Immigrant Workers in Industrial France

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IV Farms, Mines, and Poles

France in the 1920s entered the modern social and economic world.¹ By numerous indicators she experienced an unprecedented boom; rates of economic growth were similar to what France would realize in the 1950s. Heavy industry, especially iron and steel, nearly doubled output over prewar levels, stimulating the demand for French coal. New technologically advanced industries such as electricity, chemicals, and hydroelectricity grew even faster. Throughout the 1920s France was Europe’s leading automobile manufacturer and entered other mass production industries. By the end of the 1920s, France even lost her status as a nation of peasants, becoming an urban nation. Further, despite France’s reputation as a nation of small producers, labor was increasingly concentrated in large establishments: the proportion of the workforce in establishments of over fifty employees grew from 42 to 66 percent between 1906 and 1931. France was beginning slowly to adopt the pattern of heavy industrialization that was common in Germany, Britain, and the United States.

Yet, unlike those nations, French economic development was threatened by a shortage of labor. In addition to the losses of men during the war (which will be discussed presently), the net rate of natural increase in population in France was a low two per 1,000 per year. This created very low rates of unemployment (from a high of 2.7 percent during the recession of 1921 to 1.2 percent during the boom
year of 1926). This could have produced serious bottlenecks in production and caused wage increases, which could have been inflationary and impeded investment.

Furthermore, French economic growth was uneven. Heavy and new scientific-based industries blossomed but textiles, construction, and most important, agriculture, lagged behind. French coal output was never sufficient for her industrial needs. Besides, a substantial small-scale sector survived in the fashion garment, leather, and building industries. This sector required a skilled, artisan workforce at low wages. This phenomenon of uneven development exacerbated the manpower problem.

Not only were employers obliged to compete for labor, but they required a highly diverse workforce which prevented a smooth flow between labor markets. Furthermore, many industries—especially coal and agriculture—could not easily compete for labor nor find sufficient supplies of native workers willing to remain at these jobs when other positions, especially in the service sector, were available.

While capital shifted to mass production industries and to heavy industry, the primary sector of farming and mining remained important. Although portions of the primary sector rationalized and even mechanized production (for example, the coal and sugar beet industries), most primary industries still required a workforce similar to that of the nineteenth century. Farmers and mine operators found that the labor standards and working conditions which they offered could not compete with the newer industrial and service sectors. Farmers and mine operators tried to recreate the traditional workforce which they had lost—one which would accept labor standards and working conditions that no longer were the norm, and which would reproduce itself for the future labor needs of the farms and mines. Some French employers sought to fill this tall order by importing foreign workers.

Only an immigration which was organized by employers could fit these labor needs of primary industries. As we have already seen, the General Immigration Society successfully gained control over a valuable new source of labor in Poland and elsewhere in eastern Europe. This labor pool proved to be particularly useful for the primary sector because it came from a relatively backward region of Europe and had no experience with liberal patterns of migration, as
had the Italians before 1914. Thus the Poles were not yet infected with modern labor expectations. An investigation of the Polish migration into the farms and mines of France will reveal a nearly pure effort of employers to create a workforce to fit their needs. The success and failures of this effort may indicate some of the possibilities of modern capitalist hegemony over labor.

**French Agriculture and the Foreign Farm Worker**

Although foreign farm workers were hardly unknown before the war, in the 1920s they became an integral part of French agriculture. While in 1931, foreigners constituted only 125,000 of the two million farmworkers in France,\(^2\) during the 1920s some 830,484 immigrants had filtered into and often out of agricultural employment.\(^3\) French farming had a need for a small but constantly replenished supply of foreign workers.\(^4\)

Representatives of agriculture usually attributed immigration to the demographic gap left by the war and the rural exodus caused by the attractions of the easy life of the city.\(^5\) The war deeply drained the pools of indigenous rural labor. Not only were 673,500 peasants killed and about 350,000 incapacitated but agriculture suffered more than industry, whose labor was often spared combat duty.\(^6\) To make matters worse, veterans often could not be kept down on the farm after they had seen Paris. They abandoned farms both to fill the shoes of those who had not returned from the war as well as to enter expanding factories.\(^7\)

Despite the rural exodus, farm labor standards did not improve enough to attract workers. Wages continued to lag behind those offered by industry and even got worse.\(^8\) Farm labor continued to suffer from underemployment,\(^9\) while agricultural workers gained nothing from the law which reduced the workday in industry to eight hours in 1919.\(^10\) Living conditions for farm wage-earners remained inferior: even a mild proposal to prohibit lodging farm workers in barns on straw beds was repeatedly stalled in the 1920s by rural deputies.\(^11\) Low farm labor standards might be explained by the decline of commodity prices and low productivity as well as weak
labor unions. Yet, for whatever reasons, agriculture clearly succeeded in preserving the traditional standards, despite their uncompetiveness with industry. In many cases the cost of this success was a shortage of French labor and the need to recruit foreign workers.

The Widening Sphere of Immigration

Farmers sought the labor of Spaniards, Italians, Belgians, and increasingly, Poles, in the 1920s. An annual average of 69,207 immigrants officially entered France under farm work contracts between 1919 and 1930. Table 6 shows a substantial annual variation in the demand for foreign labor, which reflects cyclic patterns (for example, the 1921 and 1927 recessions). It also indicates that most of these immigrants came from the bordering nations of Belgium, Spain, and Italy. Census data also reveal that almost half worked on farms near the frontiers. This suggests that farmers continued, as they had before the war, to hire immigrants across short distances and without significant organization. Yet Table 6 also indicates a new pattern of immigration from eastern Europe, mostly of Poles. Although still representing a minority of immigrants, this trend indicated that employers increasingly had to seek labor beyond the traditional sources nearby and to organize collectively to recruit that labor.

Foreign farm workers were channeled into two broad but distinct labor markets: (1) seasonal migratory farm workers often hired en masse by large semi-industrial agribusinesses and (2) farm hands usually employed singly or in small groups by peasant farmers. Sixty-one percent of the immigrant farm workers were hired for seasonal jobs between 1928–1930 (years when data is available).

The use of large numbers of immigrants for seasonal farm labor began in the 1890s. From that time traditional French sources of seasonal labor from Brittany, the Pyrénées, and the Ariège began to dry up. As a result of the labor shortage, the black cloud of higher wages loomed over the wheat-producing areas of the Brie-Beauce, the vineyards of the Hérault and the Var, and the sugar beet regions of the North. Workers attempted to organize unions in the southern vineyards in the 1900s and in the wheat fields of the Brie in 1920. But French agriculture easily found Spaniards, Belgians, and Italians to
Table 6  Controlled Agricultural Immigration, by Nationality, 1919–1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>Iberian</th>
<th>Belgian</th>
<th>Polish</th>
<th>Czechoslovak</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>1,720</td>
<td>55,084</td>
<td>5,313</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>62,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>10,564</td>
<td>41,442</td>
<td>15,213</td>
<td>3,693</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>4,682</td>
<td>28,162</td>
<td>20,737</td>
<td>2,241</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>7,704</td>
<td>41,851</td>
<td>14,344</td>
<td>9,077</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>72,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>10,542</td>
<td>27,386</td>
<td>10,122</td>
<td>25,797</td>
<td>3,224</td>
<td></td>
<td>77,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>15,274</td>
<td>32,265</td>
<td>16,477</td>
<td>17,749</td>
<td>5,939</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>87,927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>13,263</td>
<td>17,941</td>
<td>21,354</td>
<td>13,080</td>
<td>3,313</td>
<td>2,833</td>
<td>71,784</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>11,317</td>
<td>7,837</td>
<td>21,945</td>
<td>19,177</td>
<td>1,654</td>
<td>1,240</td>
<td>63,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>5,783</td>
<td>8,728</td>
<td>22,513</td>
<td>6,773</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>1,169</td>
<td>45,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>10,512</td>
<td>12,324</td>
<td>24,100</td>
<td>11,701</td>
<td>1,402</td>
<td>1,642</td>
<td>61,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>11,854</td>
<td>18,450</td>
<td>15,127</td>
<td>16,087</td>
<td>3,529</td>
<td>3,403</td>
<td>68,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>18,502</td>
<td>18,896</td>
<td>13,649</td>
<td>26,586</td>
<td>6,523</td>
<td>8,672</td>
<td>92,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>121,717</td>
<td>310,366</td>
<td>200,894</td>
<td>151,961</td>
<td>26,167</td>
<td>19,182</td>
<td>830,287</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


supplement French migrants and to stem wage increases. In the 1920s, during the August to September season, about 14,000 Spaniards (mostly from Catalonia) harvested grapes throughout southern France. In the North at least 10,000 Belgians (mostly Flemish) travelled in workteams on six-month circuits through northern France. They cut wood in the Ardennes forests in winter, weeded sugar beets in May, worked in vegetable gardens and orchards in summer, and harvested wheat or sugar beets in the fall. A subcontract system was common for most foreign farm labor.

Demand for seasonal foreign labor changed with variations in production. Stagnation in wine production in the mid-1920s along with an unfavorable rate of exchange led to a temporary decline in the number of Spanish vineyard migrants. On the other hand, sugar beet production increased dramatically in the 1920s, requiring more foreign labor. By the mid-twenties, this growth made it necessary to employ Poles to supplement the Belgians. Finally, in 1927, due to a drop in wheat prices and thus wages, Poles and Slovaks were hired in wheat farms near Paris to underbid migrants from Belgium as well as
By the early 1920s, French agriculture had become dependent upon foreigners for its needs of seasonal labor: as many as 85,000 to 100,000 immigrated to France to do migratory farm work, while scarcely 35,000 French continued to do this arduous work. These foreign workers made an indispensable contribution to large sugar beet growers and wheat producers in northern France, to the grape growers of the southwest, as well as to a variety of fruit and vegetable producers throughout eastern France.

In the generation before the 1920s, French agriculture had to attract labor from increasingly distant regions. At first, French migrants from the overpopulated fringes of the country sufficed; but soon migrants from across the frontiers were necessary, and by the midtwenties, these groups had to be supplemented with new migratory streams from eastern Europe. Each shift of labor involved greater cost and higher levels of organization, culminating in the relatively rationalized recruitment of the General Immigration Society, who provided the eastern Europeans. With the rise of the labor standards of the French and then of the Belgian, Spanish, and Italian workers, the growers had to draw on labor ever further from the modernized regions of western Europe.

A similar pattern characterized a second type of agricultural labor, the farm hand. Hired usually on an annual basis, he or she worked closely with the peasant family in general field work, did domestic service as well as specialized tasks such as milking and shepherding. Like the employers of seasonal labor, French farmers, especially in the region northeast of Paris, had to rely increasingly upon immigrants. In fact, compared to seasonal workers, shortages of farm hands were even greater and finding replacements even more difficult.

Typical working conditions on the farm may explain the problem: peasants often hired male farm hands (servants de ferme) on annual contracts. They were expected to work ten hours a day in the winter and twelve in the summer. They were often the only employee of the farmer. Farmers sometimes lodged them in the hay loft. Not only did the farm hand work long hard hours, but he lacked the rudiments of privacy, leisure, and social contact. Female farm hands (bonnes de ferme), if anything, had it worse: they often worked six and a half days a week for up to fifteen hours a day in broken shifts; they tended the
chickens, pigs, and cows and did general domestic and farmyard work. Milk maids, who worked similar hours, also had to be skilled and strong. Specialists in herding sheep and cattle also had an arduous life; few workers were willing to accept the long lonely hours of work.23

Traditionally these jobs were filled by unmarried French youth, who usually had families and friends in the vicinity. Perhaps they also expected to inherit property in the area. These factors often balanced the unattracive aspects of farm work. Yet local French labor became increasingly scarce as the poor rural population reduced the size of their families and young workers fled to the factory.24

Naturally farmers sought replacements in seasonal immigrant workers, especially from Flemish Belgium and Spain. Yet, despite the long hours of work and difficulties of constant migration, the seasonal laborers seldom preferred employment as farm hands. After all, as immigrants they had greater freedom, higher wages, and often months of leisure during the winter.25 Families of seasonal workers sometimes had small plots at home in Spain or Italy and sent family members to France only on a temporary basis to earn savings necessary for accumulating more property.26 These people were hardly candidates for the deadend job of farm hand. Unlike the local French, they had no social or economic ties to rural France. As a result, farmers sought new sources of labor; increasingly in the 1920s they found them in eastern Europe.

Polish Peasants on French Farms

Since 1920 French farm associations from the northeast had banded together in CARD to recruit workers from eastern Europe; after 1924 these efforts were further rationalized under the aegis of the General Immigration Society or SGI (see p. 58). Through these agencies, farmers received not only a new source of labor, but workers who generally suited their specific requirements for docile, skilled, and inexpensive manpower. Most of these workers were Polish (87 percent in 1926 with Yugoslavs and Czechoslovaks making up the balance).27 Given the impetus of CARD, it is not surprising that 69 percent of these Poles were concentrated in the fourteen
departments of the northeast by 1931. They became significant competitors to the traditional source of foreign farm labor, the Flemish Belgians. By 1931, Poles comprised 45 percent of the foreign farm workers in the four departments which bordered Belgium, while the Belgians remained only 47 percent; in the Seine region, they outnumbered the Belgians (44 percent to 30 percent). During the 1920s sugar beet growers and wheat producers in the northeast increasingly supplemented their use of Flemish seasonal labor with Poles. Yet most (77 percent in 1926) of those imported by the SGI were hired as farm hands on small farms. Poles seem to have taken the permanent farm jobs which were abandoned or passed over by the Belgians, who usually preferred seasonal farm employment.

Despite the obvious complexities of recruiting Polish workers, their use did have some advantages over hiring other immigrants or the French: Poles were more likely to be stable employees, fulfilling their annual work contracts and even remaining for several years. Because of the relatively greater distance from their homelands, they were less likely to make visits to their native villages, something which was common among the immigrants from the bordering countries. Lack of knowledge of job opportunities in France probably also made them more stable than others. Furthermore, French farmers generally appreciated them, if not for their speed at work (something more important in seasonal farmwork) then, at least, for their docility and capacity for heavy labor. The French were especially impressed with Polish female workers, whom they considered to be "more docile, stronger and more energetic" than their French counterparts. The French also found skilled Polish farm hands, especially for milking and cattle tending.

The greatest advantage of Polish farm workers, however, was their low wages. While the immigration treaties guaranteed that foreign workers were to receive the prevailing local wages, they frequently were paid much less than French workers of similar skills or even foreign workers who were hired on the spot. Louis Ponzma, a Polish priest from Amiens, claimed that the immigrant farmhand was paid only 300 francs per month while the starting rate offered at the departmental farm labor office was 350; the immigrant specialist earned only 350, while the local rate was 550 to 600. Furthermore, Polish immigrants were obliged to sign blank work contracts, which
omitted both wage rates and job descriptions. As Powzma declared, the Poles "have only the meaningless freedom to accept the contract such as it is or rather such as it is imposed on them or to accept unemployment and misery for themselves and their families." Ultimately, work contracts were determined not by the state of the labor market in France, but rather by conditions in Poland.31

Naturally the result of the influx of Polish workers was a stagnation of local wages and a displacement of French farm workers. In 1927, for example, local farm workers, who had been trying to organize unions in the cereal-producing areas of Beauce and Brie, complained that immigrants undercut the wage standards of seasonal workers from Brittany and local farmhands.32

French farmers found Polish workers to be very advantageous employees: they were relatively docile, often skilled and hard working, and cheap. Nevertheless, there were some drawbacks. Language barriers were troublesome, since most of the Poles could only be directed in German or by gestures.33 Farmers also had to hire immigrants sight unseen, a considerable problem when farmers had little choice but to accept whoever the SGI recruited. Yet even this difficulty was partially solved when many farmers began to hire close relatives of farm hands whose work was already known.34

The main problem, however, from the farmers' viewpoint, was the tendency of the Poles to do what French and Flemish farmworkers had done before them—to break their contracts and head for the factory. M. Augé-Laribé, one of the best informed advocates of French agriculture during this period, aptly described the situation of all farm laborers when he wrote: "the rural exodus in France is similar to the strike, except that it is permanent and individual . . . ; more exactly it replaces the strike.35 French farmers hired the Poles not only to replace the departed French but in hopes that the Poles might be more stable. French employers in the Brie region preferred the Poles because their ignorance of the French labor market made them less likely than the French to abandon their low paying farm jobs.36 Yet the Poles quickly learned to follow their French predecessors down the road to the city. M. Pairault, an official of the SGI, claimed that only 30 to 40 percent of the Polish farm workers remained on the job after completing their contracts.37 The Polish ambassador in 1927 noted that only 29,500 Poles remained in farm work from the 68,357
who had been recruited by the SGI between 1920 and 1926. Many also broke their contracts, a fact which obsessed French officials.

The social as well as economic disadvantages of farm life explain this disloyalty to the land. A report from the farm labor service (Ministry of Agriculture) claimed that 25 percent of the Poles broke their contracts over pay disputes, another 18 percent, over excessive hours of work, while 11 percent left their employers because of complaints of inadequate housing; only 30 percent were said to have broken their contracts simply out of “caprice.” In addition to these job-related motives, René Martial, a public health official and first hand witness of Polish immigration, declared that the simple loneliness of Polish workers, isolated on farms with little contact with Polish-speaking people, contributed sizably to contract-breaking.

Poles also had alternatives to farm work, especially those placed in the departments near mining and industrial areas where many Poles worked. An analysis of sixty-two police reports of contract breakers in the Pas-de-Calais (1929) reveals the pull of the mines. Half of these cases were women. Police reported that 40 percent of these contract breakers left to seek an industrial or mining job; 23 percent fled the farm to seek husbands in the mining district; 14 percent left to join their families elsewhere in France, while 23 percent found wage and working conditions to be unbearable; only 2 percent of these contract breakers were said to be incapable of doing the work.

Naturally, landowners, officials of the SGI, and the government attempted to stem this exodus of foreign labor. In some cases, farmers could mitigate the social isolation of their Polish workers by importing relatives. By 1931, 54 percent of the Polish farm workers were hired by name on the request of relatives in France.

Yet, despite these efforts of employers and the cooperation of the state to stem the tide of instability (see p. 55), small scale farmers had little that they could do. Rather, they tended to rely on the good offices of the Polish elite to stabilize their compatriots who worked in France. Realizing that many of these Poles would eventually return to their homeland, the conservative Polish government was concerned that they be sheltered from pernicious radical ideas or excessive economic expectations. Toward these ends, Polish consuls mediated disputes between Polish farm workers and French farmers. Probably more important was the influence of the Polish clergy. Farm labor recruiters
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favored Polish missions, for religion, especially in “the first several years” of an immigrant’s stay in France, provided a moral ballast to counterbalance the threat of cultural shock and Bolshevism.\textsuperscript{42} Polish Catholic missions followed the Polish farm workers to several departments (Aisne and Somme, especially). These missionaries, organized under the revealing name of Protection polonaise (or Opieka Polska), not only provided traditional religious services to the farm workers but also mediated labor grievances and helped Poles find farm jobs.\textsuperscript{43}

While it is impossible to determine the exact impact of these efforts of the Polish elite, they were probably not very effective. The Polish farm workers were simply too widely dispersed across the countryside for a few priests to have much influence. Without substantial material incentives to remain on the land, their spiritual influence would have had limited value. The French also recognized this problem. \textit{Le Temps} and \textit{Moniteur des intérêts matériels} advocated in addition that immigrants be encouraged to acquire small plots of land in order to root them in French soil.\textsuperscript{44} Of course this was unrealistic given the immigrants’ lack of capital or possibility of inheriting French land. While some Belgians gained rural property, few Poles were able to do so.\textsuperscript{45} Sharecropping in southwest France became a well-publicized alternative to land ownership for immigrants (see chapter VIII), but it hardly touched the Polish farm worker.

In the Polish immigrant French farmers gained a relatively docile, skilled, and cheap worker. They were able, to a degree, to recreate their traditional workforce without making accomodations to the expectations of the modern French laborer. Yet, despite the hegemony which agriculturalists exercised over the Poles, they lacked an ability to prevent the Poles from following the French and Belgian to the city. The French mine operators were somewhat more successful.

\textbf{French Coal and Polish Miners}

Perhaps the best example of employers’ collectively organizing an immigrant workforce was the SGI’s recruitment of Poles for the coal mines of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais in northeastern France. Because of their extraordinary need for manpower after the war, the coal operators recruited exceptionally large numbers of
Chapter IV

Poles. The mines sought not only labor to replace French miners who did not return from the war but also the creation of a stable workforce, isolated from the radical movements of the French miners. Toward these ends, the French developed a policy of social control which was designed not only to reduce turnover but also to maintain traditional Polish culture. This policy drew on long-established tradition—the use of company housing and subsidized cultural programs, for example. Yet, because it was tailored to isolate the Poles and thus encouraged Polish nationalism, the results often conflicted with French interests. Nevertheless, the coal companies were successful in utilizing the Polish immigration to create a new stable pool of labor to replace the French and to exacerbate divisions within the mining community, thus enhancing the hegemony of the mine operators over the workforce.

In the generally tight labor market of 1919 the coal mines were particularly desperate. Not only was labor scarce because of war losses, but the prewar labor pool from which miners were drawn had been scattered during the mobilization and the German occupation. As late as January 1923, only 64 percent of the prewar workforce had returned to the department of the Pas-de-Calais, where coal mining was the dominant industry. Former French miners tended to flow into relatively high-paying jobs in the reconstruction of railroads and buildings in the war zones. Thus, when the mines lost their complements of prisoners of war and militarized French workers six months after the armistice, insufficient numbers of Frenchmen were willing to take their places. Workers employed in the mines actually dropped from 207,000 at the end of 1918 to 163,000 in July of 1919. The coming of the eight hour day to the coal mines in June of 1919 exacerbated the labor shortage. It required the expansion of the workforce in surface jobs up to 37 percent precisely at a time of acute scarcity of labor. This shortage of miners plus strikes drastically reduced output. In 1920 French mines produced only 25.3 million tons of coal (44 percent of France's needs). By contrast, in 1913, the mines had an output of 40.8 million tons (61 percent of French coal consumption). In the northern mines tonnage of coal produced per miner dropped from 700 tons in 1913 to 475 in 1920. This declining productivity threatened the profits of the coal operators. Cost per ton rose from 20.3 francs in 1918 to 27.2 in 1919. Labor shortages also
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frustrated French efforts to exploit their new resources in the iron and steel mills of Lorraine, which the French had just won back from the Germans. Throughout 1920, the French steel industry complained of coal shortages and called for increased production of up to 40 per cent.\textsuperscript{52}

In the short run, increased production required more labor. But the solution was not simply to hire unskilled workers off the street. Underground mining, in particular, demanded dexterity and strength which the general worker often lacked. More important, mine operators had traditionally relied on a self-perpetuating and largely isolated pool of mining families to replenish the ranks of coal miners. As Philippe Ariès observes, the mine company towns had created an isolated work culture in the generation before the war. Operators encouraged miners to produce large families and to preserve community loyalties by establishing an elaborate system of subsidized housing and social welfare. This system, however, could not be restored after the war. This is shown by the fact that the birth rate of mining towns decreased and members of mining families abandoned their parents' occupation for jobs in Paris and other growing industrial regions.\textsuperscript{53} Thus the mine owners sought not only a new supply of seasoned miners, but also a substitute for its traditional pool of mining families.

Polish Miners Fill Manpower Needs

The coal industry found this replacement in Poland. Even before the war, Polish miners had an international reputation for their skill and docility. German mines in Westphalia successfully recruited Poles in the 1890s and many a Polish family emigrated to the United States to work the mines.\textsuperscript{54} The French also had attempted to recruit Poles before the war without, however, much success. When, in 1919, Poland became a state, many of the impediments to French recruitment were eliminated. As described in Chapter 3, from mid-1919 until 1922, the French government used its friendly relations with the new Polish state to organize an emigration of Poles into the mining regions of the French North. In 1922, the French Coal committee took over their recruitment and in 1924, helped form the General
Table 7  Collective Immigration into the French Coal Industry, 1919–1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of miners</th>
<th>Total, including families</th>
<th>Family members as % of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919-1920</td>
<td>9,269</td>
<td>13,231</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>6,107</td>
<td>8,392</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>19,763</td>
<td>37,037</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>29,104</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>21,870</td>
<td>45,052</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>10,788</td>
<td>20,850</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>15,611</td>
<td>22,183</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>231</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1,148</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>22,127</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>136,018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Immigration Society which hired almost all of the Polish miners. Between 1919 and 1929, the French imported 135,206 miners, some 100,380 of whom were Polish (see Table 7). The French wasted no time recruiting over 100,000 miners within five years. The recessions of 1921 and 1927–1928 slowed the process but immigration was clearly critical to the manpower plans of the mines. Unlike the immigrant farm workers, these Polish miners brought their families and were thus expected to become a permanent part of the mine workforce.

Largely as a result of immigration, by December 1924 the workforce had been restored to prewar levels, allowing the mines of the North to extract 91 percent of the coal mined in 1913. But the coal industry had much more ambitious goals than this; in 1923 M. Georges, the Ingénieur en chef au corps des mines, proposed to increase total French production up to fifty million tons. He calculated that the mines needed a total of 100,000 foreign miners to reach this goal. As a result of continued massive immigration, by 1926 coal output surpassed Georges' target (52.5 million tons of coal). In 1927 immigrants constituted over one-third of the total workforce of 320,000
in the coal mines. In contrast, in 1913, only 11 per cent of the 221,000 coal miners were foreign. In fact, between 1913 and 1927, 86 percent of the growth of the coal mining workforce was due to immigration.\textsuperscript{49} It is difficult to imagine how the mine operators would have so rapidly expanded their manpower and thus production without the aid of the Poles.

While immigration helped raise production, further economic progress could not be made simply by adding more immigrant miners. The key to profitable mining was to increase labor productivity. During the war there had been a drop in productivity just as there had been a decline in the labor supply. According to an industry report, veterans returning from the war had been "uprooted from their natural milieu" and were "a little less productive than their normal rate."\textsuperscript{50} Miners produced an average of 740 tons each in 1919, compared with 945 tons in 1913.\textsuperscript{61} Key to this decline of productivity was the trend toward French miners abandoning the basic production task of underground mining for cleaner surface jobs. Jean Condevaux, a French mining engineer, wrote in 1928 that the French miner returned from the war wishing to "imitate the bourgeois, personified in his eyes by the auxiliary employee and in particular the clerk." The influx of foreign labor tended only to accelerate this trend: "Employing the foreign miner has caused a decline in the prestige of the indigenous miner, who thinks that the foreigner is an inferior."\textsuperscript{62} This attitude hardly encouraged the native miner to remain or to send his son to the mine.

One solution to the problem of productivity was to channel the immigrant into the underground work. By 1932, 86 percent of the foreign mine workers were employed as underground miners, compared with only 54 percent of the French.\textsuperscript{53} Not only did immigrants fill the manpower needs of the mines, but they probably were more adaptable than the French to efforts to increase productivity. Some Poles had already worked in the more modernized mines of Westphalia and were thus less opposed to the rationalization of the work process than the French. Others, direct from the farm, had no experience in traditional work methods and were therefore more willing than the French to accept attempts to increase their productivity. The mines also readily exploited their susceptibility to tighter controls and more productive methods. In 1924 Georges
linked “the increase of productivity and the intensive utilization of foreign personnel.”

Finally, immigrants aided efforts to increase productivity simply because they could be more easily laid off, while standards of production were maintained. After eight years of massive immigration a period of contraction began in 1927. This decline paralleled the beginning of a long upward swing in mine productivity. Until 1927 productivity in the northern coal region continued to lag behind the levels of 1913; it was only 78 percent of the 1913 rate in the Nord and 84 percent in the Pas-de-Calais. By the second half of 1928, however, productivity rose to 101 percent of the 1913 rate in the Nord and to 93 percent in the Pas-de-Calais. The engineer of the Arras mining district attributed this improved productivity to layoffs, especially of immigrants.

As an additional bonus to the mines, immigrants hired by the SGI were much cheaper than the French. In 1928 skilled Polish coal miners earned between 23 and 26 francs a day compared with the average of 40 francs earned by the French. This discrepancy resulted from the fact that Poles entered the mines under contract at the lowest pay level within each job classification without regard to their skill or experience. Thus immigrants, especially of Polish origin, became an important tool in the reconstruction and rationalization of the coal industry in the 1920s.

This huge influx of foreign workers gave mine owners a bargaining advantage over the miners; immigration probably weakened the ability of miners to successfully press for higher wages or impose other demands. The Polish miners gave the operators a much more flexible labor supply than they had with a mostly French workforce. Because of their lack of French citizenship, and thus their lack of rights to remain in France without government-sanctioned employment, the Poles could easily be dispensed with. This became very important during the economic downturns of 1927 and much of the 1930s.

Managing the Polish Mining Community

Although the mines dominated their foreign workforce, the employers found the Poles unsatisfactory in two ways: their high
turnover rates and their social or cultural independence. Like all immigrants, the Poles tended to job hop. Having no incentive from ties of family or sentiment to remain in one spot or job, as was the case with indigenous workers, immigrants were notorious for breaking their labor contracts in order to seek new jobs or a change in scenery. Because signing a work contract with a coal mine was an easy and costless way of entering France, some Poles gained access to France in this way only to immediately quit the mine in favor of a better job elsewhere. And jobs were plentiful, especially in the labor-starved building industry during the period of reconstruction (1920–1924) and during the boom years of 1928 and 1929. The chief engineer at the mines of Ostricourt, for example, complained in 1929 that 10 percent of its newly hired Poles had been pirated by other companies before even reporting for work.68

The mines obtained the support of the state to reduce turnover. In November 1921 the minister of the Liberated Regions threatened to withhold government contracts from any company which hired immigrants who had been recruited by another company. Throughout the 1920s prefects and a local police helped employers find absconding immigrant miners and forced them to return to work.69 Despite these efforts, few of the contract breakers were ever found for they easily disappeared in immigrant neighborhoods. Also, because there was no special police force assigned to control the immigrants, the state was an ineffective tool for coercing the immigrant into remaining on the job.70 Employers had to find other ways of making the immigrant workforce more stable.

Mine operators and French police feared that the immigrants would be independent of French employer control and thus would engender social problems. The rapid influx of a population, foreign in language and culture, into the confines of the mining regions of the Pas-de-Calais and Nord seemed to threaten social stability. Police reports in 1922 complained that they had few trustworthy translators and lacked confidence that security officers had sufficient knowledge of the movements and mentality of the Polish miners.71 Police believed that the Polish mining community harbored criminals and illegal aliens. One report expressed anxiety that young Polish miners, unlike farm workers with their "many tasks" to prevent "boredom," lacked sufficient "distractions" to keep them out of trouble when their
“short” workday was completed. This report advised that employers especially seek to control the leisure of unmarried immigrants, suggesting that they form sports teams for these youth “in the most dangerous period of life with respect to the inclination toward crime.”

French authorities also feared the influence of the communists and their union, the CGTU. They were shocked when communists led a strike on February 22, 1923, in which immigrants predominated (comprising two-thirds of the 14,000 participants in the Pas-de-Calais). According to the prefect of the Nord, writing shortly after this strike, the Poles were “still uprooted, poorly adapted to our traditions” and thus “prey to pernicious influences.” From the standpoint of the French authorities, immigrant communities not only harbored criminals and germinated criminality, but were susceptible to wholesale subversion.

Coal mine operators naturally hoped to counteract foreign labor turnover and to eliminate “pernicious influences” in the immigrant community. They sought also to duplicate in the Polish mining population the characteristics which they had cultivated in the French mining families before World War One—an isolated, docile, stable, and prolific population, able to assure the mines a steady source of mine labor for the future.

To meet these challenges, the operators and French authorities had some well-established tools, modified somewhat to fit the peculiarities of the Polish community. These included: (1) company housing; (2) family immigration; (3) ethnically segregated residences; (4) company-subsidized cultural and religious activities, and (5) toleration and often support of Polish nationalist activity.

Long before World War One mine owners endeavored to create a stable and fertile population of mining families through building and subsidizing housing grouped near the pits. As Roland Trempé has pointed out, company housing provided an alternative to the peasant villages from which many miners were drawn. Company towns eliminated the lure of the traditional peasant life to which many miners held tenaciously. Company housing became a major means of social control. The housing was often large enough for sizable families and usually included land for family gardens. It was designed to provide a surrogate for the farm, lower labor costs, and most importantly, to reduce turnover. Companies limited the number of
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taverns, provided meeting halls for cultural activities, and built churches. Thus mine owners hoped to minimize crime and drunkenness, while also encouraging a stable family and work-oriented life among the miners.75

What was a well-established policy before the war, and before the influx of Polish immigrants, was greatly expanded. While in 1913, 47 percent of the miners in the north were already lodged in company towns, by the end of 1924, 73 percent lived in mine-owned housing.76 Although there are no aggregate data indicating the number of Poles lodged in company towns, it was probably a much greater proportion than that of the French. Unlike many of the French, who traveled by train to the mines from peasant villages, Poles were forced to accept company housing for lack of an alternative.

Furthermore, most mine companies confined the Poles to newly-built housing compounds which were separate if not distant from French-dominated quarters. The prefect of the Nord claimed in 1923 that the Mines of Anzin grouped the Poles into separate "colonies" to make sure that they "as families do not speak French . . . . They are accustomed to live among us as if they were in Poland. . . . and only communicate to the French whenever it cannot be avoided."77 This isolation was further assured because the Poles were highly concentrated in the mining department of the Pas-de-Calais (25 percent of all Poles in France by 1933). Nearly 82 percent of this number lived in the mining district of Béthune. Some eight communes each contained over 5,000 Poles.78 In sharp contrast to the Polish farm workers, Polish miners lived in tight familiar communities; mine operators encouraged this pattern as a means of fostering a stable workforce.

As another way of promoting stability, mine operators and the government generally encouraged Polish miners to bring their families. Often with six or more children, most or all unable to work, a miner could hardly afford to tour France looking for a higher paid or less boring job. In addition, the coal operators expected married foreign miners to produce more than coal: they would also procreate future coal miners. As we have noted, the mine owners had long been concerned with the formation of a steady supply of young miners brought up in the mining milieu and kept as isolated as possible from alternative employment.

As part of this family policy, the French government, in December
of 1921, eliminated all restrictions on the entry of close relatives of 
miners, and automatically granted miners' wives and children authori-
izations to work. As a further means to encourage family immigration, 
a French-Polish Convention of March 1982 required that employers 
pay 60 percent of the costs of transporting the families of their Polish 
employees to France. The success of the family policy is evident 
from the fact that only 27 percent of adult male immigrants in the 
Pas-de-Calais were unmarried in 1931, compared with 42 percent in 
the foreign population in France. Furthermore, 41 percent of the 
immigrant population in the Pas-de-Calais in 1931 were children 
(under 20 years old), while only 27 percent were so in all of France. Polish-dominated communes also had relatively high birth rates.

Along with a mine-controlled residential milieu and the encourage-
ment of family life, mine owners employed other techniques of social 
control. They subsidized and even helped to establish cultural and 
social organizations for the Polish community. French authorities 
favored distinctly Polish groups, to make the Poles "calm and docile" 
as one subprefect put it. Separate organizations were to help young 
Polish miners remain rooted in their own culture and thus prevent 
the formation of a criminal society or other manifestations of anomie. 
These organizations were also to impede assimilation into the French 
mining culture, particularly radical miner unionism and communism. 
In fact, the prefect of the Nord, Alfred Morain, advocated that mine 
owners establish "various activities" for the Poles in order to forestall 
the growing influence of the CGTU. These activities were to include 
"musical and sports groups to be organized in the spirit of emulation 
with local French groups." Morain hoped that the French authorities 
would control the leadership of these organizations, thus leading the 
Poles gradually into conservative French groups which paralleled the 
Polish ones. This task, however, involved certain problems. As 
Morain noted, the mines must act so that the Polish organizations 
"not appear in the public eye as emanations of the employers"— 
which, of course, would discredit them.

The mine owners and the French government clearly had to rely on 
Polish leadership. Generally, this was readily available in the Polish 
government (principally the consuls), the Polish Catholic hierarchy, 
and various nationalist organizations. Like the French authorities, 
these Polish interests had no intention of seeing often temporary
emigrants attend schools of communism in France, nor lose their religious and moral beliefs in the brutal atmosphere of a foreign mining town. Furthermore, because the French authorities had the inexpensive recourse to expelling "undesirables," the ultimate responsibility for socializing the Polish immigrants was placed upon the Poles themselves who would, of course, have to control most of these "deviants" upon repatriation. Finally, Polish authorities shared an ideological goal of preserving and thus isolating the Polish community abroad.

The Stabilizing Influence of Polish Nationalism

The French and Polish elite were natural allies in a drive to stabilize and isolate the immigrants in the mining regions. For example, Alfred Morain joined with the Polish consul in Lille to create "all kinds of projects" in the mining districts to keep the Poles from communism. Labor and interior ministers of Poland and France met in November of 1924 for the same purpose. A French parliamentary report claimed that the General Immigration Society received from the Polish government twelve francs per Polish immigrant "for projects to encourage the Poles to remember their fatherland and their national culture." There is also some evidence that the French police employed nationalist Polish journalists as anticommmunist spies and agitators.

The work of the French and Polish elites would have borne no fruit without the help of Poles living in the mining community. This assistance came from the Polish church, including lay and clerical elements, as well as from nationalist groups which migrated to France primarily from the Westphalian mines of Germany. Although most Poles were Catholic like the French, the Polish church had distinct national ritualistic qualities which sharply distinguished it from French Catholicism. Polish religion was infused with national costume, traditional songs, and numerous festivals and pilgrimages. It was imported in toto to the French mining towns and was subsidized by the mining companies. At least sixteen Polish priests worked in the mining fields of the North in 1927 in complete independence of the French hierarchy. One informed Polish observer claimed that Polish
religion was the linchpin of Polish stability; if any aspect of it were missing its absence would "unloose all their inhibitions." Catholic influence also spread throughout the Polish community through church involvement in Boy Scouts, sports, music, and other Polish associations.68

The conservative goals of the elite were also fostered by a nationalist core of Polish miners from Westphalia. These miners brought stable families, mine experience, and social conservatism nurtured during a generation defending their Polish identity in Germany. In sharp contrast to the largely unmarried, young, and inexperienced miners imported directly from Poland,69 the Westphalian Poles formed a stable core of closely knit coal-mining families. Since the 1890s Polish miners in Germany had developed an autonomous ethnic culture bound together with an all-encompassing religious nationalism. "Having had practice at emigration and having adopted the habit of grouping themselves to defend their common interests," one witness wrote, they "resist the influence of their environment." Indeed, they came to France to avoid German citizenship and to preserve their Polish nationality.90 Although in the interwar years the Westphalian Poles comprised only 19,700 of the 139,000 Poles who entered French coal mines,91 they were a core of seasoned miners who dominated the emigrant community.92

This cultural influence was assured by a communications network which the Westphalian Poles brought with them from Germany. In fact, the most important nationalist organization of the Westphalian Poles, the Polish Workers Association (Société des ouvriers polonais or Zwiazek Rabotnikow Polskich—ZRP) persuaded Polish miners to abandon Germany for France in the early 1920s.93 In 1923, the ZRP, along with two important nationalist newspapers, Wiarus Polski and Narodowiec, moved from Westphalia to the mining regions of the French North. Few newspapers or organizations, however, originated in Poland, where the vast majority of the miners actually originated.94 So important were the Westphalian Poles to the employers for creating a stable conservative community of immigrant miners that they were the last to be laid off and repatriated during the depression years of 1933 to 1936.95

Some measure of the influence of Polish cultural nationalism may be found in the following statistics. In the key mining district of
Béthune in 1924 there were already eighteen musical, eleven religious, ten sports, six mutual-aid, and eight theatrical societies. In Douai, about 700 Poles belonged to fifteen gymnastic clubs, 670 to eleven devotional groups, and 6,000 to eight choral societies. A congress of Polish associations claimed that 25,000 Poles or about 20 percent of the Polish population had joined 402 Polish organizations in France in 1924. Whatever the impact of these associations on the lives of the miners, they did provide an important alternative to assimilation into the culture of the French miner.

This point can be put into focus when we consider the functions of the largest Polish organization, the Polish Workers Association (ZRP). Officially, it was a federation of mutual aid societies, providing emergency assistance and death benefits to its members. Its central office also furnished legal advice regarding immigration regulations and even job-related grievances. The ZRP also supported Polish cultural and educational events. Beginning with a claimed membership in 1924 of 4,200, by 1930 it reached about 25,000, mostly in the northern coal mining region.

Despite its non-political goals the Polish Workers Association was a source of anti-communist and even anti-union propaganda. Although legally it was only a mutual-aid society, police considered it a "disguised union" which attempted "to prevent Poles from joining the old miners' union." Because of its nationalist and conservative politics, the Polish government openly supported it, giving free passports to its members and sending representatives of the Polish Labor and Education Ministries to its conventions.

In June 1924, two months after its arrival in France, the CGT miners' union complained to the French Ministry of Labor that the ZRP was operating illegally as a trade union. The CGT claimed that the Polish consuls intervened in union activities, through their partiality toward the ZRP. The French union also objected to "Polish exclusiveness, which threatens to incite an incident similar to the anti-Belgian riots in the mines in the late 1890s." The CGT was particularly incensed with the sharp attacks on the CGT in the newspaper, Wiara Polski, which was closely linked to the ZRP. In January 1926, the CGT weekly, La Tribune des mineurs, departed from its usual dry discourse to call the ZRP "agents provocateurs of international fascism who wanted to deliver the Poles bound hand
and foot to the French capitalists." Wiarus Polski returned the insult by labeling the leaders of the CGT, "communist bandits." Although there is no direct evidence of support for the ZRP from French mining interests or the state, neither were the demands of the CGT to prohibit this foreign-run union carried out. Only after this particularly heated exchange between the CGT and Wiarus Polski in 1926 did the prefect of the Nord ask the Poles to be "less aggressive" in their opposition to the French unions. Clearly, French authorities had few reason for limiting the divisiveness caused by Polish nationalism.

The CGT, of course, attempted to neutralize the influence of the ZRP leadership. They worked with the more moderate chapters of the ZRP and advocated that ZRP members as individuals join CGT locals. However, the ZRP remained throughout the 1920s a vital organization; only in 1936 did it merge with the French unions. Unlike their French counterparts, they could provide Polish miners with support in areas specifically relating to their status as immigrants: aid in handling regulations, support of Polish cultural identity, and access to leadership positions. In none of these areas were the French unions able or willing to provide assistance. As a result, the mine operators enjoyed a situation in which the mining community was divided not only between communist and socialist but between French and Polish. The mine companies also gained invaluable assistance from Polish religious and nationalist organizations in stabilizing the immigrant community, allowing the companies to keep a relatively low profile.

The mine owners' policy achieved results: turnover was quickly reduced. While 30 percent of the foreign coal miners in 1920 broke their work contracts, by 1922 only 9 percent did so. By the mid-1920s the immigrants were as stable as the French. Furthermore, 95,744 of the Poles remained as miners in 1931 from the 103,475 who entered coal mining in the 1920s. Compare this admittedly rough indication of stability with the figures for agriculture: only 46,083 Poles were farm workers in 1931 despite the fact that 151,961 Poles entered France as agricultural workers in the 1920s. Unlike the farmers, mine operators had the resources to carry out a policy of stabilization. Because the Polish miners were concentrated in quasi-urbanized communities, whereas the farm workers were not, the mines also had the opportunity to make such a policy work.
Limits of Employer Hegemony over Polish Miners

For the French, this policy was not entirely a blessing, however. By favoring slow or minimal assimilation of the Polish miner, French authorities opened the possibility of losing control over the socialization of the Polish community. Polish nationalism had tendencies which conflicted with the goals and interests of important elements of the French community. In the first place, Polish nationalism had to defend the immigrants' interests, if not as workers, then as expatriated members of the Polish nation. Secondly, Polish leaders had an ideological incentive to encourage Polish social mobility in France. Without upward individual mobility, miners might be tempted to adopt collective or class modes of social advancement. The competent had to climb the social ladder, either in France or upon return to Poland. France could not be a human dump for the unwanted but rather had to provide opportunities for the hard-working family. France also had to be a market for Polish commerce, banking, and journalism. For the Polish nationalist, France was a substitute for a colony. These goals clashed with those of the French, who naturally wanted merely a tractable, stable, and permanent immigrant proletariat.

The mainstays of Polish nationalism in France were the small but influential service and commercial classes—petty merchants, journalists, and the clergy. As a large concentration of Poles developed in the northern mining regions, so did a number of grocers, butchers, tavern-keepers, and other small business people who catered to Polish tastes. Many of these merchants entered France disguised as miners; others, as was common among the French, graduated into petty commerce after being miners. Another important current of Polish capitalism was savings banks. Because many Poles sent home money or saved for their return, Polish money merchants found a ready market. At first money changers, often doubling as booksellers of nationalist literature, appeared in small mining towns. By 1928 Polish banks had infiltrated the mining regions in the hope of draining off some of the small savings of these hard-working immigrants. By 1930 three Polish banks formed a savings bank which gathered about 11 million francs from about 16,000 small savers.106

In spite of the growth of the Polish business class in the mining
regions, it remained weak relative to the French—only 2.7 percent of the Polish population in the Pas-de-Calais in 1931 compared with 6 percent of the French who were engaged in commerce.107 Without a nationalist Polish culture in France these Polish merchants could not easily have survived. They depended upon a closed Polish market which would be dissipated if the Poles assimilated. As a result, they were key promoters of the ideology of Polish solidarity. As a police report noted in 1929, the Polish petty bourgeoisie “are involved constantly in the lives of their compatriots. ... They serve as their lawyers, business agents, etc., pressuring them and imposing their viewpoint which is opposed to assimilation.”108

Polish journalists clearly expressed the petty bourgeois nationalism of these merchants. An editorial in *Narodowiec* (1926) claimed: “American Poles lived also in barracks at first, but all that is over now and it will be the same for us too. We must act together to aid each other. Our prosperity in France depends upon our initiative, our desire to work, and our intelligence.”109 *Narodowiec* proposed that Poles send their children to mine school to become foremen and even to trade and agricultural schools to escape the pits. Above all, they should save in Polish banks and establish businesses as in America.

These service and commercial groups naturally were thorns in the side of their French counterparts. A French tradesman from Lens (1925) probably expressed a common opinion when he declared that the Poles “ought to stay in the mines or get out. In having them come here, France has not asked for grocers, etc., but help to rebuild destroyed houses and mines.” In the same year the commercial association of the Pas-de-Calais demanded that no immigrant be allowed into business before completing a two year work contract. French commerce had no interest in seeing a Polish nation form in its midst if this nation included a business class. Poles were supposed to be workers and consumers, not competitors in business.110

Polish clergy posed similar threats to French interests. In their zeal to preserve their flock (an effort that the mine operators generally supported) they often overstepped the bounds. True to the social ideology of Pope Leo XIII and Pius XI, some priests condemned lack of social progress in France. To the irritation of the companies, some “intervened between the workers and employers with too much authority and with too many demands.”111 The chief of the Polish
Religious Mission in France was not above complaining in a Warsaw newspaper that Poles were left destitute—"on the streets"—during the recession of 1927. The mines of Aniche found "their Polish priest's intransigent defense of the interests of his compatriots" so intolerable that he was dropped from the payroll. The French church hierarchy also complained that the Poles were too independent. The archbishop of Cambrai demanded in 1925 that Polish priests give their salaries from the mines directly to the French church. French clergy chafed not only at Polish nationalism but also at their paternalistic social activism. The Poles also threatened the monopoly and authority of the French Catholic hierarchy.

Finally, the Polish Workers Association and its journalistic allies were a constant irritation to the French elite. In 1926 a police agent from Lille observed that the ZRP had increasingly "interfered directly in favor of Poles in grievances with farm and industrial employers," so much so that the public placement office of the Nord warned it to leave these matters to the French authorities. Repeatedly, the ZRP and Wiarz Polski offered Polish miners in France information about jobs available in the mines of Holland and Belgium. This led the French Interior Ministry to threaten to ban the newspaper in 1927. Because of its attacks on the Polish and French governments the Polish state outlawed the circulation of Wiarz Polski in Poland in 1929. With the help of Polish newspapers, the ZRP did in fact act as a trade union, much to the annoyance of the employers and French authorities. It intervened in labor relations between Polish workers and French employers, attempted to limit the Polish labor supply to improve the bargaining position of Poles already in France, and tried to impose the principles of seniority and job security on the mine operators.

In spite of their acceptance and often direct support of Polish nationalism, French authorities inevitably clashed with the agents of this nationalism. Yet, although Polish nationalist organizations were not completely under the sway of French authorities, they did form a useful alternative agency of socialization to the socialists and communists.

The migration of Polish labor to the coal basins of the French northeast was a clear example of an effort of organized capital to shape a workforce to suit its specific needs. This migration not only
Chapter IV

filled a critical shortage of manpower, but provided employers with a flexible and generally skilled workforce. Moreover, unlike the farmers, the mine operators were able to manipulate the social and cultural environment of its foreign workforce. With the support of the government they fostered a stable, conservative, and culturally isolated class of Polish miners. This policy helped to create a new demographic well from which the mine operators could draw future generations of miners, nurtured in an exclusively mining environment. This policy also produced a class of anti-left Catholic miners organized around a paternalistic cultural nationalism, profoundly divided from the radical French milieu. As we have seen, the mines had to rely on Polish agents of social control to carry out this policy. This could only lead to conflicts with those members of the French elite who favored assimilation. Polish nationalism also backfired for the mine operators when it became the vehicle whereby Polish miners defended their economic interests. Yet on balance the mines gained unprecedented advantages through the organized immigration of Poles: it not only efficiently solved the need for productive labor but assured employers a divided and thus powerless community of miners.