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"Most, the Town that Moved: Coal, Communists and the 'Gypsy Question' in Post-War Czechoslovakia"

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As Czechoslovakia's communist planners continually increased norms for power and coal production in the 1950s through 1970s, the sprawling surface mines of the north Bohemian brown coal basin expanded voraciously, swallowing 116 villages and parts of several larger cities by 1980. Infamously, the entire historic centre of Most was obliterated in order to expose over 85 million tons of coal. Planners envisioned a new city of Most as a model of socialist modernity. Deriding Most's old town as a decaying capitalist relic, officials lauded New Most's spacious and efficient prefabricated high-rises. Adding to the contrast, the majority of Old Most's remaining inhabitants by 1970 were Roma (Gypsies). For communists, the Roma evoked an old order of segregation, class oppression and bad hygiene. By relocating Roma to modern housing, they could 'liquidate once and for all the Gypsy problem'. This article examines the rhetorics of modernity employed as communists sought to 'solve' intertwined coal, gypsy and housing 'problems' in the city of Most. At the crossroads of several related modernising projects in the twentieth century, Most provides insight into connections between ethnic cleansing, social and environmental engineering and urban planning. All rights reserved. © 2007 The White Horse Press

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