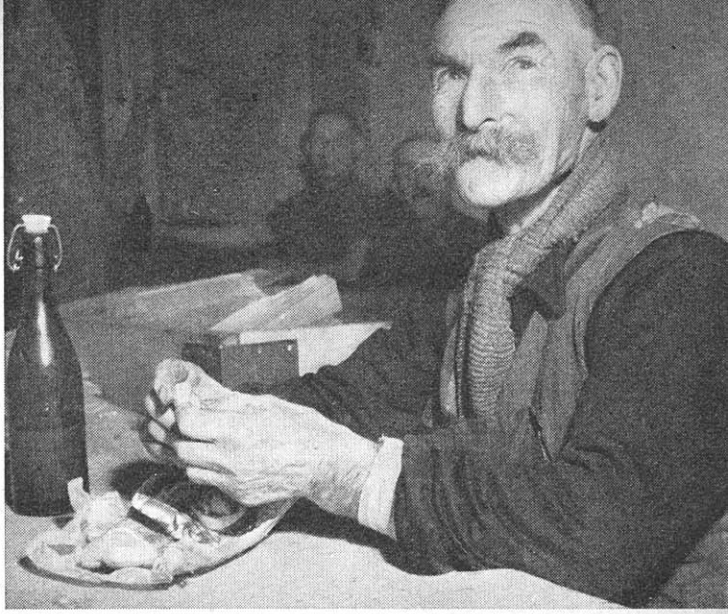
Woman employee of Schott Glass Works, formerly in Jena but now in Zwiesel, Bavaria, examines newly-made lenses.



Robl Hugo, 67, veteran Schott employee, enjoys a typical lunch. Bottle holds wine. Beside bread is sliced sausage.

Refugee Glassmakers

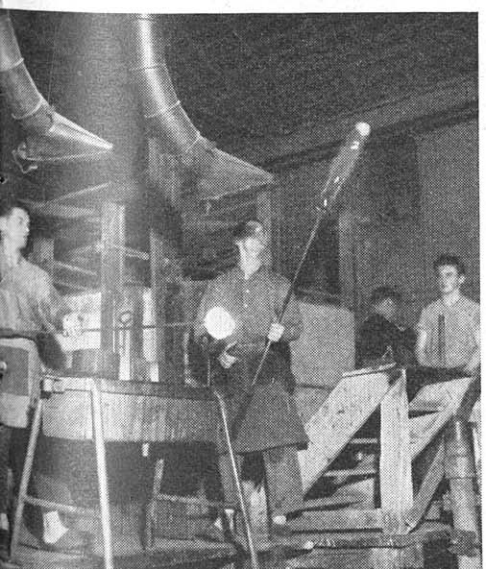
FOR HISTORIANS, Jena may be the place where Napoleon won a battle. For camera fans, it was always the place where the lenses came from — the Zeiss and the Leica. Presumably lenses are still made there, but not for Western optics. Whether the new ones are as good as the old, perhaps only the Soviet Army knows.

It seems fairly doubtful, because it takes sand and skill to make fine glass, and only the sand is left in Jena. The glassmakers of Jena became one of the first postwar refugee industries: Zeiss set up shop in Heidenheim, Wuerttemberg-Baden, and Schott in Zwiesel, Bavaria, both in the US Zone. Parts of the organizations moved out as the Red Army moved in; others followed later, evading barbed-wire barriers and sharpshooting Soviet Zone border patrols.

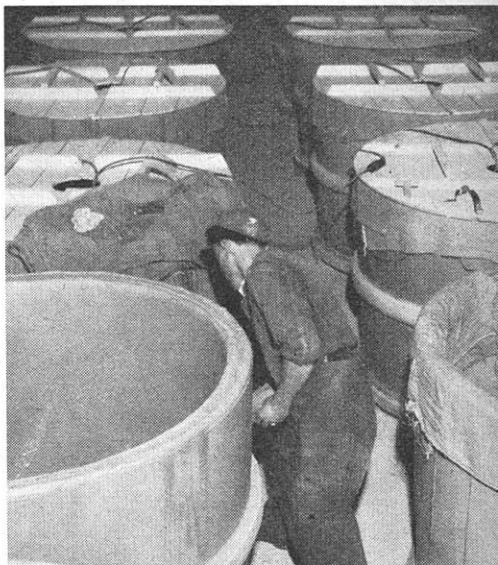
They took what they could — what they could carry in their pockets and on their backs. Directors brought important papers, the workers small tools and large know-how. Of the 780 workers employed in the new Schott factory in Zwiesel, 75 percent are Jena veterans. Marshall Plan aid of Deutsche marks 800,000 ($190,400) helped Schott retool and provide jobs for the glassmakers who chose freedom.

To Americans, the wages of freedom would seem low — average hourly wage of approximately 40 cents for top-skilled workers. The glassmakers, 90 percent union-organized, agree with Marshall Plan statisticians who calculate that, with luck, a worker with family can just live on the wages for a 48-hour week.

Schott directors, harassed by the high cost of reviving — of rebuilding a shattered distribution setup as well as replacing lost machines — appreciate the workers' patience. They promise the better life when productivity increases, but point out that the prices of even the best lenses in the world must remain competitive. Meanwhile, ERP officials who hold the key to the counterpart-fund cash box are keeping West Germany's refugee glass industry under the lens. +END



Left, glass blowers at work. Girl, 17, wraps lens blanks (below) for storage pending shipment. Right, big clay pots for melting glass sand are used only once, then discarded.



Nymphenburg. "Columbine" from Italian Comedy, by F. A. Bustelli. About 1760. (Courtesy, Schlossmuseum, Berlin)

Fuerstenberg. "Potpourri" vase. About 1760. (Courtesy, Schlossmuseum, Berlin)

Vienna. The Hunter, after J. J. Niedermeyer. About 1760.
(Courtesy, Schlossmuseum, Berlin)

Hoechst. Boy and girl playing, by J. P. Melchior. About 1775. (Courtesy, author)

Ansbach. Masked teapot, rococo style. About 1765. (Courtesy, Adolf Bayer, Ansbach)