I. Polish Deportees.

During the occupation of Eastern Poland by the Red Army about 1 million of the Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian and White Ruthenian population were deported to the interior of the Soviet Union. Among these were about 140,000 children of all ages and classes. They were transported in cattle-trucks without food, water or sanitation. They were forced to work on collective farms in Kazakstan, in mines in the Donetz Basin, on the Trans-Siberian Railway line, in brick-works and saw-mills in the Onsk province, in the forests of the Ural and Siberia in the Far North of the Arctic Regions. Many thousands died, especially among the children and old people. Of the children, it is known that 30%, or 40,000 have died up to 1943.

The figures are as follows:
People registered at the Polish Embassy until January 1943:
- 90,000 Men
- 96,000 Women
- 89,000 Children

Estimated number of people living unregistered in the Far North approx:
- 50,000

Poles called up for the Red Army from Poland:
- 100,000

So-called "Stroj" (Labour) Battalions:
- 75,000

Poles still in prisons and camps:
- 125,000

Poles who emigrated to Russia before June 1941:
- 25,000

Total:
- 646,000

Add to this:
Polish deaths in Russian territory:
- April 1940-December 1942
- 220,000

Poles evacuated to Iran:
- 114,000

After the amnesty following the Polish-Soviet agreement of July 1941 and until the severance of Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations in April 1943, 76,146 Polish children were receiving relief from the Polish Embassy among them 5,764 orphans. They were distributed geographically as follows:

- European Russia: 13,845
- Siberia: 24,339
- Kazakstan: 20,463
- Central-Asian Soviet Republics: 17,449

Relief took the form of financial grants, free food, clothing, footwear, medicines etc. Especial grants in money and kind were given to families with large numbers of children.

But conditions were so hard that families could not, even with assistance, entirely educate and feed their children. The Polish Government set up, in agreement with the Soviet Government, special establishments as follows:

- Orphanages: 73
- Kindergartens: 175
- Schools: 45
- Courses: 68
- Feeding Centres: 176
- First Aid Posts: 78
- Hygiene Centres: 41

These were inadequate for the needs of all the children but many obstacles were put in the way of the Polish Embassy. The Soviet authorities often refused to permit the organisation of institutions or liquidated existing ones on various pretexts. The Embassy also had the greatest difficulty on account of the complete lack of accommodation and fuel and the difficulty in procuring food from Soviet consignments and in the open market. The institutions therefore only existed under hard conditions, some were housed in old wooden barracks or Asiatic windowless huts built on bare soil. Often the children had to sleep on the floor.

Food was sent from Great Britain, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other Allied countries. Despite transport difficulties the lives of many children were saved. They were attended by Polish doctors and taught in Polish. But some could not get relief and they worked on collective farms in forests. Some found their way into Soviet schools where they
were ill-fed, maltreated by the Russian children and their patriotic and religious feelings offended. Some mothers who were deported without their husbands could not support large young family by their own efforts. The children starved, for only those who worked received bread. One story, typical of many, is told of a little boy who was scraping up earth and snow to eat. Seeing this his mother, in despair, tried to hang herself. She was cut down by the Russians, beaten and put in prison. The little boy found a piece of bread and tried to pass it through the door to his mother. He was severely beaten by the guards for this.

Children were also imprisoned in Russia. One Polish woman, now in Britain, told of being in prison where there were Polish boys of 11-13. She was in a cell with some young Russian prostitutes and a murderer. There also young Polish girls in the same cell. The prostitutes were diseased and their language and conversation were horrid to hear. One young Polish girl died of consumption, aged 17 and the prison authorities laughed heartily when she asked for a priest.

The Polish Government wished to evacuate Polish children from Russia and secured the consent of various countries to take them. They approached the Soviet Government to obtain their consent for the evacuation of 50,000 children in April 1942. But permission was refused on the grounds of lack of transport. In September 1942 they consented to orphans being evacuated and a list of 600 was compiled. 504 of these children left Russia and the Soviet refused to let any more leave. In 1941, 500 left for India and 14,154 were evacuated with the families of soldiers. In all, 15,158 children left the U.S.S.R. The Government of India offered to take 10,000, but they were not allowed to go.

Early in 1943 all Polish relief institutions were placed under Soviet management and administration. The children were told that henceforth they would be Soviet citizens and those over 15 were sent to work in factories. The teaching curriculum was modified; religious instruction and practice, the singing of Polish songs etc. abolished. 90% of the teachers were arrested for refusing to conform to this and to accept Soviet citizenship. The children openly boycotted the new management, manifested their religious and national feelings and voiced the opinion that they were better off in orphanages under Polish administration. They are now certainly being instructed in the Russian language in spite of the Soviet Monitor’s proposal that they should be taught in Polish. 15,000 of the children are in Soviet schools. The rest have either been separated from their families and are being brought up as Soviet citizens or are working under extremely hard conditions with their families in forced labour camps etc. Mortality has, or late, been fearful.

The Soviet Monitor of 9th and 11th July 1943, reports the setting up of a special Committee to help the Polish children in the U.S.S.R. It speaks of giving the children education and training in existing professional, technical educational institutes and in technical, factory and railway schools. It will publish textbooks and literature in Polish for the children and train teachers for Polish children’s schools. It will also take care of their health. This Committee is in close contact with the Communist Union of Polish Patriots. Nothing is said about religious instruction.

No relief may now be sent to the Poles in Russia, although many attempts have been made. Nothing is known about the 2500 tons of food, clothes and medicines left behind by the Polish Welfare Committee when they left Russia last April. If these were distributed to the Poles, they must be exhausted by now and further supplies needed. The Australian Government, who is looking after Polish affairs in Russia, can only state in a letter answering an enquiry: "There seems little doubt that the Poles in the U.S.S.R. are in fact existing under considerable strain and privation. It must be remembered that owing to the war the present standard of living is of necessity low and that therefore it cannot be denied that some of the Polish refugees - e.g. those people who come from the towns and are used to a fairly high degree of comfort - are finding living conditions very difficult. Our report states, however, that on the whole they are being treated just as the Russians among whom they are working and are being given the same rations and the same degree of physical comfort. The peasants and working people who are used to hard conditions are, generally speaking, carrying on in a moderately contented manner and retaining their health". (15th December 1943).
2. Baltic Deportees.

There were roughly about 60,000 deportees taken from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from 1940 to June 1941 during the Soviet occupation of those territories. About 20,000 women and 10,000 children from each Baltic State. No relief has ever been allowed to be sent to them by either the International, British or American Red Cross and none of their whereabouts can be traced. The only information available comes from occasional letters smuggled out of Russia and reports from the Estonian sailors seen at Archangel who described their unfortunate condition in prisons, labour-camps and "compulsory exile" on collective farms etc. There is an eye-witness account of Estonian intelligentsia being driven from their camp -on foot- 10 miles to a port, starting at 3 a.m., working at unloading ships all day, and driven back on foot 10 miles in the evening. They received a piece of bread and no more. Enquiries from the Soviet Embassy in London as to the fate of the Baltic children only elicited a reply that they were regarded as Soviet citizens, being subjects of the "Baltic Soviet Republics" which are represented by the Embassies of the U.S.S.R. abroad, which do not recognise the "so-called Baltic Legations" which are not allowed to communicate with their deportees in Russia. (Letter from Soviet Councillor, 16th December, 1943).

The Baltic deportees have not even had the temporary benefit of an amnesty and no relief has been permitted to reach them since they were deported. The death-rate among them, especially among the children is at least as high as among the Poles i.e. 30%.


The Province of Bessarabia was annexed by the U.S.S.R. in 1940 and a number of civil servants evacuated from there by the Romanian authorities in the three days permitted by the ultimatum. The Germans also arranged by agreement with the Soviet authorities for the repatriation of German settlers, which took place in the Autumn of 1940. The population of Bessarabia in 1935 was 3,048,481 and in 1943 it was 2,702,000. A difference of 380,000 may be observed which is not covered by the evacuation of Romanian officials and Germans. The Romanians say that 150,000-200,000 Bessarabians were deported to Russia in 1940-41. When the Romanian troops advanced into Russia with the German Army, attempts were made to trace these deportees but without any result. Their fate is unknown.

Letters from children.

As an illustration of the fate which the Polish children met in Russia, fragments of letters and accounts written by some of these children are given below. They are all word for word translations of the original text. For obvious reasons only the Christian names are given of children who are still in Russia, and most place names have been omitted. Letters from children who have been evacuated from the Soviet Union are, however, quoted in full.

In September 1939, the Russian armies entered Poland. When they reached Sokal, our local town, they left guards on the river Bug, in our village and on the river Słoka. Sad times ensued; we were barred from the church, from school and the shops; there was nowhere to pray and nothing to buy. People began crossing the frontier to buy things and to go to church but many of them were shot by the Russians. Some were imprisoned and deported to Russia. Every day the Committee took down the inventory. Thus we suffered until the terrible day of February 10th.

On February 10th at 4 a.m. carts full of Russian soldiers drew up in front of every house; they drove everybody to the railway station at Płoszczów where we boarded a train. We left in the evening. All the carriages were locked and guarded by Soviet soldiers who never even allowed anyone to look out of the windows. We travelled as prisoners. They gave us no food and literally starved us. When our train stopped at a station they did not allow us to get any fresh water so that we had nothing to drink. The children cried for food and water.

Under conditions like these we travelled all the way to the isolated village. When we arrived there it was a small place - they at once gave us houses to live in, one for two families. On the very first day
all were made to go to work. It was very heavy work, mostly in forests
where the snow was up to seven feet deep. Men felled trees, women burnt
the branches, stripped bark, others made containers for resin and props.
All always went to work hungry; workers received 2 lbs. of bread a day
and those who did not work 1/2 lb. Later conditions grew even worse. In
the summer the work was of a different type. Men sawed the timber they
had felled in the winter and the women collected the resin from the con-
tainers. You were supposed to collect 35 lbs. of resin in May and 140-160
lbs in July and August. They paid 10 kopeks for 1 kilogram of resin
(approx. 2 lbs). It was very heavy work and many people died in the pine
forests. Some died of overwork and others of hunger. Our village "Tchary
was situated in the area of Sverdlivsk, 37 kilometres from Kovshaye. The
road to Kovshaye led through a forest and was so muddy that it was often
impossible to carry anything over it; as a result we were sometimes with-
out food for days. We got some sugar only twice during our entire stay
there, and some cloth about five times but no one could buy it as there
was not enough money. The maximum one could earn in a month was 50 roubles
and after deductions for the "Club" about 30 roubles were left. Some
people had earned only 10 or 15 roubles. In the autumn and spring one
had to attach the resin containers to the trees. In the summer the children
would pick berries in the forest and sell them in the shop. If anyone
failed to go to work he would be arrested. When people returned from work
in the evening they had to queue for bread, and it sometimes took 12 hours
before they got away. There were no workless days, not even Sundays, and
on Easter Sunday all were made to work just as on any other day.

After about a year, in August, an "amnesty" was proclaimed, and we were
told that we could go away anywhere we liked except abroad. We left in a
October. A lot of money was required for the journey, but people sold every-
thing they had to be able to get out of "Tchary". Daddy fell ill at this
time and could not go away, although everyone else did. Nobody had any
horses to take their things to the station and so they had to pull the
sledges themselves. My sister and I put daddy, mummy, our small brother
and sister on a sled and set out on our journey. The road was terrible,
the snow was very deep and we were extremely weak and hungry and could
hardly pull the sleigh. The temperature was 35° Centigrade below freezing
point; we could hardly feel our hands and feet from the cold and we began
to doubt whether we would get anywhere at all. Somehow however, we
arrived at the railway station at Josheve after having pulled the sleigh
for two long days. Our countrymen from Tchary were still there, so we
boarded the train which left on the following evening. Some people said
that we were off to a better place and others that we were on our way to
an even worse place. The journey, however, proved to be better than the
one to Russia, for at least we could get food and did not starve. After
a month we arrived in Khab, Uzbekistan. We were sent to a collective farm.
We were very badly off for we got no bread at all only a small cake
of "izhurgas" (kind of millet), which had to last us for a whole day. V. began at 5 a.m. and ended at 10 a.m. The work consisted of picking cotten
and carting earth. People kept dying all the time. One day my daddy
cought the typhus, mummy on the following day and then the whole family.
None of us would work and had to live on grass. After a week mummy and I
were taken to hospital, and the others remained on the farm. Conditions
in the hospital were very bad, there were not enough beds, no blankets,
masses of people. We all had typhus, we were covered with lice and for a
whole month we had no change of clothes. Mummy was very ill, could not talk
and her temperature kept increasing. I was terribly worried because the
nurses said that mummy would die. The day before mummy died my brother
came to the hospital and told me that daddy had died on February 7th. I
did not tell mummy about it because she had such a temperature. I kept
all day thinking what life would be like without our parents. Mummy was
very weak and died at 10 a.m. on the following day which was a fast day. I
was so upset that my temperature rose and I was fevered and weak until they let
me leave the hospital to rejoin my brothers and sisters. On the very day
they let me go I set out for home. I kept falling in the mud and I was
not certain where our collective farm was. I asked several Uzbeks on the
way but they could not tell me. Somehow, however, I got there by the
evening. They were very sorry at home to see me in such a state. I was
covered with mud and all tears. My sister and elder brother asked me why
I was weeping, but I could not speak and lay unconscious for two days.
Then I told them that mummy was dead. My brothers and sisters were terribly
upset. We all wondered how we were going to live without our parents.
My brother and sister were also ill and could not work and as we got no
food it looked as if we were going to die of starvation. Then we discovered
that there was a Polish military feeding centre in the railway station, which also distributed food to civilians. Although still ill I went there at once to save my brothers and sisters from starving. I returned in the evening with some soup which I gave to all of them to abate their hunger. On the following morning I went again though it was about 9 miles from the farm. I continued these trips for a fortnight, thus saving the lives of all my brothers and sisters. My brother who is 14 joined the Polish Boy Scouts. My 5 year old sister and 5 year old brother went to an institution. The Army took care of my younger sister and myself. We were first taken to the railway station and then by train to Persia. It was not such a terrible journey as the other two were; we were under the care of the Polish Army and lacked nothing. We crossed the Caspian Sea to Pahlevi by boat and finally arrived in Teheran.

Jozefa Wegrzyn, Teheran, March 1943.

Please examine my situation and come to my assistance. My name is Janina, I am 17 and have two brothers and a sister aged 18, 12 and 11 under my care. Both my parents died here in Russia. We were deported from Poland on February 10th, 1940, being the family of an ex-service man settler. Daddy had a small holding in the district of Grodno.

That I find it extremely difficult to keep my family I am sure I do not have to explain in detail. As on November 20th 1942, I read in the newspaper "Polska" that the Polish Embassy accords relief to Polish citizens and especially to children and orphans - it is with confidence that I am writing for assistance and I trust that my request will not meet with a refusal.

I want to keep my young brothers and sister alive and return with them to a great and liberated Poland.


We, the undersigned Polish children in X, where we have found ourselves against our will, beg you most warmly to help us. We are without parents, older brothers or sisters and there is no one to care for us. We appeal to you like to a father...and request that our authorities send us abroad, and if that is impossible that they assist us in whatever form. Once again, we ask you to take us under your care and do not forget us otherwise we shall perish.

Signed by 13 children aged from 6-15.

June 8th 1943.

Dear Countrymen,

I send you my greetings and beg you to take me under your care. I, Jan, was born in 1925 in Grodno. My parents worked in a factory. When I was seven I went to an elementary school. I attended school for seven years and when I was fifteen my parents took me to the factory where I learnt to be a mechanic. I worked there for a year and five months and fell ill and went to a hospital camp in Poland. I was there until June 28, when the Russo-German war broke out. They took us all to X, I did not even see my parents. In X, I stayed in a children's home with my colleagues from the camp. Then a few colleagues and I were taken to factory training to work in the water-works. Some of the Russian boys worked as mechanics and at other better jobs but they would not let me because I was a Pole. I work twelve hours a day in the water. Any clothes I got were stolen. I get fed once a day with soup. Tell me, dear countrymen, can one go on living like this? I did not at first know you were in Kuibyshev, or else I would have written to you earlier. I hear that Tadeusz who was in the children's home with me has joined you. We used to go to school in Grodno together for six years, after which he went to secondary school. He must have told you about me. I have nothing else to say. Goodbye, dear Countrymen, I hope to see you soon.

Signed Jan.

Dear Countrymen,

I received your telegram in which you wrote of the difficulties involved in our going away. It is indeed extremely difficult for us to leave, for the manager is such an awful man. He does not want to let us go for anything in the world because they keep us here as labourers whom they exploit on every occasion. The manager, so as to make us believe that it is not he who is standing in the way, says that we need a permit from the Education Commissariat, for he himself has no power to let us go. He must, however, have got in touch with the Education Commissariat with a
view to preventing us from joining you. Dear countrymen, advise us how to leave this horrible children's home in which they treat us as prisoners. We tried every device, we wrote to the Education Commissariat, we begged the manager, but all in vain. We even tried to escape but the police caught us at the next station. Now we do not know what to do. Like criminals we are shadowed by the police and we have no hope of seeing you. Dear countrymen, please get in touch with the Education Commissariat about our departure or with the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs for our future lies in your hands.

Dear Countrymen, please do not forget about young people whose only wish is to live for Poland. Please reply as soon as possible. We are awaiting your advice with impatience.

Long live the Independent Republic of Poland.

Henryk, 15th August 1942.

We used to live near Rowne. The Russians deported us, i.e. daddy, mummy and my brothers Piotrek and Eugeniusz born in 1926, to the Aral sea area. They said we were to be shot, and so long as we were not free we went there. We arrived in Farabu. Daddy went for bread and got lost and we went "across the water." But conditions there were very bad so we returned after a time. We found daddy and went to live in a collective farm called "Kuibyshev" in the Karakul district, Buchara area. There was no food. We all worked. We went out into the desert and picked grass which was a lot easier. Daddy fell ill, his legs were swollen, he became blue in the face and died. Piotrek died of starvation. Mummy buried him and we had a sheet we possessed. They burned him in the desert and covered the body with stones. The Kirghiz laughed saying that the dogs dug daddy up. Mummy cried.

I worked at picking cotton. One had to pick 50 lbs. I had a basket tied to my waist which I had to fill. When daddy died the "Fredsvedetall" (manager of the collective farm) said that now our family had one worker less we shall all have to work harder and I was told to pick 40 lbs. Otherwise I would get a lot of wheat. Mummy worked at cutting Lucerne. The other Polish children were also made to work in the cotton plantations.

Mummy wanted me to go to an orphanage. Twice we were ready to leave but the "Fredsvedetall" would not let us go. We had therefore to escape. We set out at night and walked to Karakul, 16 miles away. There we boarded a train. Mummy took me to the orphanage and returned to the farm. About a week later my brother arrived in the orphanage. I waited for about a year for our departure to Iran to which I looked forward very much. I am very glad to be in Iran.

Czeslaw Makar. Teheran, Aug. 31st 1943.

We used to live in Bialystok. Daddy was a weaver. The Bolsheviks arrested him and in April 1940 deported mummy, my sister Irena born in 1929 and myself to Ashkhabad. In August 1940 the militia came and arrested mummy, though I do not know why. Mummy never came back and to this day I do not know where she is. We were taken to an institution for children "dyet-priyomnik" in Davlodat and then in September 1940 to a children's home "dyet-dom" in Irtyshek. We were not allowed to speak Polish nor say our prayers, if we did we would be locked up. Other punishments included: no meals, kneeling or stripping and standing on his nose. In a prominent place in the dinner hall we were sometimes allowed to keep their drawers on. On such occasions the boys would laugh and tease. It was a terrible shame. My sister was once stripped like this because they made us sing Russian songs and she would not.

They put our names down for the Pioneers and gave us red ties to wear. We did not want to wear them and hid them under our mattress. For this we would be punished. There were two brothers in the Children's Home Piotr and Pawel Kieziak. They would break Piotr's legs and there he went quite silly. The guards would bring him and take away his food. The fires in our dormitory were often on in the night because they used to bring the wood in the evenings. The Russian boys would sometimes put cotton-wool under Piotr's feet and set light to it. Piotr would wake up and weep. They annoyed him so that he went quite silly. He used to walk about with blepharitis fixed in the distance and would hardly keep on his feet. You could not complain, how they beat you even harder if you did. When Piotr came to Ashkhabad he used to eat 7 helpings of soup at a time. He went to Iran with us. Now he is less silly already, he talks and eats less.

We were often hungry in the children's home. For weeks on end we got no bread. Sometimes they only gave us water. We used to pick sorrel and they boiled it for us for dinner: after dinner we picked more sorrel and got it boiled in plain water for supper. Five Russian children died while we were there.

In the summer of 1942 my sister and I, being now over 15, were sent to work in a sov-khoz. There we lived with a Russian family. We slept on the floor, we had mattress and a blanket. In the sov-khoz we used to weed the fields, help in hay-making and in drying the grain and loading carts. I caught typhus and had to go to hospital. Then the Polish organisation took us to Irtyshek and thence to Ashkabad.