



## The Contradictions of Controlled Immigration: Mines, Foreign Labor, and the State in Interwar France

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In the 1920s and 1930s, France developed a multi-ethnic work force, as employers and the state promoted immigration to remedy post-World War I labor shortages. This essay takes a business history perspective to appreciate the dynamics that shaped the incorporation of foreigners into interwar France. Examining the mines of the coal-rich department of the Pas-de-Calais, and relying on government and company archives, the analysis illuminates how firms improvised new managerial strategies and reshaped traditional ones to transform foreigners into productive miners. Through these policies foreigners became vital to the mines after the First World War, helping them to rebuild staff, to reconstruct facilities, and to regain profitability. Yet, managerial policies carried unintended consequences for employers and foreigners alike. Practices in the workplace and company paternalism toward immigrants served to isolate foreigners from their French coworkers and earned them the suspicion of local officialdom. Such anti-immigrant sentiments ultimately worked against coal firms. Indeed, as joblessness and xenophobia grew in the 1930s, the foreign labor force created by coal companies was decimated, as local officials aggressively expelled non-natives in order to appease public opinion, to open positions for French workers, and to expel those held politically suspect.

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In 1926, French immigration expert André Pairault surveyed industrial recovery in France after the First World War. In coal mining, he found a dramatic example of resurgence. Hobbled by the wartime devastation of France's richest coalfields, the country's mines in 1919 produced less than half their prewar norms. By 1925, however, the mines met and then hand-

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somely exceeded their prewar attainment. Pairault noted that the “magnificent development in our coal industry was only made possible through the continued growth of its labor force. And, that [feat] could never have been realized without the call to foreign workers . . . recruited since 1919, coming almost exclusively from Poland.”<sup>1</sup> Nowhere in France was the recovery of coal mining more dramatic than in the northeastern department of the Pas-de-Calais, and nowhere did immigrant labor contribute more significantly. The Pas-de-Calais coal basin long represented the premiere site of French coal production.<sup>2</sup> In 1919, however, wartime destruction and persistent and crippling labor shortages severely compromised Pas-de-Calais mines, reducing their output and work force to about two-thirds of their prewar level.<sup>3</sup> To remedy these deficits, coal firms and other labor-starved French employers after the war recruited and contracted tens of thousands of foreign workers, mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe and especially from Poland.<sup>4</sup> In the Pas-de-Calais coalfields, immigrants arrived suddenly and en masse, greatly

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<sup>1</sup> André Pairault, *L’immigration organisée et l’emploi de la main-d’oeuvre étrangère en France* (Paris, 1927), 194.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, before the war, the pits of the basin and their massive work force yielded 60% of all the coal mined in France. See Joël Michel, “Industrial Relations in French Coal Mining from the Late Nineteenth Century to the 1970s,” in *Workers, Owners, and Politics in Coal Mining: An International Comparison of Industrial Relations*, ed. Gerald D. Feldman and Klaus Tenfelde (New York, 1990), 314.

<sup>3</sup> The government’s chief mining engineer in the heavily damaged eastern Pas-de-Calais basin reported that companies there did not expect to attain prewar levels in mining until the later 1920s—and then only if labor remained abundant. See M. Stouvenot, “Rapport de M. L’Ingénieur en Chef des Mines sur la Situation de l’Industrie minérale dans l’Arrondissement minérale dans les Houillères du Pas-de-Calais victimes de l’Invasion pendant l’année 1919,” in *Département du Pas-de-Calais Conseil General, deuxième session ordinaire de 1920, Troisième partie, Rapports des Chefs de Service et Renseignements divers* (Arras, 1920), 479-80. Prospects for an expansion in mining did not appear much more encouraging in the less battered mines of the western Pas-de-Calais basin. Here, production in 1919 swiftly fell by 7% from its 1918 levels, in large part because of the dwindling number of mine laborers. See Paul Georges, “Rapport de M. L’Ingénieur en Chef des Mines sur la Situation de l’Industrie minérale dans l’Arrondissement minéralogique d’Arras pendant l’Année 1919,” in *ibid.*, 431, 437.

<sup>4</sup> Such recruiting efforts proved tremendously successful; between 1921 and 1926 alone, the foreign population of France increased from 1.5 to 2.5 million. By 1931, this figure further increased to nearly 3 million, making foreigners approximately 7% of the total French population and 15% of the French working class. Georges Mauco, *Les étrangers en France: leur rôle dans l’activité économique* (Paris, 1932), table 3; Gary Cross, *Immigrant Workers in Industrial France: The Making of a New Laboring Class* (Philadelphia, 1983), 169; Gérard Noiriel, “Les métissages de la population française,” in Gérard Noiriel, *Population, immigration et identité nationale en France XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 1992), 120.

altering the mining labor force. Before the war, foreign manpower played no significant role in Pas-de-Calais mining; by 1924, some 50,000 non-natives, over 40 percent of the labor force, toiled in the mines. Among these foreign workers, Poles predominated, with over 38,500 Poles comprising one-third of miners in the region.<sup>5</sup>

This essay examines the strategies by which Pas-de-Calais coal firms made immigrant personnel a productive component of their work force in the decades after the First World War. It highlights that, while the arrival of non-natives presented companies with the opportunity to remedy persistent labor shortages, a number of obstacles thwarted this goal. How could companies swiftly transform unskilled foreigners into productive miners? And how could mines stabilize often-peripatetic immigrant workers? Drawing on company and government archives, this article reveals that firms met these challenges by altering policies within the workplace and by mobilizing paternalistic strategies outside the coal pits. Although such tactics earned results pleasing to management in the short-term, they also carried unintended consequences and dangers both for coal companies and for Polish immigrants in the Pas-de-Calais. The analysis thus reveals the contradictions of company efforts. Managerial policies aimed at enhancing the reliability of non-native workers ultimately left companies dependent on foreign manpower, isolated immigrants from local society, and antagonized local officials. Anti-immigrant sentiment in particular threatened coal firms and immigrants, as public opinion and local authorities could be moved to demand the expulsion of foreigners. By calling attention to the often overlooked role that employers played in endangering the security of non-natives, this study also enriches recent scholarship on immigrants in interwar France, which stresses the way municipal authorities, motivated by local concerns and perceptions, eroded immigrant rights.<sup>6</sup>

For coal firms seeking to make foreigners a productive component of their work force in the 1920s, the influx of immigrant personnel posed significant challenges. To meet certain of these difficulties, companies reshaped policies in the workplace. First, management faced the task of

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Georges, "Rapport de M. l'Ingenieur en chef des Mines sur la Situation de l'Industrie minérale dans l'Arrondissement minéralogique d'Arras pendant l'année 1924," in *Département du Pas-de-Calais Conseil Général deuxième Session ordinaire de 1925: Rapports des Chefs de service et Renseignements divers, troisième partie* (Arras, 1925), 117-18.

<sup>6</sup> Recently, scholars have similarly focused attention away from immigration policy formation to analyze local immigration policy implementation. For examples, see Philip H. Slaby, "Industry, the State, and Immigrant Poles in Industrial France, 1919-1939," (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2005), especially chaps. 4 and 5; Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2006), and Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918-1940* (Stanford, Calif., 2007).

directing immigrants to the mines' most pressing vacancies at the coalface. In response, companies such as the Mines de Marles deliberately withheld surface positions from immigrant workers. In fact, the general director ordered his engineers to "accord [Poles] no employment [on the surface] and to dismiss them if they refused to go down into [the pits]."<sup>7</sup> Such policies at the Mines de Marles and comparable placement procedures across the coal basin overwhelmingly concentrated immigrants at the coalface. Second, many foreigners arrived ignorant of the miner's trade. To train them rapidly, companies developed practices by which unprepared immigrants, under the tutelage of experienced French miners, learned mining skills while on the job.<sup>8</sup> Third, managers had to ensure that newly trained foreigners maintained high productivity. In response, coal operations developed policies of *encadrement* by which French supervisory staff intensely oversaw the work of non-native miners.<sup>9</sup>

These placement, training, and supervisory policies proved successful for Pas-de-Calais mines. Firms effectively funneled immigrant labor to vacancies underground and away from support positions on the surface. Indeed, by 1924, for all Pas-de-Calais mines, the ratio of French to immigrant workers in surface positions reached eight to one. Yet, at the coalface, the proportion differed considerably, with a ratio of one to one.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, on-the-job training permitted inexperienced foreigners to achieve, within six months of their arrival, output similar to that of experienced French staff.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, close supervision by French managers through *encadrement* maintained the efficiency of non-natives. At the Mines de Marles, for instance, the ratio of French workers and managers to Polish miners became a standard variable in productivity. Indeed, the

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<sup>7</sup> See Centre des archives du monde du travail [hereafter, CAMT] 1994048/0030: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 1 July 1920: Ouvriers polonais.

<sup>8</sup> For details of the development of this system in the Mines de Marles, see CAMT 1994048/0030: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 11 December 1919 2ème partie: Ouvriers polonais. For a discussion of these policies operating across the coal basin, see Paul Georges, "Rapport de M. L'Ingénieur en Chef des Mines sur la Situation de l'Industrie minérale dans l'Arrondissement minéralogique d'Arras pendant l'Année 1922," in *Département du Pas-de-Calais Conseil Général, deuxième session de 1923, Troisième Partie Rapports des Chefs de Service et Renseignements divers* (Arras, 1923), 319.

<sup>9</sup> CAMT 1994048/0033: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 4 January 1923: Production; CAMT 1994048/0033: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 25 January 1923: Production; CAMT 1994048/0033: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 12 July 1923: Production.

<sup>10</sup> For some mines these proportions exceeded the average. At the companies of Ostricourt and Drocourt, for instance, non-French workers formed over 70% of mining teams. Georges, "Rapport . . . 1924," 118.

<sup>11</sup> Georges, "Rapport . . . 1922," 319.

company often temporarily suspended assigning Poles to pits where elevated levels of immigrant labor threatened production.<sup>12</sup>

High turnover among non-native staff presented managers with still another obstacle to productivity. Foreigners often abandoned their posts soon after their hiring. For example, over one-third of the Poles entering French mines in 1921 abandoned the coal industry before the expiration of their one-year contracts.<sup>13</sup> Mining executives regularly decried high turnover among foreigners for good reason. The frequent departure of immigrant personnel from a mine's service left work teams shorthanded, disorganized, and unproductive.<sup>14</sup>

Managers traced instability to two main factors. First, they understood that immigrant unsteadiness in the work force stemmed from intense competition for labor in the mining region. Company inquiries revealed that at the Mines de Marles most Poles departed for higher pay elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Second, executives attributed the instability of non-natives to their rootlessness in France. They surmised that the immigrants' unfamiliarity with the French language and with local customs and work habits often produced deep frustration among foreigners. Their dissatisfaction, in turn, expressed itself in the desire to seek other employment.<sup>16</sup>

To overcome instability among immigrant personnel, companies turned to paternalist methods such as worker housing and company support for religious institutions and social organizations. Toward this goal, coal firms forwarded ethnic policies designed to create a Polish "*milieu national*" that would, as the coal cartel stated, "keep workers in contact with their former national moral and intellectual life."<sup>17</sup> As companies expanded their housing stock after the First World War, they granted Poles the choicest new lodgings out of fear that poor accommoda-

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<sup>12</sup> CAMT 1994048/0031: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 15 September 1921 Ouvriers polonais; CAMT 1994048/0032: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 15 December 1922: Ouvriers polonais.

<sup>13</sup> Significantly, this figure does not report the number of Poles who abandoned one mine for another. CAMT 40AS1 CCHF (Comité Central des Houillères de la France) Assemblée Générale 1924, 14.

<sup>14</sup> For the effects of immigrant labor instability, see Pairault, *L'immigration organisée*, 144-45.

<sup>15</sup> CAMT 1994048/0031: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 15 April 1921: Ouvriers polonais; CAMT 1994048/0032: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 12 October 1922: Ouvriers polonais; CAMT 1994048/0033: Directions des Services techniques, Procès-Verbal de la Conférence 5 June 1924: Ouvriers polonais.

<sup>16</sup> Pairault, for instance, related that mining firms considered the "adaptation" of foreigners to their "new milieu" a central means of stabilizing immigrant personnel. Pairault, *L'immigration organisée*, 193.

<sup>17</sup> CAMT 40AS7: 26 November 1920, Secretary of CCHF Circular 608.

tions would discourage future migration.<sup>18</sup> In assigning lodging, managers concentrated Poles into particular tracts of company housing, hoping such moves would counter immigrant disaffection. Beyond this, companies often constructed entire *cités polonaises*, communities devoted to Polish workers and their families.<sup>19</sup> In addition to company housing, firms supported social activities and religious institutions to stabilize immigrant personnel. They bankrolled athletic, musical, and artistic clubs for their Polish staff, expecting that such activities would acclimate the workers to local living conditions. The company support for Polish voluntary associations mirrored those available to the mining work force as a whole, with one important difference: Polish clubs largely remained open to Poles alone.<sup>20</sup> In addition, to satisfy Polish Catholics, companies underwrote the cost of hiring Polish clergy to minister in the coal basin, supported religious and prayer groups, and constructed chapels specifically for Polish worshippers.<sup>21</sup> Companies hoped that sustaining Polish cultural and religious life would carry benefits beyond reducing turnover. The Poles' often intense devotion to the Catholic Church suggested that they might share management's preference for order, family, and faith. By fostering a distinctive Polish environment, executives sought to preserve elements of the Polish mindset and social practices that presumably fortified managerial authority and worker diligence.<sup>22</sup>

In their efforts to cultivate a socio-cultural atmosphere familiar to Poles, firms found among the Polish consular staff in France, among the Polish clergy, and among the Polish immigrants themselves allies eager to accept company support for Polish communal life. The Polish government and consular authorities viewed emigrants as citizens deserving of protection of their economic and social needs. Thus, officials supported strong Polish voluntary associations. The Catholic Church of Poland, intending to protect the emigrants from the supposed pernicious influence

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<sup>18</sup> CAMT 40AS7: 18 September 1920, Secretary of the CCHF.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see "Aux Mines d'Ostricourt: Inauguration de la cité polonaise," *Nord Industriel* (25 Nov. 1922), 2043.

<sup>20</sup> See "Les Œuvres Sociales dans les Houillères du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais: II," *Nord Industriel* (1923), 2244; "Les Œuvres Sociales dans les Houillères du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais: I," *Nord Industriel* (1923), 2153, and Pairault, *L'immigration organisée*, 193.

<sup>21</sup> "Aux Mines d'Ostricourt," *Nord Industriel* (6 May 1922), 751. Much of the recruiting of Polish clergy for France was done under the auspices of the CCHF; see CAMT 40AS7: 26 November 1920, Secretary CCHF Circular 608. For a discussion of Polish and other foreign clergy in France, see Pairault, *L'immigration organisée*, 252-63.

<sup>22</sup> For a clear statement of the managerial benefits expected from company support of Polish social, educational, and religious organizations, see CAMT 40AS1: CCHF Assemblée Générale 1922, p. 12.

of French secularism, also fostered immigrant religious life in France.<sup>23</sup> Lastly, Polish immigrants themselves desired to establish and to participate in ethnic organizations.<sup>24</sup>

Efforts to create a *milieu national* for Polish workers outside the workplace secured many of the benefits managers expected. Company housing and support for Polish organizations played a critical and foundational role in shaping the Polish community in the Pas-de-Calais. Housing policies created a patchwork of immigrant settlements throughout the coal basin; indeed, in many districts, immigrants outnumbered Frenchmen.<sup>25</sup> Company support of Polish religious and voluntary institutions helped establish a vibrant network of socio-cultural and religious institutions for immigrant Poles. The *milieu national* paid dividends in boosting worker stability; as the sinews of Polish community life strengthened, turnover among immigrant workers declined precipitously. For example, the number of Poles leaving the coal industry within a year of their arrival shrank from 35 percent in 1921 to just 2 percent in 1923.<sup>26</sup>

While managerial policies toward immigrant Poles, inside and outside the mines, benefited companies considerably, the balance sheet ultimately proved mixed. Company policies carried a variety of negative, unintended consequences and risks. First, by relegating immigrants to demanding and dangerous tasks underground and by elevating numerous French miners to supervisory positions through *encadrement*, managers devalued the positions they sought to fill. Indeed, French miners came to view

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<sup>23</sup> Janine Ponty, *Polonais méconnus: histoire des travailleurs immigrés en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 1990), 113-42 and 147-72; Cross, *Immigrant Workers in Industrial France*, 71-98.

<sup>24</sup> Ethnic Poles entering France from Germany—the so-called Ruhrpoles, or *Westphaliens*, as they were known in France—played a leading role in the immigrant community. In Germany, they had developed an array of Polish clubs, associations, and even labor unions during decades of work and life in the mines there. These Poles brought with them their propensity to form and to participate in such organizations. Immigrants arriving directly from Poland soon joined them. Ponty, *Polonais méconnus*, 164. Christoph Klessmann, “Comparative Immigrant History: Polish Workers in the Rhur Area and in the North of France,” *Journal of Social History* 20 (Winter 1986): 335-53. For the organizational network of Poles in the Ruhr, see especially 336, 339-40.

<sup>25</sup> A 1924 evaluation of the department’s Polish population revealed that in 12 of 23 mining-district communes, the number of Poles equaled one-half or more of the French population. Further, in 6 of these communes, Poles outnumbered French residents entirely. For example, in the commune of Mericourt, the French population stood at 1,662, while that of immigrants was 7,712. Archives départementales of Pas-de-Calais [hereafter, ADPdC] M3231, 19 December 1924, Prefect to Direction de la Sureté Générale, Paris.

<sup>26</sup> Significantly, this figure does not include the number of Poles who moved from coal company to coal company. CAMT 40AS1 CCHF Assemblée Générale 1924, p. 14.

immigrants as their inferiors and resented any convergence between natives and non-natives in job assignments and pay.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the mines left themselves increasingly dependent upon immigrants for miners at the coalface. A second unintended consequence grew from endeavors to foster a Polish milieu in the coalfields, which ultimately served to isolate Poles from Frenchmen. In fact, contemporaries reported that Polish immigrants seldom socialized with their French coworkers whether on or off the job.<sup>28</sup> For his part, the prefect of the Pas-de-Calais noted that, in the workplace, Frenchmen and Poles remained separated by an “invisible wall” across which members of one group offered the other, at best, “a brief hello.” Contact outside work was little better. The prefect surmised that a Frenchman moved through Polish neighborhoods only as a “passer-by”; between him and the Poles arose neither “companionship” nor “friendship.”<sup>29</sup> Such social isolation meant that Poles earned only the grudging tolerance of their French neighbors. For companies, such indifference carried dangers, as public opinion could be easily moved against immigrants, thereby potentially depriving firms of the foreign workers on which they depended.

A third unintended consequence of managerial strategies toward immigrants was their influence on the local French state. While mass immigration raised profound administrative questions for French parliamentarians, and while they often passionately discussed the challenges to public safety, national security, and sovereignty that foreigners presented, economic issues predominantly shaped Paris’s immigration regulations.<sup>30</sup> In the Pas-de-Calais, however, the departmental and local authorities who enforced French immigration law remained far more concerned with national security, sovereignty, and unity. Thus, coal firm policies that physically and socially isolated foreigners and that reinforced immigrant ties to Polish cultural habits, Polish authorities, and the Polish Church aroused the suspicion and resentment of Pas-de-Calais officialdom.<sup>31</sup> Such animosity led local

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<sup>27</sup>John Condevaux, *Le mineur du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais: sa psychologie, ses rapports avec le patronat* (Lille, 1928), 15.

<sup>28</sup> ADPdC 1Z501, 10 October 1924, Special Commissar Lens to Subprefect Béthune.

<sup>29</sup> ADPC M6857, 11 October 1926, Prefect Pas-de-Calais.

<sup>30</sup> Until recently, scholars have generally focused on national-level developments, drawing attention to the horse-trading between parliamentarians and interest groups that shaped the statutes and regulations affecting immigration. Pioneering works on the subject of French immigration include: Jean-Charles Bonnet, *Les pouvoirs publics français et l’immigration dans l’entre-deux-guerres* (Lyon, 1976); Cross, *Immigrant Workers in Industrial France*; Ralph Schor, *L’opinion française et les étrangers: 1919-1939* (Paris, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> Recently, scholars have focused attention away from immigration policy formation to analyze local immigration policy implementation. For examples, see

officials to seek means to enforce the law in ways prejudicial to Poles. By so doing they endangered the Polish work force that coal firms had painstakingly assembled.

Wary and seeking to combat perceived threats to national security and unity, Pas-de-Calais authorities aggressively policed the Polish community. Public meetings of all types organized by Poles attracted surveillance. Any Polish event at which Polish consular staff or visiting Polish officials appeared drew particular attention.<sup>32</sup> Pas-de-Calais authorities feared that Polish meetings, organizations, and visits threatened France. One prominent security official clearly expressed this attitude, estimating that some seven Poles out of ten were “thoroughly nationalist” politically. Further, he saw in Polish associations not immigrants simply seeking support of their countrymen, but the controlling hand of the Polish government. Through its consular authorities in the region and aided by Polish clergy, the Polish state had, he claimed, “dragooned” immigrants into ethnic institutions where the “love of Poland and religion” became the party line.<sup>33</sup>

Pas-de-Calais authorities, troubled by the isolation of Poles from the larger French society, denounced the Polish state and Church as the chief forces retarding the Poles’ assimilation. Pas-de-Calais officials asserted that, in pronouncements from the podium and pulpit, Polish officials and priests urged immigrant Poles to remember their homeland, to maintain their native language and cultural practices, and to remain faithful to the Catholic Church. In this way, authorities such as the special commissar of Lens noted, the Polish church and state brought their “great moral authority” to counter assimilation.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, although company housing policies and support to Polish organizations and religious institutions directly and fundamentally shaped and sustained the Polish community in the coalfields, Pas-de-Calais authorities ignored the company role, preferring to rail against the Polish state and church.

To break up Polish enclaves and to limit the influence of Polish authorities and clergy, Pas-de-Calais officialdom demanded more tools and expanded powers. For instance, the special commissar of Arras called for the creation of “social laws” to thwart “the excessive chauvinism of

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Slaby, “Industry, the State, and Immigrant Poles in Industrial France,” Rosenberg, *Policing Paris*, and Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic*.

<sup>32</sup> When such Polish notables toured the Pas-de-Calais coal basin, they did so shadowed by official French observers. ADPdC 1Z501, 29 June 1924, Rapport: UTP meeting, Special Commissar Lens, and ADPdC 1Z501, 26 February 1924, Commissariat of Police, Bruay-en-Artois to Subprefect Béthune re: Reunion en Bruay.

<sup>33</sup> ADPdC 1Z501, 10 October 1924, Special Commissar Lens to Subprefect Béthune.

<sup>34</sup> ADPdC 1Z501, 25 March 1925, Special Commissar Lens to Subprefect Béthune. Also see ADPdC M3229, 22 September 1925, Special Commissar Béthune to Subprefect Béthune.

some Polish leaders.”<sup>35</sup> And because he too regarded Polish “particularism” as a “serious risk to national unity,” the prefect entreated policymakers to create measures to counter it.<sup>36</sup>

Though many lawmakers in Paris denounced segregated immigrant communities and resented the efforts of foreign diplomats to maintain authority over their nationals in France, they offered no policies to check them. Ultimately, the French government could offer no practical procedures to halt foreign consulates and to force open ethnic communities. The Polish state was both a friend of France and a critical ally against Germany. To bar contact between the Polish government and its citizens abroad would have sparked unwanted antagonism between the two states. Further, the Polish government could respond by restricting immigration to France altogether, thereby cutting France off from needed Polish labor. For similar reasons, the government could not forbid immigrants to assemble in ethnic organizations. Likewise, Paris neither pressured coal firms to integrate French and Polish workers in company housing nor called on them to cultivate voluntary organizations in support of French and immigrant interaction. National legislators, like their subordinates in the Pas-de-Calais, overlooked the crucial part coal firms played in shaping the Polish community in the coalfields.

Thus, policies toward immigrant labor developed by coal firms in the 1920s carried risks for companies and immigrants alike. True, managerial strategies in the coal pits, in paternalist housing schemes, and in support of the ethnic life of immigrant personnel earned firms short-term gains by building up and stabilizing the postwar work force. But those policies also threatened company fortunes in the long term. They left companies dependent on immigrant labor for dangerous and difficult work at the coalface. They also helped to cut immigrants off from their French coworkers and neighbors. Further, they fueled animosity toward Poles within Pas-de-Calais officialdom. Anti-immigrant sentiment in particular worked against coal firms and endangered the security of immigrants in France. Throughout the relatively prosperous 1920s, the risks of managerial strategies remained masked; however, as joblessness and xenophobia grew during the economic depression of the 1930s, the foreign labor force created by coal companies was decimated as local officials aggressively expelled non-natives in order to appease public opinion, to open positions for French workers, and to expel those held suspect. It was at this point that the risks associated with managerial policies toward foreign personnel emerged as a true menace to coal firms and to immigrant workers and their families.

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<sup>35</sup> ADPdC M6857, 30 September 1929, Special Commissar Arras to Prefect Pas-de-Calais.

<sup>36</sup> ADPdC M6857, 11 October 1929, Prefect Pas-de-Calais to Ministry of the Interior.