



POLAND

# BLACK AIR

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A detail on the uniform of a miner. Saint Barbara, the patron saint of miners is commemorated each year on December 4. Coal miners are still considered the heroes of the nation's working class.

## **Poland still runs on coal, and it is paying the price**

- ▶ By 2049 Poland will have to definitively abandon coal.
- ▶ Currently Poland is the European nation that produces the most electricity from that fossil fuel.
- ▶ Miners are a national symbol and coal provides direct employment to more than 80 thousand people.
- ▶ According to the European Environment Agency, Poland is also the EU's most polluted country.
- ▶ The record pollution is thought to cause an estimated 50 thousand deaths each year.

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Bobrek was a district that housed coal miners and steelworkers in the city of Bytom around 15km from Katowice in Upper Silesia, the region in southern Poland known for its coalmines. As a result of complications and the growing costs of mining coal, many people have lost their jobs. Consequently, many inhabitants have been forced to leave the area and numerous homes lie abandoned.



Bobrek cemetery. Atmospheric pollution worsens allergies and is the main source of cardiovascular illness and respiratory problems such as asthma and lung cancer.



Protestors shout "wake up for the climate" at the UN Climate Change Conference in Katowice.



Bełchatów is Poland's largest open seam coalmine. The nearby power station is Europe's largest coal-fired power plant and provides 20% of Poland's electricity. With annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of around 38 million tonnes, the European Commission has classified Bełchatów as the European Union's largest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Poland holds a most unwelcome European record: it is the EU country with the worst air pollution. This fact has been certified by data from the European Environment Agency (EEA) and is the result of the country's strong economic and political attachment to coal. In Poland the coalmining community is an important national symbol and the coal industry is a source of direct employment for more than eighty thousand people. Three quarters of the country's electric energy is still produced based on a development model that elsewhere is considered obsolete.

According to the EEA, this pollution is the cause of fifty thousand deaths each year. Nonetheless, for Poland an alternative based on renewable sources still appears to be some way off. There is one certainty, however, identified following long strikes and negotiations involving the Polish government, unions and the PGE (the state coal company), and that is by the year 2049 the country's coalmines will have to close forever. For Brussels and environmentalists, however, 2049 is too far away and it is necessary to act much sooner.



A flag bearing the symbol of the working class miners. Saint Barbara, the patron saint of miners is commemorated each year on December 4. Coal miners are still considered the heroes of the nation's working class.



Three children return home from school. Bobrek was a district that housed coal miners and steelworkers, in the city of Bytom around 15km from Katowice in Upper Silesia, the region in southern Poland known for its coalmines. As a result of complications and the growing costs of mining coal, many people have lost their jobs. Consequently, many inhabitants have been forced to leave the area and numerous homes lie abandoned.



A marching band plays in the streets of Bobrek, the miners' district in the city of Bytom, parading alongside miners in uniform towards the church. Saint Barbara, the patron saint of miners is commemorated each year on December 4. Coal miners are still considered the heroes of the nation's working class.



A fuel pipeline on the outskirts of Katowice.



A husband and wife wait near the tram stop in the town of Bytom.



Activists photograph an area of the town of Imielin. Many buildings have been damaged by subsidence resulting from the excavations at the nearby coalmines.



A family celebrate mass to commemorate Saint Barbara in Bobrek, the miners' district in the city of Bytom. Saint Barbara is the patron saint of miners.



Barbara in her home in Bobrek. She uses a coal-fired boiler to heat her home but the coal dust emitted from her chimney means she has to keep her windows closed.



A police unit blocks a group of anarchists suspected of being dangerous. Various social movements and NGOs, such as Polish Smog Alert and Greenpeace, are fighting to improve air quality in Poland and ensure a greener future.



Passengers on the tram from Bytom to Katowice. Transport is one of the main sources of global warming and atmospheric pollution. Switching to public transport reduces CO2 emissions and atmospheric pollution.



The coal-fired power station in Bobrek, the miners' district in the town of Bytom.



An activist for Extinction Rebellion, an international movement that uses non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act against the climate emergency, at the Greenpeace climate hub in Katowice. The hub was created as a venue for participants at the COP24 to have meetings, workspaces, eat dinner, take part in collateral events and concerts or share their experiences of global warming and climate change.



Burning coal for domestic heating is a common practice in Poland, where coal provides 80% of the country's thermal energy and electricity. Burning coal is cheap and many coalmines and steelworks supply their staff with free coal each year as a benefit.



A protestor rallies the crowd of demonstrators at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Katowice.



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