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Between fraternal help and economic realism. The employment of Polish workers in Czechoslovakia (1945–1950)¹

Słowa kluczowe: robotnicy zagraniczni, polityka pracownicza, gospodarka planowa, czechosłowacko-polskie relacje

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Abstract: The paper deals with the topic of the employment of the Polish workers in post-war Czechoslovakia. Analysed are mainly the features of the Czechoslovak workforce policy with some insight into the political context of the Czechoslovak-Polish relations. Despite the tensions, the employment of Polish citizens in Czechoslovak coal mines continued after the war in line with the laws of supply and demand. The advantages of the temporary border crossing, were enjoyed and quietly tolerated by both parties. First, with the start of the five- and six-year Plans in both countries, this development conformed with the demands of the centrally directed policy for the distribution of workforce stemming from a planned economy. From its very beginning, recruitment of Polish agricultural workers represented a method employed by the government in its attempt to cope with the permanent shortage of workers in the post-war Czechoslovak labour market. Just like the other emergency measures, it was accompanied by disproportions in economic costs. The influence of political symbols which were detrimental to the economy were also among the specific attributes of this arrangements. The development in both cases reveals a change in the economic as well as political thinking on the threshold of the communist rule.

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Introduction

This is a study of the employment of foreign workers from Poland in Czechoslovakia, principally within the context of the Czechoslovak post-war labour policies. As was the situation in many countries after WWII, Czechoslovakia faced far-reaching changes within its labour market, both in terms of its structure and the demographics. Reconstruction of the economy damaged by the war and occupation, and which was increasingly focused on heavy industry, took place during the first two years after the war when approximately one-third of the population (the Sudeten Germans) were being resettled. This decline in population was accompanied by a decline in the labour force. Although the economic consequences of this demographic revolution have not yet been properly evaluated, it has certainly resulted in a revolutionary transformation of the labour market. These were quantitative as well as structural changes. Their fundamental consequence was a shortage of workforce which manifested itself in this period as a stable feature of further economic development². In a centrally planned economy, the unavoidable consequence of the deficit was formulation of a whole range of labour policies ensuring distribution of the workforce according to the priorities and a wide spectrum of long-term and short-term measures, as well as an extensive administrative apparatus. The management of the workforce became an integral and central part of Czechoslovakia's planned economy.

One of the methods employed by the government in its attempt to cope with the shortage of workers was employment of foreigners. In Czechoslovakia during that period, various professions required recruitment of labourers from Bulgaria, Romania, Italy and Poland, while a transfer of workers from other countries was also considered. Within this context, employment of Poles had its idiosyncrasy due to the fact that the two countries had been neighbours with a specific relationship.

² Previous studies on labour policies cf. J. Balcar, J. Kučera, *Von der Rüstammer des Reiches zum Maschinenwerk des Sozialismus: Wirtschaftslenkung in Böhmen und Mähren 1938 bis 1953*, pp. 359–367; V. Steinová, *National Mobilization of Labour Force in Czechoslovakia (1945–1949)*, *Journal on European History of Law* 8 (2017) 1, pp. 135–141; J. Rákosník, *Sovětské sociálního státu: lidově demokratický režim a sociální práva občanů v Československu 1945–1960*, Prague 2010; V. Průcha, *Státní regulace pracovního trhu v Československu od konce 2. světové války do začátku dvouletky (1947–1947)*, [in:] *Studie k moderním dějinám. Sborník prací k. 70 narozeninám Vlastislava Laciny*, eds. J. Harna, P. Prokš, Prague 2001, pp. 409–424.

In the case of Poland, there was no general labour shortage despite the equally significant demographic changes and an acute growth of the industry. On the contrary, contrary to the socialist thesis of the right to work enshrined within the constitution of 'people's' Poland, the local labour market was regularly plagued by a shortage of job opportunities referred to as latent unemployment. In addition to providing employment, the labour policies formulated by the local authorities focused mainly on regulating supply and demand in the regions³.

Therefore, the Polish labour force employed before the early 1950s in Czechoslovakia can be divided into two groups. One was made up of workers from the industrial agglomeration around Ostrava, who had commuted from their homes in nearby Poland. The other group was represented by Polish workers contractually recruited for the Czechoslovak agricultural sector and spread out across Czechoslovakia; after some time they also remained in permanent residence.

After WWII, Polish workers were attracted to the Czechoslovak economy by several factors including less severe war damage, a rapid start and more dynamic recovery, a sense of greater stability and also, for a short time, better supply. A case in point is a group of 35 Polish citizens in Jindřichův Hradec in South Bohemia who, according to official reports, arrived there after Germany's retreat from Poland. In mid-1946, they were still employed in the area and endeavoured to remain in Czechoslovakia, allegedly due to the poor conditions in Poland⁴. As we will see, however, the Czechoslovak industry failed to remain attractive for long due to the wage situation.

The Czechoslovak labour policy also relied on employing contractual workers from other countries, albeit with certain provisos. At a meeting held on 4 I 1946, Czechoslovakia started negotiations first with Italy, and then Bulgaria and Yugoslavia⁵. Proposals from June of the same year to mobilize workforces were accompanied by four conditions of the transfer of workers from abroad: 1) simultaneous substitution of foreigners by mechanization, particularly in brick production, 2) foreigners

³ J. Kochanowski, *Rewolucja międzypaździernikowa. Polska 1956–1957*, Warszawa 2017; K. Młonek, *Bezrobocie w Polsce w XX wieku w świetle badań*, Warszawa 1999.

⁴ ABS [Archiv bezpečnostních složek, Prague], 304-Různé bezpečnostní spisy po roce 1945, box 173, Vol. 6, Weekly report from the district head of the National Security Corps in Jindřichův Hradec from 29 VII 1946.

⁵ NA [Národní archiv, Prague], MPSV [Ministerstvo práce a sociální péče], box. 417, Inv. No. 861, inscription 2350, Letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the MPSV from 1 II 1946 regarding the agreement with Italy.

to be employed in investment activities [construction] of permanent nature, 3) the price of contracts abroad to be advantageous for Czechoslovakia and 4) acceptance of skilled workers who could pass on their experience and, conversely, unqualified ancillary workers⁶. In practice, however, neither of these conditions was ever met.

Chronologically, this issue can be divided into two phases. The first one took place when there was still tension between the two countries. Back then the employment of Polish workers in the industry was unregulated and reflected an interesting aspect of the local nationalist policy with the Czechoslovak-Polish conflict in Těšín in tow. The de-escalation of the conflict decreed by the Soviet Union and concluded by the Czechoslovak-Polish Treaty of Fraternity in the spring of 1947 created the preliminary conditions for employment of Poles in Czechoslovakia to become the subject of a bilateral agreement on cooperation between the two countries. However, this was to happen after the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. At that time, the issue of Polish employees in Czechoslovakia became the subject of intense negotiations between the two countries, as well as within their bureaucratic and party apparatuses. This study focuses on both the bilateral negotiations and the internal Czechoslovak debate. Several academics have examined in their publications the issue of workers in the Ostrava region⁷. However, the recruitment of workers for agriculture from 1948 to 1950 remains relatively unknown.

Polish workers in the industrial region of Ostrava

There had been a long tradition of employing Polish workers in mining and related industries in the Ostrava region, going back to the time before the division of Těšín Silesia after the First World War. In the Interwar and post-war period, the former internal evolved to cross-border economic migration of people in search of work.

⁶ NA, MPSV, box. 60, Inv. No. 70, inscription 1216, Proposal to mobilize workforces IV. Department of the Ministry of Labour Protection and Social Welfare from 12 VI 1946.

⁷ D. Janák, *Neklidná hranice I–II (Slezské pohraničí v letech 1945–1947)*, Časopis Slezského zemského muzea B 42 (1993), pp. 63–75, 147–168; idem, *Dopad polské měnové reformy v roce 1950 na Ostravsku*, [in:] *Měnové systémy na území českých zemí 1892–1993. Sborník z konference v Opavě 22. a 23. března 1994*, Opava 1995, pp. 99–104; J. Friedl, *Češi a Poláci na Těšínsku 1945–1949*, Prague–Brno 2012; idem, *Otázka zaměstnávání dělníků z Polska na Těšínsku v letech 1945–1947*, Slezský sborník 108 (2010), pp. 79–91; V. Průcha, *Zahraniční dělníci v Československu 1946–1950*, [in:] *Studie k sociálním dějinám. Konference Sociální dějiny českých zemí v 18., 19. a 20. století (Praha, 10. a 11. X 2000)*, eds. J. Macháčová, J. Matějček, Kutná Hora 2001, pp. 248–260.

After 1945 in Czechoslovakia, demographic changes and the need for economic recovery led to an increased demand for labour and an influx of workers from Poland into Ostrava was one possible solution. In 1946, the management of the Ostrava-Karviná mines attempted to increase the number of workers from Poland and officially organised a transfer of 1,000 labourers⁸. The crisis in the Czechoslovak labour market significantly affected the expulsion of the German population to Germany. Imprisoned German males who had been forced to work in the Ostrava region⁹ were released by the authorities, respecting the principle that families were not to be broken up. Eventually, the overall shortage of workers led in practice to a complete halt to the expulsion of German miners¹⁰.

In the case of the Polish workers in the Ostrava region, the industrial companies as their employers played a crucial role. The companies' demands would often run counter to the centrally regulated autonomous labour policies. Reciprocal labour pooling was widespread. Some of the workers in the Ostrava region were undoubtedly employed semi-legally which further complicates a statistical study of the phenomenon, while at the same time it explains the contradictory data at hand. The situation is also illustrated by the Silesian refugees who had come from the new Polish territory to Czech Silesia in 1945, and as "Moravians" declared themselves a part of the Czechoslovak nation¹¹. According to instructions and communiques from the district office of labour protection in Opava, work was to be found for these people in agriculture, though the office itself admitted that the majority of the refugees were not registered and so there was no control over them¹². Later on, only a minimum number of these people were included by the Polish authorities in their estimates of the size of the Polish workforce in Czechoslovakia.

In 1946 there was an attempt to legalise the Polish workers in the Ostrava region with an eye to increasing their number. It was estimated that 2,000 had already worked in the region¹³. As in other cases, there was also a conflict of political interests here. The industrial region of Ostrava included the Czechoslovak part of Těšín,

⁸ J. Friedl, *Otázka zaměstnávání*, pp. 80–81.

⁹ T. Staněk, *Tábory v českých zemích 1945–1948*, Šenov u Ostravy 1996, pp. 55–56.

¹⁰ Idem, *Odsun Němců z Československa 1945–1947*, Prague 1991, p. 294.

¹¹ T. Dvořák, *Vnitřní odsun 1947–1953: závěrečná fáze „očisty pohraničí“ v politických a společenských souvislostech poválečného Československa*, Brno 2013, pp. 317–323.

¹² NA, MPSV, box 417, Inv. No. 861, inscription 2350, Report of the District Office of Labour Protection in Opava from 15 III 1946.

¹³ J. Friedl, *Otázka zaměstnávání*, p. 81.

a subject of disagreement between Czechoslovakia and Poland. The fate of the local Polish minority was a source of tension among the inhabitants as well as in the region's internal policies. On the one hand, any increase in the number of Poles in Těšín was perceived as a threat to security. On the other hand, maintaining industrial production across the Ostrava region was an economic priority. Therefore, for a long time the military and police bodies were hostile towards the idea of employing Poles and saw their permitted access to Czechoslovakia as a threat to the security policies aimed at "cleansing" the border areas of ethnic minorities. It was difficult to consider eviction of the local Polish population across the border or into the interior of the country due to their cross-border ties, at the same time supporting intensive small-scale border movement¹⁴. It was mainly the National Socialists who opposed employment of Polish nationals in Ostrava's industry¹⁵. Despite the fact that the Communists were the strongest proponents of the cleansing discourse elsewhere, they were much more accommodating towards the Polish inhabitants of Těšín, at least officially. Recommendations also came from Poland that Czechoslovak Poles should vote for the Communist Party in the 1946 elections¹⁶.

Halfway through 1946, the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior became more open to accepting workers from Poland. This was in part due to the urgent requests coming from the Ostrava-Karviná mines and attempts at reconciling the two countries by the respective Communist parties¹⁷. The employment of Polish workers could continue as part of small-scale cross-border movement¹⁸. Paradoxically, the Ministry of Industry, whose remit included employers urgently requesting Polish labour, including the Ostrava-Karviná mines, did not want to comply with these requests, referring to the risk to the national security, the danger of sabotage and the suspicious fact that Poland was willing to give up its own workforce to help Czechoslovakia. This indicated a hidden agenda. There must have been political

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 83; T. Dvořák, *Vnitřní odsun*, pp. 323–330.

¹⁵ Czechoslovak National Socialist Party [Československá strana národně socialistická].

¹⁶ *Zaolzie w świetle szyfrogramów polskiej placówki dyplomatycznej w Pradze oraz Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych w Warszawie (1945–1949)*, ed. J. Friedl, Český Těšín 2007, document No. 108, p. 128.

¹⁷ NA, ÚPV-T [Úřad předsednictva vlády – tajná spisovna], box 308, Inv. No. 1634, inscription 127/1/2, The record discusses the Silesian question from 26 VI 1946.

¹⁸ See NA, ÚPV-B [Úřad předsednictva vlády – běžná spisovna], i. j. 4509, inscription, 1281/16/1, box. 971, Letter from the Ministry of the Interior 3 VII 1946, cited according to J. Friedl, *Otázka zaměstnávání*, p. 84.

motives behind the skewed logic of the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of the Interior: competition between the parties, specifically between Václav Nosek (the Communist Minister of the Interior) and Bohumil Laušman (the Social Democrat Minister of Industry)¹⁹. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defence remained firm in its opposition²⁰.

In the autumn of 1946, the crisis accompanying the Czechoslovak-Polish treaty of friendship fuelled the fear that Poland was trying to use cross-border labour migration to export Polish inhabitants to the contested areas in Czechoslovakia²¹. There were also opinions that in the dispute over the territory, Poland could claim Czechoslovakia unable to manage the economy of Těšín Silesia without Polish workers. In an international context, this argument reflected the criticism faced by the occupied Poland in the formerly German territories. At the basis of this criticism were doubts about Poland's potential to effectively populate and stabilize this territory²². In Czechoslovakia there were repeated demands to use Polish labourers solely within the interior of Czechoslovakia²³.

The contradictory positions on the Czechoslovak side are very visible in the negotiations conducted by the Czechoslovak government. Although by the end of January, most of the departments had agreed not to support further recruitment of Polish workers, on 5 and 14 March the Presidium suggested that the government should continue with it. Ultimately, due to the protests from the foreign minister, Jan Masaryk, the government postponed the issue on 28 March. The central argument was to prevent strengthening of the Polish position in Těšín before the end of the negotiations on an additional protocol for the treaty of friendship, which was supposed to include the national rights of Poles in Těšín. In an attempt to deflect the

¹⁹ Ibidem, Letter from the Ministry of Industry 24 VII 1946. It is interesting that in the case of cleansing the border of Germans, the position of both ministries was the exact opposite, cf. T. Dvořák, *Vnitřní odsun*, pp. 96–100.

²⁰ See: J. Friedl, *Otázka zaměstnávání*, p. 84.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 85; idem, *Češi a Poláci*, pp. 183–184.

²² Cf. T. Dvořák, *Pohraničí a Ziemie odzyskane. K vybraným aspektům sídelní politiky v poválečné střední Evropě*, Časopis Matice moravské 122 (2003), pp. 447–490; M.G. Esch, „*Gesunde Verhältnisse*“. *Deutsche und polnische Bevölkerungspolitik in Ostmittel-europa 1939–1950*, Marburg 1998, p. 48; W. Borodziej, *Die Deutschen östlich von Oder und Neiße 1945–1950. Dokumente aus polnischen Archiven*, Bd. 1, *Zentrale Behörden, Wojewodschaft Allenstein*, eds. W. Borodziej, H. Lemberg, Marburg 2000, p. 53, footnote 74.

²³ J. Friedl, *Otázka zaměstnávání*, p. 86.

economic arguments, Masaryk stated that the Polish miners were not in fact of benefit to the mines “because they sow discord among the miners and cut production”²⁴.

The signing of the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement on 10 III 1947²⁵ failed to be a significant turning point in the attitudes towards employing Poles. Public opinion and officialdom continued to be reserved. In April and June 1947, the StB (secret police) in Czech Těšín issued reports warning of attempts by Polish authorities to force people who were interested in working in Czechoslovakia to remain there permanently in order to strengthen Polish settlement in the region²⁶. However, the views of the head of the Těšín office of the StB became increasingly distant from the position of the senior Ministry of the Interior²⁷. In the context of the negotiations over the status and national rights of the Polish minority in Těšín, a scandal erupted in the spring and summer of 1947 concerning the dismissal of Polish workers from the Třinec iron and steel works (an enterprise of importance to the defence of the state), on the basis of pre-war legislation²⁸. The case destabilized national relations directly in the local structures of the Communist Party, at the same time offering a pretext for criticizing the accommodating policies of the Communist Party, particularly on the part of the National Socialists²⁹. Interdepartmental debates continued to demonstrate concerns about the increased Polish influence in the region. In 1947, the government did not resume direct negotiations of the employment of Poles in the Ostrava region, therefore the issue of official recruitment was not resolved. In connection with the negotiations over the establishment of a Polish consulate in Ostrava on 1 VII 1947, the government (or the National Socialists, to be more precise) once more gave warnings about the dangers of permanent settlement of Polish workers in Těšín. The Communist prime minister, Klement Gottwald, defensively pointed out that workers from Poland could not receive permanent residency and that their employment had to be limited to small-scale cross-border movement. At

²⁴ NA, Klement Gottwald 1938–1953, a. j. 1494, Vol. 143, Notes from a meeting of the Czechoslovak government held on 28 III 1947, pp. 36–37.

²⁵ A treaty on friendship and mutual aid between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Republic of Poland. [Smlouva o přátelství a vzájemné pomoci mezi Československou republikou a republikou Polskou].

²⁶ NA, ÚPV-T, box 308, inscription 127/1/2, Reports from the State security [Státní bezpečnost] offices in Český Těšín from 29 IV 1947 and 11 VI 1947.

²⁷ T. Dvořák, *Vnitřní odsun*, pp. 329–330.

²⁸ Defence of the State Act [Zákon o obraně státu] (Act No. 131/1936 Sb. z. a n.).

²⁹ J. Friedl, *Češi a Poláci*, pp. 226–230.

the same time, data from the time in question show that 3,000 Polish workers would cross the border on a daily basis³⁰.

Clearly, despite the mistrust which suggested limiting or ending the employment of Polish workers, the practice continued and the administration did not oppose seriously the cross-border movement of the Polish workforce. On the contrary, the National Provincial Council in Ostrava allowed holders of Polish permits to travel across their entire region³¹. This leads to a question if the administration was able to control the Polish workers' dispersion into areas outside of Těšín. Some figures suggest that the overall number of Polish citizens working in the region reached 7,000³². Other sources state that by October 1947, Polish citizens had obtained more than 13,000 work permits. The state security, however, had only registered 2,900 Polish "cross-overs"³³. A retrospective report from the Ministry of Social Welfare from late March 1950 states that the number of workers during the first Two-Year Plan (1947) amounted to 8,000, and that the same number was calculated for the first year of the Five-Year Plan (1949)³⁴. Clearly, the differences in these numbers are due to the employers' liberal and semi-legal practices and employment policies. It is equally difficult to differentiate Polish citizens who crossed the border in some time intervals from people who did not have Czechoslovak citizenship but in fact lived there. The reliability of other data is further reduced by the fact that, as we will see, it was used as arguments during the negotiations which took place later over the international agreement.

Although from 1946 to 1947 the issue of recruitment of Polish workers in the Ostrava region was always accompanied by national tensions, with the recruitment never gaining governmental approval, the number of labourers who worked in the Ostrava region continued to grow. The Communist coup in February 1948 finally ended the internal political jockeying for power over the national policies, which removed a significant, albeit a more theoretical, obstacle to cross-border economic migration. However, the friendly overtures from the Communists and the sharp-

³⁰ *Státní politika vůči polské menšině na Těšínsku v letech 1945–1949. Výběrová edice dokumentů*, ed. J. Friedl, Praha–Český Těšín 2011, document No. 135, Part of a report from the 94th meeting of the Czechoslovak government, pp. 459–469.

³¹ D. Janák, *Dopad polské*, p. 100.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ J. Friedl: *Otázka*, p. 90.

³⁴ NA, MPrS [Ministerstvo pracovních sil], box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Material sent on 27 March to Rudolf Slánský, fol. 488.

ly anti-Polish rhetoric of the National Socialists should be attributed to political opportunism. Concerns about threats to the nation's security were also shared by Communist officers and officials, as testified in a security report from the Provincial National Council in Ostrava by Josef Lampa. He suggested isolating the Poles coming over from Poland from members of the Polish minority in Těšín³⁵. In spite of the political declarations, concerns over the national issue remained an integral part of the thinking of Czechoslovak Communist politicians and officials even after their definitive seizure of power in 1948.

Attempts to regulate the employment of Polish workers in the Ostrava region

The international negotiations on a contractual agreement for employment of Polish workers in the Ostrava region, which began in late July 1949, were initiated by the Czechoslovak employers in the region. They were feeling the effects of the acute labour shortage in the first year of the Five-Year Plan according to which the Ostrava region was to develop rapidly as the main centre of heavy industry.

In the summer of 1949 this led to negotiations between delegations from the regional National Council in Ostrava, the Polish employment office (Urząd Zatrudnienia) and representatives of the local government in Katowice. The meeting took place in Katowice between 18 and 21 July, where it was agreed that Czechoslovakia depended on Polish help to address the labour shortage in the Ostrava region. The Polish side declared its intention to provide Ostrava with Polish labourers, but based on conditions completely different from those for the cross-border labour market. The Polish representatives were aware of the pressure on the Czechoslovak side in these negotiations and, therefore, tried to forward their own interests to the maximum.

The Polish side obviously attempted to gain control over the movement of its citizens in addition to the economic potential represented by their work in Czechoslovakia. As it has been indicated, both parties had different ideas about the status of the operations. The Czechoslovak government requested 6,000 workers, including the quota of the "cross-overs" already employed in Ostrava but whose permits had been revoked by the Polish authorities. Czechoslovaks stated that the employment of Polish workers in Ostrava had begun in 1945, reaching a climax in 1947, when

³⁵ J. Friedl, *Otázka*, p. 82.

7,000 workers from Poland supposedly operated on the Ostrava labour market. By mid-1949, local employers registered 4,500 Polish workers. The Polish negotiating position was based on the amount of money being transferred by Poles from Czechoslovakia to Poland, and estimated the number of employees in Ostrava at between eleven and twelve thousand. A third of them must have worked in Czechoslovakia illegally³⁶.

At the centre of these complex negotiations were the economic conditions accompanying any recruitment drives in the future. According to Czechoslovak documents, from May 1948 until April 1949, i.e. in a year, nearly 210 million Czechoslovak crowns were transferred to Poland in wages and insurance benefits. The Czechoslovak side had to pay for these costs in the supply of goods as part of the clearing arrangement between the two countries.

The Polish standpoint outlined to the Czechoslovak representatives in Katowice was that the clearing balance which emerged as a result of the increased number of Polish workers in Czechoslovakia, was to be compensated for with machinery and investment units instead of “trinkets from Jablonec jewellers”. Another demand was to allow Polish workers to transfer more money to Czechoslovakia, thereby enabling them to buy more goods in the Ostrava region thus shifting the supply burden to the detriment of Czechoslovakia.

Poland also expected economic optimization of the payments for the coal bonuses included in the miners' wages. As a matter of principle, Czechoslovak mines did not deliver the coal bonus to Poland by rail; Polish miners were only allowed to transfer coal using their own transport if they lived close to the border. The others received financial compensation according to tabulated prices³⁷. Poland now proposed replacing the coal bonus from Polish mines with an exchange for different goods. There also came requests for the provision of food, work clothes and shoes³⁸.

³⁶ NA, MPSV, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Record of a meeting held 18–21 VII 1949 in Katowice between the Regional National Council Ostrava and Employment Office Katowice.

³⁷ NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Letter from The Czechoslovak Mines to Ministry of Social Welfare from 1 VIII 1949 regarding the coal benefit.

³⁸ NA, MPPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Material sent on 27 March to Rudolf Slánský, fol. 486–488; NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Record of a meeting held 18–21 VII 1949 in Katowice between the Regional National Committee Ostrava and the Employment Office in Katowice.

In late July and early August, the issue attracted the attention of the Czechoslovak government and its individual departments, lukewarm to the Polish requests. Antonín Zápotocký, the Prime Minister, expressed grave doubts. In early August, a related internal Czechoslovak meeting was held in the Ministry of Social Welfare where a representative of the Foreign Minister complained that the diplomatic corps had not been informed of the negotiations in Katowice, and communicated the position of Minister Vladimír Clementis that the issue had to be discussed by the government. The Presidium returned to the internal negotiations and the arguments related to the national security. The problem was anticipated in July by the former Polish ambassador, Josef Hejret, in the first statement of the foreign ministry. There was a clear change in the discourse with an attempt to define security threats on the political rather than national level. There is a parallel in the distinction between the East German “proletariat” and the West German “fascists” as part of the transformation in the Communists’ national policies³⁹. In the Foreign Ministry statement, Poles in general were not regarded as a threat to the security, only Polish workers who had been First Republic refugees in Český Těšín (and, therefore, were regarded as local nationalist activists), from which it was inferred that they had a negative attitude towards Czechoslovakia. In the statement, Těšín was referred to as “one of the most aggressive border territories”. Here Poland was seen as a peoples’ democratic state which had not yet managed to re-educate all of its citizens. As for foreign workers, an objection was expressed that there had been no positive experiences with the recruited labourers.

Of key importance to the negotiations was Poland’s demand that any released Polish labour would be used to manufacture products ordered by Poland, specifically the machinery for two coking plants under production at the Vítkovice iron works. The communication between the departments on either side of the border led to a vicious circle whereby the Polish side agreed to provide workers on the condition that the deadlines for the delivery of these investment units were shortened. After some hesitation the Czechoslovak ministry of industry promised to follow suit but only on condition that more labourers would be provided⁴⁰. In late July, the Ministry of Social Welfare (department Ia/1) put forward an idea which would have

³⁹ T. Dvořák, *Vnitřní odsun*, pp. 330–339; M. Spurný, *Nejsou jako my. Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945–1960)*, Prague 2012.

⁴⁰ NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Record of Ministry of Social Welfare, Report from Ia/1 Department regarding the Notification of the Ministry of Industry from 30 VII 1949.

propaganda value for the Polish workforce – they would be allowed to join professions which were important for supplying Poland, thus they would also be helping their own country⁴¹.

There was a difference between the optimism of the politicians and the scepticism of the civil service in the negotiations between the departments. In mid-1949, representatives of the Ministry of Industry expressed great interest in increasing the Polish workforce, at the same time clearly doubting that it would be possible to increase or accelerate the deliveries of machines and investment units to Poland. Representatives of the financial sector stated that the overall balance of trade with Poland amounted to 650 million crowns and that the state could only take on further commitments on the assumption that Ostrava's industrial investment exceeded the value of the costs of the Polish workforce⁴². Arguments were also put forward that there was no point in an agreement with Poland as there would be no need to increase the labour force if they did not have to fulfil their supply commitments to Poland⁴³. The recruitment of Polish workers was undoubtedly seen as a solution more costly than recruiting workers from any national reserves. However, lack of housing ruled out the alternative. The situation in the Ostrava region was declared catastrophic. The fiasco with workforce recruitment was perceived as potentially detrimental to the Five-Year Plan.

In addition to the economic issues that were part of the negotiations on the continued employment of Polish workers in the Ostrava region, there was also an issue of reciprocity. There was an unspecified number of Czechoslovak citizens of Polish nationality. With their better education, often acquired in Poland, they applied to work as qualified officials on the Polish side of the border. The Polish authorities asked for them to be relieved from their posts in Czechoslovakia – as part of the planned distribution of the workforce, their jobs did not usually correspond with their qualifications. Despite the opposition of the offices responsible for the distribution of workforce, political reasons prevailed and these individuals were allowed

⁴¹ Ibidem, Statement of Department Ia/1 of the Ministry of Social Welfare to the proposed Agreement from 30 VII 1947.

⁴² Ibidem, Report regarding the request of employment of Polish workers in Ostrava, dated Prague 29 VII 1949. This was a summary of the notes from the departments on the results of the negotiations in Katowice from 18 to 21 VII 1949.

⁴³ NA, MPPrS, box 47, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, The secret report on the Polish workers in Ostrava region.

to leave for Poland⁴⁴. The Polish side also requested that the workforce from Poland be trained and acquire skills in Czechoslovakia⁴⁵.

Throughout the negotiations, the Polish position was strengthened by the announcement of limits to the number of permits issued by the Polish authorities, and the treaty was seen as a way to solve these problems. For example, according to one report from Ostrava, between 600 and 800 workers employed in the construction and the iron industry and agriculture had not had their permits extended. In that time, reports were also circulated that the Polish authorities started to withhold workers for their own labour-market purposes⁴⁶.

The negotiations finally ended on 4 X 1949 by signing an international treaty on a regional level between the Employment Office in Katowice and the Department of Labour of the Regional National Council in Ostrava⁴⁷. The agreement stipulated that workers commuting to work in the Ostrava region would be registered; as a result, they would obtain a six months permit. The Czechoslovak side then specified the extent of the required help, requesting 5,300 male and 240 female workers⁴⁸. The Polish demands were basically met and, according to a later report addressed to Rudolf Slánský, employment of just under 5,000 “cross-overs” continued to the knowledge of the Polish Ministry of Labour. In this report from 27 III 1950, Minister Evžen Erban mentioned that the agreement was concluded otherwise than through the central-government “because that would have evidently involved complications in Warsaw”⁴⁹.

The next stage in the employment of Polish workers in the Ostrava region is somewhat confusing. For example, a report from 22 October stated that no Polish workers went to Ostrava since the signing of the agreement. The overall number of

⁴⁴ NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Vyjádření K. Kudry JUDr. Steinichovi from 29 VII 1949.

⁴⁵ NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Record of a meeting held 18–21 VII 1949 in Katowice between the Regional National Council Ostrava and the Employment Office in Katowice.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, Information for the minister’s secretary MPS Levíček from 22 VII 1949.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, Text of agreement concluded between the Regional National Council Ostrava and the Employment Office in Katowice.

⁴⁸ NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Report from department Ia/2 of the Ministry of Social Welfare from 20 I 1950 concerning the fulfilment of the agreement on the Polish „cross-overs“ concluded on 4 X 1949.

⁴⁹ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, fol. 484–485, Letter from Minister Evžen Erban to Rudolf Slánský from 27 III 1950.

workers should have amounted to 4,000, with 1,300 working in the mines, 300 in the foundries and 400 in construction⁵⁰. During the negotiations between the ministers of labour and social welfare in late November, the Polish minister Kazimierz Rusinek promised to investigate the problems with the cross-border agreement and, if required, intervene directly in Katowice. Therefore, until then the agreement was not implemented⁵¹. In a February report on keeping to the agreement, the relevant departments at the Czechoslovak Ministry of Social Welfare stated that its only result was maintaining the status quo and improvement in issuing the permits. The Czechoslovak requests for increased numbers of workers were ignored and Władysław Cofała, head of the Employment Office in Katowice, repeatedly postponed previously agreed face-to-face meetings. The report also showed that construction workers returning to Poland only a few days after their permits expired were immediately arrested in Poland and “transported to Racibórz”, which indicated the start of a strict regulation of labour movement in Poland⁵². In March, the number of Polish employees was estimated at 4,831 with 1,763 of them being women⁵³. Other reports on the subsequent Polish moves even entertained an idea of withdrawing 5,500 labourers⁵⁴. The inconsistency in the numbers was not adequately explained in the documentation, though it could have been a result of negotiating tactics between the two states, as well as within the hierarchy of the Czechoslovak administrative and party structures. Other non-official ways of employing Polish workers may also have played a role.

Based on a report from the Czechoslovak consulate in Katowice from the autumn of 1949, representatives of the Ministry of Social Welfare realized they could no longer rely on a large number of Polish workers deployed to Ostrava. This was because the Six-Year Plan was launched in Poland in 1950, focusing on massive expansion of the

⁵⁰ Ibidem, Report from department I of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare on the number of Polish workers in the Ostrava region of 22 X 1949, fol. 510.

⁵¹ Ibidem, Statement from the notes on the meeting between Minister E. Erban and Minister K. Rusinek held from 28 to 29 XII 1949, fol. 518.

⁵² NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Report from department Ia/2 of the Ministry of Social Welfare of 20 I 1950 concerning the fulfilment of the agreement on the Polish “cross-overs” concluded on 4 X 1949.

⁵³ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Letter from the Regional National Council in Ostrava to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare concerning the arrangement of employment of the Polish “cross-overs” of 14 III 1950, fol. 506.

⁵⁴ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Copy of an undated report from the Czechoslovak consulate in Katowice, fol. 508.

heavy industry, as was the case in Czechoslovakia. According to information obtained by Czechoslovak officials, a total of 30% of overall construction investments in the entire Polish economic plan was earmarked for the neighbouring territory of the Katowice region. Other extremely contradictory signals about the future of the Polish workforce in the Ostrava region came from various Polish channels in the spring of 1950. There were various options on the agenda for complete or partial withdrawal of Polish labourers, with different schedules which were typically never met. There was talk of replacing qualified workers with unqualified ones recruited from eastern Poland, or increasing the number of women. The Ministry of Social Welfare repeatedly addressed the highest party authorities, including Klement Gottwald and Rudolf Slánský, who were supposed to have an influence on their counterparts in the Polish government. Despite the threats, there was no dramatic decrease in the number of Polish workers after the April deadline. The number of permits was reduced gradually and the Polish authorities continued with the tactic of repeatedly promising to fix matters and postponing meetings⁵⁵. According to data from late October, by 15 September the number of Polish workers in the Ostrava region dropped to 2,602. One decisive moment in the employment of Polish labourers in Ostrava was the currency reform carried out due notice in Poland on 31 X 1950. The resetting of the Polish zloty against the Czechoslovak crown greatly depreciated the value of working in Czechoslovakia for Polish labourers⁵⁶. The Czechoslovak side played for time and asked for a temporary change in the rate for the transfer of wages in October and November. However, in November Warsaw represented by Konstanty Dąbrowski, the Minister of Finance, refused to do that⁵⁷. In early November, Bolesław Jaszczuk, chairman of the National Council for the new Katowice region, made a declaration that only workers who had worked in the Ostrava region for more than 15 years could remain there⁵⁸. However, given the new wage conditions, even these people (some 2,600 workers by 30 VIII 1950) were likely to leave due to the work opportunities in Katowice. This

⁵⁵ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Various correspondence between the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Regional National Council in Ostrava, the Czechoslovak consulate in Katowice and the secretariat of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from March to April 1950, fol. 476–510.

⁵⁶ D. Janák, *Dopad polské*, p. 103.

⁵⁷ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Notification from the Czechoslovak Minister of Finance Jaroslav Kabeš to Minister E. Erban from 8 XI 1950, fol. 472.

⁵⁸ NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Information from the Government Commission for Construction of Ostravsko of 4 XI 1950.

meant another decline in the remaining number of Polish labourers. Unfortunately, we do not know the dynamic of this process and its final outcome, but it is clear that since then on Poles did not play a significant role in the workforce in the Ostrava region⁵⁹.

Polish workers in Czechoslovak agriculture

Another chapter of the employment of Polish workers in Czechoslovakia was an international agreement on the recruitment of Polish workers for Czechoslovak agriculture from 1948 to 1950. According to the available sources, negotiations over “Aid from Polish workers for Czechoslovak agriculture”, as the recruitment drive was called, began at the Slavonic Agricultural Exhibition in Prague in June 1948, which took place under different political conditions to the previous recruitments⁶⁰. As part of the meetings of the Czechoslovak-Polish Joint Commission, representatives of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Agriculture mentioned the possibility of supplying the Czechoslovak labour market with 10,000 Polish agricultural labourers. The Polish side responded positively and requested immediate discussions on the matter at the appropriate level⁶¹.

The Czechoslovak side was motivated by a general shortage of labourers in agriculture in Bohemia and Moravia. The Ministry of Agriculture emphasized the lack of permanent workforce in livestock production, especially in cattle breeding, while concerns were raised over the production of milk, fat and meat. In the period in question there was also a likelihood of other groups leaving the agricultural workforce. The expiration of a year’s contract marked the departure of a majority of workers from Romania, as well as POWs and Hungarians resettled from southern Slovakia. In these circumstances the speedy recruitment of labourers in Poland was seen as very desirable⁶². The willingness on the part of the Poles obviously resulted from a possibility of removing surplus labour from regions suffering from shortages of job opportunities. The Polish authorities promised further benefits presented during negotiations which took place in Warsaw in August.

⁵⁹ Cf. D. Janák, *Dopad polské*, p. 104.

⁶⁰ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Report for Minister Evžen Erban from 29 VIII 1948.

⁶¹ NA, MPSP, box 454, Inv. No. 990, Ministry of Agriculture to its IV. department 13 V 1948.

⁶² NA, Ministerstvo zemědělství-sekretariát, box 372, i. j. 156, Letter from the Secretariat of the Ministry of Agriculture to the Presidium of the Government 19 VIII 1948.

Although the entire project was discussed between the countries' ministries of labour and social welfare and ministries of agriculture, it was agreed that Czechoslovakia would present its official request on the highest level of the Communist Party. By so doing, the Polish Minister of Agriculture could not turn down the request. Therefore, the development of the Czechoslovak-Polish fraternity changed from an economic/business to a political issue in which the economic parameters of the agreement lost their initial significance. The ideological meaning of the friendship between the two states created conditions whereby the economic logic of cooperation could be ignored.

During the negotiations in Warsaw this seemingly uncomplicated matter was accompanied by unexpected demands from the Polish party. The proxies of the Czechoslovak ministries did not dare to accept the proposed wording of the agreement without some form of political cover. There is a particularly revealing letter from Robert Obrusník, an experienced civil servant from the Department of Labour in the Ministry of Social Welfare, to Minister Erban, in which he informed him of the negotiations in Warsaw on 18 August.

I also believe that some kind of intervention from the party headquarters could result in a reversal of the developments and inducing the Poles to be more tractable and respectable of our wage regulations. [...] It will be necessary to consider all the economic and political elements and then responsibly decide if it is worth accepting this double-edged gift. It will be a difficult decision even for the Prime Minister⁶³.

The agreement was quickly concluded on 21 VIII 1948 on the ministerial level, and on 7 September the government took it under consideration and ordered additional authorization for an international agreement to be signed by the President of the Republic. Obrusník's prediction concerning the Prime Minister's reaction was correct. According to a governmental report by Minister Erban, the Poles had provided Czechoslovakia with a generous opportunity to recruit 10,000 workers, a fraternal act in Erban's eyes given the fact that Poland also suffered from a shortage of labourers. However, Antonín Zápotocký, the Prime Minister, did not share his enthusiasm and in principle rejected the international agreements.

Experience has shown that we have had great difficulties and trouble with the implementation of similar agreements. It is clear that the content of this

⁶³ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Robert Obrusník to Minister Evžen Erban from Warsaw 18 VIII 1948, fol. 528–529.

agreement will only create illusions for the Polish agricultural workers which we will never be able to sustain. According to the agreement, they can expect to buy clothes and other textile goods in this country; it says that they will have the same rights as our workers while we do not even know if we are able to provide our own workers. It is possible that over the six-month period in question, our own workers will not receive any textile goods. From the perspective of the Polish unions, however, the agreement is ideal. If they were to give their own workers what we have to give them here, they would go bankrupt. The chairman also has grave doubts if we would be able to fulfil the obligations to provide training and education for the Polish agricultural workers which the agreement commits us to. It would seem that the Poles are counting on their workers coming over to us for some kind of practical training.

Zápotocký also predicted that it would be impossible to fulfil the agreement quantitatively, which also proved to be the case⁶⁴.

Zápotocký's reservations basically summarize the content of the agreement, in particular its key points. The greatest problem was indeed wages. The Polish authorities demanded a 30% surcharge above the Czechoslovak tariffs for its workforce. While the Czechoslovak government was aware that the level of payment in Czechoslovak agriculture was completely inadequate, at the same time it was against raising tariffs across the board. Meanwhile, the preferential treatment of foreign workers was also a sensitive issue with the general public. For example, in 1947 the Central Trade Union Council protested to the government over the preferential treatment of foreign workers, with none other than Antonín Zápotocký as the head of the Council⁶⁵. On 19 August the Ministry of Agriculture proposed compensation for the Polish demands to continue wage parity with Czech employees⁶⁶.

The Polish workers were contracted to work in Czechoslovakia at a time when the agricultural economy had several seasons' experience of assistance from different groups of workers. In addition to youth and labour brigades, these were mainly groups of Hungarian citizens deployed by force, from 1946 resettled in Bohemia and

⁶⁴ NA, Klement Gottwald 1938–1953, a. u. 1494, Vol. 143, Notes from a government meeting of 7 IX 1948, pp. 21–24.

⁶⁵ NA, MPSP, box 417, Inv. No. 861, inscription 2350, Correspondence between the Presidium of the Government, the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Central Trade Unions Council from April to September 1947.

⁶⁶ NA, ÚPV-B, box 948, inscription 1240/19, Statement by the Ministry of Agriculture 19 VIII 1948.

Moravia in an attempt to alter the ethnic ratio in southern Slovakia. There was also forcible deployment of German inhabitants – after the main phase of their expulsion they were resettled and dispersed throughout Bohemia and Moravia⁶⁷. In addition, there were groups of German prisoners of war working in agriculture. Finally, from 1946, workforce was recruited on the basis of international agreements, specifically with Bulgaria, Romania and Italy. The deployment of all these groups had a common denominator, namely the expectations of the employers were not shared by the expectations of the state authorities who were in charge of distributing the workforce, or the expectations of the workers themselves. This was of special importance for the foreign workers recruited on a voluntary basis as reflected in recruitment of Bulgarians whose stay in Czechoslovakia was marked by numerous expressions of dissatisfaction on either sides, including strikes and a high level of fluctuation with the workers leaving their designated work places to look for better wages in industry. This resulted in the Czechoslovak conditions for Poland to prevent the recruited workers from looking for paid labour in Czechoslovakia after completing their contractual obligations.

The Czechoslovak side attempted to compensate for the low wages with opportunities to acquire textile goods in Czechoslovakia, and there was a chance for Polish workers to improve their skills. However, in reality the government was usually unable to meet these commitments either materially or in terms of organizational abilities. People in charge of recruitment were often aware that they the advertisements were misleading and recruitment was seen as a temporary solution to the acute labour shortage, regardless of the consequences. A case in point was an initiative launched by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which in early 1949, in connection with the recruitment of workers from Poland, suggested prioritizing Polish Czechs and Slovaks thereby improving their social standing. Specifically, this involved employment of Slovaks from the Polish parts of Orava and Spiš in Slovak factories of the local Baťa enterprise Svit. The Ministry of Labour ruled out the possibility of employment in industry and was sceptical about recruiting compatriots in agriculture:

International agreements on the recruitment of foreign workers have been concluded in order to acquire labour force for these areas of industry where, due to unfavourable local conditions, the labour force cannot be supplied from local sources. In agriculture this is due to low wages, limited opportunities for social advancement and the limited cultural life in the villages...⁶⁸.

⁶⁷ T. Dvořák, *Vnitřní odsun*, pp. 41–199.

⁶⁸ NA, MPSP, box 417, Inv. No. 861, inscription 2350, Department AI of Ministry of Social

Therefore, it was more or less assumed from the beginning that employment in Czechoslovak agriculture would disappoint foreign labourers.

In the spring of 1949, the wage situation in the state farms was absolutely intolerable. From 31 March, “various bonuses” were allowed to be paid to state farms, but it was not until the autumn that there were changes to the basic wages, for example for cattle owners⁶⁹.

The negative experiences with recruitment was also reflected in the mood and expectations of the public and employers in particular. Periodic reports on the workforce commissioned by the Office for Labour Protection in 1947 and 1948 indicate that foreign workers did not have a particularly good reputation among Czech employers and were often seen as more of a burden. Bulgarians were stereotyped as having a poor work ethic, while Germans were perceived as disciplined and hard-working, though theirs was naturally forced labour. In the last months of 1948, some of these reports also reflected the expectations of the arrival of the Polish workforce. The responses were contradictory. September reports from Kolín in Central Bohemia reflected the scepticism and mistrust of farmers based on their negative experiences with foreign workers⁷⁰. Doubts repeatedly surfaced about the rationale of employing Poles for the six winter months when farmers evidently had no need for labourers⁷¹. In addition to general mistrust, the October reports from Mladá Boleslav openly stated that, based on experience, it would not be possible to extend the work stay of Poles when there was more intensive field work⁷². It was noted that a vast majority of foreign workers were glad when their contract to work in Czechoslovak agriculture expired. The source of this disappointment was not just the low wages and hard labour, but primarily poor living conditions, including accommodation, food and work clothes. Several reports mentioned problems with housing prior to the arrival of Polish workers.

Welfare, to department AV 25 II 1949 on matters of social welfare of Czechoslovak compatriots abroad.

⁶⁹ NA, MPrS, box 49, Inv. No. 89, inscription 114, Information for the Ministry of Wages of Rural Workers from 14 X 1949.

⁷⁰ NA, ZÚOP Praha [Zemský úřad ochrany práce Praha], box 19, Monthly report of the District Office of Labour Protection [Okresní úřad ochrany práce] Kolín for August 1948.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, box 20, Monthly report of the District Office of Labour Protection Benešov for September 1948.

⁷² *Ibidem*, box 20, Monthly report of the District Office of Labour Protection Mladá Boleslav for October 1948.

On the other hand, however, there were reports in the autumn which expressed great interest in the Polish workforce⁷³. These came mainly from the borderline districts. According to the Czechoslovak state-security doctrine, as foreigners Poles were not originally supposed to be sent there⁷⁴. In late 1948 and early 1949, a series of regulations were issued for the special governance of foreigners living in borderline zones. Finally in February, the authorities gave permission for mass settlement of Polish agricultural workers in the areas immediately neighbouring with the western parts of Germany and Austria. For example, Poles worked in Valtice, Aš, Vildštejn in the Cheb region, Hrušovany near Znojmo, and even in the most strictly guarded area of the uranium mines at Jáchymov⁷⁵. The settling of Poles in these areas shows that finally, large numbers of Polish workers were used to bridge the gaps in the economies of the peripheral areas damaged by the expulsion of the German population and unconstrained re-colonization.

The recruitment of Polish agricultural workers began in autumn 1948 with 23 transports with 2,450 Polish workers arriving in Czechoslovakia between 22 November and 20 December. By the end of 1948, 1,961 Polish workers had been sent to state and public farms, and despite the previously declared need, the district labour offices were unable to settle any more. Polish workers were turned down due to lack of housing and food. In late 1948, allocating Poles to private farmers was illegal although the reality proved otherwise.

In early March 1949, the Ministry of Labour estimated that a total of 3,914 Polish labourers were allocated to the agricultural industry. Most of them were in the Prague region (1,331), specifically in the regions in charge of the district labour offices in Kladno and Mladá Boleslav. There was also a relatively high concentration of Polish workers in the Ústecký region (904), specifically in the vicinity of Žatec (548)⁷⁶. Any problems with housing were soon solved. The officials highlighted the good relationships between the workers and the management. In Tachov, training began

⁷³ Ibidem, box 20, Monthly report of the District Office of Labour Protection Plzeň for September 1948.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, box 20, Monthly report of the District Office of Labour Protection Plzeň for September 1948 and Monthly report of the District Office of Labour Protection Trutnov for October 1948; see also NA, MPSP, box 417, Inv. No. 861, inscription 2350, Various permits for working in the border areas from February 1949.

⁷⁵ Archiv města Ústí nad Labem, Jednotný národní výbor Ústí nad Labem, box 399, Inv. No., Circular of [Provincial Office for Labour Protection Prague 22 II 1949.

⁷⁶ NA, MPSP, box 454, Inv. No. 990, Report on Polish agricultural workers up till 4 III 1949.

immediately in keeping with the agreement and 15% of the workers learned how to operate tractors⁷⁷. However, by December in Benešov some of the Polish workers were allocated to private farms, contravening the regulations⁷⁸. According to a report from March, private farmers employed more than a quarter of the Polish workers⁷⁹.

Therefore the fulfilment of the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement was not only in conflict with economic rationality, but also with the policies of the Czechoslovak Communist Party involved in discriminating against and damaging private enterprise with a view to its ultimate liquidation. There were cases like in the regional employment office in Strakonice where as a result of “presumed developments in agricultural policy”, medium-sized farmers’ and “the rural rich’s” needs for more workers were ignored, and requests for labourers from “fraternal Poland” were deliberately withdrawn⁸⁰. Despite the initial enthusiasm and the need for workers, neither the government nor the employers were able to provide and guarantee all of the Polish workers with the appropriate working and living conditions or fulfil the commitments from the international agreement. Further inspections carried out with Polish observers revealed significant problems with accommodation and hygiene, with talk of barracks- or even prison-like conditions, problems with insects, men and women sharing premises etc. There was repeated criticism of the shortcomings. “In some places no effort was made to provide the Polish workers with a pleasant environment where they could feel at home...” Practices tolerated in the past with the forced Hungarian and German labourers were in 1949 politically unacceptable with regard to workers from a neighbouring communist country due to the much-heralded relationship between “fraternal nations,” not to mention the propaganda of building an ideal image of a socialist village. In relation to this, criticism was heard such as “the feudal ideas of the bailiffs” and the need to show a “new relationship” between employers and agricultural workers⁸¹.

⁷⁷ NA, ZÚOP Praha, box 21, Monthly report of the District Office of Labour Protection Plzeň for December 1948.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, Monthly report of the District Office of Labour Protection for December 1948.

⁷⁹ NA, MPSP, box 454, Inv. No. 990, Report on Polish agricultural workers up till 4 III 1949.

⁸⁰ NA, MPSP, box 379, Inv. 805, inscription 2119, Correspondence between the District Office of Labour Protection Strakonice and the Ministry of Social Welfare from November 1948 until February 1949.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, Letter from the Ministry of Agriculture from 23 XII 1948 concerning the welfare of agricultural labourers; Joint decree of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Central Trade Unions Committee and the Union of Czechoslovakia Farmers from 18 III 1948.

This critique, connecting with the discourse of rural socialization, is noteworthy for two reasons. The improvement in social conditions was to compensate at least partially for the low level of wages and to increase the attractiveness of waged labour in agriculture. However, this criticism indirectly describes the situation in agriculture both during and after the war, which became a standard in the practical implementation of post-war labour policies. The use of forced labour or special/temporary workforces with a low legal status, accompanied by lack of respect for the social standing of labourers became a general norm.

In the end, the recruitment of workers from Poland did not have any substantial influence on the critical labour situation in agriculture. In 1949, according to the plan, 20,000 new workers were to be allocated to public farms across Czechoslovakia. Half of them were to be Polish labourers, while the rest were to come from the “drawing upon hidden reserves”⁸². However, in May 1949, i.e. when the first group of Polish farm workers concluded half-year contracts, their number only reached 3,700. The promise from early January that there would be 9,000 Polish farm workers in Czechoslovakia proved to be completely unrealistic by the middle of February⁸³. In addition, in the public sector there were only 2,800 of these workers while private employers were ruled out from access to these labourers from the start. In reality, however, the state farms and training stations were not suited to deal with large numbers of workers. In the end, it was the discriminated private entrepreneurs who helped to save face and contributed at least partly to complying with the international agreement. Although a decree was issued in February to transfer Poles from private farmers to the public sector, this attempt was obviously in vain as the workers themselves were unwilling to do so, choosing return to Poland.

This fact was in sharp contrast to the ideological rhetoric of the Communist leaders who claimed that private owners exploited farm workers, which was the official reasoning for prioritizing state or collectivized employers. Nevertheless, in the spring of 1949 an international agreement was still in sight to recruit farm workers from Hungary on top of the internal sources of labour⁸⁴.

⁸² NA, MPrS, box 49, NA, Ministerstvo pracovních sil, box 49, Inv. No. 89, inscription 114, Information for the minister on the situation in agriculture from 11 IV 1949.

⁸³ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Information for the minister concerning employment of Polish farm workers, fol. 523.

⁸⁴ NA, MPrS, box 49, Inv. No. 89, inscription 114, Information for the minister concerning the situation in agriculture from 11 V 1949.

However, in January 1949 (at the start of the first Five-Year Plan) it was clear to the Communist leadership that the recruitment of workers from abroad was not meeting expectations and could not be relied on in the next stage of the plan. At that time 3,603 Bulgarians, 2,530 Romanians and 850 Italians worked in Czechoslovakia while the number of Polish farm workers was growing. It was clear, however, that the fears of opponents of the recruitment became reality. Reports contained comments on the unsuitability of the entire international agreement. Although contracts restricted to six months helped to maintain livestock production over the winter, it was clear that there would be labour-market shortages during the harvest⁸⁵.

An inter-ministerial agreement on the recruitment of Polish farm workers offered an opportunity of an agreement on extensions, with negotiations beginning in mid-May⁸⁶. Although we still do not have any exact data, a majority of the Polish workers in Czechoslovakia is likely to have left after the end of their six-month contract. Nevertheless, at a meeting of the ministers of labour in late November 1949, Kazimierz Rusinek, the Polish minister, confirmed a provisional agreement between the Czechoslovak Minister of Agriculture and the Polish ambassador in Prague, on the basis of which another 400 Polish workers, with the exception of tractor drivers (if any still worked in Czechoslovakia), could stay and work in Czechoslovakia until 9 V 1950. Two hundred of these workers were to receive training on breeding sheep and pigs.

Some of these exchanges involved discussions on further issues of the employment of Poles in Czechoslovakia, which continued on 29 and 30 December in Krakow. Regarding workers crossing the border to Těšín, the Polish representative promised to address the problem of issuing permits to Polish workers. In reality, as it was mentioned above, the Polish authorities wanted to end this practice completely. The documents contains also information about other projects. At Czechoslovakia's request, a possibility of employing Polish spinners in Náchod was to be examined with the offer of retraining in how to work with flax. Another issue for discussion

⁸⁵ NA, PÚV KSC [Předsednictvo Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa 1945–1954], Vol. 8, a. u. 157, Meeting of the greater presidium of the CCP 13 I 1949, Material for point 4 – Mobilization of the workforce in the Five-Year Plan and some social policy issues to be addressed at the social-policy conference of the Central Trade Union Committee, p. 21, fol. 50.

⁸⁶ NA, MPSP, box 417, Inv. No. 861, inscription 2350, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 18 V 1949, concerning the extension of the agreement between the ministries of the two countries.

was commuting to work across the border. There was another request for 300 unqualified labourers to work on the construction of the Orava dam⁸⁷. Until 1 February 1950, 150 Polish workers were employed at the Orava dam construction⁸⁸. According to the available information, Polish spinners worked in the Náchod region since mid-March 1949. This was a sole initiative of the Ministry of Industry and interfered with the competencies of the Ministry of Social Welfare. However, the Polish spinners in the factories in Staré Město nad Metují and in Babí were employed in line with the Polish labour and insurance law while Czechoslovakia provided them with machinery stock and daily bus travels from the boarding facilities in Kladno's Chudoba (Kudowa-Zdrój). Local and Polish raw materials were processed and both parties shared in the production. This cooperation was presented as developmental training for the Polish textile industry⁸⁹.

Conclusion

There are lessons to be learnt about Czechoslovak labour policies from the late 1940s and the early 1950s on the basis of the findings about the employment of Polish citizens in Czechoslovakia. The employment of Polish workers in the Ostrava region did not come under intense scrutiny of labour management policies until after 1948 – and this applied to either side of the border. Until then, the cross-border migration was kept small-scale. The local industry naturally attracted people from the outlying Polish territories. This triggered off gradual adaptation of an originally liberal approach towards the need for a planned distribution of workforce. In 1945–1946 the issue of employing Polish workers in Ostrava was affected by developments in the Czechoslovak-Polish relations and the national issue of Těšín. Despite the tensions, small-scale cross-border movement continued more or less undisturbed and the employment of Polish citizens was in line with the laws of supply and demand. According to the available data, the level of employment grew regularly. The mutual advantages of this temporary border crossing were quietly tolerated by

⁸⁷ NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Statement from the notes on the meeting between Minister E. Erban and Minister K. Rusinek held from 28 to 29 XII 1949.

⁸⁸ NA, MPSP, box 441, Inv. No. 957, inscription 5269, Undated secret report on the Polish “cross-overs” reporting up to May of 1950.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, Information for the minister from 24 VIII 1949; *ibidem*, Information for the minister for discussions with the Polish Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Kazimierz Rusinek, from 18 XI 1949.

either side. Even the communists were aware of its economic advantages. For example, a delegation of communist MPs travelling to the border in early September saw the ongoing restrictions on the border with Poland as outdated and unnecessary, and recommended a rapid introduction of small-scale cross-border movement and reciprocated provision of access for people on either side of the border⁹⁰. Naturally, these developments were against the centrally directed policy for the distribution of workforce emerging in the planned economy. The Czechoslovak labour market in particular was characterized by a chronic shortage of human resources, a lack of flexibility and dependence on groups of freely available workers who would be used to “patch up” the ever-increasing “holes” in the labour market. The latter reinforced the tendency to maintain the existing forms of forced labour as well as to create new ones.

The second, albeit less effective way, was to organise recruitment drives of workers, including labourers from abroad, at the expense of disproportionate economic costs. This was also a case in the employment of Polish farm hands from 1948 to 1950. In 1949, the Polish authorities attempted to introduce a similar model of economic optimization by employing workers in the Ostrava region.

The method of employing foreign workers, which did not differ greatly from the use of forced workforce in terms of the anticipated effect, understandably did not meet the expectations of the partner parties or the workers themselves. However, Polish farm workers were a special against foreign workers from Bulgaria, Italy and Hungary, who were considered for labour recruitment by the Czechoslovak government in 1946 as part of a peace settlement with Germany’s defeated allies⁹¹. Naturally, this scenario was not possible with Poland. In 1948, when the Polish contract was concluded, there were non-economic factors to contend with. Linked to the de-escalation of tension in the Czechoslovak-Polish relations, any cooperation between the two countries became a symbol of friendship within *Pax Sovietica*. This special political conditionality might also have underlain the methods of concluding relevant agreements which contained some unusual features. At a first glance, the agreement on the employment of Polish workers in the Ostrava region, concluded by the regional employment offices in Ostrava and Katowice in 1949, seems to be

⁹⁰ NA, Klement Gottwald 1938–1953, Vol. 45, a. u. 854, fol. 125, Report on borderland conditions based on notes from the delegation of CCP MPs from 1–3 IX 1947.

⁹¹ Cf. e.g. NA, MPSP, box 417, Inv. No. 861, inscription 2350, Letters from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggesting the claims for preparations for the peace treaty with Italy and Hungary from April 1946.

a pragmatic and flexible transfer of competencies to the place where the subject of the agreement was located. However, the subsequent problems with implementing the agreement may also have been due to efforts to prevent the transfer of potentially controversial problems to the highest state and party levels. The same holds true for an agreement made a year later on “the aid to Czechoslovak agriculture” which was concluded at a ministerial level, where important contradictions appeared in the internal negotiations of the Czechoslovak government. The conclusion of the agreement at a ministerial level had to be retroactively sanctioned by an additional mandate from the President of the Republic. The influence of political symbols, detrimental to the economy, can also be documented in some of the differences between the attitudes of politicians and civil servants.

The rapid outflow of Polish workers from Ostrava in late 1950 and early 1951 did not have a major influence on the overall balance of workforce in Ostrava during the first Czechoslovak Five-Year Plan. By 1949, the Czechoslovak authorities already followed a different strategy for summoning workforce for construction in the Ostrava region, principally a transfer of workers from Slovakia⁹². The deployment of Polish labourers in Czechoslovak agriculture was clearly an episode. However, its implementation within a fixed time can help us to establish the links between the employment policy and the start of the campaign against private farmers. The timing of the Poles’ departure from the Ostrava region also revealed more common chronic problems with the management of an inflow of workers and the poor preparation for the arrivals in terms of work placement and social conditions⁹³. This revealed discrepancies between the workforce plans and the reality. Frequently, the industry’s requests for labour did not match the reality while in general, the system was prone to creating unreliable data. The documentation clearly illustrates that people in charge of formulating employment policies saw the workforce mainly as an economic item, a commodity which could be “transferred”, “distributed”, “moved elsewhere” like any raw material. A case in point was the dichotomy between the terms *transfer* (the

⁹² Cf. NA, PÚV KSČ, Vol. 8, a. u. 157, Meeting of the general presidium CCP from 13 I 1949, Material to point 4 – Summoning the workforce in the Five-Year Plan and some issues of social policy for discussion at the social-political conference of the Central Trade Unions Council, p. 21, fol. 50.

⁹³ Cf. e.g. NA, MPrS, box 47, Inv. No. 75, inscription 103, Information for the minister about a report from a government commission for construction in Ostrava and implementing the plan for construction in the Ostrava region from 20 XII 1950, fol. 105.

resettlement of the German population) and *inflow* (the workforce)⁹⁴. This does not mean that the authorities ignored the relations between the social conditions, positive motivation and work efficiency. It was just the opposite. However, in the context of the emergency measures, the authorities were unable to apply this knowledge to manage the labour market, and made an informed choice of writing off this area of the employment policy as a necessary cost. However, they failed to concede that planning based on a culture of numbers could be limiting by its very nature.

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Summary

The paper deals with the topic of the employment of the Polish workers in post-war Czechoslovakia. As was the situation in many countries after WWII, Czechoslovakia faced far-reaching changes in the labour market. During the first two years after the war, when the post-war reconstruction of the economy commenced, approximately one-third of the population (the Sudeten Germans) were being resettled. This decline in the population involved a corresponding decline in the labour force. It has certainly resulted in a revolutionary transformation of the labour market. These were quantitative as well as structural changes. Their fundamental consequence was a shortage of workforce which manifested itself as a regular feature of the further economic development. In a centrally planned economy, the unavoidable consequence of the deficit was formulation of a whole range of labour policies ensuring distribution of the workforce according to the priorities and a wide spectrum of long-term and short-term measures, as well as an extensive administrative apparatus. The management of the workforce became an integral and central part of Czechoslovakia's planned economy.

⁹⁴ NA, MPrS, box 60, Inv. No. 70. inscription 1216, Proposal for summoning the workforce IV. department of the Ministry for the Protection of Labour and Social welfare from 12 VI 1946.

One of the methods employed by the government in its attempt to cope with the shortage of workers was employment of foreigners. In Czechoslovakia during that period, various professions required recruitment of labourers from Bulgaria, Romania, Italy and Poland, while a transfer of workers from other countries was also considered. Within this context, employment of Poles had its idiosyncrasy due to the fact that the two countries had been neighbours with a specific relationship.

The employment of Polish workers in the Ostrava coal mining region has a longer history, going back to the end of the 19th century when the entire broader region was a part of the Austrian Empire. The employment of Polish workers in the Ostrava region did not come under intense scrutiny of labour management policies until after 1948. According to the available data, the level of employment grew regularly. In 1945–1946 the issue of employing Polish workers in Ostrava was affected by the developments in the Czechoslovak-Polish relations. Despite the tensions, small-scale cross-border movement continued more or less undisturbed and the employment of Polish citizens was in line with the laws of supply and demand. The advantages of the temporary border crossing, were enjoyed and quietly tolerated by both parties.

However, these developments went against the centrally implemented policy for the distribution of the workforce included into the planned economy.

The Czechoslovak labour market in particular was characterized by a chronic shortage of human resources, a lack of flexibility and dependence on groups of freely available workers who would be used to “patch up” the ever-increasing “holes” in the labour market. The latter reinforced the tendency to maintain the existing forms of forced labour as well as to create new ones.

The other, albeit less effective way, was to organise recruitment drives of workers, including labourers from abroad, carried out at the price of disproportionate economic costs. This was also a case in the employment of Polish farm hands from 1948 to 1950. In 1949, the Polish authorities attempted to introduce a similar model of economic optimization by employing workers in the Ostrava region.

The method of using foreign workers understandably did not meet the expectations of the partner parties or the workers themselves. In 1948, when the Polish contract was concluded, there were also non-economic factors at play. Linked to the de-escalation of tension in the Czechoslovak-Polish relations, any cooperation between the two countries became a symbol of friendship within *Pax Sovietica*. This special political conditionality might also have been present in the methods for concluding relevant agreements, which contained some unusual features. The influence of political symbols, detrimental to the economy, can also be documented in some of the differences between the attitudes of politicians and civil servants.

The rapid outflow of Polish workers from Ostrava in late 1950 and early 1951 did not have a major influence on the overall balance of workforce in Ostrava during the first Czechoslovak Five-Year Plan. By 1949, the Czechoslovak authorities already followed a dif-

ferent strategy for summoning workforce for construction in the Ostrava region, principally a transfer of workers from Slovakia. The deployment of Polish labourers in Czechoslovak agriculture was clearly an episode. However, its implementation within a fixed time can help us to establish the links between the employment policy and the start of the campaign against private farmers. The timing of the Poles' departure from the Ostrava region also revealed more common chronic problems with the management of an inflow of workers and the poor preparation for the arrivals in terms of work placement and social conditions. This revealed discrepancies between the workforce plans and the reality. Frequently, the industry's requests for labour did not match the reality while in general, the system was prone to creating unreliable data. The documentation clearly illustrates that people in charge of formulating employment policies saw the workforce mainly as an economic item, a commodity which could be "transferred", "distributed", "moved elsewhere" like any raw material. This does not mean that the authorities ignored the relations between the social conditions, positive motivation and work efficiency. It was just the opposite. However, in the context of the emergency measures they were unable to apply this knowledge to the management of the labour market.