náměstí in PLANA. "Moto-techna" at PLANA is confirmed as is "Komunální podnik". MNV, "Jednota" and the hotel "Rudá hvězda" are UNCONFIRMED at PLANA. "Československé Státní Statky" at MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ is confirmed here. The presence of military units in PLANA was pre-
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viously reported /see Item No. 7189/52. One of our background reports also refers to the presence of army units in PLANÁ./

The new discovery of uranium deposits at ZADNÍ CHODOV in December 1952 was reported in Item No. 4983/53. The confiscated Sudeten German property compensates only a small fraction of the damages caused to Czechoslovakia by the Nazi occupation. The reported prices are obsolete.

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Once PLANÁ nestled contentedly among the green hills not far from MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ. The fields were well-tended and the crops flourishing. The town looked prosperous and busy and neighborliness had not been replaced by Communist-bred distrust. Today the fields have been swallowed up by the sovehoz and are neglected and unprofitable. About 100 empty ruined houses stretch along the left side of the Nádražní ulice between the station and the town proper, and people regard each other with suspicion.

PLANÁ's small station is dull and deserted when once the early morning trains have taken workers to their jobs in nearby MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ. Passengers from local trains stopping there do not bother to patronize the small restaurant where sausages and poor-quality PLZEN beer are sold at free market prices. They prefer to save their money for MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ. The few people leaving the trains at PLANÁ are pupils for the PLANÁ high school from the surrounding district, and visitors to the local hospital.

There are no taxis or cabs. The only public vehicle which ever stands before the station is the ramshackle bus taking passengers three times a day to TACHOV 30 km away. Traffic is sparse on the roads since PLANÁ's prosperity faded, and the old bus rattles and bangs its way at breakneck speed along the country roads, which, in contrast to PLANÁ's deterioration, are maintained in excellent condition for military reasons.

Before the war PLANÁ had a population of about 4,000, of which about 60 per cent were ethnic Germans. In 1945 all the Germans with the exception of about 30 avowed anti-Fascists were expelled from the town to Germany. Their homes in the Nádražní ulice remained abandoned. People from the surrounding countryside stripped the buildings of all

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usable material and the houses now stand with gaping roofs and glassless window frames, symbols of changed conditions in the towns.

Source and his wife, both ethnic Germans, arrived in PLANÁ in 1946, after being interned in Kladno. They had no difficulty in obtaining permission from the local authorities to settle there as source was an anti-Fascist, and for the next six years the story of PLANÁ is also their own story.

The population of PLANÁ was now about 2,000, and about 60 per cent were members of the Communist Party or other Party organizations. Although source never had any personal unpleasantness with the Czech neighbors, both Czechs and Germans avoided unnecessary contact.

As the principal town of the PLANÁ district till 1951 when the district office was transferred to MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ, PLANÁ had enjoyed some distinction. There are still some buildings in the center of the town fine enough to catch the observer's attention: the modern hospital, town hall, and church.

The church is 400 year-old, and still cherishes valuable religious pictures, images and an especially fine old altar. The priest /NU/ is not one of the new "political" priests, but a true shepherd of his flock loved by his parishioners. Although father "X" refrains from speaking against the regime, he remains apart from its influence. Although the Communists do not attend, his services are always well patronized. Since 1952, he has been able to hold a special Sunday Mass in German for his German parishioners. Even a few Czechs sometimes attend this service probably because it is held later than the Czech Mass. But they keep to themselves and do not mix with the Germans. The German nurses from the hospital all of whom speak Czech sing at both the German and Czech Masses.

Not far from the church on the main road to MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ is the headquarters of the MNV /National Committee,/ symbol of the other doctrine influencing the lives of PLANÁ's inhabitants.

When source left PLANÁ in January 1953 the MNV was without a chairman. It's former chairman ROSENBAUM /fnu/ was in the local jail for having attempted to shoot
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his wife in December 1952. ROSENBAUM was a drinker, and when his wife cursed him for coming home drunk he promptly grabbed a revolver, fired, and missed. His wife denounced him to the StB for attempted murder and political unreliability. This local scandal split the Party members into factions, some maintaining the wife was justified and others blaming her vindictiveness.

The remaining MNV officials, the secretary /NU/, and three women /NU/, were so disturbed over the whole affair that up to the time source left in 1953 they had not made up their minds who should be the next chairman, and ROSENBAUM was still in jail.

The male population regarded this as a typical example of female vacillation, resenting the fact that MNV had so many women members. But nothing could be done about it as the men had so much work to do that only the women found time for bureaucratic functions.

The hospital in the center of PLANÁ is a modern two-story building in a pleasant park, unusually up to date for such a small town. It has about two hundred beds and caters for all the surrounding villages even as far as STRÍBRO u PLZNE. The soldiers quartered in PLANÁ also send their sick there.

The head doctor TOMEK /fnu/ was well known as a good surgeon. There were five other doctors whose names are unknown to source. The fifteen trained nurses were all ethnic Germans. Source does not know how many other people were employed there.

PLANÁ's high school is a modern two storied building not far from the hospital. There are eight classes - prima to octava having each 20 to 25 pupils. These pupils come also from outside PLANÁ, from TACHOV, STRÍBRO etc. There were about six teachers and one director. Source does not know their names.

When source first came to PLANÁ there was a celluloid-making factory in which he was employed. But this was closed in 1948, so that only two factories remained; one for making neckties and the other for canning meat.

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The necktie factory moved into the former district office building when PLANÁ ceased to be the district town in 1951. About 60 women were employed for cutting and sewing ties. The porter /NU/, the director /NU/ and cadre director /NU/ were the only men employed there. Wages were quite good. One of the women workers, MAREŠOVÁ /fnu/, told source she was paid about 5,000 Kčs a month.

The canned meat factory draws its supplies from the local sovchoz, and makes and cannes sausages for distribution to the two local "MASNA" shops which are the only source of meat supply for the PLANÁ inhabitants. The factory was located in a small building on the outskirts of PLANÁ, employing about 25 men. A good deal of thieving went on among the employees to whom such a quantity of meat proved an irresistible temptation, so that about three to four of them were jailed yearly. In fall 1952 even the director of the factory /NU/ was caught stealing meat and was still in jail when source left PLANÁ.

A small automobile repair shop "MOTO-TECHNA" on the main road to PLZEN, gave employment to about 15 mechanics.

About 150-200 of the PLANÁ inhabitants sought work outside the town, travelling every day to MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ where they were mostly employed in the building trades as there is practically no industry in MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ.

All blacksmiths, cabinet makers, barbers, shoemakers, tailors etc. were organized in the "Kommunální podnik." Shops belonging to the national trust "Jednota" also had small branches in PLANÁ for textiles, vegetables and other commodities. Source does not know any particulars about this organization.

About 1,500 soldiers were quartered in PLANÁ. The majority of them billeted in the castle formerly belonging to the NOSTITZ family, on the road between station and town. 400 soldiers were housed in a building near the castle; and opposite the entrance to the castle park another 400 men were quartered in a big two storied house.

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According to source soldiers were popular among PLANÁ girls and their parents did not seem to mind. Military dances at PLANÁ's principal hotel "Rudá hvězda" were well-attended by local girls. It was otherwise however, with the local young men, who bitterly resented the way the girls ran after the soldiers whose Communist freshness often made them unpopular among the non-Communist inhabitants. Many of the young PLANÁ civilians went off to MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ at the weekend to soothe their wounded pride in the company of girls from PRAHA less likely to be impressed by a military uniform.

There were not many opportunities for entertainment in PLANÁ; only one movie theater and a small swimming pool patronized mostly by soldiers and their girls. Source never went to the movie so he does not know the names of any films given, only that there were either Czech or Russian films but never German.

Since PLANÁ was in the heart of the countryside a large number of the population had tilled and tended their own fields. But the flourishing farms and the quality of agricultural production began to deteriorate after 1948 as the fields and the agricultural machines were nationalized, and finally the Communists took them into a sovchoz under the farmer trust "Československé státní statky" in MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ. About 30 young people were employed by the sovchoz as tractorists. The local farmers continued to work in the fields with diminishing enthusiasm. They earned about 2-3,000 crowns a month if they worked a 30 day month. Work on Saturdays and Sundays was not obligatory but many of the farmers did work on those days to increase their wages.

Many farmers losing interest in property no longer sought employment in the factories in PLANÁ and MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ, so that the fields suffered badly from shortage of labor. The farm laborers became careless of the agricultural machines now they belonged to the sovchoz, and source recalls seeing plows, reapers and sowing machines lying out in the fields during winter, neglected and rusty.

The sovchoz had about 120 cows and in 1951 new electrical milking equipment was purchased costing about 180,000 Kčs. But as nobody bothered to look after it properly it soon rusted and became useless.

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Families working for the sovchoz were allowed to have their own poultry and most of them kept a few chickens. They were obliged to deliver 50 eggs a month to the community.

The sovchoz workers received a nasty shock in fall 1952 when the chairman and the bookkeeper of the sovchoz BENTL /fnu/ was arrested. In the course of his duties the bookkeeper contrived to falsify the books and embezzle some 1,500,000 Kčs belonging to the sovchoz. This loss to the general income made itself felt in smaller wages for the sovchoz workers, and their feelings toward BENTL were far from charitable. When source left PLANÁ in January 1953 BENTL was still in jail waiting trial.

Source lived a quiet humdrum existence with his wife in a two-room apartment in an old two-storied house standing in the courtyard of the big house where the landlord lived. Source would not give the address. As the rooms faced north there was never any sun and when source could not afford to heat them in winter ice formed on the walls. For this pitiful accomodation he paid 104 Kčs monthly.

The landlord was a German, but in spite of their common nationality he did not attempt to make things any easier for source. Although there was a large garden between his house and source's, he did not allow to enter it even to cut grass for his rabbits.

Source's sole acquaintance in the neighborhood, strangely enough, was a Czech. Although this acquaintanship only extended to a mutual interest in rabbits the Czech's wife wept when source and his wife left PLANÁ.

After the PLANÁ celluloid factory closed in 1948, source lived from his national insurance pension of 1992 Kčs based on money paid during his former forty years service as foreman of the KONEV iron works before he was interned. He also received an additional 780 Kčs as compensation for the KONEV private insurance which was nationalized. His wife drew an old-age pension of 500 Kčs as she was over 65-years of age. Their joint income was therefore about 3272 Kčs a month, and on this they could live carefully, even saving about 300 Kčs toward the cost of their repatriation to Germany.

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They bought meat on Sundays only, usually a pound of pork or veal. Anything left over from this helped to make a meal on Monday and even Tuesday. The other days of the week they had potatoes and vegetables - a potato and milk mixture called "škubánky" and sometimes pastry, "buchty." For supper they ate anything left over from lunch, or grits and "škubánky." The rabbits of which source had about eight provided an occasional welcome change of diet.

Food was very expensive. As his wife did not speak Czech source did the shopping himself, getting up before eight o'clock every morning in order to be early in the shops. He complained that he usually fared badly at the hands of housewives who shopped equally early and had no qualms about pushing a mere man to one side. The women gossiped among themselves while waiting to make their purchases, complaining about the price of food, shortages of commodities on the free market, and local scandal. Source never heard them discuss politics. As source spoke Czech with a German accent he avoided entering into conversation with them.

Feminine excitement arose to great heights at one of these early morning shopping discussions when it was made known that ration cards for clothing would be re-issued for 1953, after the Communists had promised that clothing would be derationed. Only 120 points were issued in January 1953 of which ten points were made immediately available. These were just sufficient for the purchase of two handkerchiefs. A shirt costs 22 points and an apron 15 points.

Source's wife only went out to gather wood in the forest on the outskirts of the town. Source preferred to keep to himself, and his only amusement was to join occasional discussions at the local tobacco shop kept by a Ukrainian Russian invalid, who remained behind after World War II. Here four or five of the older Germans sharing the same political views gathered together on dull, rainy days. They criticized the conditions in the sovchoz, the neglected fields and the damaged machines. They reminisced the days before the BENES government drove the Germans out of the CSR and confiscated their property, and bewailed the delirict houses along the PLANA road to the station. They complained - but they

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did not discuss politics. Source said they did not fear being denounced because the old people in the village were not Communists, and the Russian shop-owner shared their views.

The only propaganda source ever heard discussed was the Communist-spread story of the potato bug, but none of the people believed that the insect had been dropped from American planes.

In the evenings life was rather dreary for two old people like source and his wife. They had electricity but could not afford a radio. Source spent the time reading technical books about metal which he had either brought from the KONEV iron works when he left, or borrowed from the Germans in PLANÁ.

The German inhabitants usually met at the Sunday Mass or occasionally in the town. They were afraid to meet to often together in case the Communists became suspicious of them. Whenever a few did meet the conversation turned mostly on the letters they received from Western Germany: the plentiful food there, the lives of their relatives in the West, and the chances of repatriation.

As source only came to PLANÁ in 1946 the local Germans looked on him as a stranger, and also regarded him being pro-Czech, because he worked with the Czech iron works for 40 years. For this reason he seldom associated with them. Source recalls that these Germans were very indignant when the old German graves in the local cemetery were listed in fall 1951 and put up for sale to the Czechs. They felt that although the graves were not bought permanently by the Germans it was inhuman to sell the graves of the dead. Source never knew whether the priest protested against this, but the remains from such graves as were sold were re-buried in a common grave.

Occasionally rumors ran through the village to disturb the daily routine. Source remembers a rumor in fall 1952 that uranium had been found near the village of ZADNÍ CHODOV, 14 km to the north-east of MANIÁSKÉ LAZNĚ. This spot was closed off immediately to the public. Some work was commenced there but source does not know to what extent, although it was rumored that considerable amounts of uranium were found. He also did not know whether any Russians arrived there.

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New regulations gave the people further food for gossip such as when the order reached PLANÁ that all visitors had to be registered in special books which each householder had to procure from the local town hall. The reason and duration of the visit had to be given but source does not know any further particulars.

At the beginning of January 1953 the regulation came into force that houses were no longer the private property of the landlord. Rents had to be paid directly to the state bank instead of through the landlords as was formerly done. The former owners also had to pay rent to the state bank for their own living quarters. If the house required repairs the "owner" had to ask the bank to issue the money for this purpose.

In 1950 source's daughter in Western Germany appealed to the Czech authorities to allow her father and mother to return to Germany.

Source only recalls that nearly three years of waiting played havoc with his nerves. He does not exactly know through which official channels this appeal was sent nor the steps taken to bring it out to a successful conclusion. He remembers that the US Permit Office in PRAHA, Štěpánská ulice was in charge of the whole matter and took it up with the Ministry of Security in PRAHA. Source was granted a passport with a permit to leave the country in 1950, but his wife was refused. Source believes it was simply because he was a German and the Czech authorities were not disposed to assist him.

When the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took over the repatriation of Germans in February 1951, source put in another application for his wife through the Permit Office. This time he was successful, and after paying 7,000 Kčs to the Ministry, source does not know for what purpose, he was issued a passport and permit for his wife also in January 1953.

Source now hastened to arrange the details for his journey. He applied to the Czech Travel Bureau "Čedok" authorizing it to buy tickets, and make all arrangements so that he could take his belongings with him.

The small quantity of furniture he possessed was estimated by an official of the State Bank as being

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worth 80,000 Kčs. For this he had to pay 3,500 Kčs duty to the customs officials /five per cent/ and also the transport to the border. His daughter in Western Germany had to pay the transport of the furniture from the Czech-Western Germany border in D Marks.

Source paid for the tickets for himself and his wife to FRANKFURT, costing 365 Kčs each. He was allowed to take 80 DM with him for which he exchanged 1,000 Kčs at the State Bank /Státní banka/ before leaving the CSR.

On January 26 he left PLANÁ travelling by express train, crossing the border at SCHIRNDING into the freedom of the West.

Source gave the following prices for food-stuff current at the time he left :

Butter /free market/	450,- Kčs
Lard " "	same price
Tea	60,- Kčs for 100 grams
Cocoa	70,- " " " "
Oranges /children only/	120,- " a kilo
Apples " "	35,- " "
Bread /rationed/	24,- " per loaf of 3 kg
Bread /free market /	48,- " " "
Roll /Kipfel, free market/	1,50 " each

CORR. COMMENTS : None

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