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In Lower Silesia new nationals of Poland, like this girl, are pressing every member of each farm family into the task of making "recovered" territories pay off



Hitler's former arsenal in Upper Silesia is the core of Poland's new industrial life. Here molten steel runs from a furnace that was captured by the Soviets

THE POLISH DREAM

BY ERIKA MANN

MY VISA to Poland was granted within two days. With it, I received a letter from the Polish embassy at Prague warmly recommending me to all Polish authorities en route and giving assurance I could cross the boundary by automobile at whatever point I saw fit. My trip seemed to be getting off to an incredibly good start.

My road map indicated that a point near Jelenia Gora, formerly known as Hirschberg, would be the most logical spot for crossing the border. When I arrived in my ancient German Adler (vintage 1932) the usual formalities were quickly disposed of. My Czech visa, which was valid for a single journey and no more, was canceled and I proceeded through four kilometers of weed-infested no man's land toward what appeared to be a minor Maginot line.

The edge of Poland was spiked with a three-ply fence of wicked-looking barbed wire. From behind it Polish soldiers shouted a stern refusal to let me proceed. I demanded to see the commandant. In due course he appeared on the scene, elegantly dressed in an outfit of black and silver. The young man perused my credentials, commented politely on the excellence of their quality as diplomatic papers, and informed me, with regrets, that no one, not even an ambassador, would be permitted to cross the frontier at

Jelenia Gora. The place to go, he said, was Frydlant, some 70 kilometers distant.

History repeated itself at Frydlant; the Poles refused to be moved by my plight. Once again frustrated Czech customs officials had to be talked into permitting me to cross back into their country.

Then, on the second day of what had begun to look like a really hopeless venture, I encountered a Czech patrol that was better informed than the officials with whom I had previously had contact. These men told me there were just three crossing points that were open to automobiles along the entire 758-kilometer Czech-Polish border. The nearest authorized frontier, they said, was at Nachod, 90 kilometers away. An hour after my Adler had limped into Nachod I was permitted to enter what Poland calls her "recovered territories."

The former German region in what is now western Poland, an area smaller than the land ceded by Poland to Russia but vastly more valuable, is the dreamland of the much-partitioned neighbor of the Soviets. The grant of 61,000 square miles was made at the Potsdam Conference in compensation for the 104,000 square miles in eastern Poland that went to Russia.

The new addition is rich in raw materials, in developed industries, and in agricultural assets. In the face of

the destruction wrought there, the actual value of Poland's gains is hard to assess and probably lies below the Potsdam estimate of \$9,000,000,000. Even so, this acquisition is worth substantially more than the lost lands behind the Curzon line, estimated to be \$3,600,000,000. Potentially, at least, Poland is today one of the wealthiest countries in Europe.

Dispute Over Lands Foreseen

But these so-called recovered territories were likely to be among the most hotly disputed issues when a peace treaty with Germany came up for discussion. Would the land exchange agreed upon at Potsdam be considered permanent? The Poles, who stand ready to fight for their new hopes, would say yes—most emphatically yes. The Russians, who have never been popular with the Poles, would not hear of any further changes either. Germany, on the other hand, and with her, Poland's Anglo-American allies, were inclined to question the finality of the Potsdam settlement.

In defending her claim to what constitutes a third of her entire postwar territory, Poland was ready to insist that these territories are ancient Polish soil, which in the course of eight centuries the Germans acquired illegally by means of aggressive warfare; that they are indispensable to Poland,

whereas Germany can manage without them; that while Germany never derived the greatest possible benefit from her eastern and northeastern possessions, Poland is eager and able to develop and exploit these lands properly, to her own advantage as well as to that of Europe.

For the first couple of driving hours after you get over the border, Lower Silesia does little to justify the last claim. Although villages, farmhouses and country hotels in the areas near the border are comparatively intact, they seem all but uninhabited. Abandoned hamlets, untilled fields and roads disfigured by pits mark the face of a spooky landscape. More than two years have passed since its inhabitants fled. All German street names and signposts have been replaced by Polish letterings, which, of course, bear no similarity to corresponding markings on available maps. You can easily get lost in the silent maze.

Finally I became hopelessly mixed up and decided to park by the side of the road and wait for help to come along. Night had fallen and I felt none too cozy. An officer who was passing by stopped at my hail and came over to the car. He was not entirely sober. He squeezed his body halfway through the door window and unceremoniously attempted to open my coat. When I resisted he suggested, with a broken accent, that since it was getting

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Ilse Lachmann, 27-year-old war nurse and one of the last of the Germans left in Wrocław, works at collecting scrap iron for the Polish government steel trust

Even though it seemed to the author that men like this peasant resented their gov-

New lands wrested from Germany by Russia make Poland potential wealthiest countries in Europe. Startlingly, a well-known journalist feared for the Soviet Union is almost universal among Poles in this hotly disputed territory

late I had better join him in his quarters.

I declined, and the man became so persistent that I was forced to jerk my car into motion with enough abruptness to shake him loose. He was slightly hurt in the process, I was soon to learn. The street down which I fled was dead-end and when I turned back to find another way out I encountered not one but eight officers, including the persistent one.

"Stop!" they shouted. "Stop, or we shoot!"

Long after I had halted they were still pointing their weapons at me and I didn't like the nervous way in which they did it. I decided on a small offensive of my own. Jumping out of the car I raised my letter as if it were a shield and at the top of my voice screamed:

"Watch out for yourselves, or you'll be exceedingly sorry!"

Unwelcome Escorts

The men were taken aback and lowered their firearms. But they would not let me proceed until four of them had manned the running boards and the rest had formed an outer, walking barricade against the danger they said the night contained. I felt anything but secure and it was not until they had gone, suddenly, at the entrance to a forest, that I considered myself safe.

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After numerous false turns and detours in the black woods I reached Walbrzych, the first sizable town on my route. It was breakfast time and I was very hungry. The embassy Poles had said I would be well fed wherever I went, but if this prediction was to prove no more reliable than their information on the boundary, my chances were slim.

I went into a restaurant, sat down and when the waiter approached asked doubtfully, in English first, then in French and finally in German:

"Eggs?"

"Ja wohl," replied the waiter.

"Ham, too?"

He brought three eggs and a portion of ham the equivalent of the weekly ration of a large English family.

At a neighboring table two men were reading the morning papers. Secretary Marshall figured in the headlines. We got to talking.

They spoke German without an accent and, when they learned that I was a newspaperwoman, they wanted to know for what sort of newspaper I was working.

"A conservative one," I said, curious as to how they would take it.

The two smiled nostalgically.

"Conservative, oh, beautiful!" one of them said with great feeling.

They were not Germans, they stated. They were "autochthones"—

Polish by ancestry and blood, although, like their parents and grandparents, born under German domination. More than one million autochthones live in the recovered territories, Germans who, owing to some remote Polish background, have been nominated Poles.

Of the 32,000,000 Poles Hitler set out to enslave, not more than 24,000,000 survived. Over 6,000,000 civilians including 3,200,000 Jews perished under the Germans.

Many Germans Stayed On

An acute man-power shortage prevented the postwar government from relieving the recovered territories entirely of their German population. The majority was expelled according to the provisions of the Potsdam agreement, but an admitted 400,000—specialists, mining engineers, technicians—were allowed to stay. Together with the autochthones they form about one third of the present population of the reclaimed areas.

My neighbors in the restaurant didn't like their government and said so fairly soon, if in very low voices. Nor, for that matter, did they like the Russians, whom they considered beasts.

"But we are at their mercy," they lamented. "Look at the Marshall Plan and the chances it offered our country.

We wanted to go—even the government knew that we had better. But then the Soviets said no."

It deserves to be noted, though, that while in the early days of the Marshall talks this attitude was widespread among thinking Poles, including Socialists, it altered quickly and radically. By the end of August most Poles seemed to feel that the reindustrialization of Germany was America's real objective and that whatever aid non-German Europe might eventually receive would be too little, too late and too dearly paid for by a German power renaissance.

Figured at the official exchange rate, breakfast was expensive. The dollar rates 117 zlotys, and I paid 380 for my meal. Unofficially you can get up to 700 zlotys for one greenback, if you are ready to break the law and to search at great length for one of the few spots where such transactions take place. Poland's currency black marketeers can be sentenced to death if they are caught, and consequently they are not too easily found.

Except for a few beer-drinking soldiers, the autochthones and myself were the only guests in the place.

"People can't afford these prices," the waiter told me. "A skilled worker makes about 9,000 zlotys a month, just enough to buy twenty decent breakfasts."

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Things, however, were not as simple as all that. One of my autochthones was an accountant for a nationalized factory, and the other ran a private law practice. As a state employee the accountant was one of 8,000,000 entitled to ration cards. Apart from government functionaries, this third of the population includes "nationalized" workers, scientists, intellectuals and others considered essential. By and large these people are able to cover about 65 per cent of their minimum needs on the "controlled market" where food is exceedingly cheap. There, 11 zlotys will buy a pound of butter. Another 15 per cent of their requirements is filled on the "free market," where it takes 200 zlotys for a pound of butter. The remaining 20 per cent is left for extras.

The lawyer belonged, theoretically at least, among Poland's hungriest citizens. There are 3,000,000 so-called nonessential workers, including, besides lawyers, businessmen and private employees. My lawyer received no ration cards whatsoever and depended entirely on the free market. Actually he was making fair money, around 20,000 zlotys a month, and while he, too, spent most of his earnings on food, other commodities were still so scarce there wasn't much he could buy in nonessentials anyway.

Peasants Don't Fare Too Badly

Other nonration card holders are Poland's 13,000,000 peasants who are expected to feed themselves. On the whole they succeed in doing so and profess no dislike for the current system.

It appeared that Poland's population begins at Walbrzych. From here on, "recovered" Lower Silesia, though studded with ruins, looks like a going concern.

I moved on and when the car started to boil stopped at a medium-sized family farm for some water and talk, and received both from the old lady of the house.

"They're all out in the fields," she said in French, "even the children. There's too much to do for anyone to be idle."

Like everyone here, the family had received its slice of recovered land with the compliments of the state and was not, thus far, paying any taxes. While the Polish farmer has to meet his quota and surrender a part of his crops at ceiling price, he never deals directly with the authorities but delivers his share to a local agency composed of peasants. When I was there, the government was not telling him what to grow. But in spite of what sounded like an extremely friendly and liberal arrangement, my rustic hostess spoke no more highly of the government than had the urban autochthones.

"Half of Poland," she complained, "half of our country has been given to the Russian arch-enemy. He took our farm, too, and sent us packing. The soil is richer here, that much I grant you. But we don't belong here; I, for one, don't, although the children feel quite at home."

If the average historically minded Pole finds it hard to overcome his nation's traditional distrust and hatred of Russia, the people of the recovered territories have their special and additional axes to grind when it comes to the Soviet Union. The 1,689,000 *evacuees* from east of the Curzon line are automatically and fiercely anti-Russian. So are the Germans and autochthones. Only a small minority composed of government officials, nonpolitical treasure hunters, adventurers, pioneers from Central Poland and Jews, many of whom owe their lives to Russian protection, deviates from the anti-Russian feeling.

My next stop was Breslau, now called

Wroclaw, capital of Silesia and once a blooming metropolis of 750,000. I had known the place in prewar times, but hard as I looked I could not find one landmark, not one familiar sight to assist me in picking my way through this gigantic accumulation of rubble. Soviet artillery accounted for not more than 30 per cent of the destruction wrought here during 80 days of siege. The rest was done by German demolition squads in what was probably the most colossal "scorched city" operation of the war.

Today the rubble heap at Wroclaw shelters some 200,000 persons, most of whom seem to speak, or rather whisper, German more fluently than Polish. Virtually everybody here appears frightened of something or other. No sooner had I sat down for dinner in a ground-floor restaurant, which was all that remained of a four-story building, than the main cause of this general anxiety became clear to me.

After having addressed the waiter in English, I was joined almost immedi-

ately by an English couple who asked in a whisper whether they could be of any assistance. The waiter who had only just gone to fill my order, returned hastily and, glancing at the table at my back, muttered, "Achtung! Geheim!" ("Attention! A Secret one!")

The individual he referred to was a shabbily dressed man of no distinction who looked bored and sleepy. The waiter demonstratively cleared the suspect's table of its clean cutlery and an unused glass.

"That's how he knew," whispered my female friend. "They rarely consume anything—can't afford to, I suppose—but simply sit and listen. We have a disgusting lot of them around here."

Her husband, a physician, proved quite well informed on the city.

"The place looks awful," he said, "and I should wish, even from a sanitary viewpoint, that they'd start cleaning up. Factories, however, are held to be more important than living quarters, and perhaps they really are."

He said that 70 industrial establishments had thus far managed to reopen in, or near, Wroclaw and that they employed some 25,000 workers.

The industrial picture was even brighter than that, as I was to discover eventually. But Wroclaw officials would not say so. There was practically nothing

that they would say when it came to issuing any factual information.

"Go to Warsaw. There they'll surely know," I was told.

I started for Warsaw.

To demonstrate her disapproval of any such strenuous venture, my old car broke down in ever-shortening intervals. She boiled, coughed, jerked and whistled, and kept losing water, oil and gasoline. Time and again she simply refused to move at all, although she usually spared me the misery of a total collapse on the road, waiting until we were in front of a hotel before folding up. This was often in the middle of the night.

Feeling of Mistrust Is General

On one of these occasions I came to understand that neither fear nor dislike of the powers above is exclusive with the recovered territories but that many a citizen of central Poland shares the feeling of his brethren to the west.

It was 1:30 A.M. and the car would not

move and at any price. On this point, if on few others, the average resident of Warsaw sees eye to eye with his government.

"It's a matter of pride," I was told by the elderly owner of a small pub. "They didn't want us to have a capital any more, but we'll show them."

Oddly enough, his reference, spoken in French, was not to the Germans but to the Russians, who, to his mind, had deliberately failed to free the city at the critical moment.

"They don't want us to prosper," he declared, "yet things are far better now than they were last year."

At this point he was interrupted by a Polish customer, who seemed to resent our French conversation.

"Speak German, everybody!" he demanded drunkenly. "German, most beloved tongue in Poland."

When I left, the drunk left with me, without paying his bill, incidentally. He kept staggering along beside me and wouldn't even quit when I had arrived at my destination. The boys in the garage politely refused to rid me of my escort. Warsaw, they muttered, was full of people whom one had better not offend, and since this "gentleman" (he looked like a bum) seemed to like my company, they would rather not interfere. It was not until I produced my letter that the character, now entirely sober, took his embarrassed leave.

If there are things which the Polish government wishes to hide, the facts concerning the so-called recovered territories are not among them. A prodigious amount of relevant material has been issued and is readily available to foreign observers. According to these statistics, 33 per cent of Poland's entire coal output comes from mines that were formerly German. So does 50 per cent of her railway wagons, 25 per cent of her iron and 10 per cent of her steel. After the realization of the all-embracing three-year plan, now in its second year, the relative importance of the reclaimed areas will be greater still. By the end of 1947, 3,200,000 hectares of recovered land were to be under cultivation, as compared to the 832,000 hectares tilled in 1945. If all goes well, Poland will be an exporter of food by 1950. Even today she is an exporter of coal, the only European country now in that enviable position. Of the 58,000,000 tons expected to be produced, 28,000,000 are marked for export.

Nationalism Strong in Warsaw

While in Warsaw I listened to dozens of Poles, both within the government and without. Among ordinary citizens Communists are hard to find. By and large, people profess to a nonpolitical, or even an antipolitical, attitude which resents "Socialism" as a manifestation of Russian influence rather than as an economic or political doctrine. Nationalism proved a passion with virtually everyone to whom I talked, and the very tangible successes which the nation achieved under the current regime somewhat mitigated its unpopularity.

Seemingly unaware of the sentiments they arouse, top-ranking officials appeared cheerful and confident. When I went to see General Victor Grosz, director of the press department of the Foreign Office and senior spokesman for the government, the Harrison Report had just resulted in an American refusal of aid to the Poles.

"While we are, of course, most disappointed," General Grosz told me, "the report had its pleasing side, too. What could be more satisfactory than this official American admission that we are doing well?"



move another inch. The hotel looked pleasant enough, although its owner resented being aroused from his sleep, particularly since there wasn't an empty bed in the house. Two surplus guests, both of them Poles, sat on hard chairs in the corridor, vainly trying to get a little sleep. I produced my letter, and suddenly there was action. The elderly proprietor dashed to his room and came out dragging his own bed across the hall and put it into a tiny office. The tiny office had to be emptied of all its furniture before the bed would fit in.

Meanwhile, my car proved to have collapsed on the wrong side of the street and a young policeman came to say it had to be moved. Even while he helped me push the automobile to where it belonged, he breathlessly professed to be a very unhappy man.

"I shouldn't say so," he said, "not with this uniform on. But then, I've been with the British during the war and I've seen what democratic liberty is."

He wouldn't answer, though, when I asked in what respect his liberty had been encroached upon here.

It was only in Warsaw that I found civic reconstruction in full swing. After the ill-fated insurrection of August, 1944, and the "punitive action" that followed, virtually nothing remained of the capital. Now it must be rebuilt, as quickly as pos-

sible and at any price. On this point, if on few others, the average resident of Warsaw sees eye to eye with his government.

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A detailed UNRRA report on the subject, however, shows that Poland's economy cannot possibly develop much further unless it is aided from the outside. "Without industrial investment from abroad, Poland cannot expand her industrial production appreciably beyond present levels," the report said.

Russia had not, at the time I was there, seen fit to interfere seriously with Poland's internal affairs, but any Polish failure resulting from the rejection of any loan application would make the Poles completely dependent on the U.S.S.R.'s meager offerings.

I found Poland's affairs were being run efficiently. Prices had been stabilized; the Polish treasury showed a surplus for the year, and while Polish trade with the Soviet Union was higher than ever before, it represented only 43 per cent of the nation's total exports, with 57 per cent going to other countries. Only the Communists claim that "democratic freedom" has had much of a part in the successes boasted by the government. But then democracy, as understood in the Western nations, has no roots in Poland, where a medieval feudal society was succeeded by a Fascist one and where the vast majority of the people had never been permitted to decide anything for themselves. This was pointed out to me by an intellectual in Warsaw who was not a Communist.

People Don't Want Feudal Rule

"Liberty, though duly rationed, is more readily available now than it has been at any time in the past," he said. "We simply cannot afford democratic freedom in the Western sense. Our people are patriotic and hard working, provided they are told what to do. Since they want Poland to thrive they do not—could not possibly—want the return to power of the gentry under whose feudal regime millions of Poles had to go to work in foreign countries, while other millions were left to starve at home. If those seasoned antidemocrats were offered a nice democratic chance, if they were 'free' to stage a comeback, they'd most certainly do so and that would be the end of freedom."

In the course of five crowded weeks, I covered some 1,100 miles of Polish ground and came in touch with scores of persons of all political shades. Wherever I stopped I found people busy, friendly, healthily ambitious, and almost incredibly optimistic. Unlike most of the Western Europeans, they seem happily

oblivious of the threat of another war. When I was there, the "Information Center," backed by the Communists of nine countries, including Poland, had not yet been set up, but it is a safe guess that the average hard-working Pole has little time and less love for any such Soviet affair. Nor, on the other hand, is he likely to grasp the seriousness with which "the West," especially the United States, views this new Cominform. That Polish Communist participation in the Belgrade venture might be deemed an unfriendly act by the country as such, is surely beyond him.

To his mind, Silesia; Pomerania and one half of East Prussia have long since become an integral part of Poland, a

part in which the nation has invested an irretrievable amount of work and faith. In the industrial and mining centers of Silesia the chimneys smoke 24 hours a day. The "recovered" Baltic ports of Szczecin (Stettin), Gdansk (Danzig) and Gdynia (Gdingen), which in 1945 seemed wrecked beyond repair, operate today at 70 per cent of capacity, with 60 per cent of their quays and 30 per cent of their machinery repaired or replaced. Anywhere in the reclaimed areas, except for the far western fringes, you may drive from dawn to dusk without passing an untilled field.

Flimsy Historic Basis for Claims

But Poland's "historical right" to her "recovered territories" is upheld with a fervor hardly justified by historical fact. To establish this title, government historians and propagandists hark back to the year 1100 when Polish tribes penetrated to the Oder and Neisse rivers and Poland's western frontiers were identical with those agreed upon at Potsdam. As for her present northern boundaries, they too are alleged to have historical precedent. The Polish state reached its greatest expansion along the Baltic Coast in the 12th century, only to lose most of its western and northern territories in the two centuries that followed.

Having lost, or "ceded," almost half of her entire prewar territory to the Soviet Union after World War II, Poland cannot possibly survive without the "reclaimed" lands. Poles therefore will shun no effort to demonstrate to the world their resolution and ability to solve all problems at stake. They will never agree to return, wholly or in essential parts, the acquisitions on which they base all their hopes for a happier future. Nothing short of successful military intervention from the West, or a super-Munich abetted by the Soviet Union, could sever the "recovered territories" from a Poland which, after untold sufferings, is grimly determined to recover.

THE END

