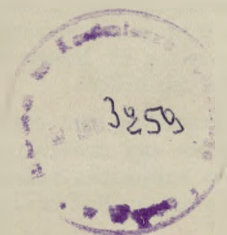


LIFE

*in*

CONTEMPORARY

POLAND



# LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

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*(The facts related below have reached the Polish Information Center from thoroughly reliable sources, through the Vatican.)*

## **CONCENTRATION CAMPS**

Poland is a country where terror and reprisals hold sway today more than at any time since the German invasion. Mass arrests and deportations to concentration camps occur at short intervals without any cause or excuse. First this "man hunting" took place in streets, in street cars, and various public places. Then Warsaw homes were searched for men between the ages of 16 and 48. On September 18, 1940 ten thousand were thus seized and deported. Some were sent to labor camps in Germany (where they were allotted the most dangerous jobs and worked under the worst conditions imaginable); some were confined in concentration camps. The conditions are hideous beyond even the most distorted imagination.

The only news that comes from these camps are death notices. They arrive in scores. In frequent cases, pneumonia causes these deaths, the result of improper clothing, intense cold, and the fact that the sick are not given medical care until their fever reaches 103.5 degrees. Torturing the unfortunate victims contributes its share.

One of the most dreadful camps is the one near the town of Oswiecim. Some eighty thousand people are confined within its walls. In September an artillery lieutenant succeeded in escaping from it. He stated that it was extremely difficult to obtain release from a concentration camp and that those who succeeded because of extreme ill health or some form of mediation, had to sign a statement on this order:

- (1) Not to divulge anything regarding the conditions prevailing in the camp;
- (2) To refrain from any activity detrimental to the Reich;
- (3) To report to German authorities what they know about secret meetings and resolutions voted by Polish organizations.

It is very difficult to obtain information from people released from concentration camps.

Lieutenant W's account runs as follows: He was apprehended in Warsaw during a raid and locked up, with many other men, in a cavalry riding academy. All were kept there two days and given as nourishment a minimum amount of bread and water. The following day machine guns were placed in the gallery and a round fired. No one was killed, but one man was wounded by a bullet ricocheting from the wall. The same day the prisoners were made to board a cattle train. The cars were so crammed that the men had to stand up. They journeyed under such conditions for three days, receiving one day's ration of bread for the entire trip. A man who jumped off the train, was fired at by the Nazi guards and seriously wounded; then he was dragged back into the train and shot dead by a Nazi officer. His body was brought to the Oswiecim camp and displayed as a warning to the inmates.

Life at the Oswiecim camp is beyond any description. A healthy man of 45 years breaks down after two weeks. The prisoners wear rags; their food consists of weak soup and a small ration of bread. Both Polish officers and civilians are employed as draught animals. In road construction, for instance, an insufficient number of men is ordered to pull a heavy roller and driven by inhuman beating to move it. Many of the men have no shoes, and having pulled the heavy roller over a gravel covered road their feet are lacerated to the bone. For a few days they are given treatment and are then sent back to work.

Penalties are varied. There are three degrees of lashing: 25 lashes, 50, and 70. Lieutenant X. saw one man receive the first, and another the second punishment. The man who had received 25 lashes was bleeding from numerous wounds. The second was a disfigured mass of bleeding flesh and evidently dead. A prisoner receiving 70 lashes becomes a corpse, since no man can survive more than 50 lashes.

Another torture is the hanging of a victim by the hands, for hours at a time. The man faints, his joints are twisted, and his muscles overstrained.

There are high walled enclosures within which terrible tortures are performed. What happens there is of course unknown. Those sentenced to the severest punishment are taken there. Their colleagues in the camp hear only terrible cries and heart-rending groans, the sound of which they consider worse than bodily tortures. Each section of the camp has its own official torturer, usually a former criminal, a Nazi athlete especially trained in the technique of tortures.

When a prisoner dies, his body is placed in a coffin which is carried to a crematory by two other inmates. There the torturer examines the body, removes from it all valuables, even the gold fillings of its teeth.

The body is then cremated and the coffin sent back to the camp for further use. The family of the defunct is notified by wire of his death and are offered his ashes upon payment of four marks.

## **STERILIZATION OF YOUTHS**

In the last few weeks proof has been obtained that in the Bavarian labor camps, where numerous Poles are being held, Polish young men are being sterilized. This is being done so viciously that one may take it for granted that the same infamous practice is being followed in other German camps. The above facts have been scrupulously and meticulously investigated and leave no room for any doubt.

## **POLISH GIRLS IN NAZI BROTHELS**

From persons who have recently escaped from Poland, information has been obtained that many Polish girls deported last winter from Poznan, have been sent to military brothels in the Siegfried Line. These girls are now returning home in a distressful condition, often completely unlike their former selves. They have terrible tales to relate about their gruesome experiences. One eighteen-year-old girl from a middle-class family said that she was forced to "serve" as many as twenty Nazi soldiers daily.

## **SPECIAL TREATMENT OF POLES**

It has sometimes been reported by neutral or semi-neutral observers who have visited prisoner-of-war camps in Germany that conditions there are quite bearable and that the prisoners are treated humanely. It must, however, be stressed here that: (1) foreign correspondents are permitted to visit only so-called "representative" prison camps, and (2) they are never allowed to visit camps wherein only Poles are confined or where they form the majority of the prisoners.

As evidence of this it is worthwhile to quote the statement of Darius Dalton Davies who, as representative of the World Alliance of Christian Youth, had visited prisoner-of-war camps in Germany, and whose views on them are by no means derogatory. However, he points out that in the camps he visited, there were 100,000 Frenchmen and 25,000 Britishers, and no Poles at all. Poles in prisoner-of-war camps, as well as in their own country, are being treated by the Nazis with a specially subtle cruelty, more inhumanely than any other people whose countries have been occupied by Hitler.

The following incident occurred in Warsaw.

Three German officers entered a small restaurant, and after having freely indulged in food and alcoholic beverages, began a loud conversation with some Poles seated at the next table. They expressed their satisfaction with having been transferred to Poland from occupied France not only because there they were in "very close proximity to the front," but also because in France they had to abide by special orders to treat the population mildly, whereas in Poland they could do as they pleased. There were here no restrictions and any abuse of the people was permitted.

"In our relations with the Netherlanders, Belgians, and French," they said, "we must heed world opinion, but no one will know what happens in Poland, and even if it leaks out, no one will believe it."

### **POISON GAS AND HUMAN TEST TUBES**

There is one fact which has been verified several times and does not admit any doubt; namely, that the Nazis, both in Poland as well as in the Reich, are removing

either from asylums or from private homes aged, infirm, incurable, and abnormal people whose state of health is diagnosed by Nazi authorities and not by physicians. Their families are told that they are being given better care. As a rule, after a lapse of time, their relatives are notified that the patient died and that they may recover his ashes upon payment of four marks. Incidents of this kind are known to have occurred in the spring and summer of 1940. It was ascertained that these unfortunate people had been used by the Nazis as guinea pigs to test the effectiveness of poison gases. The Nazis experiment on human beings to learn how much poison gas is needed to cause death or injure a man beyond medical help.

### **DEMORALIZATION OF THE POPULATION**

An ever increasing number of reports leaking out of Poland tell the tale of a conscious and planned demoralization of the people by the Nazis. The definite purpose

thereof, consistently and carefully fostered, is the moral and physical degeneration of those sections of the population, which because of ill health or old age or other technical reasons remain in the homeland. It is obviously impossible to deport the entire population of a large country to forced labor or concentration camps. The use of alcoholic beverages is being encouraged wherever possible. Its sale is being spread to little shops and small villages. Whenever the Nazi authorities requisition any agricultural product they offer alcohol in exchange. Gambling houses are



being opened and people are encouraged to visit them. Only Germans and "Volksdeutsche" are forbidden to enter them.

One of the heaviest blows to occupied Poland is the planned demoralization by the Nazis of her young people. Secondary and high-schools have been abolished. Boys and girls aged twelve to fourteen (the most critical age in the forming of character) are deprived of any mental and physical occupation (unless they are deported to forced labor). They must hide to avoid arrest and live under high nervous tension and in conditions favoring demoralization in every shape and form. Specially picked Polish-speaking "intermediaries" distribute pornographic literature and obscene photographs among these youngsters. It must be remembered that political oppression and mental depression which weigh so heavily on the population of occupied Poland are bound to have the greatest effect on youth which, naturally, possesses less force of resistance. When hunger and cold prevail in the home, when every one lives under the strain of an ever imminent danger, when every day life is dark and gruesome, it is not surprising that occasional break-downs occur, that youth should search for temporary forgetfulness of the dire reality. Moreover amidst the want and the scarcity of all necessities of life, there is still a possibility of leading a reasonable mode of life for those who are in possession of some funds. To earn money honestly is impossible. Yet, as it is always the case in unusual times, and in view of the corrupt practices of the Nazi authorities, there is plenty of doubtful business, of illegal commerce and risky traffic going on. One sees boys thirteen or fourteen years old engaged in such occupations with the lofty purpose of assisting their families the adult members of which have been deported or must remain in hiding for fear of arrest. These are risky experiences for minds yet unformed, leading often to deformation of character.

Youth purposefully and skillfully demoralized by the authorities is being gradually ruined morally and physically. The Nazis do it with a systematic thoroughness.

## **FORCED LABOR**

Labor is compulsory for all, even for the Germans. Any one unable to produce a certificate of employment issued by the Labor Exchange, is immediately sent to forced labor camps. It is particularly worthy of attention that all Poles, even those working in Germany, have to pay the so-called "Polensteuer," fixed at thirty per cent of their earnings and officially destined to the "reconstruction of Poland." Those deported to forced labor are compelled to sign contracts. But people in the Reich generally believe that these contracts are being voluntarily concluded. In consequence whenever a Pole complains about his working condition

the Reich-German tells him, in good faith, that he has no right to grumble.

**BANDITRY** To the many ills and misfortunes which have come upon suffering Poland, banditry has now been added and is spreading in hitherto unknown dimensions. The invaders who, as a rule, deal out death sentences to captured bandits, can do but little in view of the existing conditions. Continuous raids and deportations to concentration camps or to Germany where inmates suffer the most abominable tortures, compel many people to take to cover in the ruins of cities, in hovels, forests, and village hide-outs. As a result they live the life of hunted animals, suffering from hunger and cold. Their situation is, indeed, desperate. The number of those hunted men is growing daily. Very often they ask the local residents for help, for food, or shelter. But under existing circumstances, because of poverty and want, material assistance is often difficult and sometimes given unwillingly. Hence develop threats and the use of force. It must also be borne in mind that those miserable men have but one tragic alternative: surrender to the Nazis or robbery. Victims of the occupation must be persons of extraordinary force of character to not go astray.

It is but natural that under such circumstances ordinary criminal characters take advantage of the situation with the result that cases of murder, assault, and robbery have increased of late.

**GERMANS SEEK REFUGE IN POLAND FROM ENGLISH BOMBINGS** Numerous Germans seek a refuge in Poland from bombings of the R.A.F. Their influx results in the eviction of Poles. In many cities special German districts have been cre-

ated and have been proposed in others. According to the latest orders of the Nazi authorities, Poles are permitted to remain in such German districts, if a given building is not needed by Germans. Otherwise all have to vacate their premises. It goes without saying that Jews are not permitted to stay under any circumstances in such districts allotted to Germans.

**THE SPIRIT OF POLISH POPULATION REMAINS UNBROKEN** In spite of all these persecutions, Draconian orders, et cetera, the attitude of the population as a whole remains firm. The atmosphere is wholesome in all sections of the country, both among

the landowners, the "intelligentsia," the workers, and peasants. Here are a few examples:

On the occasion of a visit of Governor General Frank in Wilanow and Nieborow, the owner of the estate left for Warsaw precisely on the day of the previously announced visit. A general order was issued to the peasants to congregate in regional costumes and greet the governor. Not one of them appeared.

When former Ambassador Wysocki was offered a position in the General Protection Council, he replied that he would accept the offer only on the condition that he would be given sufficient authority to assist the population. The matter was dropped by the Nazis.

In Warsaw the Germans celebrated the first anniversary of the invasion of Poland in an imposing manner. Long before September 1, a secret "mot d'ordre" went around that on that day, immediately after church services, all Poles would return home and remain indoors all day. Throughout the day no Pole traveled in street cars and trains, neither visited cafes and restaurants, nor purchased cigarettes. Money thus saved was put aside for national purposes. The city was richly decorated with Swastikas, but was deserted. The streets were empty. Trains departed and arrived unoccupied. There were no customers in the stores. The resolution had been understood by all Poles and sincerely adhered to. After 6 P.M., when the Nazis had finished their parades, when platforms were vacated and the loudspeakers subsided, great crowds assembled at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and other monuments which had escaped the gruesome bombardment of a year ago, and covered them with red and white flowers (the national colors of Poland), singing a popular religious hymn which has the same melody as Poland's national anthem.

For this demonstration many citizens paid with their liberty. The Gestapo was frantic. They arrested members of the gatherings, they destroyed the heaps of red and white flowers, they beat the people, but whenever they went away new red and white flowers appeared, the crowds gathered anew, and the singing burst out again. On the monument of the "Lotnik" (Airman) the following inscription appeared: "Long Live Our Air Force!"

A considerable disturbance ensued, the crowd was dispersed, and women and children were beaten bestially. Many persons were afterwards deported to labor camps in Germany. At the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier the Gestapo men treated the Poles with such savage cruelty that even the German military authorities were indignant and had to intervene.

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