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22 Dec.
1/11931POLANDDESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY (3802)CHELMSKO SLASKIE - A Small Border Town.

SOURCE FRANKFURT: 38-year-old German woman born in CHELMSKO SLASKIE. Source worked in BERLIN before World War II and returned to her home town in 1939. She worked at the MIESZKO weaving mill from 1951 until May 1953 when she was legally permitted to rejoin her parents in the Eastern Zone of Germany. Source proceeded to the Western zone in October 1953.

Source is a moderately intelligent woman, and speaks some Polish. She claims to have had a hard life and to have intentionally attempted to forget the past. She is, therefore, unable to give names and detailed information.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Until May 1953

EVAL. COMMENT: See the very extensive Item Nos. 6193, 6192, 6191, 5482 and 5241/53 on the same locality and the same weaving mills. These reports give more details and present the whole picture from a broader point of view because of the higher intelligence and experience of their source. At any rate, between these descriptions and the one presented here there are no discrepancies, and a confrontation of a worker's view and that of an executive is very instructive. Interesting is the fact that the above mentioned previous reports with observation dates dating until January 1953, spoke about 110 people employed at the "Mieszko" weaving mill, while the present report, stressing the curtailment of work, speaks about only 80 people. According to the previous reports KEMPKA was not a physician, but only an assistant surgeon, and his mistakes were passed over by silence, and no measures were taken by the authorities. Maybe his quota in mistakes and deadly treatments of patients exhausted even the patience of the Communists.

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Border Zone

The small Polish town of CHELMSKO SLASKIE lies about seven kilometers from the Czech-Polish border where it makes a deep bend into Czech territory. Thick woods line the border at this point but in May 1953 there was still no line of ploughed earth or fence to mark the border as was the case further along the frontier towards the road leading from KAMIENNA GORA to TRUTNOW. The only indication that this was a forbidden zone was given by border guards on the Czech side who perched in the trees and fired warning shots across the path of unwary trespassers.

Over

However, even this guard must have been lax for in fall 1952 a woman picking mushrooms wandered over the border into CSR and woke to shocked realization of her whereabouts when stopped by two Czechs. The woman was held for about eight days for questioning in the CSR before being returned to CHELMSKO SLASKIE. She was able to prove that her border crossing was unintentional, and mushrooms her only object. She escaped more serious consequences.

Traffic across the border.

The actual, invisible guard at this open-seeming stretch of border was fear. All the local inhabitants knew that any would-be escapee ran a good chance of falling into the hands of the SNB in the CSR who would return them to the UR. Source personally was unable to cite one case of attempted escape at this part of the border.

Permits to cross the border were never applied for source stated, and she does not believe they would have been granted if requested. She cited the case of a woman from the neighborhood of CHELMSKO SLASKIE, whose daughter lived just over the border in the CSR. This woman applied for a permit to visit her daughter in fall 1952 but was only permitted to meet her daughter for a few minutes under the eyes of the border guards at the border barrier across the road from KAMIENNA GORA to TRUTNOW.

Before source left CHELMSKO SLASKIE in May 1953 it was said that this hitherto unfenced part of the border would be ploughed and fenced.

German ethnic minority.

Like other border villages CHELMSKO SLASKIE's German population was mostly expelled after World War II and only about 75 Germans remained in the small town. The large number of empty and ruined houses indicated the former extent of the German population.

The small German minority were held back for several reasons. Some of them were unfit to travel at the time the German transports left CHELMSKO SLASKIE. Source told of one woman whose leg was a terrible open sore and who could not be moved in the primitive transport supplied. She was compelled to remain behind and her family stayed with her. The leg has long healed but the woman is a cripple and she is still in

CHELMSKO SLASKIE. A few Germans were not expelled because they were expert weavers at the five weaving mills which provided most of the employment for the inhabitants of CHELMSKO SLASKIE. Although source's parents were already in East Germany she remained because she could not bear to leave her five little nephews and nieces whose father was an expert weaver employed at one of the mills.

The town of CHELMSKO SLASKIE is centered round the small public square and the mills are located in different streets radiating from the square. Only four mills were still working in May 1953; the fifth was closed when the German exodus took away many of the best weavers. Source was employed at the NIESZKO mill which, like all the mills, belonged to the Zaklady Przemyslu Lniarskiego.

The older members of the small German community kept aloof from the Polish inhabitants and lived lonely, dull lives. However, some of the young Germans finding too few companions of their own age among the tiny German group married into Polish families without, apparently, any resistance on the part of the Poles.

Generally speaking, the Poles ignored the German minority. Perhaps the only emphasis on the fact that the Germans were now interlopers in their former homeland was shown during shopping hours when Polish housewives calmly took their places in front of German women in the shopping queues without the Germans venturing a protest. On the other hand, source declared that many Poles, especially those settled in CHELMSKO SLASKIE after the German exodus, only wanted to return to central Poland.

The desire to be completely self-effacing characterized the German community's entire life. At the best of times CHELMSKO SLASKIE offered little amusement, but the Germans carefully avoided taking any part in public life. The Polish Catholic church was the only public place where the Germans ever appeared together and this was only because there was no German church they could attend.

Life in CHELMSKO

CHELMSKO SLASKIE did not boast a movie theater and films were only shown twice weekly in a room at one of the mills. This, however, was so badly organized that source told of the audience once waiting two and a half hours in the room

before the film even arrived for showing. Source only once visited this movie "theater."

Very occasionally dances were held by the Communist Party or ZMP in the only local hall. Most of the wives were too busy with household chores to attend the dances and their men went alone, usually with a bottle of potent alcohol which source described as "a horrible mixture of some sort." The men picked up young girls at these dances who were willing enough to join in the fun. Occasionally a wife arrived belatedly at the dance to find her husband overwhelmed by alcohol and local sirens and a violent domestic fight ensued. (Although most of the CHELMSKO SLASKIE inhabitants lived by working in the weaving mills a few of them worked at neighbouring kolkhozes.

The climate in this district is bad. As the local saying has it "three quarters winter, one quarter cold". The agriculture reflects the inclement climate and the crops are correspondingly poor.

Kolkhozes and Sovkhozes.

The largest farmers in the neighbourhood remained stubbornly aloof, but three quarters of the local farms were incooperated in the kolkhozes as the smaller farmers succumbed to the heavy taxes.

The kolkhoz organization was very bad. Source recalled being sent from the weaving mill with a brigade to dig out potatoes from the fields of the local kolkhoz as late as November 1952. Snow already lay on the ground, and although the kolkhoz supplied a tractor and plough to turn over the icy earth it was so so lidly frozen that the plough could only break out great clumps from which it was impossible to loosen the potatoes. The brigade, disgusted and half frozen, was sent home without having accomplished anything.

This dealy in harvesting applied to all crops and the corn often lay on the ground, source stated, until the grain started to send up green shoorts of new corn.

Brigades were also sent to a neighborin g sovkhov with about 1000 morges of land, of which source was unable to give the name. The land here was in the same rundown condition as the kolkhoz fields. During the winter only two men were employed at the sovkhov to look after all the farm chores and six sorry cows housed in the barn. In spring farm workers

were recruited from among the local inhabitants and brigades rushed out to help till the fields and sow the cropw. Another rush of brigade workers took place at harvest time, usually much too late, and then the sokhoz lapsed back into its winter sleep often with part of the crops still unharvested in the fields.

Weaving mills
Labor condition

Many of the women in CHELMSKO SLASKIE who were not overwhelmed with large families worked with their husbands at the weaving mills. However, in early 1953 it was said that no more than one person belonging to a family would be allowed to work at the weaving mills, and other members of the family would be dismissed. This was apparently due to worsening conditions in machinery and raw material.

As long as mothers were allowed to work they left their children at the mill kindergarten. Each mill had a kindergarten, according to source. She was unable to give any details but believes the children were well-treated and looked after.

Older children attended the only school in CHELMSKO SLASKIE, among them the German children, and the Polish language was obligatory. Source stated that the German children were favorites with the Polish teachers as they were well behaved. Many children walked four kilometers daily to CHELMSKO SLASKIE school as schools in outlying villages had been abolished. There appeared to be a shortage of ink at the school and the children all carried their ink bottles too and fro because any inkpots left at the school were stolen. The children romped on the way home and split ink often ruined hard-earned-by clothes. Pens seemed to be in equally short supply and source expressed a wish to be able to send her five small nephews and nieces fountain pens from the West although she observed "They will certainly have to hang on to them and never forget them at school."

Work at the weaving mills commenced at 6 a.m. in the summer and 7 a.m. in the winter and continued without an official break for an eight hour shift. The foreman did not hinder the workers taking a break but they had catch up with the work afterward to fulfill the daily norm.

The MIESZKO weaving mill where source worked was on the road to KAMIENNA GORA. The long, single story building was hidden from the street by a dwelling house originally inhabited by the former German owner of the mills in which one of the mill directors (NU) (KIEROWNIK) now lived. The mill manager was a fair-minded Pole named MUCHA (fnu) well liked by his German workers.

The long building housed about 90 looms, and when source left CHELMSKO SLASKIE in May 1953 about 80 workers were employed there. The looms were mostly old German ones and were rapidly becoming unservicable as no spare parts were obtainable when the machines broke down. Source worked on one of the few newer machines, a Swiss shuttle-winding machine.

Working conditions in the mill were bad. The light was feeble, and the heating in winter poor as the furnace man tried to earn premiums by cutting down on coal.

Production

The mill made five to six different qualities of material, allegedly linen although the quality was rapidly deteriorating as the supply of raw material, largely from the WALEZYCH spinning mills, became steadily worse. Before source left in May 1953 yarn from nettles was said to be mixed with the linen thread.

The best quality linen was for export and this included red checked kitchen towels. Wide coarse linen 80 cm wide was sewn together to make a single width and this was so densely woven that source believes it was for tent manufacture. Linen for post sacks was also made. All the material, except the kitchen towels, was unbleached.

Source was responsible for winding the linen thread on the shuttles and to fulfil the norm had to wind 8 kilos of thread in an hour. This was almost impossible to accomplish as the bad thread constantly broke and source wasted a great deal of time trying to join the thread with a special knot before she could resume winding.

The shuttles which carried the thread on the looms were of such poor wood that they were always splintering, while the metal points broke off. Shortly before source left CHELMSKO SLASKIE a woman was injured through a broken shuttle flying out of the loom.

The few Germans at the mill were hard workers and strove to earn money by exceeding the norm. On the other hand, the Polish workers' attitude towards the "people's democracy" was expressed by a "go-slow" attitude. They fulfilled the norm - but no more. Even the possibility of thus earning more money did not appear to interest the Polish weavers. This go-slow attitude was especially marked on religious holidays no longer recognized as such by the Red regime. German workers were previously allowed to work overtime to exceed the norm but at the beginning of 1953 this was expressly forbidden unless overtime was absolutely essential to fulfill the plan when the head foreman could give permission for longer working hours.

The shortage of knitting wool in the village shops encouraged the women weavers to steal skeins of cotton thread stored in the MIESZKO mill. Although all the weavers were regularly searched when leaving the building a remarkable number of pullovers were seen in CHELMSKO SLASKIE knitted from mill cotton. One of the busiest knitters was a girl (NU) said to be connected with the UB.

Shortly before source left Poland one of these busy knitters was caught. She promptly denounced another girl, setting off a chain action until altogether five girls denounced each other. Source was unable to say what happened to these girls.

The millworkers' health was very bad. There were many cases of TB and also asthma. Source believes this had much to do with the lint- and dust-filled air in which they worked at the weaving mill.

The "horse-doctor" KEPKA (fnu), mentioned by an earlier source from CHELMSKO SLASKIE, was said by source to have been arrested for causing the death of a patient by giving her a wrong injection. This woman (NU) was dangerously ill after a miscarriage and when she died the husband attacked the s-called "doctor" and later denounced him. The "doctor" was arrested and held for trial. After this a qualified German doctor BAMBERGER (fnu) was allowed to visit CHELMSKO SLASKIE from KAMIENNA GORA for two hours daily instead of the former twice weekly visits which he made while the other "doctor" was there.

End.