

- RYC. 47. Rok 1942. Robotnicy przymusowi. Od lewej Franciszek Dobrzyński i Stefan Kowalski (marynarz)  
 RYC. 48. Maj 1941 roku. Antoni Ferski  
 RYC. 49. Rok 1942. Zelki, powiat giżycki. Robotnicy przymusowi. Od lewej: Antoni Ferski, Jerzy Stawicki, Teofil Rączka, Franciszek Archocki, Piotr (nazwisko nieznane)  
 RYC. 50. Rok 1941. Zelki, powiat giżycki. Robotnicy przymusowi. Od lewej: Teofil Rączka, Jerzy Stawicki, Henryk Łukaszewski  
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## INTRODUCTION

The idea and the plan of using the labour of prisoners of war and the population of the conquered countries in case of war and German victory arose in the Third Reich before the actual outbreak of the World War II. The Supreme Command of the German Military Forces (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht — OKW) together with the Council for the Defense of the Reich (Reichsverteidigungsrat) began to work out the principles of prisoner-of-war policy already in mid 1938. The experiences of the World War I were taken into account and the needs of the German economy were considered in detail. The letter of the General Plenipotentiary for Economic Matters (Generalbevollmächtigte für die Wirtschaft) to Colonel Breyer, at that time the head of the Home Department (Inland) of the OKW, dated January 28th, 1938 and discussing the conditions of employing prisoners of war in case of war, is very significant in this respect. The letter pointed out among others, that P.O.W. camps should be built near the areas suffering from labour shortage. Besides, the conception of building large camps was criticized there, while the distributing of prisoners of war to smaller working teams (Arbeitskommando) was called for. It was also suggested to the Minister of Labour, that in case of war, in each P.O.W. camp the labour offices of the given land should keep a register determining the professional usefulness of each prisoner and give advice to the commandants of the camps in all matters concerning the employment of the prisoners<sup>1</sup>. Half a year later, during the second meeting of the Council

for the Defense of the Reich held under Göring's chairmanship on June 26th, 1939 the principles of extensive exploitation of labour for the sake of German war economy were discussed. The working out of plans concerning the scope of labour of prisoners of war, convicts and concentration-camp prisoners was allotted to the General Plenipotentiary for Economic Matters, Wehrmacht and the police<sup>2</sup>. As far as the civilian population was concerned, Hitler stated on May 23rd, 1939, that the population of the conquered countries should be employed in the Reich<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the moment the war broke out, semislavish labour was to replace both, the called-up Germans and foreign season workers, whose labour had been employed on a large scale since the end of the 19th century.

Immediately after the German aggression upon Poland the previously prepared deportation of Polish citizens to Germany began. As the war spread, the deportation also included the citizens of other occupied countries. In East Prussia, which constituted the Military District I (Wehrkreiskommando I), the September Campaign prisoners of war, both soldiers and civilians, were grouped in five camps; two regular camps — Stalag I A, Stalack, and Stalag I B, Hohenstein (Olsztyn), also referred to as the camp at Królikowo, after the name of the village one kilometre away from Olsztyn, and three transit camps (Kriegsgefangenen-Sammelstelle) in Kętrzyn, Szczytno and Prabuty<sup>4</sup>. On the whole, over 120 000 September Campaign prisoners of war (soldiers and civilians) were placed in those camps<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted, however, that the number of prisoners in those camps was not constant. After registration and a shorter or longer stay in the camp some prisoners were sent back home as unfit for labour of military service (disabled and wounded), others were shifted to other camps. Some of the prisoners, mainly those constituting national minorities — the natives of Byelorussia, Ukraine and Lithuania — were either set free and allowed to go home or, more frequently, sent to work in Germany as the so called „free workers” (freie Arbeiter). Jews were transported to ghettos in towns of the General Gouvernement — GG<sup>6</sup>. The most numerous, however, were those prisoners who were occupied doing different kinds of jobs within the camp or in the closest area. During the first few days after their arrival they formed special working teams and were sent to work at the local farms. As a result, the agriculture of the province in the early days of October 1939 employed over 46 thousand prisoners of war. At the same time, further 15 to 20 thousand were to be employed in other branches of economy in the nearest future<sup>7</sup> (cf. fig. 1).

Due to the order of the OKW, according to which all the men between 17 and 45 from the operational area should be interned in P.O.W. camps, there were many civilians (Zivilgefangene) in the P.O.W. camps of East Prussia<sup>8</sup>. The military authorities planned to send them home after the end of the September campaign<sup>9</sup>. This, however, did not happen. The joint decision made by the administrative authorities of the province and the representatives of the Army Corps I during the meeting of November 29th, 1939 stipulated that out of the 13 thousand civilian prisoners employed in East Prussia only the „Volksdeutscher” and those unfit for work would be released. The other prisoners would from December 31st, 1939 be handed over to civil administration<sup>10</sup> (cf. fig. 2).

Thus during the last three months of 1939 over 60 thousand prisoners of the

\* Remarks, p. LXXX—LXXXIII.

September Campaign were employed in East Prussia. It should be mentioned that the data for September and October 1939 also include the West-Prussian Regency (the town and the district of Elbląg, the districts of Kwidzyn, Malbork and Sztum), which only on October 26th became part of the Gdańsk—West Prussia District (Reichsgau Danzig — Westpreussen).

The number of the prisoners employed in East Prussia dropped off in the first months of 1940. In the period between the end of February and the end of May 1940 the figure diminished by 10 870 (from 52 283 to 41 413 people)<sup>11</sup>. This was caused by the already mentioned transporting of the prisoners to other camps in the Reich, releasing some prisoners, also, to some extent, by prisoners' escapes<sup>12</sup> (cf. fig. 3). Nationality relations were also of some importance. The „Bund Deutscher Osten” on February 8th, 1940 sent a special memorial to the president of the Olsztyn regency stating that the influx of the prisoners of the September Campaign had resulted in the increase of the Polish-speaking population in the area, and therefore recommended not to employ Polish prisoners in the southern part of the regency, where the ethnically Polish population was in majority<sup>13</sup>. This concurred confidential recommendations of the OKW to withdraw Polish prisoners from the so called „nationally endangered areas” and was confirmed by the disposition of the Reich's Ministry of Labour issued on February 23rd, 1940. It stipulated the withdrawal of 30 thousand Polish prisoners from East Prussia<sup>14</sup>.

In 1940, most probably in mid March, a campaign was undertaken which to the greatest extent affected the official decrease in the employment of Polish prisoners of war in East Prussia. During this campaign, they were, contrary to the international law, deprived of their P.O.W. status and became civilian workers. But this was only a formal change in status, as in most cases they remained at the same place and job and were forced to sign a declaration according to which they consented to stay in the Reich as civilian workers until the end of the war (cf. fig. 4 and 5). Official statistics were already able to list them as civilian workers<sup>15</sup>. The intensity of this campaign in East Prussia was the greatest in 1940 and 1941. In January 1941 statistics still listed 6898 Polish prisoners (8 per cent in the total of the prisoners of war employed in this province), but the figure decreased constantly<sup>16</sup>. According to the data for December 31st, 1943, there were 4928 Polish prisoners in the camp in Stablack and 220 in Olsztynek<sup>17</sup>. They then formed a small group among the prisoners of war of other nationalities, mainly French and Soviet, employed in this province.

There is no doubt about it that the chief reason for the campaign of changing the status of Polish prisoners of war were the German plans of extermination of the Polish nation. The main purpose was to deprive them of the privileges guaranteed by the Geneva Convention and to allow their limitless subordination to the administrative and police principles of treating civilian workers.

In view of the ever growing needs of the German war economy the labour of civilian and war prisoners proved insufficient. A great source of „cheap” labour, as the Germans put it, was to be found in the countries occupied by the Third Reich and the Germans did not want to give it up. Labour offices, carrying on recruitment for labour in the Reich, were organized in the conquered countries in the first days of the occupation. With the ever growing resistance towards going to Germany, the German administration used various methods. At first, voluntary employment in Germany was propagated, but when this failed, forced recruitment

including deportation was introduced. As a result, already in the first month of 1940, groups of workers transported from the occupied Poland, began to arrive in East Prussia, later followed by workers from the occupied West- and North-European countries and the occupied areas of the Soviet Union.

The whole of the activities connected with the distribution of labour in East Prussia was run by the Labour Office of the Land (Landesarbeitsamt) in Königsberg (Królewiec). For many years its president was Hans Schreiber, who also performed the function of the Trustee of the Reich for Labour Matters in the East-Prussian Economic District (Reichstreuhänder der Arbeit für das Wirtschaftsgebiet Ostpreussen). The Labour Office of the Land governed district labour offices (Bezirksarbeitsämter) embracing several administrative districts, which in turn, had branches (Nebenstellen) in the seats of the districts.

On the turn of 1939 the organizational structure of the Labour Office of East Prussia underwent some changes caused by the events of the war. Until October 1939 the Labour Office of the Land governed 12 district labour offices<sup>18</sup>. After the division of the occupied Poland by Hitler's decree of October 26th, 1939 (part of Poland was incorporated in the Reich as the so called eastern annexed territories — eingegliederte Ostgebiete) the northern part of Mazovia (16 245 square kilometres, population of 994 083) was attached to East Prussia<sup>19</sup>. In this area, forming the so called Ciechanów Regency and Suwałki District, district labour offices were established in the following places: Ciechanów (administrative districts of Ciechanów, Mława, Przasnysz and Pułtusk), Ostrołęka (Maków and Ostrołęka districts), Płock (districts of Płock, Płońsk and Sierpc) and Suwałki (the district of Suwałki)<sup>20</sup>.

The Ciechanów Regency was regarded by the Ministry of Labour as the basic source of manpower for East Prussia. Striking is the unanimity of the decisions made by the Ministry and the intentions of Erich Koch, the governor of East Prussia, who represented the opinion that after Poles had been displaced from that area it could be used as the place where sons of the peasants from East Prussia would settle down<sup>21</sup>. During the whole period of war the German in all official publications and pronouncements stressed the fact that foreign workers recruitment was voluntary. They were however more frank among themselves. The General Plenipotentiary for Employment (Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz — GBA), Fritz Sauckel, admitted during the meeting of the Central Planning Committee (Zentrale Planung) which was held on March 1st, 1944 that out of the five million foreign workers employed in the Reich not more than two hundred thousand were volunteers<sup>22</sup>.

In his well-known order No 4 issued on May 7th, 1942 and dealing with the principles of recruitment and treatment of foreign workers Sauckel declared that although the recruitment should be voluntary, in those occupied areas where the population did not respond to the appeals, labour compulsion (Dienstpflicht) and forced recruitment for labour in the Reich should be used<sup>23</sup>. This order thus gave a sanction to German occupation practice of recruiting workers used so far in countries under.

The deportation of Poles into Germany already began while the military operations were still going on. As has already been mentioned, over 13 thousand civilians captured while escaping the front or taken prisoners in towns and villages occupied by the Germans were sent to work in East-Prussian agriculture after

a short stay in P.O.W. camps<sup>24</sup>. After the end of the military operations and the division of the occupied Polish territories, the newly formed labour offices began recruitment. In the first months the objective was to achieve full control over Polish labour in order to incorporate it into the system of the German war economy as quickly as possible.

On October 26th, 1939 the governor general of the GG, Hans Frank, issued an order according to which employment was compulsory for all Poles between eighteen and sixty<sup>25</sup>. On December 14th the same year also young people between fourteen and eighteen were subjected to that law. At the same time the Germans wanted to make use of the economic stagnation and the growing unemployment and poverty in the occupied territories of Poland caused by the war events. The dole paid to the unemployed people was one of the ways of forcing them to register at labour offices. People obtaining the dole had to sign a receipt containing an overleaf clause stating that they would leave for Germany when summoned by the labour office<sup>26</sup>. Disastrous living conditions forced many Poles, previously avoiding any contacts with labour offices, to register there. On the basis of the decree of December 16th, 1939 the dole was also payable to rural population<sup>27</sup>. This enabled the Germans to register at labour offices almost all the Poles without permanent employment, i.e. those who could be sent to the Reich without impeding the economy of the General Gouvernement. The decree of January 25th, 1940 bound all the persons between sixteen and fifty to whom labour offices previously paid the dole to work in the Reich<sup>28</sup>.

After the decree on the division of Poland the territories incorporated into the Reich were treated as an integral part of the Reich and therefore since October 1939 were liable to the restrictions upon the place of employment (Arbeitsplatzwechsel) in force in Germany<sup>29</sup>. That meant the submitting of everybody employed to labour offices. At the same time everybody fit for work between sixteen and sixty was supposed to register at labour offices. In order to force people to do so, unemployment benefits were also paid here<sup>30</sup>. On April 1st, 1940 the regulations of manpower for tasks of particular state importance were introduced here<sup>31</sup>. From that time labour offices in those territories had the power to make lawful decisions ordering employment in the place and time stated therein, therefore also in the Reich; for a specified or unspecified period of time.

Apart from that labour offices carried on the campaign propagating departures for the Reich, advertising the high wages in Germany and the opportunities of learning priced professions. In those regions where there had been a tradition of going to Germany and taking season jobs there this tradition and the material profits gained by those who had done so were stressed (cf. fig. 11).

The results of the voluntary enlistment however were so poor that the German authorities began to introduce administrative enforcement. Particular communes were assigned contingents — the number of persons to be sent for labour in Germany<sup>32</sup>. The persons appointed were given special forms and those who evaded the departure were threatened with administrative and police measures. Repressive measures affected not only themselves but also their relations, according to the principle of collective responsibility used on a large scale by the Germans. The whole families of those evading the departure were often imprisoned and sent to concentration camps<sup>33</sup>. It was most difficult for the rural population to evade

forced recruitment. They used various kinds of tricks which seemed to protect them from being enlisted. In the first period, when people still believed in the reliability of the medical boards at the labour offices, teenagers were sent in place of adults or youths. People thought that children would be exempted because of their young age and ill health. These calculations usually failed as neither poor health condition, except apparent disability, nor young age protected them from being sent into the Reich.

When administrative enforcement also brought partial results only, police measures were introduced. The Germans began to organize round-ups in public places. The most common way of doing this was to surround a village in the night with police and gendarmerie and then to pick out all the young people and others fit for work and take them to the nearest labour office.

In some districts of the Ciechanów regency the Polish farmers were dispossessed and the farms were either given to the Volksdeutsche from the GG (the districts of Radzymin and Węgrów) or changed into airfields or other military grounds (the districts of Miawa and Przasnysz)<sup>34</sup>.

Similar methods of recruitment were used in the GG. The establishing of contingents began in March 1940. On April 21st, 1940 the principles of forced recruitment of people born between 1915 and 1924 were worked out at the meeting of the supreme authorities of the GG. Three days later the campaign of the so called farm-workers' recruitment was announced (Landarbeiteraktion). An appeal was made binding the persons born between 1915 and 1924 to enlist for the departure. On this occasion the old lies about good working conditions and high wages were repeated, as well as the assertion that the GG authorities would ensure decent living conditions to the families of the departing persons. Severe penalties including imprisonment were provided for in case of those persons who would evade the departure<sup>35</sup>.

Significant is the fact that despite such methods of recruitment and transportation, until May 13th, 1942 no decree had been issued by the GG authorities concerning the coercion of sending Poles to Germany. The Germans had still tried to maintain the legal fiction, for the sake of their reputation abroad. On May 13th, 1942 a decree was issued in the GG on the securing of manpower for tasks of special importance for the state and its policy (Dienstpflichtverordnung). From that moment labour offices were fully empowered to force any Pole to take a job in the place appointed by them, mainly in the Reich<sup>36</sup>. The coercive measures in the GG were made harsher by the penal decree on labour summons (Arbeitseinsatzverordnung) dated February 16th, 1944. It stipulated that those who evaded employment should be liable to hard imprisonment and high fines<sup>37</sup>.

The rules of transporting foreign workers to Germany were regulated by a number of detailed instructions of the Reich's Ministry of Labour and later of the General Plenipotentiary for Employment. The workers who were to go to Germany were supposed to undergo a detailed medical examination, which was to find out if they were fit for work and if there was no danger of bringing diseases to Germany. The latter referred chiefly to workers from East and South-East Europe. They also underwent sanitary treatment and their clothes were disinfected and deloused. Both, medical examination and the sanitary treatment were to take place twice — in the country of recruitment and after the arrival in Germany. Medical examinations were usually carried out on the premises of

labour offices, while the other treatment was to take place in specially prepared baths. Not infrequently, especially in the territory of Germany, were the workers quarantined in the so called transition camps (Durchgangslager — Dulag)<sup>39</sup>. In East Prussia they were in most cases sent directly to their jobs, after some preliminary formalities only.

According to the regulations, workers should be transported to the Reich in special trains, or in case of smaller groups, separate carriages attached to passenger trains. The management of the transport was to treat workers in a proper way. They were also to see to it that the wagons should not be overcrowded and that there should be enough food as well as the sufficient number of sanitary arrangements<sup>40</sup>. The practice, however, departed far from these instructions. Even if the medical examination was carried out twice, it was usually very superficial, and the sanitary treatment in most cases was an opportunity to humiliate those undergoing it. Only the small groups travelling in the compartments of passenger trains enjoyed relatively good travelling conditions. The conditions of mass transport outraged human dignity. People were transported in overcrowded, locked up wagons, without any sanitary arrangements and often without anything to eat or drink for a few days.

The methods of recruitment employed by the Germans resulted in the year-by-year increase in the number of Poles deported to the Reich for forced labour. We cannot, however, answer the question how many people had been brought from the occupied part of Poland for forced labour in East Prussia. Although the statistics give the number of people employed in East Prussia in particular periods, they even differentiate between those coming from the GG including the District of Białystok and those from the territories incorporated in the Reich, these data illustrate the state of employment on a given day without showing the migration of forced-labour workers. It is not known, for instance, how many people returned to their homes because they were unfit for work or because they managed to escape from the camps. They are no sources trying at least to estimate the number of workers who died during forced labour, or the number of people sent to concentration camps or prisons, from where there was usually no way back. What the Germans referred to as „natural loss” of Polish workers employed under coercion in East-Prussian industry and agriculture is included in the total biological losses of the Polish nation during the period of war and German occupation.

As long as the end of 1942 the Poles composed the most numerous group of foreign workers employed in East Prussia. Only after that date did the percentage diminish which resulted from the ever growing deportation of workers from the occupied territories of the Soviet Union (Ostarbeiter), as well as from the shifting of French prisoners of war to the status of civilian workers<sup>41</sup>.

Within three years and a half the number of Poles on forced labour in East Prussia was almost tripled (the number of men grew two times and a half and the number of women more than four times). The growth of the employment of Polish women became particularly rapid from the end of 1942. This was undoubtedly connected with the greater demand for men's labour in war industry. Men, so far employed in agriculture, were removed to the war industry, while women and juvenile labour were employed in agriculture<sup>42</sup>.

It has already been mentioned that the area attached to East Prussia, the so

Plate 1. *The Employment of Poles in East-Prussian Economy between 1939 and 1944*

Date	Men	Women	Total*	Percentage in the total of foreign workers employed
25 IV 1941	39 575	13 306	52 879	83,0
25 IX 1941	51 680	16 138	67 818	72,9
20 I 1942	56 563	17 336	73 899	74,5
10 VII 1942	66 693	22 118	88 811	79,2
31 XII 1942	66 663	25 723	92 386	81,0
31 III 1943	74 357	32 375	106 732	74,4
30 VI 1943	83 618	40 808	124 426	69,9
30 IX 1943	87 188	46 280	133 468	67,5
31 XII 1943	85 325	46 390	131 625	65,8
31 III 1944	86 004	47 189	133 193	64,7
30 VI 1944	92 272	53 463	145 735	64,4
30 IX 1944	91 875	54 082	145 957	61,6

\* exclusive of the prisoners of war.

Source: Der Arbeitseinsatz im Deutschen Reich, Jg. 1941, nr 12, ss. 18—19; nr 22, s. 18; Jg. 1942, nr 6, ss. 4—5; nr 16, ss. 10—11; Jg. 1943, nr 3/4, ss. 38—39; nr 5, s. 28; Der Arbeitseinsatz im Grossdeutschen Reich, Jg. 1943, nr 7, s. 28; nr 10/11, s. 6; Jg. 1944, nr 2/3, s. 32; nr 6/7/8, s. 14; nr 9, s. 8; nr 11/12, s. 12.

called Ciechanów regency, was treated by the Germans as the basic source of labour for this province. If we take the total employment of Poles in the Reich, those coming from the GG were most numerous, but in East Prussia the inhabitants of the incorporated territories constituted the majority. On July 10th, 1942 the predominance of the latter was relatively small (the GG and the district of Białystok — 45.0%, the incorporated territories — 55.0%), but in the following years it grew rapidly, and thus on September 30th, 1944 workers from the territories incorporated in the Reich outnumbered those from the GG and the district of Białystok by 21.6 per cent (60.8 versus 39.2 per cent)<sup>43</sup>.

The economic structure of East Prussia caused that during the whole period of war the overwhelming majority of foreign workers of different nationalities were employed in agriculture. There is no doubt about it that without their work the agriculture of East Prussia would not have been able to exist. This is best illustrated by the following data: foreign workers constituted — at the end of April 1941 — 20.6%, the end of February 1942 — 37.6%, the end of March 1943 — 53.9% and at the end of February 1944 — 42.6% of the total employment in the agriculture of East-Prussia. The percentage will be much greater if we take into consideration the employment of the prisoners of war. We shall then see that in April 1944 foreign workers together with the prisoners of war constituted 44.8 per cent of the total employment in East-Prussian agriculture, and in February 1944 — 63.1 per cent<sup>44</sup>.

In the period between April 25th, 1941 and September 30th, 1944 the total

of the Poles on forced labour in the Reich grew from 872 672 people to 1 701 412 people, the growth rate being 195.0%. In East Prussia the respective figures were 52 876 and 145 957 people. The growth rate, being 276.0%, was much higher than anywhere else in the Reich. If we consider the total number of Poles employed in the Reich, the percentage for East Prussia was rather high and it grew constantly, from 6.1% (April 25th, 1941) to 8.6% at the end of September 1944. The respective rate for Polish women is 9.2 per cent which means that nearly every tenth Polish woman on forced labour in Germany worked in East Prussia<sup>44</sup>.

Together with the deportation of Poles for labour in the Reich, the principles of treating them worked out by the superior authorities of the police and the department of labour were developed. Regulations concerning the whole of the problems connected with the stay of Polish workers in the Reich fell into two basic groups. The first one comprised labour laws determining the general framework of Polish labour exploitation by the German employer and included the decrees on the principles of employment, working time and wages. The other category dealt with police surveillance. It was a well-developed system of prescripts and bans which were to confine Polish workers to one place and one job in order to facilitate permanent control over them as well as to ensure maximum exploitation and social isolation. Their purpose was also to humiliate them before the German society.

The normative acts of the Third Reich determining the principles of foreign workers' employment as well as comments upon them stated that Poles came under a particular kind of employment (in einem Beschäftigungsverhältnis eigener Art)<sup>45</sup>. We learn what was meant by this term from the memorial of the governor general, Hans Frank, to the GBA — Fritz Sauckel (October 21st, 1943). Frank wrote there that the legal status of Poles employed in the Reich resembled slavery<sup>46</sup>.

In the first months after the September Campaign of 1939, the employment and treatment of Polish workers were regulated by instructions of the authorities of particular provinces<sup>47</sup>. A few months later they were replaced by the dispositions of the central authorities.

On January 8th, 1940 the principles of payment for foreign forced labour in agriculture were established, to hold good all over Germany<sup>48</sup>. The wages of foreign workers were to amount to 60—80 per cent of German Workers' wages. In East-Prussian agriculture they reached only 60 per cent of German wages, which was stated by Erich Koch, the governor and the president of this province, at a meeting with Hitler on October 2nd, 1940<sup>49</sup>. The system of wages deprived the Poles of extra payment for working overtime, as well as for work on Sundays and holidays. There were no regulations concerning holidays, therefore in practice Poles had no holiday rights. Even the new decisions concerning the system of wages and issued towards the end of the war (June 29th, 1944) did not bring basic changes except extra payment for overtime work<sup>50</sup>.

The employment of Poles in the Reich was based on absolute constraint; legal enforcement in case of obligatory service or direct physical constraint supported by various forms of indirect constraint. Once registered at the labour office, a Pole, regardless of sex and age, no longer decided on his or her employment, as this was the subject of arbitrary decision of the labour office. One of the first consequences of introducing the „particular kind of employment of Poles” was the abandonment of individual employment contracts (Arbeitsvertrag). In mid 1940 the em-

ployment of Poles based on the so called simplified procedure of green and grey forms (Grün und Grauzettelverfahren) began<sup>51</sup>. The green form meant work in agriculture while the grey one stood for work in other branches of economy. In this way Poles were unable to choose the kind of job and the place of employment. Contrary to the procedure used so far, the employer no longer needed to apply for a licence to employ a foreign worker, and the latter no longer had to obtain an individual permission to take a job at a given place and time. From that moment the only thing that was needed was a general order by the labour office for a given number of workers. The order was executed by sending the required number of people to the labour office and only there did they learn where they were and for what kind of labour they had been designed.

By the end of 1941 the basic decree concerning labour laws for Poles had been issued<sup>52</sup>. It was very general in character and it formed the ground for many additional instructions issued in the following months. The provisions of the decree made the previous discrimination of Poles in the field of labour laws a sanction exempting them from the most important acts of German labour legislation; regulations concerning the system of labour, some special allowances, extra payment for Sunday and holiday work. The juvenile workers between 14 and 18 were subjected to the same regulations as the adults.

No regulations determined the working time for Poles. Those whose basic working time depended on the organization of the production process (industrial plants) were forced to take up some extra occupation outside their working hours as well as on Sundays and holidays. This was also the case at large farms, where there were other foreigners working apart from Poles, as well as German workers as wage earners. In small farms owned by peasants, however, there were no limits to the working time. Work began at dawn and lasted till the evening, with a short lunch-break only.

The Poles had no right to choose the place of employment and the kind of job, therefore, had no possibility of controlling their wages either. They were assigned the hardest and most primitive tasks, and therefore graded as unskilled workers, with the lowest possible wages. Their gross earnings in agriculture, depending on the region, amounted to 60—80 per cent and in industry to 67—90 per cent of German earnings. The net earnings were even lower because of additional tax burden<sup>53</sup>. Workers employed outside agriculture were burdened with a special tax, the so called „social levelling levy” (Sozialausgleichabgabe), which amounted to 15 per cent of gross earnings. The sums deducted supported the Treasury of the Reich. This levy was to ensure the German state direct profits from Polish forced labour<sup>54</sup>.

The Poles were deprived of all social allowances, granted with regard to family situation, i.e. family allowance, benefit on a child's birth, funeral benefit etc. They were not entitled to Christmas and New Year bonuses nor to different kinds of anniversary bonuses. Those employed in industry were to be paid for overtime work the same way as German workers were. But they were not entitled to extra pay for work on those holidays which did not occur on Sundays. Those employed in agriculture did not receive any extra payment.

The fact that Poles had no right to give in a notice was equal to attaching them to the place of employment<sup>55</sup>. One of the least regulated legal questions was the problem of holidays. The decisions of the central and provincial authorities



interfered with each other. As has been said the regulations concerning labour laws for Poles employed in agriculture did not say anything about holidays. Non-agricultural employees were subject to the same regulations concerning holidays as other workers (the Germans) but in practice, they could not enjoy them as they did not have the length of service required. In the decree of September 10th, 1940 the head of the Gestapo in Olsztyn prohibited holidays for Poles, except leaves given in special cases, as the death of a close relation, leaving the power of decision to himself<sup>66</sup> (cf. fig. 6). The Reich's Ministry of Labour arrived at the conclusion that such a ban might cause unwanted disturbances in the process of labour. On September 10th, 1941 the Minister of Labour permitted leaves for Polish workers employed in agriculture and other branches of economy, but only in special cases. These were: death or serious illness of the employer's family member, the wedding of the employee or his children, the employee's illness which concerned mainly women and juvenile workers, and pregnancy (the leave to be given not earlier than six weeks before the parturition). Each of the above-mentioned cases had to be confirmed by German administrative bodies or the police<sup>67</sup>. Holidays granted to Poles were to encourage them to work more efficiently. It was for this reason that at the end of September 1942 Sauckel issued another instruction in this matter. It contained the following directions: a holiday may be granted only by the labour office consent and only to those persons who deserve it through their good work and conduct, and if they are sure to be back at work after it. Non-agricultural employers were to keep two-week earnings of the Pole going on holiday, while in agriculture a month's earnings were to be kept. The money was to be paid after the worker's return to work<sup>68</sup>. However, already on March 24th, 1943 holidays were withheld again which, as usual, was accounted for by transport problems and the tasks of the war economy<sup>69</sup>.

When the World War II broke out, the act of April 30th, 1938 on the juvenile labour protection was in force in the Reich<sup>70</sup>. In fact, this act was valid all through the period of war. It differentiated between children (persons under the age of 14) and juveniles (14 to 18 years old). The employing of children was banned, only children over twelve could be employed in easy jobs and not longer than six hours a day. The provisions of this act were to hold good also for Polish children employed in Germany<sup>71</sup>. However, on September 1st, 1941 the working time of the juveniles was made equal to the working time of the adults, and later all the working conditions became the same<sup>72</sup>. Since in practice, no difference was made between children and juveniles, the limits of the exploitation of the former ones were determined only by their physical strength<sup>73</sup>.

Similarly, Polish women did not enjoy the protection with which German working women were privileged. The labour of pregnant women and women in the period after childbirth was regulated by the 1927 act, according to which pregnant women should not be employed in jobs dangerous to their health or the health of the offspring; they should be granted a leave six weeks before parturition and employed again not earlier than six weeks after it. At first the provisions of this act were respected also in case of Polish women, but on July 7th, 1941 of this protection for Polish women might be different from that enjoyed by German women. In 1942 a new act on women's labour protection was issued (Mutter-schutzgesetz)<sup>74</sup>. In view of the executive instructions to it the protection granted

to Polish women was the least possible one, i.e. the ban on employment in noisome jobs two weeks before the childbirth and the prohibition of employment for six weeks after it<sup>75</sup>. A confidential circular issued by Sauckel restricted even this minimum protection, as it ordered to employ Polish women as long as possible before childbirth and to employ them immediately afterwards, at least doing cottage-work<sup>76</sup>.

In those cases where Poles were officially granted legal protection, the actual situation was regulated by confidential instructions. Theoretically speaking, for instance, the Poles employed in agriculture could, in case of a dispute, claim their rights before special arbitration commissions of labour offices. However, a secret instruction of the Chancery of the Reich (May 26th, 1941) said that labour offices could hear only those Poles to whom the police had given permission to leave their place of employment. Before issuing the permission the police were to check if there was ground for the claim<sup>77</sup>. Poles working in public services were prohibited from making any claims<sup>78</sup>.

The Polish literature of the subject is therefore right in saying that „labour laws” for Poles employed under coercion in Germany had only one purpose, that of incorporating them in the German economy. They were only a system of regulations to be used by the German authorities and employers applying evident coercion in employing Polish labour<sup>79</sup>.

At the same time, the system of police surveillance over foreigners staying in the Reich was being formed already in the first few months of the war. One of the first dispositions of the Ministry of the Interior, issued five days after the outbreak of the war and signed by Reinhard Heydrich, prohibited the citizens of countries which were at war with Germany (Feindstaaten) from leaving their domicile without a special permission given by the police, and authorized the latter to impose any restrictions on those persons' freedom<sup>80</sup>. At the beginning of January 1940 the first of the four decrees on the principles of treating the Poles in East Prussia was issued<sup>81</sup>. At the beginning of March 1940 the governor of East Prussia, Erich Koch, ordered all the Poles employed in East-Prussian agriculture to wear a yellow arm-band<sup>82</sup> (cf. fig. 7).

These first decrees restricting the personal freedom of Poles on forced labour in Germany, not yet uniform in the scale of the nation, were developed by a series of legal acts of March 8th, 1940. One of them was the decree issued by SS Reichsführer and the head of the German police, Himmler, concerning the labelling of Polish workers<sup>83</sup>. It obliged Polish workers employed in the Reich to wear the national distinction on each piece of outer garment. The distinction was a yellow square (5 by 5 cm) bordered violet and with a violet letter „P” inside it, resting on one of the angles and placed upon the right breast. The decree provided a fine of 150 marks or six-week imprisonment for not wearing it. Besides, it did not exclude the use of „securing measures” by the police, which in most cases meant corporal punishment. Every German, even a minor, had the right to identify and detain workers who had no national distinction on or wore it in the wrong way. Therefore, true is the statement that „a foreign worker was regarded as the property of the German state and nation, the members of which had the right and duty to supervise it, watch and reprimand”<sup>84</sup>.

On the same day Himmler directed an outline of the principles of treating Polish workers during their stay in Germany to the Reich's deputies, presidents

of regencies, the police and the Gestapo in Germany<sup>76</sup>. These instructions were composed of three basic parts. The first one comprised general principles of treating Polish workers and was the basis for detailed police dispositions worked out by the presidents of particular provinces. The second part was a bilingual instruction entitled „List of Duties of Workers of Polish Nationality during Their Stay in the Reich”, and the third one contained instructions for the German employers on the treatment of Polish workers.

Poles were obliged to observe the curfew that is not to go out between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. from April 1st to September 30th, and between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. from October 1st to March 31st. The use of means of public transport was banned. The ban might be revoked by the police only, after consulting the labour office and only in that case when it was necessary because of the kind of job performed. The participation in German social and cultural events, religious ceremonies and church services was banned too, as well as visiting pubs and restaurants. Depending on the local conditions, one or more pubs which Polish workers would be allowed to visit within certain hours were to be appointed, the consent of the owner being the necessary condition. It was advised that this service should be performed in the first place by the canteens of those works in which Poles were employed. The Germans and workers of other nationalities were prohibited from visiting those places at that time.

The offenders were to be fined and if that did not help, the case was to be reported to the Gestapo and the worker arrested. In order to ensure the respectation of these instructions, i.e. the terrorization of the Poles, Himmler ordered a special preventive campaign to be carried on in the first eight weeks after these regulations had come into force.

After listing all the restrictions imposed on Poles, the instruction for the German employers made it clear that those of the Germans who would come into illicit contacts with Polish workers would be prosecuted. „Illicit contacts” included such activities as, for instance, collecting clothes and money for them, buying them railway tickets and sending out their letters, or visiting pubs with them. The instruction bound the employers to report any offense made by the Poles to the police, as well as to minimize German workers' contacts with Poles at work and exclude them completely after work.

The part of the instruction which dealt with the accommodation of Polish workers said that their strict isolation from the German population should be attempted. In industrial plants and at large farms Polish workers should be quartered in separate barracks and boarded separately, and should be isolated even during the intervals at work.

Himmler's instructions to the Gestapo stations all over the Reich were issued on the same day as the above-discussed ones<sup>77</sup>. They dealt with repressive measures to be used in opposing the danger resulting from the employing of so many Polish workers, whose attitude towards the Reich was definitely hostile. The instructions composed of five paragraphs included:

- the principle of fighting the resistance and the reluctance of Polish workers to work. Himmler stipulated for the exclusive jurisdiction of the Gestapo over all cases of dilatory workers, abandoning the job or acts of sabotage. The sanctions provided were imprisonment, sending to a reformatory labour camp (Arbeitser-

ziehungslager — AEL) (cf. fig. 8) or to the quarry at the Mauthausen concentration camp;

- the principles of preventing improper behaviour towards the German population, and especially coming into close personal or intimate relations. Also these matters fell under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Gestapo. The repressive measures involved only the sending to a concentration camp, and in case of sexual intercourses with German women, the so called „special treatment” (Sonderbehandlung), which meant the gallows;

- the censorship of forced-labour workers' correspondence, also carried out by the Gestapo;

- repressive measures against the German population for friendly attitude towards the Poles.

As Himmler's instruction left the detailed formulation of Polish workers' duties to the Reich's deputies or presidents of the provinces, after some time the number of decrees, instructions and circulars was so great that it caused misunderstandings, particularly at lower administrative grades. The Head Office for the Security of the Reich (Reichssicherheitshauptamt — RSHA) thought it justified to prepare a list of the basic regulations. This summary of the principles of police surveillance over Poles in the Reich contained eight items:

- orders and bans: obligatory labelling with the „P” distinction, the ban on leaving one's domicile without police permission, the prohibition of leaving one's flat (curfew) without such permission, the bans on using means of public transport outside one's residence, participation in German ceremonies, visiting pubs and restaurants unless specially designed for Poles on the specified days and hours, the possession and use of bicycles and cameras, the participation in German church services. The services for Poles could be held on the first Sunday of every month and on important holidays, between 10 and 12 a.m. The participation in these services was permitted only for those who lived not farther than 5 kilometres away from the church, and the use of the Polish language during the service was banned;

- Gestapo permission was needed for: the use of radio sets and granting driving licences to Poles. The licence could be issued when suggested by the labour office in justifiable cases. People using radio sets without permission were to be prosecuted;

- marriages among the Poles and German — Polish marriages were basically ruled out. Marriages between Poles and other foreigners depended on the decision of the Gestapo. The same applied to leaves which could be granted only in very special cases (death or serious illness of the employee's close relation, etc), the decision depending on the labour office and the employer concerned. Polish children were excluded from education and there was no professional training for the juvenile ones;

- the following were to be reported to the Gestapo: escapes of Poles, any action dangerous to the German state, e.g. sabotage, Polish drifts towards independence, listening to foreign radio broadcasts, attacks on the Germans, refusal to perform the job, liaisons with German women, indecent behaviour towards the Germans. The kind of prosecution depended on the Gestapo. Directing a case to judicial authorities was inadmissible. The criminal police had the duty to hand

in the Pole captured during the escape either to the nearest Gestapo station or the nearest reformatory labour camp. The police were not allowed to send him back to the labour office or the former employer;

— the local police had the jurisdiction over smaller offenses of Poles, like theft, fraud, embezzlement, insubordination — unless these were suspected to have been committed on political grounds; help in escaping, spreading alarming rumours, impudence towards the Germans;

— Instructing before Employing — information about severe police measures for disobedience to the regulations in force, threatening with death penalty for fornication with German women, reminding that there was no prescription of police measures;

— the German greeting [Deutscher Gruss, i.e. „Heil Hitler“]. Poles could not be greeted with it and were not obliged to use it, but its use was not subject to punishment. Poles were not to be requested to salute German standards, etc.;

— the Poles possessed labour cards which they should show on demand<sup>78</sup> (cf. fig. 9).

Police bans and orders regulated the life of Polish workers brought in for forced labour almost in every detail. The changes which, in the course of the war, occurred in the living conditions of foreign workers in the Reich did not, as a rule, affect the Poles. The same police rigour held good throughout the whole period of war.

The above-given list of restrictions is not complete. The reality presented many others, which did not have a clear legal ground, but were derived from the general tenor of the regulations in force and introduced by the German authorities. In view of the total lack of legal protection of the Polish workers, they were in most cases absolutely discretionary. The major principle formulated by Himmler (the circular of September 10th, 1943) said, „It is not possible to regulate all the problems which might occur, thus the executive bodies will in many cases have to make decisions themselves. In these cases one should always remember that it is the most essential necessity to tie the Polish labour down to the German economy and at the same time to prevent any danger that might occur for the security and the racial situation of the German nation”<sup>79</sup>.

\* \* \*

The picture of the situation of the Poles based only on the normative acts would be a one-sided one and incomplete. Although the regulations on the employment and treatment of Polish workers issued by the German authorities aimed at the most detailed regulating of their living and working conditions, in practice they depended, especially in the country, on the employer. It was the employer's task to ensure the accommodation and boarding of the workers allocated to him, as well as to supervise them and exact the observance of the regulations in force.

The working and living conditions of Poles in East Prussia were not uniform. Those quartered in labour camps were subject to the rigorous regulations, while workers individually employed in the country, and these were the majority, de-

pendent in practice on the employer's good or bad will. He could either execute all the restrictions and persecutions ordered by the authorities and even make them more harsh, or, which sometimes happened, abandon them.

In order to get the picture which would as much as possible approximate the actual situation, one should make use of one more source. This source is a specific one as it includes the accounts, recollections and memoirs of those people who worked under coercion in East Prussia during the war. Although they present individual experiences in a subjective way, they are the only source of information on the mutual contacts of forced labour workers of different nationalities and the atmosphere of the working community. They also inform us about the opinions on the contemporary events, the food situation and the attitude of the German society and the employers towards foreign workers. Besides, they enable us to establish how the laws concerning Polish workers were executed in East Prussia. Thus, they include all those elements which are not reflected by the normative acts.

The authors of those accounts and memoirs usually present the realities of that period in a much-to-the-point way. Most mistakes occur in the dates of certain well-known events and names of places. One should, however, remember that it is thirty years since those events took place, which results in the fact that some events have been forgotten or altered in the memory, the more so as the authors of these accounts did not have any records at their disposal. The descriptions of individual facts do not arouse any doubts as they have been remembered better than every day activities. The experiences from the period of German occupation and forced labour were very varied. The wording of the accounts is therefore often turpid. This results from the deep emotional involvement, as the experiences of the Nazi slavery were a shock impossible to forget. Most of the former forced labour workers say that the slavish labour has taken the best of their young years and made them experience famine and humiliation; many lost their health. The accounts and memoirs, however, do not contain hatred or the desire for revenge. On the contrary, their authors eagerly mention all the humane impulses on the part of the employers, the manifestations of sympathy, friendliness and help displayed mainly by the local population.

The present book is a selection of memoirs and accounts. Its editors therefore owe the reader a few explanatory words. In the first place they tried to select the material in such a way that this volume, incorporating unquestioned cognitive value, should be interesting not only to those particularly interested in the matter. The interference in the memoirs and accounts has been limited as much as possible, and concerned only the adjustment of the spoken language to the requirements of the printed word and the rules of Polish grammar and spelling. In case of accounts the narrative has been arranged by means of leaving out all the repetitions and digressions irrelevant to the subject matter and by correcting all errors in dates and names of places. While establishing the names of places the index of places in the Olsztyn province was used<sup>80</sup>. The cut-outs have not been marked in the text. The editors' explanations and comments have been square-bracketed.

(Trans. by Wojciech Krzyżanowski)



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