

## **‘Frenchmen’ in Polish mines.**

### **The politics of productivity in coal mining in Poland 1946-48**

During the years 1946-48, a period of economic recovery in post war Poland, a government sponsored repatriation program resulted in over 40,000 Polish nationals returning to Poland from a number of West European countries. In the large picture of population movements after the war this was not an exceptionally big group, one which is dwarfed by the re-location to Poland of over one million Polish nationals who had found themselves in the Soviet Union due to the border changes. In virtually all cases the repatriants from the West and East had been forced out of Poland against their will and/or under duress either during war activities or as a result of a premediated occupation policies by the Soviet Union and Germany (Kersten 1974, p.22). This explains why they were usually referred to as ‘repatriants’. Among the Polish nationals who were assisted in their return to Poland from Western Europe was an unusual group of miners. What differentiated them from the other repatriants was that most of them had left Poland to work in West European mines during the 1920s and 1930s (Wróbel 2009, p. 29). When they decided to return to Poland after the war they had not been forced to leave countries in which they had been settled. They had on the whole been well integrated into the labour force of their host countries and had enjoyed a relatively good standard of living. In reality because they had not been forcefully removed from Poland were not repatriants but reemigrants. The 13,721 skilled and experienced miners who were accompanied by their families came from Holland, Brandenburg and Westfalia. A large number (1,032) came from Belgium. But the largest and most important group came from France (10,157).<sup>1</sup>

The repatriation of Polish miners from France involved a number of government agencies and required the Polish and French governments to collaborate in the transfer. Additionally, the repatriation which was done by train, called for cooperation with US and British occupation authorities in Germany and with the Czechoslovak government through whose territory some of the repatriants’ trains passed. On the Polish side the repatriation was a source of concern to the Central Executive of the Coal Industry (Centralny Zarząd Przemysłu Węglowego- CZPW), the Repatriation Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Biuro do Spraw Repatriacji Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych), the Government Central Executive for Repatriation (Zarząd Centralny Państwowego Urzędu Repatriacyjnego), the Ministry for Recovered Territories (Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych), the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza - PPR) in Poland and the party branches in

France and Belgium, the Central Committee of the Polish Workers Party in Warsaw and finally also the Office of State Security (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa - UB). The repatriation of Polish miners, an enormous logistic operation, clearly indicates the importance which was attached to ensuring that they come to Poland. The main reason was the need for miners in the Polish economy. The government's extensive involvement was due to the need to integrate into Poland's borders previously German areas. The so called Recovered Territories were rich in coal and restarting coal exploitation was of crucial importance in the program of reconstruction while at the same time being a test of the government's ability to take control of the new territories. When the repatriation drive came to an end in 1949 all those involved felt that it had failed because only a proportion of the expected miners returned to Poland. Since the repatriation had taken place during a time of great political changes in Poland the shortfall was not just investigated as a failure to secure a valuable human resource, it came to be seen as a political matter. In fact the repatriation of miners from France was always linked to the need to restart coal production, but the political changes which took place in Poland between 1945 and 1949, meant that there was always an added political dimension to the debates on productivity and on the way the government related to the workers, in this case the miners,

The purpose of this article is to investigate why and how the drive to return to Poland was instigated and organised. This article will investigate how the government, the agencies responsible for the repatriation and the coal mining industry responded to problems which beset the repatriation program, in particular because all agreed that they were vital to plug of the critical shortage of key workers. In view of the fact that the government had embarked on a program to increase coal production at the very same time as it was consolidating its hold over all aspect of Poland's economic and political life, the debate on the repatriation of miners from France always had a political dimension. This article will position the debate on the repatriation within the context of the highly charged political debates of the 1945-49 period.

The presence in post war Poland of a cohesive community of miners and their families who had spent many years working in France has been noted by local historians and journalists. The coal mining town of Wałbrzych had been the area to which most, though not all, miners and their families had been channelled as they came back to Poland in 1946 -1949. Studies have focused on the repatriants' distinct ways and social and cultural activities which they had brought with them after having spent many years in France. Commenting on the remarkable cohesiveness of the community which was always referred to by the Poles as 'the Frenchmen',

authors noted their low level of reintegration into Polish life and continuing use of French at homes and among themselves (Krzemińska 201). While no book has been written on the subject in Polish an excellent article by Piotr Retecki is in effect a study in mass resettlement after the war. Retecki's work is based on interviews and published accounts of those who either came to Poland as part of the repatriation drive or on their children's accounts (Retecki 2010). The town of Wałbrzych has maintained the memory of the 'Frenchmen' who came back to Poland after the war and who always felt that they were distinct from the other Poles even though they too had arrived in the town in search of employment ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MDL5TqdkA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MDL5TqdkA)).

Monographs dealing with repatriation of Poles after the war likewise note the presence of Polish miners from France but there is no study of either the repatriation nor of the debates which took place in the various governmental agencies around the need to bring them to Poland (Kersten, 1974). Where historians have noted the distinct community of the 'Frenchmen' this was because of their participation in strikes which took place during 1946 (Zaremba 2012, p. 359; Kamiński 2000, p.96). Although the history of the French side of the story of the repatriation of Polish miners lies beyond the scope of this article it is important to mention that the departure of highly respected Polish miners for Poland has been the subject of a number of studies in French. These had focused on the human element and did not discuss the policies of the Polish government which is the subject of this article (Glazewski, A, 2001; R o y C 1995).

Until the elections in January 1947 the first post war government, the Provisional Government of National Unity (Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej – TRJN), ruled in an uneasy coalition (Prażmowska 2004, pp.113-4). While the Polish Peasant Alliance (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL) assumed the role of an opposition party, the Communist PPR sought to disguise its slight social base by seeking to build an electoral bloc. During 1946 the three key parties; the PSL, PPR and the Socialist PPS jostled in preparation for the elections. On 30 June 1946 a referendum took place. The first post war general elections took place on 19 January 1947. Voting was conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation. The aim was to destroy the PSL. The results, which were forged, were that the Democratic Bloc which was dominated by the PPR and the PPS, had won 80.1 percent of the votes cast. It was widely suspected that these were not the correct results but that did not prevent the winners from announcing the composition of the new government in which the PPR took the key ministries of security, industry and the Recovered Territories (Prażmowska 2004 , pp.202-3).

During the period before the elections and after conflicts between the three dominant parties were paralleled by struggles within the economy. There old and new doctrinaire debates on the economy went hand in hand with a desperate need for reconstruction and improvement in productivity. At least in principle the decree on the nationalization of all enterprises which employed more than 50 workers which was passed in January 1946 clarified the issue of ownership. But the situation was more complex because in reality the workers had played a key role in the restarting of production after the war. The disputes in factories evolved on several levels, most obviously between the pre war unions with their loyalty to the PPS and the PPR which favoured centralised control. The Ministry of Industry and Commerce of which the coal industry was part, was in the hands of Hilary Minc who was considered to be one of the key PPR leaders (Kenney , 1997, pp. 29-31). His dominant role in the party was mirrored by his unchallenged role in matters relating to the economy. An eminent economist had drawn attention to the fact that during the first months after the war PPR tended to confine its statement on economic matter to generalities, preferring to camouflage its intentions. But in reality Minc had no time for collaboration with trade unions or factory committees and instead drove on a policy which strengthened the role of managers with the ultimate aim of reinforcing the state's control over economic matters (Kowalik, 2006, pp. 40-3). Minc has been accused of having little understanding of economics and of viewing production in organisational if not outright military terms. This explains his choice of the word 'struggle' to describe particular stages in the implementation of policies in Poland during the years 1944-48 (Kowalik, 2006, p. 43). In his eyes and in his approach to problems which confronted planners and economists after the war, the government's policies were a struggle against the encroachment and the return of capitalist elements. This meant the reduction of the authority of workers' organisations and the establishment of a hierarchical production ethos in which subordination of all economic decision to the state was equated with the building of socialism.

On 10 November 1945 a Central Planning Office (Centralny Urząd Planowania – CUP) was created to supposedly plan, coordinate and supervise the work of government departments which dealt with economic matters. But in reality it became an office which started making decisions concerning future developments (Kowalik, 2006,p.86). Minc had absolute and unquestioned control over the CUP. Its first task in 1945 was to prepare plans for future development which were later presented as the Three Year Plan covering the years 1947-1949. According to Minc the plan was not a set of realistic and attainable targets. Its function was to mobilise. The immediate purpose was reconstruction and restarting of production in enterprises but the ultimate aim was industrialisation at a rapid rate. During the first year of its existence economists connected with CUP

many of whom had links with PPS, tried to moderate the grandiose plans favoured by Minc. But economic discussions on the Three Year Plan coincided with the political jousting before the general elections. This meant that the most important decisions were made after the elections which were ostensibly won by the PPR-PPS dominated Democratic Block. After the elections the PSL was destroyed but PPS' role in the government was reduced. The Three Year Plan to all purposes came to represent PPR's policies. In those plans coal played a key role. Together with the development of the rail infrastructure and electrification, mining was expected to make biggest progress. This was not dependent on additional investment being available. The stress on mining was reaffirmed by references to its export potential. How this ambitious plan was to succeed was not obvious. The plan which was finally approved in July 1947 spoke of the integration of the newly acquired territories into Poland's economy and the repatriation of Poles who had left during the war and during the inter war period. Output was to increase and the costs of production were to be lowered (Jeziarski i Petz, 1980 , pp. 49-53). The key principles of the Three Year Plan would have an impact on the way the issue of the Polish miners in France would be addressed during 1947.

The CZPW knew that it did not have the resources to fulfil the 1947 plan for coal extraction. In November 1946, at a time when the Three Year Plan was being widely discussed within the government and CUP, but when the CZPW already knew that it would be expected to increase production, the executive of the coal industry send a letter to Minc. The purpose of the message was to spell out the problems created by shortage of skilled labour. The Three Year Plan in the form in which it was still discussed, stipulated that productivity would increase but the executive knew that his could only be achieved if additional 39,600 people were employed in the mines. Of those 29,800 had to be miners and the remaining would be needed in related professions. At this stage it was still assumed that the German POWs, numbering 30,000 would continue to work in Polish mines and that unfit miners would not be released. The CZPW had tried to identify possible sources of manpower and had come up with the following solution: 10,000 repatriants from France, 2,000 from Belgium, 1,000 from Holland and Rumania, 5,000 from Westfalia, 5,000 repatriants from the Soviet Union and 3,000 Italian migrant workers to work in stone quarrying. Additionally 13,000 would be recruited in Poland to work in related jobs. Clearly the success of the plan to increase coal exploitation was heavily dependent on the return of miners from France. As the CZPW stated 'the French repatriants who are the core of the problem of the increase in terms of qualified miners, should in 1947 reach the maximum figure of no less than 10,000 coal face miners.'<sup>6</sup> The CZPW favoured the miners from France because those who had returned to Poland in 1946

proved to be reliable, whereas all other options were risky. Even if manpower was obtained, it was pointed out, that miners needed to come to know the mine in which they were to work. Only miners who had already worked in coal mining would do even if miners with experience in ore and potash mining were available. Clearly productivity had been calculated in such a way that nothing could be left to chance. As the authors of the letter to the Minister of Industry pointed out, the only compromise solution they could envisage was a reduction of required numbers of experienced coal miners by 1,000. Even those would have to be replaced with experienced machine operators also chosen from those available from the repatriants from France. One can conclude that either there was no room for manoeuvre or the CZPW was making the most of the evident demand for coal to obtain government funding. The letter also stated that the miners from France ‘ had to be in peak of health and not burdened by large families’. They were to return to Poland with their own furniture and chattels. Critically for the success of the whole endeavour the repatriation of the miners had to be handled by a special team in Paris which was to focus exclusively on the repatriation of the miners. Ideally the miners were needed in Poland by April 1947.<sup>7</sup> As to the disposition of the miners the plan was for 5,000 to be directed to Lower Silesia, mainly to Wałbrzych.<sup>8</sup>

It would be impossible to overstate the importance of coal to the economy of post war Europe and by implications, in Poland’s reconstruction plans. In addition to being the source of energy it was virtually the only commodity which could be exported to the West. Upon the government’s ability to restart coal exploitation depended other sectors of the economy. In addition coal was an important bargaining chip in relations with the Soviet Union (Kochanowski, 2001, p.45). In August 1945 the Soviet Union put to the Polish government a suggestion that the exploitation of coal in the Lower Silesia should be controlled by joint Polish- Soviet companies. The reasoning put forward by the Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs was that in taking over previously German territories Poland obtained wealth in excess of what it had ceded to the Soviet Union in the East. Molotov’s argument was that while the Poles gained \$9.5mln they had only lost \$3.6 worth of economic capacity. Hence his claim that Poland owed the Soviet Union the difference between the two estimates. When the Poles rejected the proposal the Soviet Union demanded that Poland settle this debt by supplying coal at the price of \$1 per tonne. To enable the Poles to increase the coal mining output they undertook to hand over 50,000 German POWs who were to be employed in the mines (Jeziński i Petz, 1980, pp. 82-3).

The main areas of coal exploration were going to be the Dąbrowa Basin and Lower Silesia. The former had belonged to Poland before the war and had benefitted from modernization drives and state investment (Jeziernski i Petz, 1980, p.85). Lower Silesia which had been part of Germany became the object of allied negotiation during the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. US and Britain were unwilling to see the whole of Lower Silesia go to Poland, something on which Stalin insisted during the Yalta Conference (Siebel-Achenbach, 1994, pp.89-90). The matter of Polish administration of areas up to the Oder-Neisse line was prejudged by the simple fact that the Soviet army relinquished control over the disputed German territories to the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity. During the Potsdam Conference these areas were placed under Polish jurisdiction. This was done on Soviet insistence. The Soviet and Polish reasoning was that while this would be initially a temporary territorial transfer the decision was bound to be ratified at the future peace conference (Siebel-Achenbach, 1994, p. 110). Lower Silesia offered the Polish government large opportunities for coal exploration in particular because the area had been spared during military activities. So pressing was the need for coal that the government restarted mining even though the status of the recently acquired territories was still not resolved. In fact by stimulating economic activities in the areas the government hoped to create a *fair accompli*.<sup>14</sup> But the government knew that it had a limited support in Polish society and therefore it hoped to increase its popularity by consolidating the Polish state's claim to previously German territories. Even before the fall of Berlin the Polish government did all in its powers to indicate that it was in charge of ex German areas which it hoped would be granted to Poland during the post war conferences. This meant not merely establishing first administrative structures but also repopulating the areas with Poles. Most of those who were to be moved to the so called Recovered Territories were to be Poles displaced from areas which had been incorporated into the Soviet Union. In addition the government hoped that Poles returning from the West would gravitate to the newly acquired territories. The government wanted to restart production and to physically lay claim to these areas as quickly as possible but this proved difficult. The obvious problem came down to the sheer logistics of moving thousands of people from the East and Polish Displaced Persons from camps in the West to the Polish territories (Siebel-Achenbach, 1994, pp.155-7) When it became apparent that this would be a longer project than the government had anticipated, the focus shifted for the time being to settling the agricultural areas and on restarting coal exploration.

The pressing matter of restarting mining brought to the forefront questions on manpower and in particular skilled manpower upon the mobilisation of which so much depended. Since the government needed to increase

coal production the only way it could do so was through either employing more miners or by increasing the miners' shifts. In 1945 the option of increasing efficiency by additional mechanization was not feasible as this could only have been done in the long term. During a meeting in March 1945 the Central Executive of the Coal Industry (CZPW) which had been established in February 1945 accepted that the present output of 25,000 tonnes a day could be doubled only if manpower was available. As a result recruitment drives were initiated. All options were considered including the employment of criminals and POW. This was not always a good idea because both categories created problems due to the fact that they had to work under strict supervision and be guarded. In July 1945 5,675 POWs were employed in mining (Kochanowski 2001, p.47). The Soviet promise of 50,000 German POWs proved a mixed blessing and even though they were sent to Poland in several tranches their employment was problematic, not least of all because it was known that they would have to be released in due course (Kochanowski 2001, p.58). Critical to the increase in coal exploitation was the issue of skilled manpower. The use of forced labour did not guarantee that output would be improved. The CZPW spoke of the need to employ 13,500 additional miners but all efforts made to recruit them from either free labour or forced labour yielded limited results. And although from May 1945 hopes were voiced that the shortfall in manpower could be plugged by either attracting Polish miners who had migrated to the West during the inter war period or by the increase in the numbers of forced labour, the coal industry failed to resolve the shortage (Kochanowski 2001 pp. 57-8). The danger was that instead of providing much needed coal the mines of Lower Silesia would drain the economy of resources (Siebel-Achenbach, 1994, p.160). In the circumstances the repatriation of experienced and highly professional Polish miners from France was an extremely attractive proposition. The fact that from Paris came news that these miners wanted to return to Poland and that some sections of the Polish community had not merely indicated an interest in being repatriated but had taken active steps towards it, all bode well.

What lay behind the desire expressed by some Polish miners in France to leave the stability of their employment and their well organised lives in the mining settlements for the uncertainty of life in war torn Poland? As will be shown the Polish government financed and organised the transfer of miners from France but was this done, as has been suggested by one historian, only to relieve the shortage of skilled manpower in the mines (Retecki 2010 pp. 290-1). The fact that the representatives from Poland went to great length to persuade these miners to come back and because of the well-known preoccupation with productivity, seems to support the theory that the repatriation drive was a government campaign to get people to come back at all costs. It is nevertheless



difficult to agree with this simplified picture because this interpretation ignores the Polish miners' wish to return to Poland. At the same time there is an assumption that from the government's point of view what drove on the repatriation were anxieties about productivity and the need for politically reliable cadres. This scenario would suggest that the miners were victims of misinformation and that there was a degree of cynicism in the government's handling of the process, possibly because it was known that the miners, once in Poland would not be rewarded or compensated for having left good jobs in France.

The first question therefore relates to the organisation of the repatriations . In October 1944 a Government Office for Repatriation (Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny – PUR ) was established to oversee and coordinate, in the first place, the resettlement of Polish nationals from areas which had been incorporated into the Soviet Union. Once Polish territories were liberated the activities of PUR were extended to include the return to Poland of citizens from the West (Banasiak 1963, pp. 29-30). While the case of the miners in France could not be defined as the case of repatriation, PUR was fully involved in arrangements concerning the remigration of these Poles. This was because PUR was tasked with the responsibility of settling the newly acquired territories with Poles (Banasiak 1963, pp. 30-1). The idea that Polish miners in France should return to Poland after the end of hostilities was first broached by the Polish government in exile in 1944 ( Wróbel 2009, p.228 ). But not until 1945, by which time the exile government was no longer recognised either in Paris or on London and a Communist dominated government was established in Poland that the matter was expedited. The fact that the mining community had strong links with local trade union and the French Communist Party meant that the debate on the return to Poland took the form of a call to join in the rebuilding of Poland and the need to stop the pre war political elites returning to power. Among the miners in France repatriation was not merely as a reflection of the desire to return to the homeland but became a campaign of mobilising Polish nationals to participate in the building of a new, Socialist Poland (Wróbel 2009, pp. 228-9 ). The coal industry's desperate need for skilled miners coincided with sentiments expressed by the Polish community in France to return to Poland. On 5 December 1945 the Polish Ambassador in Paris sent a report to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw. In it he stated that the Polish emigre community had been extensively analysed with a view to finding out whether the miners would be interested in returning to Poland. The Embassy had ascertained that the Polish diaspora consisted of approximately 470,000 people. Of those 400,000, who were referred to as the 'old' diaspora, had migrated to France in search of employment during the inter war period. The remaining 70,000 arrived either during or after the war. The latter, which was usually referred to as the 'new' diaspora

consisted of people who had variously been taken into German forced labour, were freed prisoners of German concentration camps or were demobilised from the Polish military units which fought with the British in the West. The Polish community in the West also consisted of German POW, usually Silesians or Kasubians who had been forcefully conscripted into the Wehrmacht. While the 'new' diaspora was considered to have links with the Polish government in exile which resided in London, the 'old' diaspora, being economic migrants were keen to return to Poland. The Ambassador reported that on hearing of land reform and about the nationalisation of enterprises, the 'old' diaspora, most notable the miners, looked forward to returning to Poland. So strong was this sentiment that the Ambassador described it as a 'suitcase' mood, by which he meant that many of the Poles were already packed in preparation for the return to Poland. He advised against a government sponsored drive to encourage mass returns to Poland because of problems with transport. <sup>21</sup>

Repatriation of Polish miners from France required the full cooperation of the French government and the management of the mines. In principle this could have been done without reference to the French authorities because most Poles had not been naturalised which meant that they could not have been detained or prevented from traveling to Poland. But on a diplomatic level such action would have been imprudent, therefore the Polish Embassy in Paris put the matter on an official footing. While no separate repatriation office was established in Paris, the Polish embassy assumed responsibility for liaising with the French authorities and for organising the transfer of Poles to Poland (Kersten 1974, p.125). In the first place the embassy organised the repatriation of Poles who had found themselves in France as a result of war time activities. Between September 1945 and June 1946 nearly 18,000 Poles were assisted in returning to Poland (Wróbel 2009, pp. 473-4). By the end of 1946 the embassy accepted that those who wanted to return had done so. But at the same time the embassy looked for a way of encouraging Polish miners to return to Poland. By then the repatriation drive became more than just a way of bringing back to Poles scattered through war time activities and became a way of securing a work force which could be deployed in the newly acquired German territories, most notably in Silesia (Banasiak 1963, pp. 30-1). On 20 February 1946 an agreement was signed by the Polish and French governments for the repatriation of 5,000 Polish coal face workers and their families to Poland during that year. The French were not happy to lose an excellent work force in particular at a time when they too hoped to increase coal extraction. They therefore tried to restrict the repatriation to 5,000 only whereas the Poles insisted that they would return to the subject during the coming years. The French then responded by asking for supplies of Polish coal in return for letting the Polish miners leave. The Poles rejected this request. In the end the Polish delegation had to admit

that the French had been remarkably fair and that the representatives of the French Union of Miners and the CGT had been very helpful. The latter two organisations had in fact helped in setting up a repatriation office and placed announcements in their broadsheets and in newspapers read by miners.<sup>22</sup> The CZPW representative who came to France to attend those talks and who later visited some of the Polish community centres in Paris came back with a very good impression of the miners who, it was hoped, Poland would soon welcome back. He pointed out that the prospect of the return to the homeland was inspiring the Poles and that they had expressed a longing to be in Poland, though he felt that they were creating a very idealised image of the country. But he felt that these were people who were 'moral, cultured and materially on a higher level than miners in Poland'. The delegate who was a mining engineer and who presumably knew the realities of Polish daily life, also cautioned: 'If we manage to only in a small way to transplant (this community) to Poland we shall gain a positive force, but one (which will be) defenceless in relation to the low morality of daily Polish life, a force which will undoubtedly need our protection, our, meaning the coal industry's (protection).' Everything about the life of the Polish diaspora in France recommended itself to someone coming from war torn Poland. It lived a well organised life, fully integrated into the French world, respectful of its democratic traditions and history. The CZPW representative noted that they were politically active and belonged to trade unions and civic organisations. He further explained that the arrival in Poland of the first transport of 1,500 workers and their families would give a much needed moral boost for the Polish government. Poland's prestige would be thus enhanced. He felt that Poland needed workers of such high moral and professional standards. The arrival of the first and subsequent tranches of Polish miners from France was to enrich Polish life which would go beyond mere productivity targets.<sup>23</sup>

The decision to reemigrate to Poland was not merely a response to the Polish Embassy's campaign. The initiative was as much the result of some sections of the mining community believing that this was the right thing to do for Poland. The delegate of the CZPW who was in France in February 1946 was able to make easy contact with the Polish mining communities and to convey to them the message that they were needed in Poland. In France the initiative to encourage and to organise repatriation was taken up by the French section of the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza – PPR). After the war, spontaneously, these Communists formed foreign branches of the PPR which then made contact initially with the Polish embassies and consulates.<sup>24</sup> In France relations between the PPR and the embassy appear to have developed well and PPR, while strongly rooted in French political realities also collaborated with the embassy and various Polish state delegates in a

drive for the miners to return to Poland to build Socialism. When on 16 March 1946 activists from the PPR in France convened a conference to discuss repatriation from the Pas-de-Calais and Nord districts the matter was already well advanced. 3,604 miners with their families had volunteered for repatriation.<sup>25</sup> An interesting point which emerged from the report on the conference was the fact that PPR and the embassy had established good working relations but also that they were liaising with the other Polish diaspora organisations on the basis of shared objectives. The conference had been attended by delegates from the Polish National Council, the Polish section of the CGT, the Executive of the Federation of Polish Emigrants and a variety of youth organisations. By March the main points of discussion were organisational matters because the principle of repatriation seems to have been widely debated and generally met with approval and enthusiasm in the Polish mining community. This would suggest that the idea of returning to Poland was discussed with the Polish diaspora which in turn had expressed an interest in repatriation even before the Polish government decided to work towards the same objective.

The operation was run by the representatives of the CZPW with support from the embassy, representatives of the Polish Red Cross and appointed members of the Polish diaspora. It was entirely funded by the Polish government which had set aside 100 mln Polish zlotys to finance the project. The coal industry was given an assurance by the Treasury that it would carry the full costs of the recruitment and repatriation during 1946, 1947 and any further years. Since the main aim was to complete the plan for coal extraction, securing manpower was just one of the way of guaranteeing the plan's success.<sup>26</sup>

The repatriation of Polish miners was very well orchestrated. While the recruitment and publicity was left in the hands of committees appointed by the National Council of Poles in France, the final decision were made by the Secretariat which functioned in the embassy. The French government was not involved in any of the stages though it had agreed to the repatriation. From the outset it was assumed that the directors of the French mines would not be happy with the loss of the workforce but where there was evidence of obstruction this took the form of their being just difficult. No intimidation was reported and no threats were made to those who had indicated that they wanted to leave. Those miners who had applied to be included in the repatriation had to fill in a form which then had to be verified by the mine where they had worked. This was followed by a medical examination. The purpose of both was to make sure that only miners with the required qualifications and in a good state of health were included in the repatriation.<sup>27</sup> With help from UNRRA the Polish Embassy bought

US rolling stock which was used to take the miners and their families to Poland. All repatriants were encouraged to take their personal property to furnish their new homes and any farm animals they possessed. In addition they were to bring to Poland tools and implement.

Between 15 May and 15 October 1946 32 trains departed from various congregation centres in France. 5,029 miners with their families, numbering in all 12,854 people, were thus transported to Poland. The largest numbers of miners were from Pas-de-Calais (3,656), the second largest from Moselle and Meurthe de Moselle (332). 22 trains collected miners from Northern France, 5 from Southern and Central France and 5 from Eastern France. Each train consisted in average of 45 to 50 cars and carried up to 500 people with all their belongings. No major problems were reported at this stage. The Polish written summary report was in every respect positive indicating that the first trains was seen off by a crowd of 10,000 people who bade their compatriots farewell in an atmosphere imbued with patriotic fervour and emotion.

No sooner did the first group of miners arrive in Poland and the organisers endeavoured to mobilize Poles for repatriation during the coming year, major problems were reported. These difficulties had an immediate impact and the number of miners willing to return to Poland fell. The authorities realised that this would have a very damaging impact on the plans for coal extraction for 1947. This alerted them to the need, in the first place, to find out what was the reason for the negative reports, and in the second, to immediately rectify this. Since according to the plan coal exploitation was to increase, so the Poles could not afford to lose the valuable human resource which the Polish miners in France represented. Already in the summary report for the 1946 repatriation the authors had signalled that there were very real problems in the way these miners and their families had been received in Poland. Three problems stood out. The first was the way the miners were treated by their superiors in Polish mines. The Polish author of the report, who clearly knew the French work place well warned:

The re emigrants who went back had worked in France for several years. A French miner is used to being treated well by his superiors, to being able to discuss with them matters relating to his professional work. A Polish miner who has worked in France for several years, had got used to these conditions of work, and considering them to be good, wanted to transplant them to Poland. Unfortunately (his, the miner's) patriotism and democratic habits were not appreciated by the

administration, as they should have been. Which is why letters are arriving in France in which the miners, the re emigrants, complain about the superiors hostile attitude towards them.<sup>28</sup>

Possibly more problematic was the fact that the miners received low wages, housing was inadequate and that the female members of the families could not find employment, which had been the norm in French mining settlements. According to the report more worrying was the fact that the Polish community in France was fracturing and possibly succumbing to persuasion from groups hostile to the government of National Unity in Poland. These were issues which the Polish Embassy was monitoring continuously as it was only too well aware of the fact that the question of whether to return to Poland had acquired a political significance. This was because people started wondering about Poland's future and the direction in which political life would develop. (Kersten 1974, pp. 199-200). Writing on 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1946 the PPR representative in France reported to the Central Committee of the PPR that the Polish émigré community was divided into three groups.<sup>29</sup> The first had allied itself with the PPR and was fully aware of the economic and organisational problems in Poland. The second was under the influence of the *Narodowiec* publication and Father Cegielka who were disseminating information about difficulties in Poland. The PPR cell in France chose to believe that the party had been at fault in failing to find a way of linking up with Poles who as a result were persuaded by information which the latter group was disseminating. But, as the embassy reported, the most worrying was the third grouping which was described as pro-fascist and was hostile to the government in Poland. PPR planned to base its propaganda campaign for miners to return to Poland on the Organisation for the Help of the Fatherland (Organizacja Pomocy Ojczyźnie – OPO) a Polish community organisation which had existed in France before the war. In order to combat anxieties about what awaited the returning miners and to neutralise hostile propaganda OPO appointed a delegation which was to go to Poland on a fact finding mission. This delegation was to in particular visit the Katowice district, where most of the repatriants had been channelled. But the embassy report also noted that miners who had expressed an interest in returning to Poland had been approached by agents of the other Polish organisations with the aim of dissuading them from going back. At this point first letters from the repatriants started arriving in France. A number of the recent repatriants indicated that they wanted to return to France which had a bad effect on the party's efforts to encourage repatriation.

A notable decrease in the numbers of applicants must have had a mobilizing effect on the authorities in Poland because a month later a proposal was in place to address the repatriated miners' grievances. PPR in Paris was kept informed of the proposals presumably so they could disseminate this information during their contacts

with those miners who were still hesitating as to whether to return to Poland.<sup>31</sup> The plan was that the newly arrived French repatriants should be released from paying taxes for one year and that higher family support allowances should be paid to them. The same report suggested that daughters of the French repatriants should receive training so they could be employed in skilled professions eg. as shop assistants, bookkeepers, nurses and typists. The miners who had returned to Poland were though increasingly seen as not just a skilled and productive group, but their political and moral qualities were repeatedly stressed. This explains why the report recommended that they should be trained to act as supervisors and foremen, so they could be used to replace the Germans who had dominated the supervisory roles. The continuing employment of Germans was a source of irritation to the returning miners. If the repatriants could replace them the extent of sabotage in the mines which was put down to the Germans, would be reduced.<sup>32</sup>

In view of the already signalled negative reports from Poland the Polish Consulate in Paris knew that continuing repatriation would have to be preceded by a propaganda campaign to persuade the Polish community in France that all was well in the homeland. Problems which had been identified earlier had to be addressed in detail. This explains why a two pronged effort had to be made. In the first place living conditions and pay in Poland had to be improved and in the second positive information about conditions in Poland had to be disseminated throughout the Polish mining communities in France. So important was the campaign to persuade the miners to return to Poland that, in spite of the appalling economic circumstances in Poland, funds were swiftly made available. On 19 September 1946, which was before the elections, the Council of Ministers had agreed to fully fund the repatriation from the Treasury. 100mln Polish zloty was immediately made available for the repatriation of miners from France. The coal mining industry was assured that it would not have to cover from its budget the costs of either the recruitment or the repatriation.<sup>47</sup>

The pressure to improve working conditions was motivated by the need to tackle disaffection which was being communicated to the Polish diaspora in France but also because the miners already in Poland appeared to act against all expectations. During 1946 565 strikes took place in major enterprises. These usually related to the textile industry but in reality all sections of the economy were affected, including coal mining (Kamiński 2000, p. 60), The 'Frenchmen' were notably law abiding and committed to left wing parties but still they voiced disaffection with working conditions and furthermore were ready to resort to strikes. The miners from France were in some cases the organisers of the strikes (Kamiński 2000, p. 96), On 17 July 1946, which was pay day,

the miners from France working in the 'Ludwik' mine in the district of Zabrze threatened to stop work. Not only were the miners furious with the low pay but their wives also loudly voiced their anger. As one of the mining engineers reported, 'all the miners from France are unhappy with the conditions of work and with pay rates...The miners wives are the most unhappy and showed this quite openly (by) cursing and complaining in public in the town of Zabrze'. While in this case the strike was averted by the management and the workers' committee intervening, the fact that these were men were 'ideologically aware and in 98 per cent belong to political organisations' indicated the limits of their compliance with the regime's objectives.<sup>48</sup> Not surprisingly therefore the management of the coal mines first response to these problems was to ensure that the most pressing grievances were swiftly addressed. In any case the managers had to have it spelled out to them what the miners from France were used to and what were their expectations. These were people who were used to the extremely generous family allowances. The employment of wives and daughters in local industries was taken for granted. In Poland the mines were often in areas where no other industries existed, the exception to which was Wałbrzych which had a ceramic factory and sugar industries which could employ females. This meant that vocational training courses would have to be run to prepare the women for employment in other economic activities.<sup>49</sup> The Polish Embassy in Paris, advocated that the miners' grievances should be addressed immediately because this would have a very positive impact on the willingness of remaining miners to return to Poland.<sup>50</sup> In addition to repeating the already known list of grievances about housing and provisioning they sought to alert the authorities to disappointments which had their roots in different political cultures. The embassy report noted that in France church observance was low and religion was not taught in schools. The miners had functioned in a political world in which the Soviet Union was spoken of with respect and where anti-Semitism as it was known in Poland was unheard of. Those who returned to Poland were shocked by the Catholic Church's presence in all walks of life, including within schools and by the constant and casual anti-Semitism. One example of the gap of expectations between the miners from France and the realities which prevailed in Poland was illustrated by the case of a miner who died in an accident and whose friends, knowing his views, wanted to bury him without a religious ceremony. So shocking was their decision to the local Poles that they were neither able to get a coffin nor secure a plot in the cemetery. Even miners in France and Belgium who were members of the PPR sections in those countries were signalling that the realities in Poland were falling short of what was expected. An example of the worrying trend was the fact that party activists were now advising their members not to rush to Poland. In another case it was reported that a miners' delegation had gone to Poland to hand over to the mines pneumatic drills, which were probably purchased after a campaign to help



fellow miners in Poland. When the delegation returned its members advised Polish miners in Belgium not to be in too much of a hurry to return to Poland. As a result numbers of application from Belgium fell.<sup>52</sup> Anger, irritation and finally disappointment with living and working conditions led to a dangerous situation of some repatriants applying to return to France. In March 1947 just weeks before the next round of transports from France were to depart for Poland Władysław Gomułka, in his capacity of Minister for the Recovered Territories was informed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that the French Consulate had applicants from 300 recent repatriated miners who now wanted to return to France. Low pay and the children's inability to integrate into life in Poland were cited as the main cause of unhappiness. The ministry appealed to Gomułka to treat the miners as a special case. The return of the repatriants to France would effectively destroy all hopes for the mobilisation campaign for the return of further miners to Poland.<sup>53</sup>

One of the issues which caused concern was hostility towards the repatriants in Poland. On arrival they were met by people who tried to dissuade them from coming back.<sup>54</sup> In 1946 the negative reaction of the Poles to people to 'the Frenchmen' was probably motivated by the fact that they were well dressed and had brought with them property and tools of which no Poles could have dreamed. This had a negative impact on the repatriants from France. The Polish consulate in Paris pointed out that this matter needed to be addressed. Polish society was not tolerant towards different people and when they heard youngsters speaking in French they reacted to them with hostility. The same happened in schools where the children were struggling because of they spoke Polish with distinct accents.<sup>55</sup> The issue of the way families coped had a direct bearing on the miners willingness to consider returning. So important was the matter that as the numbers of miners willing to return to Poland fell during 1947 to this aspect of the campaign became more important. PPR in France continued to be the main driving force behind the campaign to return to Poland. At the beginning of 1947 PPR in Poland reminded the PPR branches abroad to continue calling for Poles to return and help in the post war reconstruction.<sup>56</sup> The directive stressed that difficulties should be discussed openly but that Poles enquiring about returning to Poland should be told that if things were bad then that was more of a reason for them to return and to help rectify these problems. While the propaganda campaign for the miners to return was increased, so the PPR branch in France tried to comply with the directives. During the months after the elections the government increased pressure on those in France to expedite the repatriation. The Conference of Social Organisations in France which represented an umbrella organisation of all left wing social and political Polish organisations and which was clearly dominated by the Communists tried to persuade the Poles to make the

commitment.<sup>57</sup> The Conference organisers tried to monitor the mining colonies and to respond to the changing mood. They worked closely with the Embassy and in fact guided the consulate officials in resolving practical issues, such as those relating to currency exchanges, how to help the miners get permits so they could take their chattels and livestock with them to Poland.<sup>58</sup> The battle for the miners to return was acquiring a political dimension with the PPR activists presenting this as a conflict between the reactionary forces who had no desire for Poland to be rebuilt and the progressive workers who should go back. And in that formulation they came up against the problem that women were more cautious and conservative. They seemed to be so important a factor in each families decision as to whether to stay in France or to return to Poland, that special propaganda material was to be prepared in order to make them change their minds.<sup>59</sup> No amount of propaganda materials and of campaigning helped. By September PPR knew that they had failed in the stated objective of increasing the numbers of those willing to return to Poland. In that the women had been a key factor. The other factor were letters from Poland which painted a worrying picture of a country beset by a myriad of economic and social problems.<sup>60</sup>

While the recruitment of miners for repatriation to Poland in 1947 continued to take place in France, the Polish authorities sought to establish firmer control over developments once the trains arrived on the Polish border.<sup>61</sup> It clearly was not enough to have welcoming committees with brass bands, security from thefts and protection from confrontations with enemies of the regime who would seek to disabuse the returning miners became a matter of some concern to the Ministry. On 17 January a letter was sent by the Ministry of Industry to the Ministry of Public Safety asking that security officers should be delegated to meet the trains with the repatriants as they arrived in Poland. In 1946 the trains had been confronted by organised groups which ‘took action to sow defeatism and to portray the internal situation in the country in way that was unfavourable to the Polish reason or state’.<sup>62</sup> The authorities saw this not merely as a sign of social and economic conflict but perceived that there were political motives in the unfavourable attitude towards ‘the Frenchmen’. Agents from the Ministry of Public Safety were to henceforth be present at the border crossings at which the repatriants trains arrived. The repatriants were to be afforded special protection and the officers assigned to this task were, to be recruited from the repatriants who had returned earlier.<sup>63</sup>

An entirely new note was struck by the message sent by the Central Committee of the PPR to Paris to instruct the embassy to appoint two men responsible for each train which would be bringing the miners to Poland. One

was to be in charge of technical matters but the second 'was to be politically responsible for the transport'.<sup>64</sup> The role of the political agent was certainly not confined to ensuring that defeatism was kept to the minimum. On the contrary, his role was to screen the repatriants with a view to their joining the party on arrival in Poland and being used by the party in the locality to which they were directed. On arrival in Poland the political agent was to immediately contact the district party secretary and after giving a full report of the journey he was to state how many party members were included in the transport, how the transport was greeted once it arrived on the Polish border, and how it was handled on arrival at its destination. Finally the political agent was to give a short character sketch of each party member on the transport. Because much of this information was to be verified before the train departed the party members would be directed to areas where they were most needed. When the reports were prepared they reveal the purpose of the screening. The information they contained indicated the degree of party trustworthiness as it distinguished between those who had been in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil war and those who were described as merely party members. The information also indicated the nature of possible employment which was evident from following recommendations: 'Appropriate for employment in the security services' and 'Can be trusted with money'.<sup>65</sup> While it is impossible to say whether these recommendations had any bearing on how the miners were employed the regime might well have made some use of the politically reliable 'Frenchmen'.<sup>66</sup>

During the opening months of 1947 it became clear that the outline plans for economic reconstruction would not be achieved. This coincided with terrible weather conditions during the winter during which frost killed overwintering crops from which it was obvious that there would be a shortage of food during the coming year. The need for coal increased but the transport system, primarily rail was affected by the cold. At the same time the Soviet leaders demanded that coal supplies from Polish mines to the Soviet Union should be increased. Since the elections in January 1947 PPR had consolidated its grip on matters relating to production and proceeded to launch a campaign to mobilise the work force. In reality all increases in production were due to the raising of miners' working hours. They were also forced to work during Sundays and holiday. Shortage of manpower and limited ability to mechanize the process of coal extraction led to pressure being put on those miners who were already working in the mines (Jeziński i Petz 1980, pp. 87-8). In 1947 Poland's coal production was 57.5 mln tones whereas in 1948 70.3 tones. In each of these years production was increased without further investment or employment of additional miners (Jeziński i Petz 1980, pp. 88-9). During 1945 six mln tones of coal were exported to the Soviet Union, during the next years that figure was increased first to

seven and then to eight mln tones. The coal which was sent to the Soviet Union was at a fraction of the world price and still the Soviet Union put pressure on Poland to increase deliveries. The Polish government was powerless to refuse even though the party leaders knew that they were alienating the miners. Instead they bowed to the pressure and forged on with increasing the miners' working day from the previous 7.5 hours per shift to 8.5. Not surprisingly waves of strikes hit key industries. In all cases shortage of basic supplies and increases in food prices lay at the root of the labour unrest (Kamiński, Ł 1999, pp. 63-3). Anxiety about the possibility of further strikes haunted the party and the managers of the mines but there appeared few choices (Torańska, 1985, p.31) . The cancellation of UNRAA supplies to Poland and Soviet pressure on Poland to discontinue exploratory talks on Marshall Aid defined Poland's position in Europe as that of being firmly within the Soviet sphere.

In March 1947 it was already well known that the target of 10,000 coal face miners from France would not be reached. PPR in France signalled that the full extent of the shortfall, while not known precisely, would be very big. On 27 April a meeting of 500 miners (presumably Polish miners) delegates from the Pas de Calais and Nord departments took place to discuss the repatriation. The Secretary of the PPR in France wrote to the party representative in Wałbrzych that he anticipated 'great difficulties in the fulfilment of the repatriation plan'.<sup>70</sup> This prediction proved to be correct. At the time when the Ministry for Foreign Affairs wrote of the employment of 41,000 coal Polish coal face miners and 9,000 surface workers in French mines the final tally of applicants for repatriation in 1947 was shocking low. On 28 April the number of applicants stood at 2,505 coal face miners and 2,940 surface workers. The largest number of applicants was from the Pas de Calais (1,403 and 256). 280 and 30 applied from Dijon, 240 and 26 from Strasbourg Hte. Sao Ne Rouchamp, 185 and 31 from St.Etienne Loire, and 146 and 35 from Clermont-Ferrand. From the smaller mining areas the figures were considerably lower as was the case from Lyon (18 and 3) and Nantes Vendee (9).<sup>71</sup> During the following years when a summary was made of the numbers of miners that had been repatriated from France in 1947 the earlier pessimistic predictions proved correct. Only 2,844 coal face miners and 5,77 surface workers came back to Poland during that year.<sup>72</sup>

The unease caused by the slowing down of the repatriation program created an atmosphere in which the various agencies involved sought to deflect the responsibility for the recruitment shortfall and for the looming problems. This might explain lengthy reports send by the Polish Consulate in Paris to the Ministry for Foreign affairs in

June. Just as the repatriation swung into operation with the first train leaving on 12 June from Lens, so the consulate signalled that while the quotas for the first period would be fulfilled, the fall off in applications was so serious that the overall plan for 1947 would not be fulfilled. The consulate which continued to be well informed of the French realities, put this down to two main causes. Hostile elements which supported the now derecognised government in exile were held responsible for an extensive campaign of disinformation. At the same time the management of French mines had taken action to retain their valuable workers. They and the local offices, whose cooperation was necessary if the project was to be successful, were now trying to prevent the loss of their work force. But the most cutting criticism was reserved for the engineers and foremen of the Polish mines in which the repatriants from the 1946 transports worked. The consulate pointed out that miners who had worked in French mines were not servile and had not expected to be treated so badly by their superiors. They had a strong sense of dignity and self worth and expected to be shown respect for their professionalism. Work place relations in Poland were very different from what they had known in France and this affected the old miners. At the same time the Poles' hostile attitude towards 'the Frenchmen' was something which the younger repatriants found difficult to overlook.<sup>73</sup>

An article which appeared in the newspaper *Voix du Nord* which was published in Pas de Calais on 15 June 1947 particularly stung the Poles. Written by Serge Karsky who was sent to Poland with the explicit task of finding out first hand how the repatriants from France had fared in Poland, the article captured the predicament in which the Polish authorities had found themselves. This was in essence a problem of needing the repatriants in order to boost production of coal while at the same time not knowing how to handle this sizeable human migration. What must have appealed to the French readership was the author's obvious conclusion that the repatriants felt a stronger affinity with France than with Poland and that they had immense respect for French ways of doing things, the legality, the propriety, respect and good standard of living, none of which they had found in their homeland.<sup>74</sup>

When in 1947 the first indications of the low uptake of the repatriation program were communicated to Poland the Central Committee of the party established a commission to deal with the repatriation from France and Belgium. There was no mistaking the deep anxiety about the shortfall in the number of miners willing to come back to Poland.<sup>75</sup> During a meeting with all agencies involved in the repatriation over which Minc presided an attempt was made to identify those responsible for the problems. In view of Minc's highly politicised approach

to the economic problems it is not surprising to note that this was a meeting committed to identifying political and leadership shortcomings rather than objective difficulties. During this particular meeting the Polish delegation responsible for repatriation which was working within the Polish Consulate in Paris was described as the being the source of all problems. It was accused of not standing up to the French who were trying to use the repatriation to get rid of the ill and infirm workers. But it was the CZPW that came for the biggest and most damning criticism. Opposition to the repatriation of miners from France ‘ had undisputedly political connotations’. <sup>76</sup> As a result of these debates the Central Committee Commission put pressure on the local party cells to become more active and to in particular to prioritise housing for the repatriants. <sup>77</sup> As the first transports moved so all agencies involved, most notably the CC Commission in Poland, PPR section in France which was working closely with the consulate and finally the CZPW all tried to do something to maintain the flow of applicants. Glossy publications were despatched from Poland to France for distribution to Polish miners. The Embassy and the CZPW tried to organise delegations which would visit Poland and hopefully return with positive reports. But still something was lost, the momentum, so impressive at the beginning of 1946 was not there, and this was at a time when in Poland the demand for reliable and hard-working skilled miners was increasing.

As all agencies tried to deflect accusations that they had failed the Central Committee and not the CZPW took over the responsibility for finding solutions. That and the tensions between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers had an impact on the way the debate was being framed. On 3 October the PPR cell in Paris appealed to the Foreign Section of the Central Committee for understanding. They pointed out that in Paris they were confronted by new developments; the consolidation of groupings opposed to the government in Poland, the worsening of the economic situation which made the French less willing to agree to the loss of valuable workers and finally the international situation. All these issues required the party cell to become more politically aware. They therefore requested that the cadre in France should all receive intensive political training which would help them understand the present political juncture. They wanted to strengthen links with Warsaw. They then requested that they should be invited to the forthcoming plenary session of the Central Committee so that they could reconnect with the debates within the party. <sup>78</sup>

The repatriation drive was always intended primarily as a way of getting economically valuable workers to return to Poland. While the PPR branch in France defined this in terms of returning to Poland to help build

Socialism, it is doubtful that this is how most of the Polish miners and their families saw it. To them this was most likely a return to the country of their origin. This in itself would not have been unusual. It nevertheless raises questions as to why the repatriation program came to an end. There was undisputedly an enormous gap between what the miners had hoped for and what they were confronted with once in Poland. It would seem that they had hoped for working and living condition like those they had known in France. Instead they found a world demoralised by the war and politically deeply divided. The fact was that most of the repatriated miners, in common with all other new arrivals in the newly acquired and previously German territories, were essentially pioneers, expected to build a new reality, a new Poland (Kenney, 1997, p.137). The factory managers, mining engineers and the party structures were untried and unsure how to treat these workers. The miners from France had in Poland no structures, trade unions nor cultural associations into which to slot in, they therefore formed their own, on the basis of what they had known in France. To them Poland quickly became a hostile territory which they could not leave because the Polish government prevented any miners who wanted to return to France from leaving. In 1948 1,064 coal face mines and 267 surface workers elected to return to Poland. In 1949 when the project was wound up by the French government only 146 miners and 16 surface workers from France returned as part of the state sponsored repatriation drive.<sup>80</sup>

From the beginning of 1948 the repatriation project was no longer supported by the French government. In fact the French government which had during 1946 and the first half of 1947 allowed the Polish organisations and the consulate to arrange the repatriation now took a different view. Initially the Poles had hoped that the political confrontations and the waves of strikes which affected France during 1947 would encourage the Poles to return to Poland. They noted that the economic situation in France had deteriorated which led them to be optimistic. But at the same time there were worrying sign of Poles in France holding back from coming to Poland and the only explanation which the consulate could offer was that there was a 'war psychosis'. A general sense of insecurity which had been caused by international tension and 'events in Germany, prevailed'. Fear of another war led people to postpone making decisions to reallocate to another country. The Poles responsible for the repatriation noticed that people who were presenting themselves for repatriation were either retired or in receipt of invalidity pensions which meant that not only were they not employable but would in fact become a burden to the Polish state.<sup>81</sup>

In February and March 1948 following a wave of strikes the French police arrested the leadership of the PPR in France. The police, acting on the instruction of the Minister of Interior, raided the party premises and found incriminating documents which linked the party with the Polish embassy and showed that PPR was receiving instructions from Poland.<sup>82</sup> The bombshell came on 3 May with reports that the PPR in France had been declared an illegal organisation.<sup>83</sup> The role of the PPR in France in first facilitating and coordinating and later in campaigning for the miners to return to Poland had been crucial in making the project viable from the French side. On 27 November the Quai d'Orsay cancelled the repatriation agreement.<sup>84</sup> In fact the French government had during the last months used the repatriation program to force militant miners of Polish origin to leave France. The impression which the Polish government got was that in the confrontation with militant workers the French government had decided to get rid of those Poles who were politically active in the strikes but who did not have French citizenship. Throughout November a steady stream of Polish miners were either forced to leave or were simply deposited on the border with Germany. The latter presented themselves to Polish agencies usually destitute and in need of help. The CZPW found out that some had been taken straight from the prisons. The coal mining industry brought these men to Poland and employed them in mining.<sup>85</sup>

By the time the repatriation of miners from Western Europe came to an end in November 1949 Poland had acquired 11,502 men of which 10,157 were from France.<sup>86</sup> Of those, 1,064 coal face miners and 268 surface workers had come to Poland in 1948 and 146 coal face miners and 16 surface workers returned in 1949.<sup>87</sup> These figures have to be seen on the background of the assessment made by the CZPW in October 1948 when it was stated that release of German POW's has created a desperate situation in Lower Silesia. Coal mining required a minimum of 6000 miners to replace them. In spite of a recruitment drive in Poland the miners from France were still the only possible source of manpower.<sup>88</sup> As has been shown these hopes were not realised and clearly the fulfilment of the Three Year Plan could only have been taken place with the increase in productivity by those already employed.

Although the Six Year Plan was officially initiated in 1950 the year 1949 marked the boundary between reconstruction and the process of intensive industrialisation which was the stated objective of the Six Year Plan. The long term economic program beyond the Three Year Plan was introduced in December 1948 at the unity congress of the PPR and PPS which resulted in the formation of the Polish Workers' Unity Party (Zjednoczona Polska Partia Robotnicza – PPZPR). The program outlined as its aim the redistribution of productive capacity



throughout the country and the overcoming of economic backwardness (Kaliński i Landau, 1976, p.25) . The 1948 draft plan anticipated that the Six Year Plan would lead to the quick development of industry with the main focus being on iron, steel, machine building and electrification.<sup>90</sup> The basis of the Six Year Plan was coal, the exploration of which was going to be a problem. On 21 September 1950 undaunted by physical or human constraints Minc announced that the Six Year Plan would result in the 35 percent increase in lignite coal extraction and the building of 11 new mines. Overall productivity was also to improve by 38 per cent. The extraction of bituminous coal was to increase by a heady 84 per cent (Minc in Bierut, B. (et.al) 1951, pp.104-5) .<sup>91</sup> The productivity targets did not speak of manpower or of employment, they were in effect a means of mobilizing the working class to build socialism. Whereas in 1945 the debate on manpower was rooted in realities, in 1950 this was no longer the case. The repatriation of miners from France had not been an improbable project even if it ultimately failed. Their history and fate of the 'Frenchmen' who came back to Poland was a chapter in the larger history of Poland's post war economic history and by implication in the political history of the time. What followed was different and indeed the aim of the Six Year Plan clearly was not to practically and rationally overcome constraints to the achievement of stated objectives, but to vanquish the improbability of these being achieved.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Wojewodzkie Archiwum Państwowe, Katowice (henceforth WAP), Centralny Zarząd Przemysłu Węglowego

(henceforth CZPW), 393. 3868. 2 January 1950

<sup>6</sup> WAP, CZPW, 393/4862,8 November 1946

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> WAP, CZPW 393/8232

<sup>14</sup> The use of the phrase Recovered Territories was to signify that these areas were returning to the 'motherland', whereas in fact historically none of the areas in question had a continuous link with the Polish Kingdom. Lower Silesia in particular had not been part of the historical Polish lands.

<sup>21</sup> Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, Warsaw (henceforth AMSZ), Repatriation Office , France, 274, Zespół 22, W3/52

<sup>22</sup> WAP, CZPW, 393/4861

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (henceforth AAN) AAN, PPR in France 382/VI/10

<sup>25</sup> AAN, PPR in France, 382, XVI-2

<sup>26</sup> CZPW 393/8231

<sup>27</sup> AMSZ, Repatriation Office , France, 274, Zespół 22, 78/4

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> AAN, PPR in France 382, VII/83 12 September 1946

<sup>31</sup> AAN, PPR in France 382, XVI-3 22 October 1946

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> WAP, CZPW 393/8231,

<sup>48</sup> WAP, CZPW, 393/4897, 26 July 1946

<sup>49</sup> WAP, CZPW, 393/4896 November 1946

<sup>50</sup> WAP, CZPW 393/4896 11 November 1946

<sup>52</sup> AAN, PPR in France, 382, VI/10

<sup>53</sup> AAN, Ministry of Recovered Territories 196. 69 18/1 29 March 1947.

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<sup>54</sup> WAP, CZPW 393/4863 17 January 1947

<sup>55</sup> AAN, CPRsSR 522/II 195 15 June 1947

<sup>56</sup> AAN PPR in France 382 VIII/83 Instructions to all Polish organisations in connection with the repatriation in 1947 p. 21-2

<sup>57</sup> AAN PPR in France 382 XVI/1

<sup>58</sup> AAN. PPR in France 382/XVI/1 14 May 1947

<sup>59</sup> AAN, PPR in France 382/XVI,1 12 June 1947

<sup>60</sup> AAN, PPR in France 382/XVI, 18 September 1947

<sup>61</sup> WAP CZPW 393/4863 17 June 1947

<sup>62</sup> WAP CZPW. 393/4863 17 January 1947

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> AAN, PPR in France, 382, XIV/1 10 February 1947

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> During the course of research in the archives of the mining industry which are housed in Katowice the author of this article frequently heard comments by local people who claimed that most of the 'Frenchmen' worked for the police or/and the security services.

<sup>70</sup> AAN, PPR in France 382, 3/VII-91 28 March 1947

<sup>71</sup> WAP, CZPW, 393/4863

<sup>72</sup> WAP, CZPW, 3868 2 January 1950

<sup>73</sup> AAN CC Commission dealing with repatriation matters, 522/II 195, 15 June 1947

<sup>74</sup> AAN, PPR in France, 382, XVI-3 15 June 1947

<sup>75</sup> AAN, PPR in France 382 VIII/83 5 March 1947

<sup>76</sup> AAN Government Agency for Repatriations, 522/II, 198 26 August 1947

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> AAN PPR in France 382, VIII/83 3 October 1947

<sup>80</sup> WA, CZPW 393,3868 2 January 1950

<sup>81</sup> WAP CZPW, 393/4889, 15 April 1948

<sup>82</sup> AAN PPR in France, 382, XVII-3

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<sup>83</sup> WAP CZPW 393/4889, 3 May 1948

<sup>84</sup> AAN Government Agency for Repatriations, 200 XI/83, 30 November 1948

<sup>85</sup> WAP CZPW, 393/4909 March 1949

<sup>86</sup> WAP CZPW, 393/4895 7 November 1949

<sup>87</sup> WAP CZPW, 393/3868

<sup>88</sup> WAP CZPW, 393/4877 15 October 1948

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. pp. 25-6

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