

HOW DID OCCUPATION AFFECT PEOPLES' LIVES?

Extracts from an account of events in Poland, September 1939 to March 1940

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Extract a

The lack of food is best illustrated by the dramatic account related to me by the girls, concerning a carthorse which dropped dead in one of the main streets of Warsaw. As soon as the carman disappeared, apparently to seek some help, the dead horse was carved up by hundreds of people who, at the end of ten minutes left a bare skeleton on the pavement.

The lack of food is also illustrated by the fact that the price of bread as and where available, has gone up four-fold, and cereals, flour, rice and sugar are almost non-existent.

Whenever the German soldiers get to know of some stock of food either in a warehouse or shop, they walk in and take it away, either not paying at all, or paying very little for it.

Another daily occurrence is the intrusion of German soldiers and Officers, as well as of Gestapo Agents into private houses where the tenants are robbed of everything they possess, under the threat of being shot.

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: OCCUPATION

Extract b

The curfew is rigorously observed in Warsaw, and at the end of Jan. it was imposed from 8 p.m. till 8 a.m. Those who arrive at railway stations after the curfew hours, are advised to apply to the station master for special permits.

An Uncle of the girls, who returned from a short visit to a provincial town whence he was expelled a week or two earlier, arrived at the Warsaw railway station with the rest of the belongings he was able to save from the said visit. At about 8.10 p.m. he duly applied for his permit from the station master, and then walked home, a short distance from the station. As he was about to enter his house, he was shot in the back, and dropped dead on the pavement. During the night, members of his family who expected his arrival, made enquiries by telephone, and they at last were informed that he had left the stationmaster's office in possession of a permit at about 8 p.m. The following morning his wife found him dead on the pavement, with a label attached to his clothing, stating "Found in the street without a permit at 8.10 p.m." The label was issued by a Gestapo Officer. His wife found on him the permit allowing him to be in the street until 9 p.m.

What is this source?

This source is taken from an account of the experiences of two Polish girls who escaped from Poland and arrived in Britain. They then told their story to officials at the British Foreign Office.

The two girls were aged 16 and 18. They arrived in Britain via Berlin, Vienna, Milan and Paris.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/>

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What's the background to this source?

The Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939. Soon afterwards the USSR invaded Poland from the East and the country collapsed. Conditions for Polish civilians were appalling.

As soon as they had conquered the country the Nazis set about putting their policies into action. There were two main policies. The first was to clear Poles out of lands and homes so that German settlers could take their place and gain new living space or Lebensraum. The second policy was the rounding up of Polish Jews and forcing them to live in areas called ghettos. Many Jews were killed during this process, but at this stage the policy of mass murder had not yet come into force.

It's worth knowing that...

The two girls were from a wealthy family. Her family managed to do a deal with a Nazi official to get papers and permission to travel across Europe.

The girls were actually Polish Jews but the Nazi official got them papers that said that they were Aryans. This arrangement very probably saved their lives.

Does this source support the drawing by T. Cuneo?

1. What does the story about the carthorse tell us about food shortages in Poland?
2. According to **both extracts**, how are peoples' lives controlled in occupied Poland?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of **this source** as evidence of what it was like to live under Nazi rule?

Use the table to record your views.