

ITEM No 3343/53

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POLAND

MINING (1706)

KOWARY, Poland's Only Large Uranium Mine, Is Nearing
Depletion; Conditions At The Mine.

SOURCE FRANKFURT: 20-year-old electrician who, after two years training at the Electrical Trade School at RUDA SLASKA from 1948 - 50 was employed at the uranium mine near KOWARY, Lower Silesia, from 1950 to April, 1952.

Source is an orphan and had hoped to find in this "People's Democracy" working conditions and wages which would in some way compensate for his difficult childhood. His complete disillusionment led him to escape over the Czechoslovak border to Western Germany in June 1952.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: April 1952

EV L. COMMENT: In view of a delay of nearly a year since the source left the described mines, this report does not present much up to date interest.

Item 10207/52, based probably on the narration of the same source, brought some news about this establishment in August 1952.

See also Item 3509/52.

The KOWARY mine is Poland's only large uranium mine, and the number of Russian experts employed there indicates that great importance is attached to this mine by the Russian and Polish Reds despite the fact that there are many indications that the supply of uranium is almost exhausted, according to source, a young electrician who worked there from 1950 to 1952.

This mine is so well guarded, and so carefully shrouded in secrecy that as far as source knows it has never been mentioned in either press or radio.

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While other industries often suffer from an acute shortage of materials for repairs and maintenance, such as fuses, copper wire and machine parts, KOWARY received such an abundance of material that source never had to complain that a job had to be left undone because of lack of material or spare parts.

This privileged mine covers an extensive area about 2 km from KOWARY and 17 km from JELENIA GORA. It is several hundred years old, having been mined previously by the Germans for other metals. It is quite deep, source estimates the main shaft to be about 600 meters, but some parts of the galleries are under water, and although attempts have been made to pump them out, the work proved too expensive and was abandoned. Drilling goes on constantly in an endeavour to find out uranium deposits before KOWARY is utterly depleted.

At the time Source started work in 1950, about 4,000 miners were employed at the mine, 600 of them soldiers from the barracks at JELENIA GORA who also worked as miners; but by the time Source left the number had dwindled to 3,000, an obvious sign that operations in the mine were gradually being reduced. Another indication of the shrinking yield of the mine was the fact that at one time the Russians came every second day with seven trucks to take away the packed lead-lined cases of uranium active-stones, but by 1952 they were only coming once every five days with five or seven trucks. Furthermore, it was rumored among the workers that there would be no further replacement of miners at the end of two years, as was usually done, because the supply of uranium would be exhausted before then.

The entire area is strictly guarded by members of the KBW (Korpus Bezpieczenstwa Wewnetrznego) who change guard every four hours and are armed with machine pistols. During holidays and festivals they replace their pistols with machine guns, evidently because they feel that the danger of sabotage is greater on such days than on others.

Every attempt is made to keep the real object of the mine secret, it being known only as "Industry Works No. 1" "Zaklady Przemyslowe Wyodrebnione R-1). Workers have to sign a pledge of secrecy when starting work at the mine and again when leaving it. At one workers' meeting the suggestion was even made that miners should be

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referred to by other names, such as "plasterer," "painter" etc., in order to camouflage their real function, but this rather ridiculous suggestion was never carried into effect. At the same time, miners were authorized to demand the papers of any persons outside who discussed the mine and, if necessary, to call the police to deal with them.

All important work at the mine was either done by Russians or under strict Russian supervision; the director was a Russian named PAVLIN (fnu), who was assisted by a Polish deputy named KUREK (fnu). Russians worked in the laboratory and technical departments, and specially picked and trained Russians and Poles were used to handle the Geiger counters.

The UB, of course, had its agents among the miners, usually men who were not known as Party members, so that they would be less easily suspected by the miners, and the UB ruthlessly used anything they found out against any miner to press him into their service as a spy.

Miners were searched thoroughly when entering and leaving the mine by members of the KBW and other guards recruited from among the miners for this purpose. Source knew of 12 miners picked for such duty. A man who was rash enough to remove anything from the mine was seriously punished. Source recalled the case of a young miner who was found with two small stones in his pocket. He was immediately arrested and sent away. His family never knew what became of him.

The explosion of a transformer in 1951, believed to have been caused by sabotage, resulted in an overall tightening of security measures. Every man entering the mine had a card with a letter indicating the section to which he belonged. Source himself had a card with the letter B to show that he was permitted to those sections where electrical equipment was installed. In addition to the card, however, he had to be in the possession of written orders from the chief electrician describing the repairs to be done, and a guard accompanied him whenever he had to enter any important installation. Source was never able to gain a clear idea of the work carried on in the laboratory for instance, because he was always strictly watched when doing repairs there. Every building with machines in it was under heavy guard.

The most trivial breakdown was attributed to sabotage by the nervous Reds, and anyone open to suspicion, however innocent would be dragged off to the KBW barracks in KOWARY and subjected to days

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of intense questioning by UB agents. Source himself was taken there once and quizzed for three days after a switchboard burned out, before he was able to convince his interlocutors that he was innocent.

Labor in the mine was both difficult and unhealthy while safety measures were sadly neglected, according to source. He observed, for instance, when he worked in the flooded part of the mine that the lack of fresh air was such that even the Communists realized the necessity of sending the miners up for a lungful of fresh air every two hours.

The miners worked in three eight hour shifts accompanied always by 45 men with Geiger counters. The drilled ore was sent to the surface where it was sorted, the active ore coming into crushing machines while the worthless metal was thrown on the slag heap. The crushed ore proceeded from the crushing machines on a moving band to the sorting room where it was, with the aid of Geiger counters, again graded and finally packed into lead-lined crates by the soldiers. No civilians took part in the packing operation.

These soldiers had been promised a reduction of their military service in return for working as miners, but source was unable to say how much time was remitted, or for that matter, whether the promise was even kept. They received the same pay as the civilian miners only 100 Zl of their salary was paid out, the remainder on paper. In practice being deposited in a saving account pending their discharge.

Civilian miners averaged a wage of 700 Zl. a month, slightly better pay than that given in ordinary mines. Some extra pay was given for especially harmful work, and also a free $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of milk daily. Source received 80 Zl. a day the time he worked in the flooded part of the mine, enabling him to buy a suit and a pair of shoes which he would never have been able to afford out of his normal salary. He also received free milk because he worked on the accumulators. From the 700 Zl. he paid 450 Zl. for food at the mine canteen and 6 Zl. for his room in the mine settlement.

Miners were recruited from all over Poland, but Source never saw any German among them. Some of the miners were so-called "Frenchmen". Poles who had emigrated to France during the years before

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World War II when it was hard to find work in Poland. These men became Communists in France and had returned to Poland believing they would find Utopia. They were all greatly disappointed and most of them bitterly regretted their return.

All these miners were housed in the mine settlement about 3 km from the pit. It had been originally built by the Germans and was later added to by Poles. During the time source was there 63 new housing units were constructed.

Two of these units were given over to single men, three to four men to a room; the others were inhabited by families. Single men has also the use of a kitchen with gas cooker for every four rooms so that they could cook their own food if they wished. Source preferred to eat in the mine canteen, however, where the meals were tolerable.

Men who suffered ill effects from work at the mine might - if the mine doctor would grant a certificate and the workers' trade union would agree to it - be lucky enough to spend a few weeks in the mine Rest Center at KARPACZ. This home was built in 1950 to accommodate 70 miners. Although the men continued to work in the mine while they were there, being driven to and from work in trucks, they received special food and medical treatment. Meals were served day and night whenever the men returned from work. Source said that food and treatment were very good here and both were free. However, in order to get in, the worker had to be in the good graces of the workers' trade union organization. Source was lucky enough to spend 45 days there on one occasion.

In April 1952 source began to feel that his health was breaking down as a result of his unhealthy work and requested his discharge. After signing the usual pledge not to talk about the mine he was released without difficulty.

CORR. COMMENT: In view of the relatively old date of observation only those conditions have been described in some detail which are not likely to have changed in the meantime.