

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: OCCUPATION

Extracts from a letter written by a young Polish girl February 2nd 1940

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Extract a

For the killing of one German whole massacres among the Poles are being perpetrated every day and in general shooting of people goes on constantly for the most trivial reasons, as well as putting them to prison. Tens of thousands of completely innocent people are filling the prisons. In spite of it all Warsaw is as a paradise compared to Pomerania or Posnania, where people are being driven out of their dwelling places and not allowed to take anything with them. Then they put them into unheated trucks and leave them somewhere in the open country in this cold. Untold horrors are being done with the Jews.

Extract b

All classes and all professions are equally staunch in their absolute hatred of the Germans and no wonder. If you had lived through the siege, or rather the murder of Warsaw and passed some further months under the rule of the enemy, you would understand..... They are complete savages without even a vestige of the most commonplace decency or any kind of moral feeling. . . And if all this is to last longer, then - after a far far away victory of the Allies nothing will be left here except the naked soil. The nation will have died. Everybody here believes that the Germans will leave in summer at the latest. To imagine any other solution to be possible would drive one to madness. People are afraid even to think of it. And in spring people are to be driven to Germany to do field work.

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What is this source?

This source is taken from a letter written by a Polish girl from Warsaw who lived through the German invasion of Poland.

The letter was sent to a relative in Britain. That relative then passed the letter on to the Foreign Office so that they could see what was happening in Poland.

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 well as food shortages and other hardships, the population was strictly controlled. There was a curfew and listening to the radio was punishable by death.

As soon as they had conquered the country the Nazis set about putting their plans into action. The first was to clear Poles out of their homes and off the land so that German settlers could take their place and gain new living space or "Lebensraum". The second was to round up the Polish Jews and force them to live in ghettos. A ghetto is usually a poor section of a city inhabited mainly by people of the same race, religion, or social background, often because of discrimination. Many Jews were killed during the process of forcing them into the city ghetto areas, but at this stage the policy of mass murder had not yet come into force.

It's worth knowing that...

In other parts of the letter the girl indicates that conditions in other parts of Poland were even worse than they were in Warsaw.

Unlike source 2, the writer of this source was still in Poland and she was writing to a relative in Britain. She was therefore writing to her own family rather than trying to influence British government officials. They only received this letter because a family member passed it on.

Does this source support the drawing by T. Cuneo?

1. According to both of **these extracts**, how did the Germans deal with any kind of resistance?
2. After reading this source, do you feel more inclined to trust or mistrust the drawing by T. Cuneo or the other document from Poland in the source box?

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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.