

## Foreword

This book deals with the disappearance of the German minority from the present-day autonomous province of the Vojvodina in the years 1944-1948. It came into being as an upgraded version of my MA paper from two years ago which was written as the first attempt by a Yugoslav historian at elucidating the fate of the Vojvodina Germans. Consequently possible pioneer errors are not to be excluded.

The province that now comprises Yugoslav parts of the former Hungarian counties Bacska and the Banat, as well as the eastern part of the former Croatian county of Syrmium, has been chosen as the geographic setting of the present work for a number of reasons.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, despite the differences which marked the fate of the Ethnic-Germans in its three constituent parts, the province has a modicum of cohesion which caused considerable similarities in the treatment of the local German populations. At the same time, it can also epitomize the treatment of the Ethnic-Germans in the whole of the former Yugoslavia. Indeed, the treatment the Volksdeutsche had meted out to them in Slovenia and Croatia was not a whit different. It was only the number of the Ethnic-Germans that varied considerably - the one in the Vojvodina having been much higher already before the Second

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<sup>1</sup> Serbo-Croatian place names will be used throughout the book. For the German and Hungarian variants see the very useful: Isabela Regenyi, Anton Scherer, *Donauschwaebisches Ortsnamenbuch fuer die ehemals und teilweise noch deutsch besiedelten Orte in Ungarn, Jugoslawien (ohne Slowenien) sowie West-Rumaenien (Banat und Satmar)*, Schriesheim 1987.

World War; by the autumn of 1944 the disparity increased even more markedly.

Secondly, only the territory of the Vojvodina was taken into consideration because the concentration camps into which the *Volksdeutsche* had been interned in 1944/45 were put in charge of Yugoslav republics' Ministries of the Interior<sup>2</sup>, although an ultimate centralized decision-making was retained on the federal level.

Thirdly, the break-up of the country made research in other former Yugoslav republics difficult for historians coming from other, brotherly-turned-enemy, republics. However, historical events and processes are seldom confined to an area to suit the historian's wishes. For that reason we are going to cross these geographic boundaries when the narrative so requires.

The appellations Ethnic-Germans, the *Volksdeutsche*, the Danube Swabians (or simply Swabians)<sup>3</sup> as well as the

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<sup>2</sup> *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Bd. V. Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien* (henceforth: Dok.), Bonn 1961, p. 110E.

<sup>3</sup> The term (*Donauschwaben*) was coined by the Stuttgart geographer Hermann Ruediger in 1922 to mark the Ethnic-Germans other than the so-called Transilvanian Saxons, of the former Kingdom of Hungary. Until then the terms Ungarlaendische Schwaben was used for the Germans living in the country, and the name Deutschungarn for the townees. (*Leidensweg der Deutschen im kommunistischen Jugoslawien. Bd. II. Erlebnisberichte ueber die Verbrechen an den Deutschen durch das Tito-Regime in der Zeit von 1944-1948*, (henceforth: LW) Muenchen/Sindelfingen 1993, p. 16.) This appellation was (and still is) used by the Swabians themselves, as well as by their Serbian, Croatian, Hungarian and Romanian neighbours,, sometimes although with derisory taint. It will be used with no derogatory undertones. The term *Volksdeutsche* was introduced by the Nazis to designate the Germans

German minority will be used throughout the book in order to designate the German population<sup>4</sup> of the Vojvodina.

The period 1944 through 1948 was chosen as the most tragic and crucial part of the Ethnic-Germans' 200 years long history in the Vojvodina. That period was marked by their suffering and final disappearance as a national minority. During these four years the *Volksdeutsche* were evacuated by the Nazis or they fled on their own accord, they were subjected to dudgeon by the victorious communist partisans and the Red Army, plundered, shot *en masse*, manhandled and incarcerated. Throughout the period they were dying in their thousands. It was only in the spring of 1948 that the concentration camps were disbanded and the surviving Swabians given the chance of a new start. Although their civil and, indeed, national rights were fully restored, their property was not. Thus the vast majority had no desire to start from the scratch in a country which had treated them so cruelly, and which, in the meantime, had become communist. Even less so since most of them had relatives in Germany or Austria.

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who were not German citizens as opposed to *Reichsdeutsche* who were. The word was banned as politically incorrect by Himmler in the last year of the war. (Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy 1939-1945. A History of the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germandom*, Cambridge 1957, p. 217.) Despite its Nazi origin, this term became widely accepted not only by the Germans, but also by other nations. From the realm of the political slang it made its way into scientific historiography and became a *terminus technicus* in its own right.

<sup>4</sup> One cannot say the German-speaking population, since there were also German-speaking Jews, as well as the *Volksdeutsche* who spoke no German.

The German authors writing about the problem, usually use the term expulsion (*Vertreibung*). It is correct, to a degree. It will be shown that it was coined on the general pattern of the treatment of the German minorities throughout Eastern Europe which could indeed be best described with that word. However, this term does not do the full justice to the subtleties of the Yugoslav situation: i.e. only a small number of the Yugoslav Germans were actually expelled, and the percentage of these among the Vojvodina Swabians was even smaller than in other parts of the country.<sup>5</sup> Due to the later developments for the majority of the *Volksdeutsche* the temporary (as they thought) evacuation turned into a permanent resettlement or expulsion.

As for the Yugoslavs, they prefer the term resettlement or migration (*iseljavanje*). They claim that the Swabians' departure was a process by which the *Volksdeutsche* left the country voluntarily. This is true only of those who migrated legally after 1948. (In order to give the full account, the period after disbanding of the camps will be briefly dealt with too.) However, most of those evacuated or those who fled had no intention of leaving their homes for good. As for those who left after 1948, they were compelled to do so by the force of circumstances. Nevertheless, the latter group was not expelled in the full sense of the word.

Although containing a greater or smaller degree of truth, both these terms have strong emotional and political undertones

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<sup>5</sup> The greatest part of the expelees was from Slovenia, for obvious geographical reasons.

and therefore both are not completely justified.<sup>6</sup> For this reason I chose to entitle my work *The disappearance of the Vojvodina Germans*, the word disappearance serving in the broadest sense as a blanket term for all that has contributed to reducing once the largest national minority in the country to a mere handful of scattered individuals on the way to complete ethnic extinction.

The question as to what had happened to the Ethnic-Germans in Yugoslavia was a taboo almost until the very end of the communist system and the state itself. Just like in other socialist countries, Tito's regime did not like unpleasant questions to be asked. A proof of possible wrongdoings or errors in one field would immediately raise the question as to the Communist Party's infallibility in others. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the regime and of the whole system hinged decisively on the legend of the great patriotic liberation war and socialist revolution with which the war was inextricably mingled. In the communists' cast of historical roles, the *Volksdeutsche* were assigned the role of universal bad guys alongside with other counter-revolutionary forces of the Yugoslav peoples. However, the fundamental difference was that the Croatian Ustashi, Serbian Chetnics, Slovenian White Guard, Albanian Ballists and other anti-communists were regarded as some kind of aberration within their respective peoples. The case of the Ethnic-Germans was exactly the opposite: almost all of them were proclaimed villains, except for a handful that had taken part in communist activities or had fought in partisan units. All those who had been forced into German service or preferred to remain passive, were lumped

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<sup>6</sup> More about this see in: Zoran Janjetovi}, *Odlazak vojvođanskih [vaba - proterivanje ili iseljavanje*, Tokovi istorije 3-4, 1997.

together with those *Volksdeutsche* who had supported Hitler's cause enthusiastically, as well as with other real or purported war criminals.

Because of this, until ten odd years ago, it was impossible to deal with the problem of the *Volksdeutsche* exodus except for that part of it which was organized by the Nazis i.e. about the evacuation.<sup>7</sup> It is typical that evacuations were depicted as running away from deserved punishment or permanent resettlement schemes, which, at best, was only partly true. About the fate of those Ethnic-Germans who remained in the country once evacuation and flight had been over, next to nothing was written. The reasons were obvious enough: the treatment of the remaining *Volksdeutsche* was everything but commendable and writing about it in its true colours would have hardly enhanced the glory of the regime which has claimed to be the best and most humane social system there had ever been. Maybe even peskier would have been the inquiries about the regime's other, more numerous, victims.

The subject was first broached by newsmen in the late 1980s. Since then a number of valuable works have appeared

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<sup>7</sup> Antun Mileti} *Preseljenje i evakuacija Folksdoj-era iz Srijema i Slavonije 1942-1944*, Zbornik Historijskog instituta Slavonije i Baranje, 12, 1975; Zdravko Krmi}, *O iseljavanju Njema~ke narodne skupine (Volksdeutschera)iz NDH za vrijeme II svjetskog rata*, Zbornik Historijskog instituta Slavonije, 1966. Short surveys of the Nazi-organized evacuation can also be found in: Slobodan Milo{evi}, *Izbeglice i preseljenici na teritoriji okupirane Jugoslavije 1941-1945*, Beograd 1981; Josip Mirni}, *Nemci u Ba~koj u Drugom svetskom ratu*, Novi Sad 1974; Petar Ka~avenda, *Nemci u Jugoslaviji 1918-1945*, Beograd 1991.

about this problem, especially in Slovenia and Croatia.<sup>8</sup> Although by far the largest number of the *Volksdeutsche* lived in Serbia (i.e. the Vojvodina, which is its constituent part) very little has been written about the topic by scholars there. Apart from 45 years of socialism, there is a good reason for such a dearth of works on the subject: it lies in the acute lack of the pertinent archival sources. It has been noticed in all the three republics in which the bulk of the German national minority had lived.<sup>9</sup> This author also encountered the same problem, which only goes to show that there is little difference in this respect between Serbia and the two other former Yugoslav republics which are, with reason or not, often considered to be more democratic. There are two versions as to what had happened to the Yugoslav documents about the German exodus. The people working in Serbian archives either did not know where the documents could be found or presumed that the documents had been destroyed. This other supposition is also endorsed by Ivan Ivanji, a Jewish writer from the Vojvodina who maintains that they were destroyed in the 1950s.<sup>10</sup> There is another hypothesis which gives some hope, at least for the future: namely that the documents survive but are being kept in the Archive of the Ministry of the Interior which is still closed to the public.

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<sup>8</sup> Some of them will be quoted later on in this book.

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Geiger, Ivan Jurkovi}, [*to se dogodilo s folksdoj-erima?*], Zagreb 1993, p.113; Tone Ferenc, *Nemci na Slovenskem med drugo svetovno vojno*, in: Du{an Ne}jak (ed.), "*Nemci*" na Slovenskem 1941-1955, Ljubljana 1998, pp. 135, 141.

<sup>10</sup> Arbeitskreis Dokumentation, *Verbrechen an den Deutschen in Jugoslawien 1944-1948. Die Stationen eines Voelkermordes*, Muenchen 1998, p. 131.

On the other hand, the German literature on the exodus is so copious, making it practically impossible to read it all. The most important standard works are the already quoted *Dokumentation der Vertreibung* and the *Leidensweg*. The first is the official version published by the Bonn government and supplied with an lengthy and learned introduction by Hans-Ulrich Wehler.<sup>11</sup> The latter is a more problematic edition. Although the testimonies are reproduced verbatim, comprehensive introductory texts by various authors are not without strong political, national and ideological bias sometimes at variance with the *Volksdeutsche* testimonies published in the same work. However, some of the introductory texts are written with great expertise and contain useful data.

The reproduced testimonies of the surviving *Volksdeutsche* collected in 1947 and 1958, are kept in the branch of the German *Bundesarchiv* in Beyreuth. There are tenths of thousands of these testimonies written by all sorts of people: from semi-illiterate peasants to highly educated intellectuals. In order to read them, one would need years, which this author did not have at his disposal. However, the published accounts give a clear enough picture of what had happened. A number of smaller works on the exodus exist, (sometimes also reprinting the Swabians' testimonies) some of which have been used by the present author.

Interesting sources, albeit usually not first hand, are the so-called *homeland books* (*Heimatbuecher*) about certain villages,

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<sup>11</sup> Wehler published the introduction as a separate book virtually unaltered in 1980. (Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Nationalitaetenpolitik in Jugoslawien. Die deutsche Minderheit 1918-1978*, Goettingen 1980.)



towns or areas once inhabited by the Ethnic-Germans. Their number is legion. As a rule, they depict the whole history of a whole settlement, including the 1944-1948 period. They are useful in that they sum up the fate of larger groups of people which the individual testimonies often do not. The accounts about the exodus in them range from schmaltzy sob-stories to reports approaching serious scholarship. On the whole the *homeland books* tended to improve over time, those published in the 1970s and 1980s, being on higher intellectual level than those from the earlier period. Some of these *homeland books* were also utilized in this work. The German literature on the disappearance of the Vojvodina Germans by far surpasses the available Serbian literature and archival sources. However, only a very small portion of it can be considered serious historiography.

When my supervisor at the Belgrade University Professor Milan Ristovi} proposed the *Volksdeutsche* exodus from the Vojvodina as the topic of my MA paper, I jumped at the idea. It was my aim to bridge the gap between the ample and ever growing German literature on the subject and practically non-existent Serbian one. My goal was to compare the *Volksdeutsche* testimonies with the available Yugoslav documents so as to check both groups of sources. My success was a modest one due to the lack of Yugoslav documents. Nevertheless, I did manage to find confirmation of many of the *Volsdeutsche* statements in them. I also wanted to put the Calvary of the Vojvodina Swabians in the broader framework of events before and during the Second World War in Yugoslavia and Europe. In my opinion, only in that context can one

understand the fate of the German national minority in the Vojvodina and Yugoslavia.

The problem of what happened to the Swabians is still a ticklish topic in Serbia.<sup>12</sup> It is no longer impermissible to put in a good word for the former Swabian neighbours, but one must also count on many people who, due to their life experience or ideological persuasion, are prone to disagree vehemently not only with any attempt at rehabilitation of the *Volksdeutsche*, but even with any attempt at serious research of the true role of the German national minority throughout their 200 years long coexistence with other peoples of the region. They still see the history as a black-and-white war film with partisans playing the good and the *Volksdeutsche* the bad guys.

The matter is not a simple one when the Swabians are concerned either. Because of their great sufferings many of them refuse or are unable to see their conationals in the true light. They see a mote in another's eye but they connive at, play down or deny altogether the crimes of some of their fellow-Swabians. It is needless pointing out how such attitudes obscure the complexity of the long gone years and make it difficult to research, explain and understand the troubled past. This in its turn makes the mutual understanding, not to mention reconciliation, impossible. It is the typical vicious circle of inter-ethnic relations: the conflicts of the past breeding future conflicts. It takes courage and

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<sup>12</sup> As an illustration for this statement this author can adduce his 15 months of patient waiting to be given permission to do research in the Diplomatic archive of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was ultimately denied with an explanation that the whole thing was still very tricky and could cause diplomatic difficulties.

honesty on both sides to call a spade a spade, to explain and understand the past and let it finally pass away in order to create a better future.

## Chapter One

# Between Serb and Magyar: The Ethnic-Germans in the Vojvodina from 18th century to 1918

The present day Vojvodina<sup>1</sup> (which used to be called South Hungary) was under the Ottoman domination until late 17th century. The country was freed by the joint effort of the Germans, Magyars, Serbs, Croats, Poles and people of many other nationalities under the aegis of the Austrian Emperor in the wars of 1683-1699 and 1716-1718. With the peace treaties of Karlowitz (Sremski Karlovci) and Passarowitz (Po`arevac) whole of Hungary was reunited under the Habsburg sway after 150 years of tripartite division. The long Turkish misrule and the wars that had ended it, have left the country devastated and depopulated.<sup>2</sup> Cultivation of the land and its repopulating with

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<sup>1</sup> The Vojvodina got its name only in mid-nineteenth century, i.e. during the revolution of 1848. Until 1860 it comprised somewhat different territories than it does today . (It excluded Syrmium, but included parts of adjacent territories now belonging to Hungary, Croatia and Romania.) Its capital was Timisoira. After the First World War the name was used only colloquially. At that time it was considered that the Vojvodina comprised the Yugoslav parts of Bacska, the Banat and Baranya. (The greatest part of the last mentioned Hungarian county remained with Hungary.) It was only after the Second World War when the borders between the Yugoslav republics were drawn that the Vojvodina got its present shape.

<sup>2</sup> Anton Tafferner, *Quellenbuch zur donauschwaebische Geschichte*, Stuttgart 1977, p. XXXII.

tax-payers and, if need be, soldiers was the supreme order of the day. Some 30 000<sup>3</sup> Serbs settled there as refugees after 1690. However their numbers and agricultural skills were far bellow the mark even though there had been some Serbs living there since the Ottoman rule. In order to have the newly acquired country repopulated and economically capacitated as soon as possible, the Viennese court started bringing in colonists from all over the Empire, and indeed even from some foreign lands.

The Germans seemed the best choice for the Court's designs. They were diligent, thrifty, law-abiding, peace-loving and desirous of better life than their West German homelands ruled by scores of grasping princelings or endangered by chronic French incursions could provide. The colonization took place in several waves throughout 18th century, although a handful of Germans came already by the end of the previous century. The settlers were given financial aid, tax exemption for some years, often a house, grain, tools etc. The government was eager that the colonists find their feet as soon as possible. To be sure, the Germans were not the only settlers, but their impact was decisive in many fields.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The number is still very hotly disputed between Serbian, Albanian and Hungarian historians. (For a short survey of the problem see: Noel Malcolm , *Kosovo. A Short History*, London 1998, pp. 144-161. However, his estimates as to the number of the Serbian emigrants need not be correct either.)

<sup>4</sup> The literature about the German colonization is more than ample. For basic information see: Erik Roth, *Die planmaessig angelegte Siedlungen im Deutsch-Banater Militaergrenzbezirk 1765-1821*, Muenchen 1988; Sonja Jordan, *Die kaiserliche Wirtschaftspolitik im Banat im 18. Jahrhundert*, Muenchen 1967; Felix Milleker, *Die Besiedlung der Banater Militaergrenze*, Bela Crkva 1926; the same author, *Geschichte der*

During the 19th and 20th centuries the Serbian nationalists claimed the settlement of so great a number of Germans was a wicked plan of the traditionally inimical Habsburg court aimed at destroying the Serbian ethnic compactness and in the event Germanizing the whole area.<sup>5</sup> This was by no means true. The wish to weaken the ethnic compactness did exist, but it was leveled against the Hungarians and not against the Serbs. The Serbs, were not only numerically too weak, but were not considered a *historical people* in the traditional Austrian pecking order of nationalities, and therefore they, unlike the Hungarians (meaning Hungarian nobility), could not aspire to participate in the decision-making.<sup>6</sup> However, the economic motive was

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*Banater Militaergrenze 1764-1873*, Pan~evo 1925; Andreas Dammang, *Die deutsche Landwirtschaft im Banat und in der Batschka*, Novi Sad 1931; Borislav Jankulov, *Pregled kolonizacije Vojvodine u XVIII I XIX veku*, Novi Sad 1961; Lazar Jelap, *Prilog prou~avanju kolonizacije Vojvodine krajem XVIII veka*, Zbornik za dru{tvne nauke Matice srpske, 29, 1961; Friedrich Lotz, *Die fruhteresianische Kolonisation des Banates (1740-1742)*, in: *Gedenkschrift fuer Harold Steinacher (1875-1965)*, Muenchen 1966; Geza C. Paikert, *The Danube Swabians. German Populations in Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia and Hitler's Impact on their Patterns*, The Hague 1967. K. Schuenemann, *Oesterreichs Bevoelkerungspolitik unter Maria Theresia*, Muenchen 1935; Balduin Saria, *Geschichte der Suedostdeutschen Volksgruppen*, Kitzingen/Main s.a., pp. 15-26. Each and every *homeland book* has a section devoted to the settlement of a particular village or town. They are much too numerous to be adduced here.

<sup>5</sup> A typical example of this way of thinking can be found in: *Stenografske belefke Senata Kraljevine Jugoslavije, Redovan saziv 1932/33, knj. III*, Beograd 1933, p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> According to this legal and political theory so-called *historical nations* (the Germans, Hungarians, Czechs (i.e. Bohemian multinational nobility), Italians and the Poles in Galicia ) could have a say in the affairs of the

decisive with the ethno-politic having to take the back seat at best.<sup>7</sup> This was quite natural in a time which cared little about national feelings and much about revenues.<sup>8</sup>

The relations between the indigenous or lately settled Serbian population and the German newcomers were fairly good throughout their common history.<sup>9</sup> They were never overly close but they were friendly enough and correct for the greater part of their coexistence. However, they had their ups and downs like all inter-ethnic relations usually do. The first conflicts arose in the days of the German colonization when the Serbian cattle-breeder often had to make room for the Swabian agriculturists. It was the perennial clash between a shepherd and a ploughman. These initial conflicts were soon overcome through necessities of common living under hard conditions and the government's intervention.

The second major set-back in the Serbian-German relations came about during the revolution of 1848/49. Nationally unconscious but materialistically disposed Swabians were espousing the Hungarian cause hoping for greater civil liberties, economic opportunities and upward social mobility. Less

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state, whereas all others were considered as legal and political *quantite negligible*. (See: Robert A. Kann, *The Multinational Empire. Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, I*, New York 1950.)

<sup>7</sup> Paikert, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed sometimes it was the Hungarian nobles who invited the German colonists to cultivate their large estates. (Ibid., p. 18.)

<sup>9</sup> For an outline of the history of the two peoples' coexistence from 18th to 20th century, see: Zoran Janjetovi}, *Odnosi Srba i Nemaca u Vojvodini (XVIII-XX vek)*, Tokovi istorije, 1-2, 1996.

practical but nationally very conscious Serbs, for their part, strove to achieve a national autonomy. In their struggle for autonomy they tended to oversee the fact that other nationalities living on the same territory could have different aspirations. The clashes were often bloody enough and they have embittered the neighbourly relations for some time afterwards. By the end of the revolution, the Serbs were quite aware that they had been misused by the Court against the Hungarians; the Ethnic-Germans, on the other hand, became conscious of having been used as cat's paw by nationalistic Magyars only some four or five decades later.<sup>10</sup>

The next opportunity for troubling the relations presented itself in the late 1860s and early 1870s when the issue of the demilitarization of the antiquated Austrian Military frontier was raised. The Serbs did not want the Frontier abolished, obsolete and harsh though it had been, at least it presented a safe haven from Magyarisation which the Hungarian government was furthering with ever increasing vehemence. The Germans, nationally still dormant, just like back in 1848, were not able to realize the threat to their nationality inherent in the impending dismantling of the Military Border. The incipient conflict was

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<sup>10</sup> For the account of the Serbian revolt in 1848 see: Siegfried Kapper, *Die serbische Bewegung in Suedungarn. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der ungarischen Revolution*, Berlin 1851. For surveys of the national conflicts of 1848/49 in general see: Goergy Spira, *The Nationality Issue in the Hungary of 1848/49*, Budapest 1992.



prevented by the arbitrary decision of the Emperor who made yet another concession to the Magyars and abolished the Frontier.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from these conflicts the mutual relations were peaceful, the only major cause of tensions being the economic fear of the Serbs (and others!) of the Swabian economic preponderance. The bugaboo of the ever increasing German landholding was a stock-in-trade of Serbian (but not only Serbian) nationalists. As most fears, it had some foundations in reality. (It certainly had at least a modicum of envy too.) The tendency of the *Volksdeutsche* accumulating land and non-Germans gradually losing it was noticed as early as the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> To be sure other nationalities also had to book losses from the German land-buying drive.<sup>13</sup>

Rabid nationalists saw a Germanic conspiracy and just another aspect of the German *Drang nach Sued-Osten* in this process. More sober heads, however, detected the roots of the calamity in the *Volksdeutsche* hard-work, thriftiness and moderation in drinking, these being the features other nationalities

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<sup>11</sup> For a survey of these conflicts see: Zoran Janjetovi}, *Zeitweise getriebene Beziehungen durch die Jahrhunderte*, in: *1. Dialog Symposium vom 2. bis 4. Oktober 1998 im Haus der Heimat*, Wien 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Slavko Gavrilovi}, *Srem, Banat i Ba~ka od kraja XVIII do sredine XIX veka*, Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju, 6, 1972, p. 15; the same author, *Privredne i društvene prilike u Injiji 1746-1849*, Godi{njak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu, 6, 1961, p. 157; Radoslav Markovi}, *Pravoslavna srpska parohija u Injiji krajem 1900*, Sremski Karlovci 1902, pp. 22, 65.

<sup>13</sup> C.A. Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors. The treaty of Trianon and its Consequences 1919-1937*, London, New York, Toronto 1937, p. 34.

(except for the Slovaks) could not have boasted of.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the Swabians were so keen buyers that they were willing to overpay the land in order to get it.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, for them acquisition of land was strictly a business transaction spurred by desire for economic security and social prestige that went alongside landownership. They certainly had no intention of spearheading a Germanic penetration to the South-East, especially since the Pan-German circles were showing only a very modest interest in the Hungarian Swabians.<sup>16</sup> Moreover the vast majority of the Hungarian Swabians not only had a very weak national consciousness until late 19th century, but was increasingly a prey to the rampant Magyarisation. This hardly made them a suitable tool of the German *Drang*, especially when one knows that it was the propertied classes (i.e. those who were buying land) which were most prone to turn

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<sup>14</sup> Markovi}, pp. 15, 34, 64; Jugoslovenski dnevnik 20 October 1933; Du{an Popovi}, *Srbi u Vojvodini*, III, Novi Sad 1990, p. 183; Mariann Nagy, *Nineteenth Century Hungarian Authors on Hungary's Ethnic Minorities*, in: Laszlo Kontler (ed.), *Pride and Prejudice. National Stereotypes in 19th and 20th Century Europe East to West*, Budapest 1995, p. 35; Dammang, p. 40; Slavko Stani}, [*vabe u Vojvodini*, Letopis Matice srspe, knj. 330, sv. 1-2, 1931, p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> Popovi}, p. 184.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Cord Meyer, *Mittleuropa in German Thought and Action 1815-1948*, The Hague 1955, p. 54. The ramified activities of the most important nationalistic organization, the Pan-German League (Alldeutscher Verband), rarely reached as far as Hungary. For reasons of imperialistic foreign policy the Swabians were kept on the back burner, the bulk of the League's attention being devoted to the Germans in the areas bordering on Germany and distant African colonies. (See: Alfred Kruck, *Geschichte des Alldeutschen Verbandes 1890-1939*, Wiesbaden 1954.)

Hungarian.<sup>17</sup> However, the land, fear and envy accumulated in the second half of 19th century continued to influence the inter-ethnic relations in the Vojvodina until the mid-twentieth century.

The First World War caused no major upsetting of the relations between the Serbs and their Swabian neighbours. It was only at the end of the war that the fateful historical questions were posed, with the two peoples inclined to give different answers.

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it was exactly the Germans (and the Slovaks) who suffered the heaviest losses because of the Hungarian government's policies of Magyarisation. (About Hungarisation see: J. Weidlein, *Madjarisierung der Deutschen in Ungarn*, Schorndorf 1955; Dimitrije Kirilovi}, *Poma/arivanje u biv{oj Ugarskoj*, Novi Sad 1935; Paikert, pp. 43-61, 80-89; Vladimir Margan, *Poma/arivanje u biv{oj Ugarskoj*, Glasnik Istorijskog dru{tva u Novom Sadu, kn. VIII, sv. 1, 1935; Mathias Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben in Jugoslawien*, Stuttgart 1955, p. 16; the same author, *Volksgeschichte der Deutschen in Ungarn*, Stuttgart 1954, pp. 33-39 ) In Syrmium, which belonged to Croatia, the assimilation was rather into the Croatian than the Hungarian nationality. (Valentin Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen in Syrmium, Kroatien und Bosnien. Geschichte einer deutschen Volksgruppe in Suedosteuropa*, Stuttgart 1989, pp. 56-61.)

## Chapter Two

### **From unconsciousness to infatuation: The Vojvodina Swabians in Yugoslavia 1918- 1941**

The end of the First World War had fateful consequences for almost all peoples of Europe. This was particularly true of Eastern Europe where the major map re-drawing took place. Old empires disappeared and new states emerged. Among the latter was also the Kingdom of the *Serbs, Croats and Slovenes*.<sup>1</sup> It was created from the unified territories of the former kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro and former Habsburg territories inhabited by the South Slavs.

Among all these territories it was the Vojvodina which was the most disputed. It was the only part of the new Kingdom that did not have an absolute Slav majority.<sup>2</sup> The *Great Popular Assembly* in Novi Sad proclaimed unification with the Kingdom

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<sup>1</sup> The country was renamed Yugoslavia in 1929 and it was under this name that it existed for the next 60 odd years. Because of this, reasons of expediency, as well as because already in the 1918-1929 period it was colloquially referred to as Yugoslavia, that name will be used henceforth.

<sup>2</sup> This was indeed true of Kosovo and parts of Western Macedonia, but these territories belonged legally to Serbia and Montenegro already before the First World War, to whom they were restored after it. Although some authors try to argue to the contrary. (See: Malcolm, pp. 263-267), the fact that no-one disputed their possession in practice testifies that the Powers regarded these territories as belonging to Serbia and Montenegro i.e. Yugoslavia.

of Serbia on 25 November 1918.<sup>3</sup> However, the Assembly was everything but representative: only few of the deputies were non-Slavs ( and only 6 out of 757 were Germans).<sup>4</sup> Thus the Swabians' consent was practically not asked for, although without them the Slavs had no absolute majority over the local Hungarians. It turned out later that the rights of free national development for all, promised by the *Great Popular Assembly* remained a dead letter.

The situation of the Serbs and Swabians now changed dramatically. In the pre-war Hungary both peoples were considered *nationalities* (i.e. national minorities) and were equally oppressed. With the creation of Yugoslavia the Serbs became the part of the *state people* as the dominant (newly proclaimed but in practice non-existent<sup>5</sup>) Yugoslav nationality was called. As for the Vojvodina Germans, they remained a national minority, although under drastically changed circumstances.

The Swabians were reluctant to change suzerainty. Thanks to centuries of living under the *Holy Hungarian Crown of St. Steven* and Magyarizing policies of the Hungarian governments,

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<sup>3</sup> Petranovi}, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1988*, I, Beograd 1989, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Volkmar Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben im Koenigreich Jugoslawien*, Muenchen 1969, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> The Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were proclaimed one nation with three *tribes*, as it was called in the political lingo of the time. For numerous controversies such an unitarian concept produced see: Ivo Banac, *Nacionalno pitanje u Jugoslaviji. Porijeklo, povijest, politika*, Zagreb 1988. Although Banac's book is somewhat warped, it pinpoints the main bones of contention.

they have developed a strong sense of loyalty to Hungary.<sup>6</sup> The take-over by the Serbian army was accomplished for the greatest part in an orderly manner: the Serbian military took care to reestablish the public security and to disarm civic guards which had been set up for that purpose<sup>7</sup>.

In the political sphere the things did not go off so smoothly. In the days of the break-up of the Habsburg Monarchy, almost all its nationalities set up their *national councils*. The traditionally unpolitical Hungarian Germans hurried to catch up by organizing three of them. The rival two with the seat in Budapest were espousing Hungary's integrity with national rights for its minorities. However, their influence in the Vojvodina was almost nil.<sup>8</sup> Much greater influence was exercised by the Swabian Council in Timisoara. It was as pro-Hungarian as its two Budapest counterparts. Indeed it enjoyed Hungarian government's full support.<sup>9</sup> In its manifesto of 8 December 1918 it demanded a plebiscite to decide the future of the Banat and Bacska, autonomy for these territories, guarantees for ethnic minorities' rights and the representation of the Council at the peace conference.<sup>10</sup> Due to the imposition of the Serbian

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<sup>6</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Nationalitaetenpolitik in Jugoslawien. Die deutsche Minderheit 1918-1978*, Goettingen 1980, p. 26; Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben...*, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Josef Mueller, *Syrmien, Slawonien, Bosnien. Verlorene Heimat der deutschen Bauern*, Freilassing 1961, pp. 42-43; Valentin Oberkersch, *India. Deutsches Leben in Ostsyrmien (1825-1944)*, Stuttgart 1978, p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Deutschen...*, pp. 58, 61.

<sup>9</sup> Wehler, p. 26; Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben...*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Deutschen...* pp. 6-7.

administration already before the peace treaty was signed, such attempts were destined to failure.<sup>11</sup>

There were several ideas among the Swabians of South Hungary as to what the future of the region should be. They ranged from independence, to autonomy for the Banat and Bacska within Hungary, to joining Romania or Yugoslavia, dependent of the future appurtenance of the Banat's capital Timisoira.<sup>12</sup> The Swabian delegation which had been sent to the Paris peace conference in the summer of 1919 asked for the whole of Banat to be allotted to Romania since it was already known by then that Timisoira would go to Romania.<sup>13</sup> However, the Swabians' wishes were disregarded by the big powers just like most of the demands of small peoples and countries. The new borders were drawn primarily according to the wishes of the great powers.<sup>14</sup>

As a sop for the new and old national minorities clauses on minority protection were introduced into peace treaties with the newly-created countries. They were meant to protect the world peace but they only managed to scathe the vanities of the new

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<sup>11</sup> Danilo Keci}, *Revolucionarni radni-ki pokret u Vojvodini 1917-1921*, Novi Sad 1972, pp. 123-135.

<sup>12</sup> Annabring , *Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben...*, p. 10. The issue of Syrmium could not be raised because this region had a very strong Slav majority. Furthermore, it belonged to the Kingdom of Croatia (which also proclaimed its secession from the Habsburg Monarchy and unification with Serbia and Montenegro) and not to Hungary proper.

<sup>13</sup> Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben...*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> On the frontier-drawing see: Andrej Mitrovi}, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira 1919-1920*, Beograd 1968; Ivo Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference. A Study in Frontiermaking*, New Haven, London 1963.

states without giving efficient protection to the national minorities.<sup>15</sup> The League of Nations which was in charge of supervising the observance of minority rights was much too weary of hurting susceptibilities of member-states and the procedure much too intricate to provide effective protection.<sup>16</sup> Over and above, the protective measures imposed had no universal validity, i.e. they were not binding on the old-established powers.

Despite the obligations which Yugoslavia only grudgingly accepted, the conditions of national minorities in the country left much to be desired. In that respect one might say that the conditions of the Ethnic-Germans were not good, but that they were nothing like so bad as those of the Albanians, or for that matter, the Hungarians. Small Slavic minorities (the Czechs, Slovaks and Ruthenians) were of course treated better, but not so brotherly as one might have expected. In other words, the position of the *Volksdeutsche* was in the golden mean.

The new state did little to endear itself to its new subjects. For former Austro-Hungarian territories a three years' deadline for opting for one of the two successor states (i.e. Austria or Hungary) was set in the peace treaties. The state used the right of option in order to withhold civil rights from the national minorities, burdening them at the same time with civic duties such as taxes and military service. The latter was especially resented since it

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<sup>15</sup> Erwin Viehhaus, *Die Minderheitenfrage und die Entstehung der Minderheitenschutzvertraege auf der Pariser Friedenskonferenz 1919. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Nationalitaetenproblems im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Wuerzburg 1960.

<sup>16</sup> Helmer Rosting, *Protection of Minorities by the League of Nations. A Historical and Legal Survey*, Geneve 1922.



often involved a hard service in far-away uncultured parts, or combat duty on the Albanian frontier which was worse still. Sometimes the police had to crimp people to service.<sup>17</sup> In some cases open revolt with bloodshed ensued.<sup>18</sup> This reluctance was not confined, be it said, to national minorities or former Habsburg lands only.<sup>19</sup>

It took some time until the Swabians reconciled themselves to the new state. For reasons to be discussed presently, most of them never developed a feeling of real loyalty for the South Slav kingdom.

In terms of numbers, the Ethnic-Germans were the most numerous national minority in Yugoslavia comprising some 500 000 people. According to the census from 1931, the number of the *Volksdeutsche* in the Vojvodina was as follows: in the Banat there were 120.450 Germans to 585.549 inhabitants; in Bacska 173.058 to 611.838 inhabitants; in Syrmium they numbered 49.345 out of total population of 316.444.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Arhiv Jugoslavije (henceforth: AJ), 14, 143/497; 145/509; 161/564.

<sup>18</sup> AJ, 14, 143/497; Politisches Archiv des Auswaertigen Amtes (further: PA), Abteilung Iib, Nationalitaetenfrage, Fremdvoelker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1.

<sup>19</sup> AJ, 14, 145/509; 143/497.

<sup>20</sup> Dok. , p. 11E. The government did not like the number of non-Yugoslavs, so for political reasons the complete data concerning nationalities were not published. It was only done by the Germans in 1942. This means that the adduced numbers can be taken for accurate in spite of the possible distortions some *Volksdeutsche* authors are complaining of.

Most of the Swabians were peasants: roughly 80% which was also a Yugoslav average.<sup>21</sup> As for their economic strength, they were certainly somewhat better-off than their non-German neighbours. On the whole their landholdings were somewhat bigger and they were often overrepresented in landownership. This was particularly true of predominantly non-German settlements where the competition was weaker.<sup>22</sup> The Swabian individuals lost only a small fraction of their land (1,5%) through the agrarian reform, although the losses of the German communes were greater. The percentage of landless peasants among the *Volksdeutsche* too was lower than among other nationalities.<sup>23</sup> Their financial power also exceeded their numbers.<sup>24</sup> They were also overrepresented in commerce, industry and innkeeping.<sup>25</sup> Their strong position in the national economy was further fortified

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<sup>21</sup> Wehler, p. 18; Dušan Biber, *Socijalna struktura nemačke nacionalne manjine u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis, 14, 1978; the same author, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji 1933-1941*, Ljubljana 1966, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Leopold Egger, *Das Vermoegen und Vermoegensverluste der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*, Sindelfingen 1983, pp. 34-141; Dammang, p. 59.

<sup>23</sup> 41,40% of the Hungarians, 22,68% of the Serbs but only 18,18% of the Swabians were landless. (Nikola Gašić, *Nemci u agrarnoj reformi i vlasništvu obradivog zemljišta u Vojvodini 1919-1941*, in: Nikola Gašić, *Radovi iz agrarne istorije i demografije*, Novi Sad 1995, p. 288.)

<sup>24</sup> Laslo Kevago, *Statistička ispitivanja društveno-ekonomskog položaja južnih Slovena u Mađarskoj poslije XX veka*, Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke, 54, 1969, pp. 40, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Wehler, p. 18; Božidar Ivković, *Neki metodi ekonomske politike i privredne politike okupatora u Banatu 1941-1944*, in: *Vojvodina 1941. Radovi i diskusije sa skupa istoričara u Subotici 9. i 10. decembra 1966. godine*, Novi Sad 1967, p. 176.

through a well-functioning and ever-sprawling co-operative system.<sup>26</sup> Thus, as far as the economy went, the Swabians were in a somewhat better position than their neighbours of other nationalities. Indeed, the economy, despite some set-backs the *Volksdeutsche* also experienced, was to prove itself the brightest facet of their minority existence.

Far less gratifying was their position in other fields. Their main complaints were in the fields of language, education, political representation, public security and agrarian reform.

Although Yugoslavia had agreed in peace treaties with Hungary and Austria to insure a modicum of language rights for its national minorities, next to nothing came of it. The authorities insisted on the sole use of (the non-existent) Serbo-Croato-Slovene language, so as to emphasize the Slavonic character of the new state. Overzealous officials often tried to supplant minority languages even from the private sphere. True enough, in the Vojvodina it was Hungarian that had to bear the brunt of these measures, but German was not spared either.<sup>27</sup>

Education was another sore spot. In the first few years the government made certain concessions in the field of education to the Ethnic Germans in the Vojvodina in order to wean them from the Magyars and win them over for the new state. This policy however was short-lived. As soon as the powers-that-be felt that their new acquisitions were safe, they switched over to the policy of ethnic assimilation through the school system. The number of German schools was reduced and the German-language

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<sup>26</sup> Wehler, pp. 18-20; J. Durman, *Zadrugarstvo Nemaca u Jugoslaviji do Drugog svetskog rata*, Zadrū`ni arhiv, 2, 1954.

<sup>27</sup> Macartney, pp. 409-410.

instruction was reduced to a minimum. The stipulations of the peace treaties were construed in the skimpiest sense possible. Above that, the so-called *name analysis*<sup>28</sup> was used in order to slash the number of pupils below the required minimum so as to enable the government to close down minority schools or classes. The lack of eligible teachers and school-books was chronic. Sometimes Swabian teachers were sent to non-German boondocks while the *Volksdeutsche* children were taught by teachers who spoke no German. It was only in 1930 and 1931 that some concessions were made which improved the German education to a degree. However these concessions were neither sufficient nor made in good faith. They were just a token of goodwill towards the Weimar Republic with which Yugoslavia wanted to improve relations at the time. For the Swabians whose national consciousness started to awake since the First World War, this was far bellow the mark.<sup>29</sup>

As far as the political representation on the national level went, the Ethnic-Germans were satisfactorily represented (by Yugoslav standards) in the Yugoslav parliament, but it was only from 1923 that they were given the opportunity to participate in the political life of the country. Their *Deutsche Partei* often served as a tip on the scales in the parliament. Of course, the

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<sup>28</sup> This was a process of proving an impeccable minority origin of a pupil. If a pupil had just one Slavic ancestor or a Slavic sounding family name, he or she had to attend Yugoslav classes. The mother-tongue or parents' wishes were irrelevant.

<sup>29</sup> For surveys of the Ethnic-German education in Yugoslavia see: J. V. Senz, o.c.; Hans Rasimus, *Die deutsche Schulnot im ehemaligen Koenigreich Jugoslawien*, Muenchen 1979; Ljubodrag Dimi}, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918-1941*, III, Beograd 1997, pp. 8-55.

*Volksdeutsche* complained with right of gerrymandering and elections violence on the part of the government, but that was a common complaint of all opposition parties.

In the 1929-34 period no political life worthy of the name existed. This was doubly true for the national minorities. From 1934 when a semi-democratic constitution was promulgated the Swabians could take part in political life only through a handful of their distinguished politicians - a separate German party could not be revived again.

The situation was however much worse when the local administration was concerned. From the dismantling of the Hungarian state apparatus in 1918-1919, predominantly *Volksdeutsche* settlements were run by the central government's commissars of non-German descent. This state of affairs prevailed until 1927, when the first local elections took place in the Vojvodina. Nevertheless the small gains the Swabians were able to score then were taken away by the royal dictatorship imposed in January 1929. Never again had the pre-war Yugoslavia a really democratic system.<sup>30</sup>

Public security was never a forte of the pre-war Yugoslavia. The quantity of violence generally practised was considerable. This was possible because the state itself did not shrink from using it. However, whereas the use of force was a rule in the southern parts of the country, in the Vojvodina it was only occasional and never on such a grand scale: clubs and only sometimes rifles were used in the Vojvodina, compared to constant use of firearms and artillery as a means of persuasion in

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<sup>30</sup> Macartney, p. 396, 410-413; Wehler, pp. 26-28; Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben...*, pp. 32-39.

Kosovo and some other areas. To be sure the government violence was not reserved for minority territories alone. It was also used in other, predominantly Slavonic, parts of the country, Serbia proper included.<sup>31</sup>

The cultural differences and the Habsburg traditions of the legal state shielded to a degree the German-populated areas from the worst forms of the government-sponsored violence. The matter with the private violence of nationalistic organizations stood different. Similar gangs of thugs flaunting high falutin' patriotic slogans existed all over Europe throughout the inter-war period. Domestically the most important ones were ORJUNA, SRNAO and some Chetnik organizations.<sup>32</sup> All of them were anti-democratic, nationalistic and profoundly anti-minority disposed. They managed to thrive thanks to the sponsorship of the ruling Serbian parties and the government.<sup>33</sup> Their pet targets were national minorities' newspapers, prominent politicians and

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<sup>31</sup> On use of government violence see: Banac, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> About these organizations see: Mladen \or|evi}, *Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (ORJUNA)* (bachelor's paper, MS), Beograd 1998; Branislav Gligorijevi}, *Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista*, Istorija 20. veka, 5, 1963; the same author, *Srpska nacionalisti-ka omladina (SRNAO). Prilog izu-avanju nacionalisti-kih organizacija u staroj Jugoslaviji*, Istorijski glasnik 2-3, 1964; Nusret [ehi}, *^etni{tvo u Bosni i Hercegovini (1918-1941.). Politi-ka uloga i oblici djelatnosti-etni-kih udru`enja*, Sarajevo 1971.

<sup>33</sup> ORJUNA was a kind of prolonged arm of the unitarist Democratic Party. SRNAO was the rough-neck band of the strongest party in the country, the People's Radical Party. Very soon after its foundation it managed to take over most of the members of its rival the ORJUNA. The Chetniks were an association of former bushwhackers and other patriotic enthusiasts. Like most other patriotic associations, they enjoyed the government's goodwill.

public rallies. The authorities, for greater part, looked upon their actions with benevolent consideration.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most serious reasons for Swabians' discontent was the way the Yugoslav state was implementing its agrarian reform. As we have already mentioned, the *Volksdeutsche* individuals, usually not owning large estates liable for confiscation, were not hit hard by its stipulations. However, the German communes were. On the other hand the Swabian have-nots were sidestepped in distribution of the confiscated land, often in preference of the Serbian colonists with whom the government strove to *improve* the ethnic make-up of the province.<sup>35</sup>

What the Germans resented most was the virtual prohibition to acquire land in a strip of 50 km alongside the border which was imposed in 1938. It was a somewhat paranoid reaction to what the government and nationalistic circles saw as the *Volksdeutsche* land-buying campaign since mid-thirties.<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> The best known case was an attempt on life of the main Ethnic-German leader Dr Stefan Kraft in Stari Sivac in 1925. It also caused a diplomatic scandal involving the German ambassador. (PA, Abteilung II b, Politische Beziehungen Jugoslawiens zu Deutschland, Politik 2, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1; PA, Abteilung II b, Nationalitaetenfrage, Fremdvoelker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 3 and 4; *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca. Vanredni saziv za 1925. godinu, knj. 2*, Beograd 1925, pp. 216-217.)

<sup>35</sup> Ga}e{a, o.c. Some German peasants were given land on the Albanian frontier. (Macartney, p. 427.) This was in accordance with the government's wish to scatter the minorities throughout the country and to render them harmless in this way.

<sup>36</sup> Ga}e{a, pp. 298-308.

measure was decreed on Slovenian motion but was soon extended to the whole northern border area. The Swabians were right when they perceived the decree as a violation of their civic rights, but they oversaw the fact that similar measures were in force in many other countries, not least in the German Reich.<sup>37</sup>

The Ethnic-Germans' economic strength caused envy and fear, especially after the advent of Hitler. They were made suspect of receiving foreign capital to bankroll their transactions which were, allegedly, but part of the *Drang nach Sued-Osten* scheme.<sup>38</sup> There are no conclusive proofs that this was so. Due to snippily preserved archival sources the ultimate truth about this will never be known. However, the Germans were buying land and this caused anxiety and envy with the Serbs and this is what was most important at that moment.

One more thing made the *Volksdeutsche* dissatisfied. It was high taxes levied in the Vojvodina. Some Ethnic-German authors depict this as measures aimed at ruining economically the national minorities. Although such taxation provoked discontent, it was by no means leveled against the minorities alone. Indeed the Vojvodina Serbs and Croats had to pay the very same taxes as the non-Yugoslav population. Therefore the dissatisfaction with high taxes was a universal and even unifying feature of all the

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<sup>37</sup> Among Yugoslavia's neighbours Italy and Hungary also adopted such legislation.

<sup>38</sup> AJ, 66, 72/195; 37, 58/371; Arhiv Vojno-istorijskog instituta (henceforth: AVII), pop. 17, k. 32, f. 1, d. 40; k. 76, f. 2, d. 23; Arhiv Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti (henceforth: ASANU), 14530-II 12/2; Biber, p. 203.



Vojvodina's inhabitants.<sup>39</sup> The differences in taxes stemmed from the difference in development levels and abilities to pay of various Yugoslav provinces. The claims, often furthered also by nationalists of many ex-Yugoslav peoples, that it was exactly their people who had had to pay most, chime in with similar complaints of the *Volksdeutsche*. However it would be difficult to substantiate such contentions since the Yugoslav fiscal policy was tailored on the regional and not the ethnic basis.

The fateful change in the relations between the Vojvodina Swabians and their Slavic neighbours came with the accession of the Nazis in Germany. This influenced the Germans throughout the world.<sup>40</sup> It was only natural that National-Socialism would also leave its mark among the Yugoslav Germans. The harbingers of a new area were the young intellectuals, partly educated at the already nazified German universities, who started preaching their gospel even before the Nazi take-over. They enjoyed support of

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<sup>39</sup> About this see: Bogumil Hrabak, *Autonomizam u Vojvodini 1919-1929 kao reakcija na finansijsko iscrpljivanje i politi~ko z apostavljanje pokrajine*, Godi{njak Dru{tva istori~ara Vojvodine 1982; The local Serbs even complained that they had been united with Serbia but not liberated. (*Stenografske bele{ke Narodne skup{tine (henceforth: SBNS). Redovan saziv za 1926/27. godinu, knj. III, Beograd 1927, p. 15.*) Discontent found its expression in a popular ditty of the time: "Srem, Banat, Ba-ka, srbijanska plja~ka." ("Syrmium, the Banat and Bacska, the Serbians' ( i.e. pertaining to the Serbs of Serbia proper) plunder.") (*SBNS Redovan saziv za 1927/28. godinu, knj. I, Beograd 1928, p. 151.*)

<sup>40</sup> MacAlister Brown, *The Third Reich's mobilization of the German fifth column in Eastern Europe*, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, XIX, 2, 1959; The Nazi influence was felt as far as the Americas. Louis de Jong, *Die deutsche fuenfte Kolonne im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart 1959, pp. 19, 33, 35, 37-40.

some of the nationalistic organizations in Austria and Germany.<sup>41</sup> Their crusade however started in earnest only in 1934 with the foundation of the *Renewal Movement* (*Erneuerungsbewegung*), named and organized on the model of the Romanian-German Nazis.<sup>42</sup> They tried to conquer the leading posts in the *Deutsch-Schwaebischer Kulturbund - SDKB* (German-Swabian Cultural Association) which was the largest German cultural organization in the country, as well as lucrative jobs in cooperative organizations. They recruited most of their adherents among the youth which had grown up in Yugoslavia and was not encumbered with pro-Hungarian sentiments and Habsburg nostalgia which still marked the older *Volksdeutsche* generations.

Their protest was leveled not only against the state which treated the Ethnic-Germans as second-class citizens, but in the first place, against the impotent German chiefs of the older generation who had accumulated most of the leading posts in very few hands but were unable to improve the situation of the German minority. The old leaders enjoyed support of the wealthier and more conservative sections of the *Volksdeutsche* community, whereas the *Erneuerer* (the Renewers) relied on the unprivileged classes, the position of which was additionally exacerbated by the economic depression in the early 1930s.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Biber, pp. 43-44.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Menzel, *The German minority in inter-war Yugoslavia*, Nationalities papers, XXI, 2, 1995, p. 134; Branimir Altgayer, *Elaborat o njema~koj narodnoj skupini I dio, s.l. 1947* (in: AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 40-D, f. 3, d. 1.), p. 48; ASANU 14530-XIV2.

The emergence of home-grown Swabian Nazis was made possible through a considerable rise in national consciousness that started to manifest itself since the First World War. It was encouraged by contacts with Reich and Austrian German troops and further facilitated by the secession from Hungary, tolerant attitude of the Yugoslav authorities in the first post-war years and last but not least, through the activities of the SDKB.<sup>44</sup>

The struggle for taking over the leadership of the SDKB was neither an easy nor a short one.<sup>45</sup> It turned into the cleavage that divided the nationally conscious *Volksdeutsche* into two bitterly opposed camps. More prone to accept Nazi ideas and organization patterns were the young untouched by Magyarisation. Nationally more conscious Protestants were also more receptive than the members of the multi-national Roman Catholic Church who were still, for great part, under Hungarian or Croat spell.<sup>46</sup> However, one should keep in mind that until 1938 not more than 10% of Yugoslav Germans were members of the SDKB, which means that the vast majority of the Ethnic-

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<sup>44</sup> The beginning of the Swabian national awakening started in the last decade of 19th century.( Ingomar Senz, *Die nationale Bewegung der ungarlaendischen Deutschen vor dem ersten Weltkrieg*, Muenchen 1971.) The war gave a renewed impetus to the process. (Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Deutschen...*, pp. 45-72; Altgayer, p. 5; Lorant Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte der Ungarndeutschen seit 1919*, Budapest 1991, p. 30; Paikert, p. 89; PA, Abt. II b, Nationalitaetenfrage, Fremdvoelker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1.)

<sup>45</sup> For details see: Biber, *Nacizem...* A shorter survey in: Mirni }, pp. 36-50;

<sup>46</sup> More about factors which facilitated or hindered the spread of Nazi ideas see in: Zoran Janjetovi }, *O nacifikaciji vojvo[anskih [vaba*, Tokovi istorije 1-4, 1999.

Germans were not directly involved in the brawl.<sup>47</sup> What contributed to the spreading of National-Socialism was the highly-developed *Volksdeutsche* press which has always obediently followed the Reich German trends.<sup>48</sup> But the most persuasive factor of them all were Germany's diplomatic and military successes in the late thirties.<sup>49</sup>

The *Erneuerer* were able to score the final victory only in mid-1939. It was made possible thanks to the general radicalization of the Reich German foreign and domestic policy with the concomitant personal changes.<sup>50</sup> It was only at that time that the Reich agencies lent decisive support to the *Volksdeutsche* Nazis.

It was a tragic coincidence that the majority of the Vojvodina Swabians reached national maturity only at the time of undisputed Nazi preponderance over the Ethnic-Germans throughout Europe. Being traditionally disinterested in politics and great ideas, they tended to sympathize with idealized Germany without paying much attention to the realities of Hitler's Reich,

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<sup>47</sup> Branko Be{lin, *Nema~ka {tampa u Vojvodini 1933-1941* (MA paper MS), Beograd 1995, p. 85.

<sup>48</sup> On the Swabian press in this period see: Be{lin, o.c.

<sup>49</sup> Vladimir Geiger, *Nestanak folksdoj~era*, Zagreb 1997, p. 23; Vladimir Geiger, Ivan Juki], *[to se dogodilo s folksdoj~erima?*, Zagreb 1993, p. 45. The German youth followed with great sympathy and pride Germany's victories. (Oskar Feldtencer, *Autoportret sa istorijom*, in: Nenad Stefanovi} (ed.), *Jedan svet na Dunavu*, Beograd 1997, p. 72.)

<sup>50</sup> Biber, pp. 207-210; William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. A History of Nazi Germany*, London, Sydney 1976, pp. 382-393; Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik 1933-1938*, Frankfurt/M, Berlin 1968, p. 249.

even in the cases they could discern.<sup>51</sup> Such an attitude is typical of national minorities which either feel themselves to be or really are oppressed.<sup>52</sup> As to the ideological part of National-Socialism, it is hard to believe that the poorly educated Swabian peasants could grasp what it was all about.<sup>53</sup> Indeed many of the leading Nazis in the Reich could not understand the intricate tenets of the Party ideologues either.<sup>54</sup> It is much more likely that those Swabians who did have ideological bent took from the Nazi ideology what they liked best, just like their conationals in Germany.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the lack of interest in culture and politics made indoctrination easier.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the urbane Sudeten-

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<sup>51</sup> This was also apologetically claimed by the *Volksdeutsche* after the war. It is certain that there is more than one grain of truth in it. (Hans Sonnleitner, *Karlsdorf im Verlauf donauschwaebische Geschichte. Erd- und Vorgeschichte. Altertum, Mittelalter und Neuzeit des Donaubeckens. Ein Denkmal der verlorenen Heimat. darstellung ihren historischen Brennpunkte*, Muenchen 1985, p. 60. the same author, *Aktion Intelligenzija in Karlsdorf. Tatsachen und Hintergruende. Reflexion zur Sinnfrage ueber Mord und Tod. Gedenkschrift 194-1984 ueber die Ermordung von 36 Karlsdorfern*, Muenchen 1986, p. 53; Herbert Krimm (ed.), *Das Antlitz der Vertriebenen*, Stuttgart 1949, p. 7.)

<sup>52</sup> De Jong, p. 271.

<sup>53</sup> Feldtencer, p. 72. The Nazi ideology itself was so tortuous and unsystematic that it was open to number of interpretations. It was rather an intellectual hodge-podge than a firm set of ideas. It was really a *weltanschauung* for many. (See: Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. Die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918-1933*, Muenchen 1962, pp. 169-170.)

<sup>54</sup> Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, London 1979, p. 255.

<sup>55</sup> Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries. The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe 1933-1945*, Chapel Hill, London 1993, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> Geiger, p. 23.

Germans, the Swabians had little to fight Nazism with. They were politically immature, their intelligentsia was small, and the state they were living in was going out of its way to make them dislike it. Those nationally awake were hot-blooded youngsters whereas the older generations were still living in the Habsburg past unable to exercise a corrective influence on their progeny.

A group of *Volksdeutsche* authors gathered under the name *Arbeitskreis Dokumentation* divided the Yugoslav Germans into four categories according to their attitude towards National-Socialism:

- a) Those who identified National-Socialism with Germany
- b) The Hitlerites - those enchanted by Germany's newly-acquired might and Hitler. For them the *Fuehrer* was synonymous with Germany. They constituted the bulk of the SDKB activists
- c) The hesitant ones - these included the skeptics, Magyarones (i.e. pro-Hungarian Swabians), ethnic turncoats, liberals, cosmopolitans and reformist socialists
- d) Ideological enemies of National-Socialism - meaning church-goers who thought one can be a good German without being a Nazi.<sup>57</sup>

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to tell the percentage of the Ethnic-Germans in each category. A different categorization could also be made. Be that as it may, the fact is that the *Volksdeutsche* of Yugoslavia toed the Nazi line, at least in terms of organization, if not of ideology.

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<sup>57</sup> Arbeitskreis Dokumentation, *Verbrechen an den Deutschen in Jugoslawien 1944-1948. Die Stationen eines Voelkermords*, Muenchen 1998, p. 22.

Just like in the eyes of the Swabians the ordinary local Serbs had to shoulder the responsibility for oppressive government policies, in the eyes of the Serbs all the *Volksdeutsche* were seen as accomplices in the distasteful Hitler's policy. The tenor of *Volksdeutsche* performances grew increasingly nationalistic and provocative. They were perceived doubly so because the non-Germans were not used to seeing the Swabians flaunting their national feelings in such an ostentatious way.<sup>58</sup>

Ethnic tensions were growing daily with pranks by the German youth aggravating the situation.<sup>59</sup> The Serbian youth often responded with violence which only made the matters worse.<sup>60</sup> The beginning of the Second World War increased the Swabians' pride still further. While the *Volksdeutsche* were sympathizing with the Axis, their Serbian neighbours were favouring the Western allies. Thus an additional bone of contention came into being. Sometimes the Germans' enthusiasm turned into threats to the local Serbs.<sup>61</sup>

Hitler's might, *the Volksdeutsche* economic preponderance and cheekiness have sown suspicion of all the Swabians among the Serbs. The last straw were the rumours of weapons being smuggled and paramilitary bands being organized and trained.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> AJ, 38, 7/27.

<sup>59</sup> Biber, *Nacizem...*, pp. 52, 196-197, 246.

<sup>60</sup> Biber, *Nacizem...*, pp. 52, 196; Kosta Mitrovi}, *Pod kulom vr{a~kom. Hronologija doga{aja iz revolucionarnog pokreta Vr{ca i okoline od 1926. do 1945*, Novi Sad 1969, pp. 53-54, 67-68.

<sup>61</sup> AVII, pop. 17, k. 28, f. 3, d. 17; Biber, p. 251; Mirni}, p. 71.

<sup>62</sup> The first information about gunrunning was recorded as early as 1937. However, it remained unproven. (Biber, *Nacizem...*, p. 251.)

In 1939 the weapons were indeed uncovered in Novi Vrbas.<sup>63</sup> In May 1940. the Yugoslav General Staff got wind of armed bands being organized for sabotage actions in case of war.<sup>64</sup> Certainly such groups existed by October 1940.<sup>65</sup> The Yugoslav authorities which were usually lenient toward the *Volksdeutsche* excesses (because they did not want to upset good relations with Germany), made by the end of 1940 a list of the Ethnic-Germans (and traditionally suspicious Hungarians) to be disposed of in case of the German attack. Special Chetnik units were to be organized for the task.<sup>66</sup> According to the military intelligence service, the SDKB had made similar lists already in May 1940.<sup>67</sup> They contained the names of some 40 000 persons from all over the country.<sup>68</sup> The spy network *Jupiter* organized in Yugoslavia by the Reich German military intelligence service was also staffed, for the greatest part, by the Ethnic-Germans.<sup>69</sup>

In the first three months of 1941 the news about the paramilitary *Volksdeutsche* units appeared with an ever increasing frequency.<sup>70</sup> The relations between the *Volksdeutsche* and their Serbian neighbours came to a head at that time. However, friendships and respect survived on personal

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> AVII, pop. 17, k. 95, f. 5, d. 18; k. 95 b, f. 6, d. 19; k. 32, f. 1, d. 28, 40.

<sup>65</sup> Mirni}, p. 70.

<sup>66</sup> Du{an Biber, *Britanska diplomatska poro~ila o nem{ki manjini v Jugoslaviji v letih 1933-1945*, Prispjevki za novej{o zgodovino XXXV, 1995, p. 100.

<sup>67</sup> AVII, pop. 17, k. 95 b, f. 6, d. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Mirni}, p. 69.

<sup>69</sup> Biber, p. 252; Ka~avenda, p. 24.

<sup>70</sup> AVII, pop. 17, k. 22, f. 3, d. 39; k. 26, f. 4, d. 24; AJ, 74, 9/17.



level alongside hatred and intolerance.<sup>71</sup> Both moods would make themselves felt in the *April War* and after, but due to the later developments the latter would leave deeper impact. The main reason was that by the time the first *Wehrmacht* units crossed the Yugoslav border, the *Volksdeutsche* paramilitary bands were already waiting for them, arms in hand.<sup>72</sup>

### **Chapter Three**

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<sup>71</sup> Wehler, p. 43.

<sup>72</sup> The *Volksdeutsche* have always denied vehemently the existence of these paramilitary groups and their treasonable activities. The most they are willing to concede is that there have been civic guards set up to preserve public order and protect property. This may have very well also been true, but in that case the civic guards should not be confused with the real paramilitary units (usually called the *Deutsche Mannschaft* - DM) the existence and activity of which had been proven beyond any doubt. (See: C.A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth. A History of Modern Hungary 1929-1945*. I, Edinburgh 1957, p. 480. Macartney got his information from an independent Hungarian source.)

## **Blood thicker than water: The Vojvodina Germans from April 1941 to October 1944**

In order to realize his plans for the conquests in the East Hitler wanted to secure a food and raw material basis in the South-Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> By March 1941 the Axis powers managed to win over or conquer all of Yugoslavia's neighbours

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<sup>1</sup> More about this see in: Vuk Vinaver, *Svetska ekonomska kriza u Podunavlju i nema~ki prodor 1929-1935*, Beograd 1987; Andrej Mitrovi}, *Nema~ki privredni prostor i jugoisto~na Evropa 1933*, Istorijski ~asopis, XXI, 1974; the same author, *Nacisti~ka ideja velikog privrednog prostora i jugoisto~na Evropa 1940*, Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta, knj. XI-1/1970; the same author, *Kontinuitaet und Diskontinuitaet in der deutschen Suedosteuropa-Politik*, Balcanica, VIII, 1973; Du{an Luka~, *Tre}i Rajh i zemlje jugoisto~ne Evrope, I, 1933-1936*, Beograd 1982, pp. 107-108, 114-120; *ibid.*, II, 1937-1941, pp. 33-40; Milan D. Ristovi}, *Nema~ki novi poredak i jugoisto~na Evropa 1940/41-1944/45. Planovi o budu}nosti i praksa*, Beograd 1991, pp. 10-22; Andrej Mitrovi}, *Ergaenzungswirtschaft: Theory of an Integrated Economic Area of the Third Reich and Southeast Europe (1933-1941)*; Laposava Cvijeti}, *The Ambitions and Plans of the Third Reich with Regard to the Integration of Yugoslavia into its so-called Grosswirtschaftsraum*; Wolfgang Schumann, *Aspekte und Hintergruende der Handels- und Wirtschaftspolitik Hitler-Deutschlands gegenueber Jugoslawien*; Hans-Juergen Schroeder, *Suedosteuropa als "Informal Empire" NS-Deutschlands: das Beispiel Jugoslawiens*; Enzo Colotti, *Penetrazione economica e disgregazione statale: premesse e conseguenze dell' agression nazista alla Jugoslavia*; Zdenka [imon~i}, *The Influence of German Trade Policy on Economic Development in Croatia in the Period from the Great Depression to the Second World War*, all in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia 1933-1945*, Belgrade 1977.

save Greece. Yugoslavia itself had already for a long time been pressurized by Germany to accede to the Tripartite Pact. Finally the Yugoslav government, realizing that no efficient help could be got from Great Britain, Germany's sole rival at the time, decided to bow to the inevitable.<sup>2</sup>

Yugoslavia's accession was signed on 25 March 1941, but only two days later the government was overthrown by a group of overpatriotic lightheaded pro-British army officers, possibly encouraged by British agents. A new government was formed. However, as soon they were in power, they realized the foolishness and futility of their heedless action. They immediately tried to appease Hitler by professing Yugoslavia's unflinching adherence to the Tripartite Pact. But it was already too late. Hitler was enraged by what he perceived as yet another breach of faith by the conspiratorial Belgrade clique, which, in his opinion, had already provoked the First World War. He decided to smash the *vipers' nest* once and for all.<sup>3</sup> Hitler's rage was whetted further by a wave of anti-German demonstrations which swept the greater part of the country, sometimes involving violence against the Ethnic-Germans and their property.

As usual when he was about to attack a country, Hitler fabricated a number of reasons which ostensibly called for German action. This time, alleged ill-treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* was prominent among them. However, the

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<sup>2</sup> Dušan Lukač, *The Final Stage in the German-British Diplomatic Struggle for the Balkans*, in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*.

<sup>3</sup> More about the *coup d' etat* of 27 March 1941 see in: Nikola Milovanovi}, *Vojni pu~ 27. marta*, Beograd 1960; Branko Petranovi}, Nikola @uti}, *27. mart 1941. Tematska zbirka dokumenata*, Beograd 1990.

German *White book* on the conflicts with Yugoslavia and Greece managed only to list some broken *Volksdeutsche* noses and windows, and only few cases of severe injuries.<sup>4</sup> The new government (which contained some of the ministers of the previous one) recognized the seriousness of the situation and managed to prevent things from getting out of hand. They were still hoping against hope and they had done their best to prevent incidents so as not to give Hitler extra reasons to justify his dudgeon and launch an aggression.<sup>5</sup> However, nothing the Yugoslav government could say or do was able to change Hitler's mind. Yugoslavia was doomed.

The attack started on 6 April 1941 with a the savage bombardment of Belgrade and other towns. The same day the *Wehrmacht* troops started pouring into the country. Certain number of the *Volksdeutsche* hotspurs who had emigrated during the previous year or to were also among them.<sup>6</sup> The illegal *Deutsche Mannschaft* units also sprang into action. They started disarming the disintegrating Yugoslav army units, took possession of vital facilities, such as bridges, post-offices, weapons depots, power stations etc. Their chief exploit was the capture of the

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<sup>4</sup> *Dokumente zum Konflikt mit Jugoslawien und Griechenland*, Berlin 1941, pp. 124-125, 129-137.

<sup>5</sup> This much was admitted by the German ambassador to Belgrade too. (Biber, *Nacizem...*, 260. See also: Wehler, p 39; Mentzel, p. 139. )

<sup>6</sup> They started leaving Yugoslavia illegally from 1939. Some of them even managed to make it to Hitler's personal guard (*Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*) (De Jong, p. 217.) After 27 March 1941 the drain of the *Volksdeutsche* was intensified. It is not known how many of them fled for security reasons and how many did so as part of the Reich German propaganda campaign. (Mirni}, p. 75, 99-103; Wehler, p. 41.)

Belgrade military airfield in Zemun. A number of 90 000 Yugoslav soldiers captured by the Ethnic-Germans was reported, but it is certainly an exaggeration.<sup>7</sup> Although all these actions were treasonable and did harm to the Yugoslav defense, they were not the reason for its speedy collapse. Plain and simple: Yugoslavia was militarily (but also politically and economically) too weak to resist Germany and her allies for long. On the other hand, the *Volksdeutsche* actions, treacherous though they had been, were planned and executed by unsynchronised armed groups, rather than by centralized organization. Indeed, throughout the *April War* they remained without a central leadership.<sup>8</sup> The Yugoslav defeat certainly cannot be blamed on the Ethnic-Germans.<sup>9</sup>

As we have seen, the Yugoslav authorities had expected such a development. For that reason *Volksdeutsche* hostages

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<sup>7</sup> Biber, *Nacizem...* pp. 65-67; Mirni}, 78; De Jong, pp. 217-218; @arko Atanackovi}, *Srem unarodnooslobodila~kom ratu i socijalisti~koj revoluciji*, Beograd 1968, the same author, *Zemun i okolina u ratu i revoluciji*, Beograd 1962, p. 43; p. 78-80; Wehler, p. 42; Ka~avenda, pp. 25-27.

<sup>8</sup> Sandor Vegh, *Le systeme dy pouvoir d'occupation allemand dans le Banat Yougoslave 1941-1944*, in: *Les systems d'occupation en Yougoslavie 1941-1945. Raports au 3e Congres International sur l'histoire de la Resistance europeenne a Karlovy Vary, les 2-4 Septembre 1963*, Belgrade 1963, p. 498.

<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning that the German plan for the attack on Yugoslavia contained no mention of the *Volksdeutsche* paramilitary groups. (*Aprilski rat 1941, II*, Beograd 1987, passim.) Even though their aid was not counted on in the plan of the aggression, it was gratefully accepted by the *Wehrmacht*.

were taken.<sup>10</sup> Most of them were brought to the Petrovaradin fortress, overlooking Novi Sad, but were soon released unscathed thanks to the intercession of Dr Sepp Janko, the *Volksgruppenfuehrer* (the leader of the ethnic group) of the Yugoslav Germans and his lieutenants.<sup>11</sup> It was only in exceptional cases that the hostages were manhandled.<sup>12</sup> In some places it was the local Serbian (or Croatian) prominent persons who brought about the liberation of the *Volksdeutsche* hostages.<sup>13</sup> Personal friendships, civic decency and fear of the advancing German armies played their role.

The darkest shadow cast on the Serbian-Swabian relations in those days were persecutions and mass murders by the *Wehrmacht* and the *Volksdeutsche*. People were shot for German-baiting before the war, personal offenses, membership in nationalist organizations, for property or retaliation for the Reich Germans and *Volksdeutsche* who had been killed during the

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<sup>10</sup> According to the Ethnic-German authors, some 600 of them. (Arbeitskreis Dokumentation, p. 44. See also: Wehler, p. 42; )

<sup>11</sup> Biber, *Nacizem...*, p. 265; Berta Sohl, *Heideschuetz 1809-1945*, Freilassing 1960, p. 47; Oberkersch, *India*, p. 87; Hans Volk, *150 Jahre Karlsdorf. Geschichte der Gemeinde Karlsdorf im Banat*, Freilassing 1958, p. 42; Philipp Sandles, *Sekitsch, erlebte Heimat*, Sensheim 1977, p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> Such was the case in Franztal (part of Zemun, near Belgrade). (Nikolaus Hefner, Franz Eger, Josef Braschel (eds.), *Franztal 1816-1944. Erinnerungen an Franztal/ Semlin. Heimat an der Donau. Ansiedlung, Dorfleben, Flucht, Neubeginn* (henceforth: FT), Salzburg 1984, p. 161.)

<sup>13</sup> FT, p. 162; Leni Lenz, *Franztal, ich muss dich lassen ( mit ergaenzenden Beiträegen von Nikolaus Hafner)*, Freilassing 1957, p. 81; *Heimatbuch der Stadt Weisskirchen im Banat*, (henceforth: WK) Salzburg 1980, p. 170; Oberkersch, *India...*, p. 86.

troubled days of German invasion. The Ethnic-Germans had a prominent place in these goings on which earned them hatred of many a Serbian neighbour.<sup>14</sup> In some places the Swabians took part in the plundering of the Serbian and Jewish property.<sup>15</sup>

However, since the relations between the Serbs and the *Volksdeutsche* were not completely spoiled, instances of humane and helpful behavior on the part of the Swabians were also recorded.<sup>16</sup>

The *Wehrmacht* units were greeted with delirious enthusiasm in Swabian villages and towns.<sup>17</sup> Some *Volksdeutsche* authors explain this by unbearable tensions of the previous days. There could be truth in this too, but that was not

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<sup>14</sup> Mitrovi}, pp. 101-102; Ka~avenda, p. 30; Branislav Popov Mi{a, *Nema~ki zatvori i koncentracioni logori u Banatu 1941-1944*, Beograd 1992, pp. 10-25.

<sup>15</sup> Atanackovi}, *Zemun...*, p. 48; the same author, *Srem...*, p. 80; Vegh, pp. 502-503; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen in Syrmium, Slawonien, Kroatien und Bosnien. Geschichte einer deutschen Volksgruppe in Suedosteuropa*, Stuttgart 1989, p. 377; Petar Vukeli}, *Okupaciona vlast i sistem nacionalne diskriminacije u Sremu za vreme "Nezavisne dr`ave Hrvatske"*, Zbornik za dru{tvne nauke Matice sprske, 35, 1963, pp. 115-116; Mirni}, p. 295.

<sup>16</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, 377. Some *Volksdeutsche* in Bacska were protecting the local Serbs from the local Hungarians and Hungarian soldiers who had occupied that part of Yugoslavia. They were also issuing them membership cards of the SDKB and recommendations for the German military in Syrmium and Slavonia. (AJ, 398, f. 1.)

<sup>17</sup> WK, p. 174; Sandles, p. 269; FT, p. 164; Volk, p. 39; Sohl, p. 48; Lenz, p. 82; Anton Zollitsch, *Filipowa. Entstehen, Wachsen und Vergehen einer donauschwaebischen Gemeinde in der Batschka*, Freilassing 1957, p. 175.

all. This was proven by Nazi flags which were readily hoisted<sup>18</sup> as well as by considerable number of the Ethnic-German youth who had joined the *Wehrmacht* already before the war.<sup>19</sup> It seems opportune to quote Alfred M. de Zayas here: “Most of the *Volksdeutsche* had indeed welcomed the Nazi invaders, but in point of fact they had done little to bring about the invasion which was but the fulfillment of Hitler’s fundamental policy of gaining *Lebensraum* in the East.”<sup>20</sup> However, that, coupled with the treasonous actions of their paramilitary units and (sometimes) mass murders as a means of retaliation or intimidation, was sufficient to embitter considerable part of the Serbs against them. The acts of friendship and help could not erase the memory of these untoward acts. Believing they were putting right old injustice the *Volksdeutsche* were committing new ones.<sup>21</sup> In turn, the Serbs would reciprocate in autumn 1944.

The so-called *April War* lasted only 17 days. Once it was over, the country was carved up by Germany and her allies Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria. The dismemberment of Yugoslavia brought about the dismemberment of the Vojvodina too. Symium was allotted to the newly-created *Independent State of Croatia*, which was a typical puppet state run by Croatian Fascists, the Ustashi. Bacska, alongside the Yugoslav part of Baranya, was given to Hungary. The Banat remained a part of German-occupied Serbia for fear that the German allies Hungary

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<sup>18</sup> Volk, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Mirni}, pp. 99-103.

<sup>20</sup> Alfred M. Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam. The Anglo-Americans and the expulsion of the Germans. Background, Execution, Consequences*, London, Boston 1979, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> De Jong, p. 275.



and Romania would start a war over it. This tripartite division took the Ethnic-German leaders by surprise, but since it was in Berlin that the decisions were being made, they had to reconcile themselves to the new reality.<sup>22</sup> These three territories had different fates during the war as well as in autumn of 1944. For this reason each of them will be dealt with separately.

There was, however, a common feature uniting the Swabians from all three regions: it was the sense of disappointment. What they hoped for was an independent or autonomous Swabian *Donauland* or *Prinz-Eugen Gau* which would be either attached to the Reich or under its immediate control. The proponents of these ideas were adducing Prince Eugene, who had expelled the Turks from these parts, as the originator of such a scheme of a Swabian land around the Danube, with Belgrade as its capital, that would be a German bulwark in the South-East Europe. The idea included settling of additional contingent of the Ethnic-Germans and wholesale expulsion of the non-German populations. To be sure, it was not a unified plan by one single author. Various people had varying suggestions as to the details, but the gist was that a country for the Danube Swabians should be built around Belgrade and the Danube. This idea was propounded by Reich and Ethnic-Germans and it tallied nicely with the already existing autonomist tendencies of the nationally conscious *Volksdeutsche* of the

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<sup>22</sup> Vegh, p. 498. In this instance the traditional pattern of relations between the *Volksdeutsche* and Berlin was repeated: the Ethnic-Germans were kept in the dark about the plans of the Nazi big-wigs who were using the *Volksdeutsche* (not only in Yugoslavia) as a cat's-paw of their imperialist policy.

region whose appetites grew under the changed circumstances, from personal to territorial autonomy. Such tendencies were also supported by the Swabians from the Romanian Banat, in line with the Swabian manifesto of 1918. These conceptions were favoured also by some Berlin circles, but eventually, to the great Swabian's disappointment, nothing of these plans came off.<sup>23</sup> Hitler's wishes to win over the Croats by giving them Syrmium as part of the *ICS*, to satisfy (at least partly) the Hungarian revisionist demands by allotting them Bacska and Baranya, and to prevent a possible clash over the Western Banat coveted by both his allies Hungary and Romania were decisive. Once again the Swabians' desires were disregarded, this time by their Reich German brethren and alleged protectors. However, as we shall see presently, the *Volksdeutsche* were not left completely empty handed. However, the boon they received was a mixed blessing.

### **The Ethnic-Germans in the Independent State of Croatia**

The *Independent State of Croatia* had some 220 000 Ethnic-Germans on its territory. 61% of them lived in Syrmium.

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<sup>23</sup> Atanackovi}, Zemun..., p. 88; Slobodan Milo{evi}, *Kvislin{ke snage u Banatu u slu`bi nema~kog okupatora 1941-1944. godine*, Vojno-istorijski glasnik, 1, 1979, p. 139; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Reichsfestung Belgrad" . *Nationalsozialistische "Raumordnung" in Suedosteuropa*, Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte, 1, XI, 1963; Nikola Bo`i}, Ratko Mitrovi}, *Vojvodina i Beograd sa okolinom u planovima Tre}eg Rajha*, Zbornik Matice srpske za dru{tvne nauke, 48, 1967; Ekkehard Voelkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944. Die deutsche, die ungarische und andere Volksgruppen*, Muenchen 1999, pp. 69-72; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, 369; Vegh, p. 508.

For that reason this region was a perpetual sore spot in the relations between the *Volksdeutsche* and the Ustashi government.<sup>24</sup> However, the *Independent State of Croatia* was independent in name only. In practice it was completely dependent on the goodwill of the Reich (and Italy) to whom it had to grant substantial concessions. This made the conditions of the local *Volksdeutsche* very propitious, or at least so it seemed on paper.<sup>25</sup>

They were not only proclaimed equal in rights with the Croats, but their *Volksgruppe* was granted the right of a legal person. All the Ethnic-Germans belonged to the *Volksgruppe* irrespective of their volition; the fact they had declared themselves Germans in the census sufficed to make them members.<sup>26</sup> The German language was made official in municipalities with more than 20% of German population. A number of German schools, hitherto almost completely lacking in Croatia, was now opened. They had parallel German institutions

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<sup>24</sup> Atanackovi}, Srem..., p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> About the the Ethnic-Germans' position in the *ISC* see: Wilhel Sattler, *Die deutsche Volksgruppe im Unabhaengigen Staat Kroatien. Ein Buch von Deutschen in Slawonien, Syrmien und Bosnien*, Graz 1943; Zdravko Kri}, *The German Volksgruppe in the Independent State of Croatia as an Instrument of German Occupation policy in Yugoslavia*, in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*, pp. 608-609; Vukeli}, pp. 111-113: Atanackovi}, *Zemun...*, p. 50; the same author, *Srem....* p. 106; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, pp. 372-373. About the military organization see: Antun Mileti}, *The Volksdeutsche of Bosnia, Slavonia and Srem Regions in the Struggle against the People's Liberation Movement (1941-1944)*, in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*, pp. 559-576.

<sup>26</sup> Zdravko Kri}, *Prosvijetna i kulturna djelatnost Njema-ke narodne skupine u NDH*, ^asopis za suvremenu povijest, 2, 1978, p. 17.

in many fields with a few liaison officers with the Ustashi authorities. The Ethnic-Germans became mayors in predominantly German (and indeed some non-German!) communes. The *Volksdeutsche* also had separate military units with German insignia and commands. The degree of their autonomy was testified by the fact that they took oath of allegiance not only to the ISC and its *Poglavnik* (chieftain) Dr Ante Paveli}, but to Adolf Hitler in the first place. The leader of the *Volksdeutsche* Nazis in the ISC, Rudolf Emptig, declared that the local Ethnic-Germans were nowhere else given such good living conditions.<sup>27</sup>

In practice the things did not look quite so rosy. The conflicts with the Ustashi were frequent enough. They had started in the first days of the war and continued unabated until its end. The reasons were manifold. One of the most important was the struggle for power in the German-inhabited areas. Alongside it went also the scramble for Jewish and Serbian property. The relations were further aggravated by national intolerance on the part of lower Croatian officials. Another bone of contention was the protection the Swabians' lent to the Serbs, viciously persecuted by the Ustashi.<sup>28</sup> There were several reasons for this protection and they varied according to time and place, from friendship, to humanitarian reasons and selfish calculation: namely in many places in Syrmium the *Volksdeutsche* needed Serbian support in order to oust the minority Croats on whom the Ustashi

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<sup>27</sup> @eljko Kru{elj, Vladimir Geiger, *Veliki egzodus: Tragi-na iluzija Kulturbunda*, Danas 12 June 1990, p. 63.

<sup>28</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 424; Atanackovi}, *Srem...*, 240; the same author, *Zemun...*, p.88.

relied. The Ustashi kept complaining of the *Volksdeutsche* disobedience to the Croatian state and the Swabians of the Croat infringements of their guaranteed rights. Thus the antipathy remained mutual and cordial throughout the war.<sup>29</sup>

The fact that the Swabians were often at loggerheads with the Croats, did not mean that their relations with the Serbs were universally friendly. Indeed, due to nationalism on both sides and the conditions created by the war they were, as often as not, quite bad. The animosity was caused by the participation of part of the *Volksdeutsche* in the excesses against the Serbs and plunder of their property<sup>30</sup> as well as in the fact the Swabians were serving in the Croatian or German units on the one hand, and by the predominantly Serbian make-up of the partisan units fighting the Ustashi and (what was, not quite without reason, perceived as such) their *Volksdeutsche* allies on the other. The partisans were attacking German villages in retaliation for the Swabians' collaboration with the Ustashi authorities. Thus the Ethnic-Germans had to bear the brunt of the partisan revenge not only for the crimes committed by their own fellow-nationals, but also for much graver Ustashi crimes. The poorly protected *Volksdeutsche* villages became the partisans' pet targets. This was particularly true of the scattered and weak German settlements in Western Slavonia, the larger and stronger villages

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<sup>29</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, pp. 376-379; Vukeli}, pp. 114-115; Atanackovi}, *Zemun...*, pp. 60, 88-89; the same author, *Srem...*, 109, 240; Vukeli}, pp. 114-115; Gordana Kora}, Emil D'igurski, *Zemun 1941*, Beograd 1941, p. 23; Krni}, *The German Volksgruppe...*, p. 612.

<sup>30</sup> Vukeli}, pp. 116, 119; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, pp. 377; Atanackovi}, *Srem...*, pp. 90, 346.

of Syrmium being much less molested until the later stages of the war.<sup>31</sup>

The actual position of the *Volksdeutsche* was further aggravated by military service that tended to harden over time. It started as military service in the German units of the Croatian army, but soon turned into ever increasing recruitment for much tougher *Waffen-SS*. The *Independent State of Croatia* was growing weaker daily and Himmler's pressure to get the *Volksdeutsche* ever stronger. It started with 10% of those liable for call-up in 1941, only to end up with practically all able-bodied *Volksdeutsche* males being inducted either in the *Waffen-SS* (usually the *Prinz-Eugen Division*), the German police or various forms of labour service of the Reich by late 1943.<sup>32</sup> Although the recruitment had been proclaimed voluntary in the beginning, the volunteer mask was soon dropped. The Ethnic-Germans were given to understand in unmistakable terms that failure to comply would entail the severest punishment.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 457; AVII, Nema-ka arhiva, k. 40-c, f. 2-II, d. 102, 114; microfilmed documents in the same archive: London N-4 / H 299197, 299200; London N-1 / H 297394; Atanackovi}, *Srem...*, p. 341; Antun Mileti}, *Preseljenje i evakuacija folksdoj-era iz Srijema i Slavonije 1942-1944*, Zbornik Historijskog instituta Slavonije i Baranje, 12, 1975, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> More about it see in: Holm sundhausen, *Zur Geschichte der Waffen-SS in Kroatien 1941-1945*, Suedost-Forschungen, XXX, 1971; Valdis O. Lumans, *The military Obligation of the Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe Towards the Third Reich*, East European Quarterly, XXIII, 3, 1989, pp. 314, 318

<sup>33</sup> Sundhausen, p. 189; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 410(*Europa unterm Hakenkreuz. Die Okkupationspolitik des deutschen Faschismus (1938-1945)*). *Achtbaendige Dokumentationsedition. Bd. 6. Die*

Thus all those *Volksdeutsche* who otherwise would have not taken part in fighting were forced to service. As the time passed the privilege of being a German was becoming ever more onerous to bear. As the war progressed the *Volksdeutsche* willingness to participate began to wane.<sup>34</sup> However they were locked in a dead-end situation; it became impossible to detach themselves from the Ustashi and the crumbling Reich, not least because of the crimes committed by the notorious *Prinz-Eugen Division* staffed partly by the Croatian *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>35</sup> Thus defeat of the Reich would spell their doom too.

### **The Bacska Germans under Hungarian Rule**

The situation of the Ethnic-Germans in Bacska was dramatically different from that of the *Volksdeutsche* in Ustashi Syrmium. On the one hand, Hungary was an old established state traditionally ill-disposed towards its national minorities.<sup>36</sup> On the

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*Okkupationspolitik des deutschen Faschismus in Jugoslawien, Griechenland, Albanien, Italien und Ungarn (1941-195)*, Berlin, Heidelberg 1992, p. 227.

<sup>34</sup> Kmi}, *Prosvjetna i kulturna djelatnost...*, 29; Atanackovi}, *Srem...*, p. 241.

<sup>35</sup> Indeed it was on the territory of the *ISC* that this division perpetrated its most heinous atrocities, sometimes on their Croat or Bosnian-Muslim “allies”. (*Europa...*, pp. 240-242, 320; Sundhausen, p. 195; Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, p. 223.)

<sup>36</sup> On Germans in Hungary see: Tilkovszky, o.c; the same author, *Teufelskreis. Die Minderheitenfrage in den deutsch-ungarischen Beziehungen 1933-1938*, Budapest 1989; Thomas Spira, *German-Hungarian Relations and the Swabian Problem. From Karolyi to*

other, a considerable part of the older generation of the Vojvodina Germans was still pro-Hungarian.<sup>37</sup> This caused frictions within the *Volksgruppe* which would plague the Bacska Germans until the end of the war.

The nationally conscious young Swabians were enraged when they learned that Bacska would go to Hungary. The *Volkseutsche* leaders even sent an angry telegram of protest to Berlin saying they would “prefer a lifetime under the Hottentots to a day of being exposed to the boons of the Crown of St. Steven.”<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the relations with the Hungarian authorities were never good.<sup>39</sup>

On the whole, the conditions of the Bacska Germans under Hungarian rule were nothing like so good as those under the Ustashi or in the occupied Banat. The Bacska *Volksdeutsche* became incorporated into the *Volksbund* of the Hungarian Germans in which they constituted the most radical element. However, the Hungarian government was never disposed to go as far as to grant the Swabians the legal person status they enjoyed in the *ISC* and the Serbian Banat.<sup>40</sup> The *Volksdeutsche* remained but a national minority, albeit one with somewhat greater rights than others. At all times their position remained precarious i.e. dependent on the military and political strength of the Reich.

*Goemboes 1919-1936*, Boulder 1977; Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Deutschen...*

<sup>37</sup> Wehler, *Nationalitaetenpolitik*...,p. 50.

<sup>38</sup> Johann Wuescht, *Beitrag zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*, Kehl am Rhein 1961, p. 191. See also: Mirni}, pp. 81, 91.

<sup>39</sup> Mirni}, p. 91.

<sup>40</sup> Wehler, *Nationalitaetenpolitik*..., p. 50.



Just like in Croatia, the organization of the German *Volksgruppe* in Hungary was a carbon copy of the respective Reich German agencies.<sup>41</sup> The salutary difference compared to Symrium was the almost complete non-existence of a serious partisan movement which made life in Bacska much more peaceful.<sup>42</sup>

The Swabians of Bacska were rarely deployed against the partisans in their own homeland, but were liable for military service in the odious Hungarian *Honved and the Waffen-SS*. The recruitment for the *Waffen-SS* took place in three waves, each of them being less voluntary. Indeed the last one was compulsory for all those who had managed to avoid being crimped in the first two which had involved some degree of free decision.<sup>43</sup> It was a real man-drain that took 120 000 Ethnic-Germans from all over Hungary.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> The reasons were geographical and political. Firstly, unlike Symrium, Bacska has no suitable terrain (woods, hills) for harbouring partisans. Secondly, the Hungarian regime was on the whole, much more lenient towards the local Serbs than the Ustashi government which wanted to eliminate them altogether.

<sup>43</sup> It was the first recruitment drive that was most enthusiastically responded to by the Bacska Swabians. Out of 17690 volunteers from the whole of Hungary, 12 868 were from the Yugoslav Bacska. (Mirni}, p. 177.) In the second recruitment 8 out of 18 transports were from the Yugoslav Bacska although less than 20% of the Hungarian Germans lived there. (Ibid., 214.) More about recruitments for the *Waffen-SS* see in: Josip Mirni}, *The Enlistment of Volksdeutshers from the Ba-ka Region in the Waffen-SS*, in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*; Lumans, *The Military Obligation....*pp. 316-317, 319; Tilkovszky, pp. 148-149, 157, 163-165.

<sup>44</sup> Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte....*, p. 165.

The nationally conscious part of the Bacska *Volksdeutsche* who had never reconciled themselves to the Hungarian rule, had a brief sparkle of hope that liberation had come at long last in March 1944 when Hungary was invaded by Germany. German forces were greeted as enthusiastically as in 1941<sup>45</sup>. It turned out that the new puppet government handed completely its suzerainty over the Swabians to the Reich German agencies. There was no escaping enlistment now, although the resistance, due to the military developments unfavourable for the Germans, was stronger than ever.<sup>46</sup>

Although a national minority, the Ethnic-Germans of Bacska were in better position than their neighbours. They were protected by their strong mother-country, and were the strongest national minority in the country. However, the Bacska Swabians who had been used to more liberal possibilities of national development in Yugoslavia, were dissatisfied. They did participate in the administration as mayors etc. but the Hungarians were wary to give them too much power.<sup>47</sup>

As a national minority in a relatively peaceful region the Bacska Swabians were showing their zeal for the German cause by serving in the Waffen-SS as volunteers and not, and by economically helping the Reich's war effort.<sup>48</sup> The bulk of war

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<sup>45</sup> Mirni}, Nemci..., p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. , p. 320-324.

<sup>47</sup> This seems to have been a wise precaution, since the Germans had a tendency to impose *Volksdeutsche* mayors who in ethnically mixed communes sometimes demonstratively refused to speak Hungarian or Serbo-Croatian. (Josip Mirni}, *Sistem fa{isti~ke okupacije u Ba~koj i Baranji*, Zbornik za dru{tvne nauke Matice srpske, 35, 1963, p. 37.

<sup>48</sup> Ka~avenda, pp. 56-57.

crimes committed in Bacska was not their but Hungarians' doing.<sup>49</sup> The communist authorities have declared only 929 Swabians guilty as war criminals out of some 170 000 odd *Volksdeutsche* in Bacska, and yet all those Swabians who had remained in the country had to pay.<sup>50</sup>

### **The *Volksdeutsche* in the Autonomous Banat**

Of all the three parts of the Vojvodina it was in the Banat that the *Volksdeutsche* had the greatest power. Because the Yugoslav part of that province was coveted by both Hungary and Romania, Hitler decided to keep it under German control until the end of the war.<sup>51</sup>

As for the local *Volksdeutsche*, they wanted some kind of independent *Donauland*. Since the Banat was under German occupation, the Swabians, encouraged by the officers of the regiment *Gross-Deutschland*, were on the point of proclaiming it in Vr{ac on 24 April 1941, but were prevented on time by higher-ups from Belgrade and Berlin.<sup>52</sup>

The Western Banat remained part of the occupied Serbia but with autonomy and the *Volksdeutsche* in key posts.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Zvonimir Golubovi}, *Racija u ju`noj Ba~koj*, Novi Sad 1992; the same author, *Racija januara 1942 u ju`noj Ba~koj*, Letopis Matice srpske, 35, 1963; Mila ^obanski, Zvonimir Golubovi}, @ivan Kumanov, *Novi Sad u ratu i revoluciji 1941- 1945, I-II*, NOvi Sad 1976.

<sup>50</sup> Mimi}, Nemci...,p. 331.

<sup>51</sup> Voelkl, p. 10-21.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 71; Milo{evi}, p. 140.

<sup>53</sup> About the make-up of the Banat administration see: Milo{evi}, pp. 141-149; Ljubica [ija~ki, Teror I plja~ka okupatora u Banatu 1941-1944, Istra`ivanja, 7, 1979, pp. 224-230; Voelkl, pp. 73-78; Vegh, pp. 515-517.

However, the majority of officials remained Serbian<sup>54</sup>. The official languages were Serbian and German.<sup>55</sup> The local Swabians were executives but the ultimate power rested with the powers-that-be of the *Wehrmacht* in Belgrade.<sup>56</sup>

Feeling insecure about what the fate of the Banat in the future would be, the *Volksdeutsche* leadership (*Volksgruppenfuehrung*) headed by Dr Sepp Janko, the former leader of all Yugoslav Germans, managed to obtain from the Council of the commissars (i.e. interim Serbian government ) a decree about the legal status of the *Volksgruppe*. Under this decree, the *Volksgruppe* became a legal person with extensive autonomy.<sup>57</sup>

The leading *Volksdeutsche* once in power started to use the advantages that power in a totalitarian regime brings with it. They seized the opportunity to enrich themselves with the land and real estates of the expelled Serbian colonists and Jews. The Yugoslav agrarian reform was reversed, this time in favour of the

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<sup>54</sup> Voelkl, p. 76; Karl-Heinz Schlarp, *Wirtschaft und Besatzung in Serbien 1941-1944. Ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Wirtschaftspolitik in Suedosteuropa*, Stuttgart 1986, p. 341.

<sup>55</sup> Vegh, p. 517.

<sup>56</sup> Mi{a, p. 39; Milo{evi}, p. 142; Schlarp, p. 341.

<sup>57</sup> Vegh, p. 527.

Swabians.<sup>58</sup> Cases of destroying or plundering of Serbian churches were also recorded.<sup>59</sup>

After the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, the Ethnic-Germans could give vent to their chronic anti-Semitism which often took quite brutal forms.<sup>60</sup> Wealthy Jews were intimidated in order to make them sell their property for a song. Others were arrested and savagely tortured.<sup>61</sup> In mid-August 1941 the Jews were shipped off to concentration camps at the *Volksgruppenfuehrung*'s request.<sup>62</sup> The Jewish shops and flats were plundered in the first days of the war. As usual, it was the leaders who profited most.<sup>63</sup> The commissars who were appointed to take care of the confiscated Jewish property were the *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>64</sup>

The Ethnic-Germans also took part in mass arrests and persecutions of the Serbs.<sup>65</sup> Often they were also both the instigators and executors of mass shootings.<sup>66</sup> In certain cases a

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<sup>58</sup> [ija~ki, pp. 293-294. The Ethnic-Germans were the main buyers (85%) of the vacated land. As for the Jewish property 80% of the buyers were Reich or Ethnic-Germans. (Schlarp, pp. 299, 344; Voelkl, p. 87 Branislav Ivkovi}, *Uništenje Jevreja i plja~ka njihove imovine u Banatu 1941-1944*, Tokovi revolucije, I, 1967, pp. 394-395.) The *Volksdeutsche* landed property increased by 11000 acres. (Ivkovi}, *Neki metodi...* p. 180.)

<sup>59</sup> [ija~ki, p. 295.

<sup>60</sup> Ka~avenda, p. 35.

<sup>61</sup>, Ivkovi}, *Uništenje...*, pp. 378-379; Ka~avenda, pp. 35-37.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 392, 401; Ka~avenda, p. 40.

<sup>64</sup> Ivkovi}, *Uništenje...*, p.395; Voelkl, p. 174.

<sup>65</sup> K. Mitrovi}, pp. 101-102; Mi{a, p. 233, 245.

<sup>66</sup> Vegh, p. 503; K. Mitrovi}, p. 125; Mi{a, pp. 10-24, 157, 213; [ija~ki, pp. 244-247.

system of killing up to 50 hostages for a murdered *Volksdeutsche* was applied.<sup>67</sup> Some of the Swabians were serving as spies and concentration camp guards and part of them evinced great cruelty while performing these duties.<sup>68</sup> Apart from this, the able-bodied Swabian men also had to serve in the auxiliary police or similar units, taking part in mopping-up operations against the partisans who were (due to better natural conditions) more active there than in Bacska. These actions were also sanguinary which only contributed to embittering further the local Serbs.<sup>69</sup>

The *Volksdeutsche* of the Banat were the first to be subjected to the recruitment in the Waffen-SS. The Prinz-Eugen Division was founded in 1942 and manned chiefly by the Banat Swabians and later on, Croatian *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>70</sup> Although it was named “volunteer”, in practice it was mandatory. The summons were to be taken seriously, since for failing to comply one could end up in a concentration camp.<sup>71</sup> The number of those refusing to serve is not known, but it is sure that such cases did

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<sup>67</sup> [ija~ki, p. 256; K. Mitrovi], pp. 154, 164, 167.

<sup>68</sup> Mi{a, pp. 39, 65, 69, 233; Bo'idar Ivkovi}, *Koncentracioni i radni logori u Banatu 1941-1944. (primena fa{isti~kih metoda genocida)*, Zbornik Matice srpske za dru{tvane nauke, 39, 1964, pp. 113-115, 117-118, 124.

<sup>69</sup> Mi{a, pp. 23, 124, 128, 136-139, 148, 191; Ka~avenda, p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> For an apologetic account see: *Otto Krumm, “Vorwaerts Prinz Eugen!” Geschichte der 7. SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division “Prinz Eugen”*, Osnabrueck 1978.

<sup>71</sup> Lumans, *The military Obligation...*, p. 312; Mi{a, p. 192; Ivkovi}, *Zatvori...*, p. 119.

occur now and then.<sup>72</sup> However, it is also true that the *Prinz-Eugen* “compiled a grisly record of massacres, torture, murder and village burning.”<sup>73</sup> This has been held against its soldiers to this day, and served as one of the main incriminations against the *Volksdeutsche* in general.

Apart from performing military or police service, the Banat Swabians had to support Germany’s war effort economically. The families of the serving soldiers were sometimes helped by forced Serbian labourers.<sup>74</sup> Together with privileges, bigger contributions were demanded from the Ethnic-Germans.<sup>75</sup> Part of these extra duties served to finance the *Volksdeutsche* parastate institutions.<sup>76</sup> No wonder that under such circumstances some Swabians felt the Banat to have been exploited<sup>77</sup> which was actually the case.<sup>78</sup>

The Swabian sway over the Banat has always been only conditional. However, the power they had as executives was significant. Therefore it was only too natural that they were held responsible for all the goings-on during the war once it was over, even though the supreme masters were to be found among the Reich Germans in Belgrade and Berlin. On the other hand, the post-war communist regime chose to ignore the instances of the *Volksdeutsche* helping and sheltering non-German neighbours

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<sup>72</sup> Microfilm Bonn 8/561, 565. Some Germans tried to avoid the service by declaring themselves Hungarians. (Voelkl, p. 109.)

<sup>73</sup> Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, p. 216.

<sup>74</sup> [ija~ki, p. 288.

<sup>75</sup> Schlarp, p. 353.

<sup>76</sup> Vegh, p. 528.

<sup>77</sup> Voelkl, p. 123.

<sup>78</sup> Schlarp, p. 352.

which were also recorded.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Slobodan Mari~i}, *Susedi, d`elati, `rtve. Folksdoj~eri u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd 1994, pp. 201, 208; Centar za dokumentaciju o vojvo|anskim Nemcima, Pan~evo, fond *Svedo~enja*, dok. 9-2008994, 9-0610993.



## Chapter Four

# A Stairway to Heaven or Highway to Hell: Population Transfers Before and During the Second World War

Population transfers are as old as humanity. The first recorded instances of violent or (less often) peaceful uprooting of large groups of people were recorded already in the Old Testament. Since then the practice was very much in use. The 19th century brought the first modern notions about protection of ethnic and religious minorities. In the first half of the 20th century (*the century of the masses*), the idea of population transfer as a means of establishing and maintaining the world peace appeared.<sup>1</sup> However, practice was ahead of its theoretical underpinning.

The first modern contract on populations transfer was the Convention of Adrianople from November 1913, concluded between Bulgaria and Turkey. It stipulated exchange of populations living in 15 km bright strips of land alongside the

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<sup>1</sup> It was allegedly first propounded by the Swiss anthropologist Georges Montandon during the First World War. (Hans Lemberg, *Die Entwicklung der Plaene fuer die Aussiedlung der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei*, in: Detlef Brandes, Vaclav Kural (eds.), *Der Weg in die Katastrophe. Deutsch-tschechoslowakische Beziehungen 1938-1947*, Essen 1994, p. 79; Gerhard Seewann, *Der Vertreibungsprozess in und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg aufgrund britischen Quellen*, in: Du{an Ne}ak (ed.), p. 326.)

border on both sides. In practice it only legalized the already created state of affairs . The same was true of the Greek-Turkish convention signed in 1914.<sup>2</sup> After the First World War, the Greek Prime Minister Venizelos proposed unmixing population with Bulgaria. This was accepted and added to the Neuilly peace treaty with Bulgaria, signed on 27 October 1919. It stipulated that emigration would be on voluntary basis, which diminished chances of success.<sup>3</sup> The contract most completely fulfilled was the one between Greece and Bulgaria, but it still left 60% of the Bulgarians living in Greece at home.<sup>4</sup>

The most famous convention on population transfer, which was to set an example for orderly exchange of populations (or so the policy-makers thought), was the one concluded between Greece and Turkey in Lausanne on 30 January 1923. The major criticism expressed about this convention was leveled at the principle of compulsion. This however was only of academic importance since this convention also only legalized the fact that the majority of the Greeks had already fled from Turkey, with only one sixth of the one-time total Greek population of Turkey leaving in the 1923-1926 period.<sup>5</sup>

It was not by chance that all these conventions concerned the Balkans. Ever since the early 19th century when the Christian peoples of the peninsula started shaking off the Ottoman yoke, the migrations which have always marked this part of Europe,

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<sup>2</sup> Josef B. Schechtmann, *European Population Transfers 1939-1945*, New York 194, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. Indeed, it turned out that very few had been eager to budge before they were pressed to do so in 1923. (*ibid.*, p. 14.)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

intensified. This was particularly true of the last three decades of the 19th century. As the Turkish possessions in Europe shrank, the Muslim population tended to leave newly-liberated Christian countries, not always without some *encouragement* from the new masters.<sup>6</sup>

In the light of all these facts, it seems strange that the Nazis had no plans for resettlement of the Ethnic-Germans until 1938.<sup>7</sup> However, they did have them for the Czechs and other *subhumans*.<sup>8</sup> As for the *Volksdeutsche* they were seen only as an instrument of the aggressive Nazi foreign policy to be used as the needs of the Reich required.<sup>9</sup>

However, the first to raise the issue of what one might conditionally call the *population transfers of the Second World War*,<sup>10</sup> were not the Germans but the Italians who proposed emigration of the German minority from South Tyrol. It was their desire primarily to get rid of c. 50 000 irredentists. The affair

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<sup>6</sup> Dimitrije \or|evi}, *Migrations During the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars and World War One*, in: *Migrations in Balkan History*, Belgrade 1989; Marko Dogo, *Muslimani kao etni-ke i verske manjine u jugoisto~noj Evropi izme|u dva svetska rata*, in: *Islam, Balkan i velike sile (XIV-XX vek). Me|unarodni nau-ni skup 11.-13. decembar 1996*, Beograd 1997; Vasa ^ubrilovi}, *Politi-ki uzroci seoba na Balkanu od 1860. do 1880. godine*, Glasnik Geografskog dru{tva, sv. XVI, 1930.

<sup>7</sup> Koehl, p. 34; Tone Ferenc, *Nacisti-ka politika denacionalizacije u Sloveniji u godinama od 1941. do 1945*, Ljubljana, Beograd 1979, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ferenc, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobsen, pp. 103-104, 246.

<sup>10</sup> Meaning those which took place immediately before, during and right after the war.

dragged on until 1942 when, to all intents, it came to a halt before the majority of the *Volksdeutsche* were resettled.<sup>11</sup>

At first sight, it may seem paradoxical that the second resettlement scheme was proffered by the Czechoslovak government in a memo of 16 September 1938 to the French politicians. In it the Czechoslovaks proposed to cede part of their predominantly German-inhabited territory to the Reich with mutual obligation to resettle the remaining national minorities which would be left on the wrong side of the new frontier. This was refused by the Western powers. Even after the Munich accord, the Czechoslovak politicians did not give up the idea of partial emigration and partial resettlement within the rump Czechoslovakia of the remaining Germans.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the exchange of the Germans and Czechs who had settled on the wrong side of the new border after 1910 was foreseen by the Munich treaty and the joint German-Czechoslovak declaration of 20 November 1938. However, Hitler, already bent on complete destruction of Czechoslovakia, prevented this stipulation from being put into practice.<sup>13</sup>

After the agreement with Stalin was reached, Berlin decided to resettle the Ethnic-Germans from the Soviet zone of influence, in order to prevent them from being used as hostages. This resettlement scheme presupposed evacuation of the *Volksdeutsche* from the Baltic states, Bessarabia, North

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<sup>11</sup> More about the South Tyrol see: Conrad F. Latour, *Suedtirol und die Achse Berlin-Rom 1938-1945*, Stuttgart 1962.

<sup>12</sup> Tomaš Staneč, *Vertreibung und Aussiedlung der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei 1945-1948*, in: Brandes, Kural (eds.).

<sup>13</sup> Koehl, p. 42; Schechtmann, p. 40.

Bukowina, Dobrudja and Galicia. The Ethnic-Germans from these lands were duly evacuated 1939 through 1941 in keeping with the contracts concluded for the purpose.<sup>14</sup>

Although migrations had started before the war itself, it was on 6 October 1939 that Hitler in his speech before the *Reichstag* on the occasion of peace treaty with Poland asked for the resettlement of the *Volksdeutsche* so as to “create new system of ethnological (sic!) relations.”<sup>15</sup> Among other things, he said:” The whole of East and South-East Europe are partly full of scattered and unviable groups of Germans. It is precisely them that are the cause of constant international frictions. In the era of the nationality principle and racial idea, it would be utopian to believe that members of a high-grade people can be assimilated just like that. Therefore, one of the tasks of a far-sighted arrangement of the European life would be to undertake resettlements so that at least one part of the European bones of contention would be eliminated.” Three days later the *Reichsfuehrer-SS*, Heinrich Himmler was put in charge of the resettlement of the *Volksdeutsche*. They were to be resettled primarily on the annexed Polish territories.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, Hitler announced the emigration of the national minorities living in the Reich.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ferenc, pp. 30-32; Eugen M. Kulischer, *Europe on the Move. War and Population Changes 1917-1947*, New York 1948, p. 256; Koehl, pp. 45-48, 53-57, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Dok., pp. 75E-76E.

<sup>16</sup> *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, Bd. III. *Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Rumaenien* (henceforth: *Dok. III*), Bonn 1956, p. 41E.

<sup>17</sup> Dok., p. 84E.

The German national minority with its increasing self-assertiveness was becoming ever more onerous for the Yugoslav government. For that reason they jumped at the *Fuehrer's* hint. Ivo Andri}, the Yugoslav minister to Berlin immediately received instructions to find out with the German Foreign ministry what Hitler meant by his resettlement speech.<sup>18</sup> The Yugoslav press mirrored the government's interest in the resettlement.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the Swabian press expressed worries and opposition of the *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>20</sup> To the Yugoslavs' disappointment, Andri} was given to understand that the *Fuehrer* meant only the Ethnic-Germans from the Soviet Union and Estonia, so the matter was dropped.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, there were no plans for the resettlement of the *Volksdeutsche* from South-East Europe at all.<sup>22</sup> Despite that, the Swabians were profoundly disquieted.<sup>23</sup> Swabian peasants were marching on Belgrade demanding to see Yugoslav and German officials.<sup>24</sup> Therefore the German embassy in Belgrade had to issue an official statement in which the ambassador von Heerren claimed the "action was off the map at the moment" and if it

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<sup>18</sup> @elimir Bob Juri~i}, *Ivo Andri} u Berlinu 1939-1941*, Sarajevo 1989, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> Schechtmann, p. 239.

<sup>20</sup> AJ 14, 86/339.

<sup>21</sup> Juri~i}, p. 89; *Dok.*, p. 84E.

<sup>22</sup> Koehl, p. 53; Anton Scherer (ed.), *Unbekannte SS-Geheimberichte ueber die Evakuierung der Suedostdeutschen im Oktober und November 1944 sowie ueber die politische Lage in Rumaenien, Ungarn, der Slowakei, im serbischen Banat und im "Unabhaengigen Staat Kroatien"*, Graz 1990, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ristovi}, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> Juri~i}, p. 89; Koehl, p. 53; *Dok.*, p. 84E.

would take place at some point in the future, it would be done with the full consent of the Yugoslav government and the *Volksdeutsche*. In other words, only voluntary resettlers would be accepted. This managed to calm down the scared Swabians.<sup>25</sup>

Hitler's announcement caused anxiety among the Ethnic-Germans of the neighboring countries too. Not only were ordinary *Volksdeutsche* against such plans, but also the leaderships of the *Volksgruppen*.. In Hungary the local German leaders called the resettlement scheme a treason to the Swabians. Through the resettlement a useful stepping-stone for the Reich's penetration to the South-East would be lost, they argued.

Not even the Nazi top brass were of one mind in this respect.<sup>26</sup> Emigration of the *Volksdeutsche* would remove a valuable means of pressure on the countries in which the German minorities lived. Considerable economic capacities would also be lost to the Reich. So would be the eventual strong fifth column. Last but not least, numerous people and agencies specialized in the *Volksdeutsche* affairs in Germany and abroad would lose their cushy jobs because an eventual resettlement and integration of the Ethnic-Germans into the Reich would extinguish their *raison d'être*.

Eventually very little came out of the grand designs when the *Volksdeutsche* were concerned. The operations which were carried out were on comparatively small scale, especially when compared with the millions of Jews, Slavs, forced labourers, POWs and other undesirables shipped off to various concentration or labour camps. It was only when the tide of the

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<sup>25</sup> Juri-i}, p. 90; *Dok.*, pp. 75E-76E.

<sup>26</sup> Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte*..., pp. 108-109.

war turned that large masses of Germans started to leave home. On the other hand, resettlement of smaller groups of the scattered Ethnic-Germans served the purpose of repopulating the annexed territories cleansed of their original Slavonic inhabitants, as well as the ethnic unmixing of populations with *friendly* countries. The conventional explanation was that it was done in order to save these scattered splinter groups from ethnic extinction, which was only partly true.<sup>27</sup>

There are three main reasons why no wholesale resettlements of the Ethnic-Germans was undertaken until the later stages of the war. The first one was that the long-term expulsion plans of the indigenous population for the annexed part of Poland which was to be the main receptor of the new colonists, were lacking for a long time. Therefore, for shortage of spatial possibilities, although comprehensive enough, the expulsions were piecemeal and could not yield the desired results.<sup>28</sup>

The second one was the role the Nazi leaders meant for the *Volksdeutsche*. Very few Nazis were interested in the Ethnic-Germans before 1933.<sup>29</sup> However, once in power, they could

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed some of the smaller groups resisted assimilation more staunchly than some much larger groups. A case in point was a tiny group of some 15 000 Germans from Koševje (Gottschee), Slovenia, which resisted assimilation with far greater success than hundred times more numerous Danube Swabians.

<sup>28</sup> Ferenc, *Nacisti-ka politika...*, p. 33. As a rule, the Nazi expulsion schemes made sure that the number of expelees always significantly surpassed the number of the future German colonists so as to give the *Volksdeutsche* settlers larger farms than their Slavic predecessors had had.

<sup>29</sup> Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 32.



not ignore the minority issue. The success of the new regime raised great hopes among the Germans abroad.<sup>30</sup> The *Volksdeutsche* also had powerful champions in some of the Nazi grandees such as the chief Party ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg (a *Volksdeutsche* himself) and Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess (also not a native of Germany although not a *Volksdeutsche*).<sup>31</sup>

The third and the most important reason was that Hitler wanted to put off the final resettlement of the ethnic-Germans of South-East Europe until after the war.<sup>32</sup> He clearly recognized the potential importance of the Ethnic-Germans for realizing the Reich's foreign policy aims. So long as his plans for conquering territories in the East were not complete, it was better that the bulk of the Ethnic-Germans should stay in their homelands. This is what he said in his speech to the *Volksdeutsche* leaders from all over Europe in 1934:

“Gentlemen, you have assumed one of the most important tasks, consisting not only of fostering your German identity, but of forming fighting units on the basis of your German nationality. You do not have to fight for parliamentary rights and legalistic freedoms. These could one day be more to our detriment than advantage. Therefore, in your work you must not do as you think best but, rather, you must listen to the commands of those backing you up. This is because what may seem useful to you could, from a superior point of view, be damaging. This is why I am asking you for blind obedience. I shall not always disclose my real intentions to you. Your obedience must stem from your faith

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Ristovi}, p. 109.

in me personally. You, from now on, will be the outposts of Germany in the frontlines of our struggle and make it possible for us to carry out our campaign...It will be your job to camouflage our own preparations for the attack. Consider yourselves to be at war. The laws of war are valid when you are considered...It is your job to tell all the Germans abroad that they are Germans first and foremost, and only then loyal subjects of another state....It is your job to lay the groundwork because Germany will be expanding its power far beyond its present frontiers, to the East and Southeast...?after the German victory? your job will be to be the custodians in all the subjugated countries and you will discharge your custodian powers in the name of the German people...And so our great misfortune of millions of our best Germans has been transformed into our great fortune.”<sup>33</sup>

The Nazis wanted to make the Ethnic-Germans a pliant instrument of their foreign policy, keeping even the *Volksdeutsche* leaders in the dark as to the final aims of that policy.<sup>34</sup> In utilizing the Ethnic-Germans they were only continuing the policy the foreign minister Gustav Stresemann launched in the second half of the 1920s.<sup>35</sup> Resettlements were but part of larger racial and national fantasies the crack-pot Nazi leaders (such as Himmler who was in charge of the *Volksdeutsche* and resettlements) wanted to make come true. On the other hand, these plans and the concomitant practices used during the Nazi

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<sup>33</sup> Hermann Rausching, *My Confidential Talks with Hitler*, New York 1940, pp. 61-63.

<sup>34</sup> The leaders of the Yugoslav Germans had time and again chances to realize that.

<sup>35</sup> Helmut Pieper, *Die Minderheitenfrage und das Deutsche Reich 1919-1933/34*, Hamburg 1974, pp. 95-96.

aggressions caused people in the opposed camp to think increasingly in terms of massive population transfers themselves.

As we have seen the Czech leaders had some notions about this of their own already before the war. After the beginning of the war, the Czech president Eduard Beneš was still considering a combination of population transfer and cession of part of the Czech territory after the war. The alternatives were discussed throughout the war and the most radical solution was not unanimously accepted. The plans tended to change over time in relation with the latest military and political developments.<sup>36</sup>

The radical treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* after the war was debated in the classified materials of the British agencies as early as the spring of 1940.<sup>37</sup> A year later the Czech resistance movement in Bohemia had a unanimous and radical plan for the treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* in the future. In September 1941 Beneš also accepted the radical solution of the Ethnic-German question through wholesale expulsion.<sup>38</sup>

Late in 1941, early 1942 Beneš started sounding the British - if they would aid resettlement of the Ethnic-Germans.<sup>39</sup> The idea had already been voiced before the British in summer 1941 by the Czech minister Ripka and Beneš now continued to canvas for it.<sup>40</sup> To be sure he thought “the transfer can be made amicably under decent human conditions, under international control and

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<sup>36</sup> Stanek, o.c.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>40</sup> *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa, Bd. IV/1. Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei*, (henceforth: *Dok. IV/1*) Bonn 1957, pp. 39-42.

with international support.’<sup>41</sup> These plans would have been difficult to materialize before the war, but now after innumerable Nazi crimes, a spate of Germanophobia spread over Europe and America making such population engineering feasible.

The exiled Polish politicians accepted the idea with enthusiasm. It was one of the few matters on which they were of one mind. They intended to reduce the numbers of the Ethnic-Germans on the Polish territory, whatever its future frontiers. The controversial leader of the Polish Peasants’ Party and the later prime minister, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, was propagandizing it in the West while his colleagues of the pro-Soviet Lublin Committee were doing the same in Moscow.<sup>42</sup>

As expected, Stalin needed no prodding. He became the main champion of the population transfer. This was in keeping with the Russian traditions (czarist and Bolshevik) of mass deportations as well as with Stalin’s own *modus operandi*. Indeed he did not only relegate millions of Slavs to Siberia and other outbacks, but he also deported the Russian Germans at the beginning of the war so as to render them harmless.

From the end of 1942 the exiled Czech politicians were becoming increasingly vociferous in demanding the German resettlement.<sup>43</sup> Their efforts began to bear fruit in the summer of 1942 when the British minister of foreign affairs Anthony Eden informed Beneš that he and his colleagues agreed with the principles of the transfer.<sup>44</sup> In May 1943 American , and soon

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<sup>41</sup> Zayas, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Paikert, *The German Exodus*, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Stanek, p. 173.

<sup>44</sup> Zayas, p. 7.

afterwards Russian approvals were granted. However, American go-ahead concerned only the *Lebensraum* colonists on the annexed Polish and Yugoslav territories.<sup>45</sup> By the spring of 1945 the Allies have accepted the principle of population transfers, but were still not willing to commit themselves by taking fixed obligations in that respect. They insisted that the issue should be settled only after an agreement between the three big powers had been reached.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, by the end of 1944, the USA informed the Polish exiled president Mikolajczyk that they would not only approve, but facilitate the transfer of the Germans from Poland.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, by the end of 1944 the Czechs themselves did not reach the final decision to expel *all* their *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>48</sup>

However, by then the principle of collective responsibility and consequently of collective guilt, was widely accepted among the democratic leaders. It was deemed just to punish all the Germans for Nazi crimes, or at least not to bother much with separating the guilty from the innocent. So American president Roosevelt wrote to his State Secretary of War on 26 August 1944: "The German people as a whole must have it driven home to them that the whole nation has been engaged in a lawless conspiracy against the decencies of modern civilization." It was

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Beneš claimed in his memoirs that Roosevelt approved of expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia, East Prussia and Transylvania. (Eduard Beneš, *Memoirs. From Munich to New War and New Victory*, London 1954, p. 195.)

<sup>46</sup> Stanek, pp. 174-176.

<sup>47</sup> Zayas, pp. 9-10.

<sup>48</sup> Lemberg, p. 88.

also reported that Roosevelt even went so far as to state that the Germans should be castrated.<sup>49</sup>

In September of the same year, the famous plan of the American finance minister Henry Morgentau was launched . It envisaged the so-called *pastoralisation* of Germany, meaning dismantling of all industries and turning the whole country into a purely agrarian one. Furthermore, the plan proposed that Germany cede East Prussia to Poland, Saar and the territory between the Rhine and the Mosel to France, that Ruhr be internationalized and the rest of the country turned into a confederation of states. Roosevelt accepted this draconian plan and even won Churchill over at their meeting in Quebec. Luckily for the Germans, the plan was eventually dropped by the State Department.<sup>50</sup>

Although somewhat reluctant to be so severe towards the defeated Germany, Churchill too accepted the population transfers as a means of securing the peace. In the Commons on 15 December 1944 he said:” Expulsion is the method which, so far as we had been able to see, will be most satisfactory and lasting. There will be no mixture of population to cause endless trouble...A clean sweep will be made. I am not alarmed by these large transfers which are more possible in modern conditions than they ever were before.”<sup>51</sup> With this he had in mind transfers of the Germans above all.

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<sup>49</sup> Geiger, *Nestanak folksdoj~era*, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Alfred Grosser, *Deutschlandbilanz. Geschichte Deutschlands seit 1945*, Muenchen 1970, pp. 41-42; Martin Gilbert, *Churchill. A Life*, London 1994, p. 548.

<sup>51</sup> Zayas, p. 1. It was only a year later , when the Cold War had already started and the expulsions were at their worst, that he changed his mind.

The British labour leader Clement Attlee (giving the lie to his first name) was even harsher. In his speech before the Parliament in March 1945 he said:” They [i.e. the Germans] have broken down old barriers, and therefore I say they cannot appeal to the old Europe . If they have to yield to make restitution, they are not entitled to appeal on the basis of the moral laws that they have disregarded or the pity and mercy that they have never extended to any others.”<sup>52</sup>

Half a year after the war in Europe had been ended, the attitude of the American president Truman was almost as harsh. In his answer to senator Hawkes’ appeal to help the Germans, he wrote: “While we have no desire to be unduly cruel to Germany, I cannot feel any great sympathy for those who caused the death of so many human being...I admit that there are, of course, many innocent people in Germany who had little to do with Nazi terror. However, the administrative burden of trying to locate those people and treat them differently from the rest is one which is almost insuperable.”<sup>53</sup> The crimes committed in the name of the German people made Germanophobia an almost universal feeling in the democratic countries. This hatred of Germans was to a large extent shared by Western policy makers. Over years it made them not only connive at, but also encourage and organize a huge ethnic cleansing in the form of population transfers.

For understandable reasons, Germanophobia reached its pinnacle in the Soviet Union. No country had suffered such devastation and lost so many lives. The reaction to Nazi atrocities reached its peak there, since the crimes committed there also

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<sup>52</sup> Zayas, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Zayas, pp. 133-134.

surpassed anything seen in other parts of occupied Europe. The hatred of Germans was spread by the official propaganda which had an easy task of pouring some more oil over the flames. One of the best examples is a flier by a noted Soviet author Ilya Ehrenburg from 1945. It countered the Nazi racist ideology by the same means. It reads:

” The Germans are not humans. From now on the word German is the worst curse for us. From now on the word German causes gunfire. We shall not speak. We shall kill. If during a day you have not killed a single German, you have wasted a day. If you think your neighbour is going to kill a German instead of you, you did not understand the message. If you do not kill the German, he will kill you.

If you cannot kill a German with a bullet, kill him with a bayonet. If it is quiet at your section of the front and you are waiting for the battle, kill a German before the battle. If you let the German live, he will kill a Russian man and rape a Russian woman. If you have killed a German, kill another one too. Nothing is merrier for us than German corpses. Do not count days, do not count kilometers, count only the Germans you have killed. Kill the German, your old mother implores you. Kill the German, your children implore you. Kill the German, thus cries your homeland. Do not miss, do not fail, KILL!’<sup>54</sup>

As we have seen, Stalin was the main promoter of the expulsion of the Germans from eastern Europe. That dove-tailed with his plans of Soviet domination in that region. He perceived the *Volksdeutsche* of the East European countries as the factor

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<sup>54</sup> Mari~i}, p. 90; Siegfried Kagelfranz (ed.), *Die Vertriebenen*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1985, p. 16.



of insecurity and potential tool of the German imperialism.<sup>55</sup> The assertions that he wanted to get rid of them because they were “indigestible” and because they would flaw the ideological unity are less plausible.<sup>56</sup> The fact that the *Volksdeutsche* or their assimilated descendants accounted for a large part of the bourgeoisie of their respective countries was not as important as it would seem. On the one hand, there were even more people of the middle class who were not of German origin. On the other, many Ethnic-Germans were workers or peasants. (Indeed, in many countries the majority of the *Volksdeutsche* were peasants.<sup>57</sup>) The main reason was the wish to turn countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia into the Soviet satellites: having expelled their Germans, they would need the Soviet protection against revenge in case of German resurgence.<sup>58</sup>

The supposition that Stalin wanted to create a “revolutionary situation” by dumping so many destitute refugees on Germany does not hold water. The Germans were starving to death in the American but also in the Soviet zone of Germany until April 1946 when the aid of the International Red Cross was finally admitted.<sup>59</sup> That would mean, the Soviets were creating a “revolutionary situation” in their own zone, while the Americans (who by the way took most of the *Volksdeutsche*) were helping them to create a “revolutionary situation” in theirs.

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<sup>55</sup> Paikert, *The German Exodus*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> As we have seen that was the case in Yugoslavia too.

<sup>58</sup> Paikert, *The German Exodus*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>59</sup> Zayas, p. 133.

To tell the truth, the main champion of the population transfers, Stalin, was not a German-baiter himself. In his daily command no. 55 of 23 February 1942 he stated:

“It would be ridiculous to equate the Hitlerite clique with the German people and the state. History shows that Hitlers come and go, but the German people and the state remain.”<sup>60</sup> A man who sent millions of people to their death or concentration camps could certainly not be impressed by Nazi enormities. It is almost certain that Stalin was only using Germanophobia as a cat’s paw for achieving his own ends. However, he left his Myrmidons (such as Ehrenburg and his ilk) to handle the tool.

As the war drew to its end, the Western allies started to drag their feet, since they began to be anxious about the ever increasing number of DPs which would soar if the foreseen expulsions were carried out.<sup>61</sup> The resettlement of the Ethnic-Germans from Eastern Europe was discussed between the Allies throughout the war, including the meetings of the Big Three in Teheran and Yalta.<sup>62</sup>

The decisive effort to regularize the resettlement was made at the Potsdam Conference (17 July to 2 August 1945). The Conference which, to all intents, ended the wartime alliance, had as its main task to deal with the problems of the defeated Germany. In that context momentous decisions concerning the *Volksdeutsche* of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland were

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<sup>60</sup> Grosser, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> Lemberg, p. 84.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Nahm, *Die Wanderung der 18 Millionen. Das deutsche Fluechtlingsproblem in seinen ersten Jahrzehnt*, in: *Festgabe dargebracht Harold Steinacker zur Vollendung des 80. Lebensjahres 26. Mai 1955*, Muenchen 1955.

reached. Although the Yugoslav Germans were not the subject of the talks, the decisions of the Conference had bearing on them too.

The work of the Conference was ended by signing the Protocol on 2 August. Point XII of the Protocol envisaged expulsion of the German populations from Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. It was stipulated that it should be carried out “in orderly and humane manner”. Because the huge number of DPs was already causing difficulties for the occupying powers, in order not to complicate things further, it was decided that the expulsions should proceed gradually and in agreement between the Czechoslovak and Polish governments, as well as the Hungarian Control Council with the Allied Control Council of Germany. These three countries were asked to cease temporarily the expulsions which were already under way.<sup>63</sup>

What were the reasons, other than the rampant Germanophobia, which spurred the Allies to consent to an action that would incur only great difficulties and costs? An expert on the problem Alfred M. de Zayas lists the following reasons:

- 1) The Allies wanted to secure a durable peace by eliminating the German minorities from Eastern Europe;
- 2) They wanted to recompense Poland in the West for her losses to the Soviet Union in the East without encumbering her with an unloyal and dangerous national minority;
- 3) They believed the transfer could be executed orderly and humanely;

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<sup>63</sup> Paikert, *The German Exodus*, pp. 8-9. (These were so-called wild-cat expulsions.)

4) They wanted to punish the defeated Germans.<sup>64</sup>

Geza C. Paikert adds these reasons:

1) The wish of the United States and Great Britain to continue the cooperation with the Soviet Union because they needed the Soviet help to finish off Japan;

2) Sympathies with millions of the Soviets and Slavs who had suffered so much at the hands of the Germans;

3) The war has taken a heavy toll of Great Britain and the United States themselves so they were not disposed to show leniency towards the defeated Germany;

4) The Holocaust of the Jews also contributed to the rough treatment of the Germans.

All these reasons sound more or less plausible. What these two authors leave unanswered is the question why only these three countries were taken into consideration and Yugoslavia, Romania and the Soviet Union were left out.

The answer is easy only when the Soviet Union is concerned. The local *Volksdeutsche* were deported to the backwoods of Central Asia and Siberia at the beginning of the war and thus made inoffensive. The country was large enough, so there was no need for expelling the Ethnic-Germans abroad. Furthermore, the mightiest victorious power would never consent to its internal matters being settled at an international conference.

The things with Romania and Yugoslavia are more difficult. Romania, just like Hungary, was an ally of the Reich, whereas Yugoslavia, like Czechoslovakia and Poland, was a victim of its aggression. The number of Germans living in Romania by the end of the war was considerable, making it thus similar to the three

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<sup>64</sup> Zayas, p. 2.

countries mentioned in the Potsdam Protocol. As for Yugoslavia, only some 200 000 *Volksdeutsche* remained in the country by the end of the war. This was not much compared to the pre-war total. Compared to the numbers of the Ethnic-Germans in other countries it seemed even less.

This small number of the Yugoslav Germans remaining in the country was probably the reason for Yugoslavia being omitted from the group of the expeller countries. As we shall see presently, it seems that at that time the Yugoslav government hoped to use the first chaotic months after the war to expel the remaining *Volksdeutsche* even without the Allies' permission. It seems it was for these reasons that Yugoslavia did not even ask of the Conference to allow her to evict her Germans.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore Yugoslavia had an unresolved conflict with Great Britain and the United States over her borders with Italy (and partly with Austria) and could not therefore hope for complaisance on the part of the two Western powers.

Romania was left out of the Potsdam Protocol because of the following reasons:

1) There was no wide-spread Germanophobia there as well as no plans for the expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche*;

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<sup>65</sup> Katherine Stenger Frey, *The Danube Swabians. A People With Portable Roots*, Bellville 1982, p. 115; Johann Wuescht, *Ursachen und Hintergruende des Schicksals der Deutschen in Jugoslawien. Bevoelkerungsverluste Jugoslawiens im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Kehl am Rhein 1966, p. 34. (Wuescht's guess is that Yugoslavia did not ask for an expulsion permission because of the renegefulness, arbitrariness and Tito's pride - he considered himself to be an equal partner in the victorious coalition, so he did not want to let others decide what was to be done with "his" *Volksdeutsche*.)

2) Romania had no common frontier either with Germany or Austria, so there was no danger of a German irredenta;

3) Romania played only a subordinate role in the Soviet strategic plans which were centered at East-Central Europe - i.e. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Austria.

What were then the reasons for including Hungary in the population transfer scheme? Throughout the greater part of the war she had been not Germany's victim but her ally. However, the lost war has reawakened the latent Germanophobia.<sup>66</sup> After the defeat the Swabians were made a scapegoat. One wanted to excuse the expulsion by bad historical experience the Magyars had had with the Germans and a wish for a more secure future. The expulsion was shown as putative cleansing of the Fascist remnants, but was in fact washing hands of the inglorious past by accusing the Ethnic-Germans for all the evils.<sup>67</sup>

These were the excuses, while the real reason (together with the Hungarian jingoism) was the desperate need for land for the expelled Hungarians pouring in from the neighbouring countries, especially Czechoslovakia.<sup>68</sup> It was probably in order to make room for the in-coming Hungarians that the Allies included Hungary into the resettlement scheme.

The Potsdam Protocol was an attempt to regularize the expulsions of the Ethnic-Germans. To this end the Allied Control

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<sup>66</sup> On Hungarian hatred of Germans see: Johann Weidlein, *Pannonica. Ausgewahlte Abhandlungen und Aufsaezte zur Sprach- und Geschichtsforschung der Donuschwaben und der Madjaren*, Schorndorf 1979.

<sup>67</sup> Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte*..., pp. 175-176.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178; Weidlein, *Die nationale Bodenpolitik Ungarns*, p. 323, in: *Pannonica*.

Council of Germany prescribed quotas for each of the three expelling countries.<sup>69</sup> However, the three countries tended to make and carry out their own plans disregarding the schedule set by the Allies. The worst transgressor was Czechoslovakia which continued wildcat expulsions. For that reason, Geza Paikert is correct when claiming the Potsdam Protocol has only legalized the existing state of affairs.<sup>70</sup>

The policy of population transfers left its mark on the territory of the occupied Yugoslavia too. After the dismemberment of the country, a plan for resettling all the Yugoslav Germans in Germany was made in the German Foreign Ministry. Its final version was finished on 15 July 1941 and it envisaged repopulating the conquered territories of Poland with the Ethnic-Germans from South-Eastern Europe. Hitler's final approval was eventually secured, but for technical and political reasons he chose to postpone the resettlements until after the war.<sup>71</sup> Only smaller groups were to be transferred during the war.<sup>72</sup>

It is not known if it was in any connection with these ideas that Hitler proposed moving away the *Volksdeutsche* from the Prekomurje region, allotted to Hungary.<sup>73</sup> The 600 years old ethnic island Ko~evje (Gottschee) in the Italian-occupied part of Slovenia was also evacuated in accordance with the agreement

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<sup>69</sup> The quotas were set on 20 November 1945. Poland was allowed to transfer 3,5 mil. Germans, Czechoslovakia 2,5 and Hungary 0,5 mil. (Kulischer, p. 282.)

<sup>70</sup> Paikert, *The German Exodus*, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ristovi}, p. 109.

<sup>72</sup> Ristovi}, pp. 101-102.

<sup>73</sup> *Dok.*, p. 78E.

signed between the two Axis partners.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, plans for mass expulsion of the Slovenes from parts of the German-occupied Slovenia were made and partly carried out.<sup>75</sup> During December 1941 and January 1942 some 2900 scattered Germans living in Serbia proper were also moved away.<sup>76</sup> Under the contract with the government of the *Independent State of Croatia* some 18 300 Ethnic-Germans from Bosnia-Herzegovina were resettled between 6 October and 22 November 1942.<sup>77</sup>

The reasons for the resettlement of these *Volksdeutsche* were different. Those from Prekomurje and Ko~evje were removed because their territories went to Germany's allies. This was the case Hitler meant in his *resettlement speech*. The Ethnic-Germans of Serbia were resettled in order to prevent their assimilation. As for the Bosnian Germans, they were moved away because almost all of their settlements were an easy prey to the severe partisan attacks and the *Ustashi* state could not protect them. Not all of these people left their homes willingly. Sometimes a great deal of propaganda, and occasionally even pressure had to be used.

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<sup>74</sup> Hans Hermann Frenssing, *Die Umsiedlung der Gottscheer Deutschen. Das Ende einer Suedostdeutschen Volksgruppen*, Muenchen 1970; Ferenc, *Nacisti~ka politika...*, pp. 478-577; Milo{evi}, *Izbeglice...*, pp. 343-347.

<sup>75</sup> Ferenc, *Nacisti~ka politika...*

<sup>76</sup> *Dok.*, p. 81E-82E; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 176.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83E-84E; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 176; Oberkersch, *die Deutschen...*, pp. 387-388; Milo{evi}, *Izbeglice...*, pp. 188-193; Krni}, *O iseljavanju...*, pp. 79-80; Mileti}, *The Volksdeutsche...*, pp. 593-595; the same author, *Preseljenje...*, p. 16.



The situation of the Ethnic-Germans in Syrmium and Slavonia was to a degree similar to that of the Bosnian Germans. Their villages also had to resist partisan onslaughts. Therefore as early as February 1942 Himmler and the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop considered their resettlement. Himmler deemed that the majority of the *Volksdeutsche* would leave willingly. At the same time, the resettlement would also have the merit of showing to the Italians that Germany was disinterested in the *ISC* which was considered Italian sphere of influence. In the meantime the chief of the VoMi, Lorenz reached an agreement with the commissioned German General in Croatia Gleise von Horstenau not to raise the matter until the spring of 1943.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, some villages had to be vacated.<sup>79</sup>

The *Wehrmacht* tried to recruit the Croatian *Volksdeutsche* in September 1942 which infuriated Himmler. He regarded all the *Volksdeutsche* as a reservoir of manpower for his *Waffen-SS*. For that reason he considered resettling all the Ethnic-Germans from the *Independent State of Croatia* again. This met with a fierce opposition on the part of the German Foreign Ministry as well as the German embassy in Zagreb, so the plan was shelved once more.<sup>80</sup>

In January 1943 the matter was discussed again. The *Auswaertiges Amt*<sup>81</sup> was against the resettlement for fear it would alienate the Croats and weaken the working zeal of the

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<sup>78</sup> Bonn 8/ 437-438; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p.388; Mileti}, *Preseljenje....*, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> Kmi}, *O iseljavanju....*, pp. 77-79.

<sup>80</sup> *Dok.*, p. 79E.

<sup>81</sup> German Foreign Ministry

*Volksdeutsche*.<sup>82</sup> In early March 1943, the German ambassador to Zagreb Siegfried Kasche talked to the *Ustashi* minister Mladen Lorkovi} about the resettlement of the *Volksdeutsche*. They agreed that such a measure would not be opportune as long as the war lasted. This opinion was shared by the German Foreign Ministry. They concluded that only the villages of Western Slavonia, which were endangered by the partisans and from whence most of the inhabitants had already fled anyway, should be evacuated. The evacuation of these scattered and unviable German villages of Western Slavonia was recommended by Werner Lorenz to Himmler too. In his opinion, due to the technical difficulties, they should be moved only to Syrmium for the time being.<sup>83</sup> Because nothing could be done for the safety of the endangered villages, they had to be vacated in December 1943. Some 20 000 people were resettled to Syrmium into the predominantly German villages and into the houses of the Serbs who had been expelled by the *Ustashi* or had joined the partisans.<sup>84</sup>

This moving of the *Volksdeutsche* like pawns on a chessboard coupled with mass deportations and expulsions of non-German populations within Yugoslavia and throughout Europe, in the words of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “created a model

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<sup>82</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 390.

<sup>83</sup> Bonn 8/ 450; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 391. The resettlement of 7420 Ethnic-Germans into the vicinity of Osjek started on 29 May 1943. (Mileti}, *The Volksdeutsche...*, p. 597; the same author, *Preseljenje...*, p. 18.)

<sup>84</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 397.

of population transfers on a large scale for the forces desirous of emulating it.’<sup>85</sup>

Which were then these “forces desirous of emulating it”? According to Sepp Janko, the leader of all the *Volksdeutsche* in Yugoslavia before the war, and the *Volksgruppenfuehrer* of the Ethnic-Germans in the Banat during the war<sup>86</sup>, the chief proponents of ethnic cleansing were professor of law Fedor Niki} who, according to Janko, had written the book *Nationalization of the Vojvodina* and the economist Vladan Jojki} who was the author of the book *Nationalization of the Banat and Bacska*.<sup>87</sup>

The first author was known for his dislike of the Vojvodina minorities. However, being a lawyer and a political realist, he advised that the national minorities be granted those rights foreseen in the Minority convention of 1919, but not more. He deemed that national minorities should prove their loyalty and observance of the integrity of the state, before they were given rights which surpass the minimum stipulated by the Convention.<sup>88</sup>

As for his putative book on the *nationalization* of the Vojvodina, Janko (who is not a very reliable source of information) is wrong there. It is not a book but an article entitled *For the nationalization of the Vojvodina* and it has nothing to

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<sup>85</sup> Dok., p. 85E.

<sup>86</sup> Sepp Janko, *Weg und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppen in Jugoslawien*, Graz, Stuttgart 1982, p. 238.

<sup>87</sup> Under the term *nationalisation* the inter-war Yugoslav authors understood *Yugoslavization*.

<sup>88</sup> Fedor Niki}, *Upotreba jezika nacionalnih manjina*, Letopis Matice srpske, knj. 316, sv. 3, 1928; *Manjinske i privatne {kole i na{a prosvetna politika*, Letopis Matice srpske, knj. 330, sv. 3, 1929.

do with ethnic cleansing.<sup>89</sup> The text only suggests that the Slavonic population of the Vojvodina should be strengthened through colonization of the Serbs, agrarian policy, political, professional and economic organizations. In that way, he thought, the Vojvodina would be strengthened ethnically and ethically. The measures he proposed were in a way certainly aimed against the national minorities, but they fell far short of ethnic cleansing. Furthermore, his proposals were aimed at the potentially irredentist Hungarians in the first place.

Jojki}'s book is a work of similar character and it belongs to the same vein of thinking. In his opinion Bacska and the Banat were the hinterland of the national capital, Belgrade and the granary of the whole country, and yet they were not Yugoslav enough, i.e. the Slavs were a minority there. In order to rectify this, one would need some 500.000 more Yugoslavs.

As a means of achieving this Yugoslav surplus he envisaged several measures. The first one being assimilation. However he firmly rejected forced assimilation as practiced by the Hungarians. In his opinion such procedure would be counter-productive and unnecessary. He was in favour of a gradual and nonviolent assimilation of the national minorities over several generations.<sup>90</sup> The greatest shortcoming of this method was its slowness.

For that reason he suggested depopulation and colonization as more effective approach. However, in this he also insisted on

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<sup>89</sup> Fedor Niki}, *Za nacionalizaciju Vojvodine*, Letopis Matice srpske, knj. 314, sv. 3, 1927.

<sup>90</sup> Vladan Jojki}, *Nacionalizacija Ba~ke i Banata*, Novi Sad 1931, pp. 83-85.

voluntary principle- people belonging to national minorities should scatter throughout Yugoslavia on their own free will. For that purpose the landless minority peasants should be given free land in other parts of the country. The fault of this method was the chronic lack of funds by the state.<sup>91</sup>

In order to achieve the Slav majority, the birth-rate of the local Slavonic population should have been much higher, which was not the case. Thus to offset the difference in numbers between the Yugoslavs and the minorities in the province, the state should “import” extra Slavonic population from other humanely more fertile, but economically sterile parts of the country.<sup>92</sup> In other words, the main vehicle of the *nationalization*, was to be colonization. This was the state policy anyway.<sup>93</sup>

However, Jojki} perceived colonization in somewhat different terms. In his opinion the colonization should be “a free immigration of the Yugoslav population” from other parts of the country. In other words, he was not in favour of a state-organized colonization but of one that would result spontaneously

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-93.

<sup>93</sup> On agrarian reform and concomitant colonization see: Milivoje Eri}, *Agrarna reforma u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941*, Sarajevo 1958; Milovan Obradovi}, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija na Kosovu (1918-1941)*, Priština 1981; O. Jančič}, *Agrarna reforma v Sloveniji med obema vojnama*, *Zgodovinski časopis*, 17, 1964. For the Vojvodina see: Nikola Gašević}, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Bačkoj 1918-1941*, Novi Sad 1968; the same author, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Banatu 1919-1941*, Novi Sad 1972; the same author, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Sremu 1919-1941*, Novi Sad 1975; the same author, *Radovi iz agrarne istorije i demografije*.

from the economic attractiveness of the province. In order to achieve that, he foresaw measures for furthering economic (and cultural) development.<sup>94</sup> Jojki} was a liberal of the old stamp. His aim was not elimination of the minorities but their neutralization by diminishing their share in the total population of the Vojvodina. The national minorities would also profit materially from his scheme thanks to the free land distribution throughout Yugoslavia and economic development of the Vojvodina. His was a plan for reducing the influence of national minorities, not for their elimination or physical liquidation. As for the *Volksdeutsche* they were anyway prone to move or migrate to those parts of the country or abroad wherever better economic opportunities occurred.<sup>95</sup>

Janko also ascribes plans for ethnic cleansing to Prof. Aleksa Ivi}, Prof. Mirko Kosi} and Svetozar Putnik.<sup>96</sup> He reports to have heard that these three had expressed the opinion that the Second World War would decide the fate of the Vojvodina and that the Swabians should leave. On the same place in his memoirs he claims that similar views were held by some other prominent Serbian patriotic politicians. He also claims there was a direct connection between the pre-war expulsion plans of the bourgeois politicians and the post-war actions of the communist leaders. This is a stock-in-trade of many *Volksdeutsche* authors, who just like Janko fail to adduce any

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<sup>94</sup> Jojki}, pp. 94-99.

<sup>95</sup> Goran Simovi}, *Jugoslovenski iseljenici na ameri-kom kontinentu izme/ u dva svetska rata* (bachelor's paper MS), Beograd 1997, pp. 29, 126, 137, 159; PA Abteilung II b, Nationalitaetenfrage, Fremdvoelker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 3.)

<sup>96</sup> Janko, p. 238.

conclusive proofs. As we have seen Janko's accusations of Niki} and Jojki} were untrue, so we can ask ourselves if his other statements should be taken for granted. Knowing the apologetic tone of his memoirs, we are inclined to take all of his statements with more than one grain of salt.

The Swabians from Ba-ka Palanka in their *homeland book* claim that the Yugoslav government planned to exterminate the national minorities of the Vojvodina so as to increase Yugoslav chances of getting the province at the Paris peace conference. They ascribe this plan to "Prime Minister Pa{i}". However, since Yugoslavia got the Vojvodina anyway, their version goes, the plan was dropped altogether.<sup>97</sup> There are several things fishy about this. Firstly, at the time of the Paris peace conference Pa{i} was not the prime minister. Secondly, extermination of national minorities would rather wipe out than increase Yugoslav chances of getting the Vojvodina, since the mood of the decision-making great powers was strongly in favour of the national minorities.<sup>98</sup> Thirdly, the presence of the French troops in the region made every such attempt illusory. Fourthly, the Serbian army was too exhausted by the four years of war and it had more than enough to do keeping order and establishing the new administration to be able to carry out a wholesale massacre. Fifthly, the Serbian army's take-over was for greater part orderly and bloodless, as admitted also by some more honest *Volksdeutsche* authors<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> Adalbert Karl Gauss (ed.), *Erinnerungen an Palanka*, Freilassing 1958, p. 25.

<sup>98</sup> See: E. Viefhaus, o.c.

<sup>99</sup> Mueller, pp. 42-43.

Indeed, not only were the minorities spared, but the Swabians were given opportunity to expand their schools.<sup>100</sup>

Pa{i}, who was certainly no friend of national minorities, was accused also by Hans Rasimus who quotes Johann Wuescht, of wanting to expel the Swabians during the 1920s. He allegedly said that to the leader of the German minority Dr. Stefan Kraft when the latter asked for the *Volksdeutsche* rights to be observed.<sup>101</sup> Whoever knows about Pa{i}'s proverbial taciturnity, will find it hard to believe this accusation. Above all Pa{i} was a very realistic politician and he must have known that the Powers would never acquiesce in such a scheme, not least because Yugoslavia was obliged by the Minority Convention to respect at least the elementary rights of her minorities. It seems this accusation is more like a historical projection or resentment and less a historical fact.

There is more truth in the accusations the authors from Ba-ka Palanka have raised against the Chetniks. They were accused of having a plan for extermination of the national minorities in the Vojvodina in the 1930s.<sup>102</sup> The Chetniks did toy with the idea of expulsion of the Jews and other *foreign* elements during the discussions about revamping Yugoslavia in the 1930s.<sup>103</sup> However, the influence of the Chetniks lagged far behind their official numbers.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Wehler, p. 22.

<sup>101</sup> LW, p. 19.

<sup>102</sup> Gauss, p. 32.

<sup>103</sup> [ehi}, p. 124.

<sup>104</sup> Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945. The Chetniks*, Stanford 1975, p. 120.



Other nationalist organizations which were as inimically disposed to the national minorities as the Chetniks also liked to take menacing postures. The minorities were seen by the ORJUNA as one of the main disturbing factors in the new state. They were prepared to eliminate all the enemies of the state (or those whom they had perceived as such) by all means, fair or foul.<sup>105</sup>

The rival pro-Serbian jingoist organization, the SRNAO (which sometimes cooperated against the national minorities with its arch-enemy the pro-Yugoslav ORJUNA) also threatened to expel the illegal part of the national minorities. (For them loyalty to the state was synonymous to the loyalty to the Radical Party which was sponsoring them.)<sup>106</sup> The threats of these two organizations that some day the minority issue would be settled once and for all by bloodshed was not taken seriously by anyone.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, by the mid-twenties both these organizations receded into insignificance. This does not mean that extreme anti-minority (and therefore anti-*Volksdeutsche*) ideas ceased to exist, but only that they were relegated to the realm of wishful thinking of the nationalistic lunatic fringe which exists in every country. The rise of Hitler's Reich extinguished all hopes of these circles that such plans could be put to practice.

The Second World War brought about immense population shifts and enormous Nazi crimes. During the *April War* the Yugoslav Germans sided with the aggressors or at least greeted them enthusiastically becoming thus traitors for the majority of

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<sup>105</sup> \or|evi}, pp. 25, 30.

<sup>106</sup> Gligorijevi}, *SRNAO*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>107</sup> Altgayer, p. 78.

the Yugoslavs. This meant that they had become enemies of their one-time neighbours. Ill-feelings caused by their unloyal behaviour nurtured old and bore new prejudices and hatreds. The schemes for their expulsion started to proliferate throughout the country. However, it should be noted that such plans were not made for the *Volksdeutsche* alone, nor were they made only by the Serbs. Indeed, other national minorities had exhibited similar behaviour as the Ethnic-Germans and thereby incurred the same hatred by their Slavonic neighbours.<sup>108</sup>

The first to produce expulsion schemes for the national minorities were the refounded Chetniks. As early as June 1941 their ideologue Dr. Stevan Moljevi} wrote a memo in which he demanded that the Serbs be the leading people in the Balkans and Yugoslavia and that the Serbian ethnic territory be cleansed of all non-Serbs. His plan envisaged great expulsions and population exchanges but he suggested no numbers.<sup>109</sup> The Belgrade Chetnik committee discussed a similar plan in the summer of that year. This plan reached the Yugoslav government in exile by September. The map drawn by the committee was based on Moljevi}'s ideas but the plan itself was more precise: it demanded emigration of 1 million Croats and half a million Germans from the territory of the projected Greater Serbia, as well as immigration of 1,3 million Serbs. The Chetnik commander-in-chief Dra`a Mihajlovi} approved of this plan. In

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<sup>108</sup> About the behaviour of the other two largest minorities see the following works: for the Albanians: Malcolm, o.c.; Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian*, London 1998; for the Hungarians: Golubovi}, o.c.; Jovan M. Pejin, *Srbi i Ma}ari*, Kikinda 1996; Aleksandar Kasa}, *Ma}ari u Vojvodini 1941-1946*, Novi Sad 1996.

<sup>109</sup> Tomasevich, p. 167-169.

one of his proclamations he said that Greater Serbia would be ethnically pure , i.e. that one of the aims of the Chetnik movement was cleansing the national territory of all national minorities and other *non-national* elements.<sup>110</sup>

The same ideas were accepted at the conference of young Chetnik intellectuals in the village of [ehovi} from 30 November to 2 December 1942. The official tone to this meeting was given by the presence of the prominent Chetnik commanders Ostoji}, La{i} and \uri{i}.<sup>111</sup>

Approximately at the same time a handbook of the Chetnik struggle was written. It divided the struggle into three phases. The first one was the *April War*. The second one was the occupation and period of waiting for the propitious moment to start fighting. Finally the third one envisaged eviction of the enemy from the country when the conditions become favourable and expulsion of all national minorities.<sup>112</sup>

The Chetnik congress at the village of Ba (which was a Chetnik answer to a similar partisans' convention known as the AVNOJ II, two months earlier) adopted a plan for the creation of Greater Serbia which would contain no national minorities. The minorities themselves were not explicitly mentioned in the congress resolution, but it is clear from the context as well as from the later documents that the Chetnics counted on their property.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 169; Milan Vesovi}, Kosta Nikoli}, *Ujedinjene srpske zemlje. Ravnogorski nacionalni program*, Beograd 1996, p. 46.

<sup>111</sup> Tomasevich, p. 171; Vesovi}, Nikoli}, p. 48.

<sup>112</sup> Tomasevich, p. 173.

<sup>113</sup> Tomasevich, pp. 399-402; Vesovi}, Nikoli}, p. 70.

The programme of the Chetnik Movement was given its final shape in the first half of 1944. Among its goals was the expulsion of all the national minorities which sided with the enemy, thus forfeiting the right to continue living in the Yugoslav community.<sup>114</sup> However what all these plans left unresolved was the problem how all these population transfers and expulsions were to be carried out.<sup>115</sup>

Jozo Tomasevich is right when he supposes that these plans, which were not aimed only against national minorities, came into being as a corollary of the Ustashi massacres, but he is certainly wrong when he sees them as a completely new plank in the Chetnik political programme.<sup>116</sup> Indeed there is a red thread of national intolerance in the Chetnik ideology from the very beginning of the Chetnik movement, but it was the unloyal behaviour on the part of national minorities and some Yugoslav peoples that revived the plans of ethnic cleansing. It was the war with its massacres and population shifts that made these plans re-emerge and it was the war that made them look feasible.

To tell the truth, just as population transfer schemes abroad were not confined to the Nazis alone, similar plans were not

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<sup>114</sup> Vesovi}, Nikoli}, p. 77.

<sup>115</sup> Vesovi}, nikoli}, p. 151.

<sup>116</sup> Tomasevich, p. 173. There was no organizational continuity between the pre-war Chetnik organizations and the wartime organization headed by Dra`a Mihajlovi}. As we have seen the pre-war Chetniks had some ideas about expelling the national minorities. This was in fact one of the elements of the ideological continuity that connected ideologically the pre-war Chetnik organizations and the wartime Chetniks. Another bond were certain individuals who had been active as Chetniks already before the Second World War, or even before and during the First World War.

particular only to the Chetniks, nor indeed only to the Serbs. The Slovenes had their own problems with the local Ethnic-Germans which were of one century's standing. Their conflict was aggravated during the inter-war period when the Slovenes turned from under-dogs to top-dogs with a severity typical of a people that had been oppressed for much too long.<sup>117</sup> After the Yugoslav defeat in the *April War* Slovenia was partitioned just like the rest of the country. In the German-occupied part, as we have seen, the Nazis tried to carry out their resettlement schemes. This protracted conflict between the Slovenes and the Germans would have ominous consequences for the fate of the Vojvodina Swabians too.<sup>118</sup>

The Slovenians, painfully hit by the Nazi aggression and destruction of the Yugoslav state, started making plans to quit scores with the local Germans only a few months after Moljevič's programme was made. These plans were written down in several memos and papers produced by Dr. Janko Mačkovšek, the former researcher in a Ljubljana institute for national minorities, and his associates. In a memo of 11 October 1941 they proposed that all the Ethnic-Germans be expelled from Slovenia

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<sup>117</sup> On the conditions of the *Volksdeutsche* in Slovenia in this period see: Arnold Suppan, *Zur Lage der Deutschen in Slowenien zwischen 1918 und 1938*, in: Arnold Suppan, Helmut Rumpler (eds.), *Geschichte der Deutschen im Bereich des heutigen Slowenien 1848-1941*, Wien, Muenchen 1988.

<sup>118</sup> In the pre-war Yugoslavia the adamant attitude of the Slovenian politicians toward the Slovenian *Volksdeutsche* often prevented the Belgrade government from meting out a more lenient treatment to the Vojvodina Swabians.

after the war.<sup>119</sup> These demands were repeated several times in various memos written during the next two years. One of them of 10 March 1943 spoke for the first time of the collective guilt of the *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>120</sup>

These memos found clandestinely their way to London.<sup>121</sup> It is possible that they influenced the Foreign Research and Press Service at Balliol College in Oxford which, working for the Foreign Office, made a plan for a European confederation in February 1942, where, among other things, a plan of the expulsion of the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* was proposed.<sup>122</sup> It is very likely that the Slovenian memos left their mark on the expulsion plans of the exiled Yugoslav government mentioned in a Foreign Office writing in the autumn of 1943.<sup>123</sup>

Unfortunately next to nothing is known about such plans of the exiled Yugoslav government. To the knowledge of this author, it seems that the first among the exiled ministers to mention the resettlement of the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* was Ivan Juki} (a Croat, by the way)<sup>124</sup> in his conversation with Hugh Dalton on 29 August 1941.<sup>125</sup> However, it also seems that at that time it had been only his personal opinion. As yet it is not known

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<sup>119</sup> Ferenc, *Nemci...*, p. 115.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>122</sup> Biber, *Britanska diplomatska poro~ila...*, p. 100.

<sup>123</sup> Ferenc, *Nemci...*, p. 119.

<sup>124</sup> This fact is noteworthy because, just like the Slovenian memoranda, it shows that Germanophobia unleashed by the Second World War in Yugoslavia was by no means confined to the Serbs as some Swabian authors would have it.

<sup>125</sup> AJ, 103, 65/288. (The author is indebted to Milan Koljanin Ph.D. for bringing this information to his notice.)

to what extent it was shared by other members of the government. This would suggest that the Yugoslav government may have made some expulsion plans in the period from August 1941 to the autumn of 1943. However, it is also known that at least until March 1944 the Yugoslav government in London submitted nothing on the subject in writing to the British.<sup>126</sup> It is possible that they were either poorly informed about the Polish and Czech expulsion plans<sup>127</sup> or that they had not reached a definitive decision by that time.<sup>128</sup> Little more is known about the eventual resettlement schemes of the exiled Yugoslav government. It seems the matter did not have the high priority for them.<sup>129</sup>

However that may be, the exiled government never had any real power anyway. Their influence on the developments in Yugoslavia was negligible throughout the war. By the end of the war they had been forced to reach a compromise with Tito which left all the levers of power in the hands of the communists. Thus we can assume with a great degree of certainty that eventual plans for the expulsion of the *Volkseutsche* made by the wartime Yugoslav cabinet had, to all intents, no bearing on the future of the Ethnic-Germans in the country.

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<sup>126</sup> Detlef Brandes, *Grossbritannien und seine osteuropäische Alliierten 1939-1943. Regierungen Polens, der Tschechoslowakei und Jugoslawiens im Londoner Exil vom Kriegsausbruch bis zur Konferenz von Teheran*, Muenchen 1988, p. 410.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Judging by the constant bickering of the exiled ministers, this is very likely.

<sup>129</sup> Bogdan Krizman (ed.), *Jugoslavenske vlade u izbjegli{tvu I,II*, Beograd 1981.

Now we turn to those who were to decide not only the fate of the Vojvodina Swabians and other *Volksdeutsche* in Yugoslavia, but indeed the future of the whole country. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) was an illegal revolutionary party and an obedient branch of the Comintern. In nationality matters as well as in all others it toed the Moscow line. Until mid-thirties the Kremlin demanded that the CPY utilize national conflicts within Yugoslavia for its revolutionary goals. The country which had been labeled a typical “artificial bourgeois product of the Versailles system” and “the dungeon of its peoples” was to be decomposed to the historical and national provinces. The dissatisfaction of the Croats, Macedonians (who were not recognized as a nationality in the inter-war Yugoslavia), Montenegrins (who, though of the purest Serbian stock, were invented as a separate nationality only by the Comintern on grounds of their separate state traditions) and national minorities was to be used to that end. A federation of socialist Balkan republics was to be created on the debris of Yugoslavia.

This policy was duly carried out by the Yugoslav communists until 1935 when new tack arrived from the Moscow oracle. Having realized the Nazi danger before their Western democratic opposite numbers, the powers-that-be in the Kremlin made a U-turn and instructed their vassals to change policy. From now on preservation of Yugoslavia was the order of the day. However, the communists were to continue working for the liberation of the oppressed peoples and national minorities.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> On the communist nationality policy in this period see: Janko Pleterski, *Nacije, Jugoslavija revolucija*, Beograd 1985, pp. 244-374.



The German aggression and dismemberment of the state have created a “revolutionary situation” Yugoslav communists had been dreaming of for decades. Finally when Hitler attacked his former ally, the Soviet Union, Stalin gave a wink to his Myrmidons all over Europe to run to the aid of the “first country of socialism”, which many of them felt to be their real fatherland.

The Yugoslav communists led by crafty and ambitious Party secretary-general Josip Broz Tito started the long awaited revolution. Very soon Tito would show that he was not an ordinary Party aparatchik, but a leader in his own right, prone to disregard Moscow’s wishes when they were at variance with his own. The Communist Party under his leadership would start a four years’ ruthless struggle not only against the invaders, but also against all those real or imagined enemies of their subversive aims. As we have seen the *Volksdeutsche*, partly by their own choice and partly through the circumstances beyond their volition, landed in the latter category.

To be sure, there were Ethnic-German communist too.<sup>131</sup> In Zemun only, some 30 Swabian families were supporting the communist partisans.<sup>132</sup> The communists tried for quite a long time to win the Swabians round. Their leaflets kept urging them to join other nationalities in the struggle against the occupants.<sup>133</sup> The response was extremely modest, the only palpable success being scored in Slavonia where the *Volksdeutsche* company

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<sup>131</sup> Mari~i}, p. 77-81.

<sup>132</sup> Atanackovi}, *Srem...*, p. 168.

<sup>133</sup> *Vojvodina 1941. Radovi i diskusije sa skupa istori~ara u Subotici 9. i 10. decembra 1966*, Novi Sad 1967, pp. 374-375, 384-385.

“Ernst Thaelmann” was formed.<sup>134</sup> In the Vojvodina neither the political nor geographical conditions were propitious for winning the Swabians over. As we have seen, they were either pro-Nazi or pro-Hungarian, staunchly Roman-Catholic for the greater part, materialists and individualistic to the core. Furthermore, for understandable reasons they were certainly no Yugoslav patriots, so the patriotic card the communists were playing could hardly appeal to them. At the same time the Marxist mumbo-jumbo was even more incomprehensible for them than the Nazi one. In other words, except for some town workers, there was practically no ideological affinity between the partisans and the Swabian peasants<sup>135</sup> and the historical situation had already pitted the majority of the *Volksdeutsche* against their non-German neighbours.

The change of attitude of the Yugoslavs apparently did not come about over night. Unfortunately we know very little about the process and the factors that influenced it. It is however certain that the decisions were made centrally for the whole country.<sup>136</sup> As to the details, we are still in the dark. The decisions which determined lives of millions were reached at secret powwows of Tito and a few of his lieutenants. More often than not, nothing was committed to writing and the orders issuing from these sessions were transmitted orally. It was only partly due to the wartime exigencies that the decisions were made in that way.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> S. Hre~kovski, *Njema~ka ~eta "Ernst Thaelmann" u jedinicama NOV i POJ u Slavoniji*, Zbornik CDISB, 1, 1984.

<sup>135</sup> Voelkl, p. 85.

<sup>136</sup> Ferenc, *Nemci...*, p. 120.

<sup>137</sup> Mi{o Lekovi}, *O nekim zna~ajnim sednicama CK KPJ u toku 1942. godine*, Jugoslovenski istorijski ~asopis 3-4, 1971, p. 95.

The communists maintained conspiratorial way of decision-making throughout their history<sup>138</sup>. This fitted not only into the general pattern of their Party, but is a common feature of the Balkan political life in general which revolves rather around charismatic personages or powerful cliques than around mass party conventions.

The Serbian archives have given us no clue as to the decision making process concerning the plans for the expulsion of the Ethnic-Germans. Therefore we had to resort to the wartime memoirs of one of Titos closest henchman (who later on became the first Yugoslav dissident), Milovan \ilas, and to the research of the Slovenian colleagues whose work on the Slovenian Germans has some bearing on the fate of the Vojvodina Swabians too.

This is what \ilas tells us:

“In actual fact, the Politburo was saddled only with the problem of the Hungarian minority, because the fate of the German minority - the *Volksdeutscher* - was foreordained... Our Germans have so embittered our army and people that their expulsion from our soil was mentioned many times in the Central Committee. Yet perhaps we might have changed our minds had not the Russians, Poles and Czechs already decided for and partially carried out, the expulsions of their Germans. We adopted this stand without any discussion, as something which the German atrocities made understandable and justifiable.”<sup>139</sup>

\ilas also states that the Province Committee of the Communist Party for the Vojvodina was against the same

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<sup>138</sup> Indeed it has also remained the *modus operandi* of their successors of the Socialist Party of Serbia.

<sup>139</sup> Milovan \ilas, *Revolucionarni rat*, Beograd 1990, p. 410.

treatment being meted out to the Hungarians, although part of the Serbian population demanded it. The reasons in favour of the Hungarians were adduced: they were not as bad as the Germans and did not commit mass shootings. Furthermore, Hungary was going to be a socialist country and was not big enough for Yugoslavia to be afraid of her. As additional alleviating circumstance, the fact that at least some resistance against Horthy's regime existed among the Hungarians, was quoted. As the crucial argument, \ilas adduces, and justly too, that ordinary people - women, children - cannot be responsible for the misdeeds of their rulers.<sup>140</sup> However, what \ilas failed to explain is why the same was not valid for the Ethnic-Germans. He also forgot the resistance among the *Volksdeutsche* as well as the fact that ten odd of them were even decorated with the highest Yugoslav medal, that of the national hero.<sup>141</sup>

This passage by \ilas testifies that the decision to expel the Germans was reached unanimously, without discussion. This may have been so on the Yugoslav level. However, it seems the first plans as to what was to be done with the *Volksdeutsche* were made on the local or regional levels. It also seems that several ideas of different degree of severity have been ventilated. This can be concluded from the now known plans made in Slovenia by the Slovenian minority experts and some of the leading local communists.<sup>142</sup>

The final decision, like all the really important ones, was reached in the Central Committee of the CPY. It is an interesting

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>141</sup> Mari~i}, pp. 77-81, 163-169.

<sup>142</sup> Ferenc, *Nemci...*, pp. 117-118.

question when that was done. Many *Volksdeutsche* authors claim the fateful decision was made at the second session of the partisans' quasi-parliament (AVNOJ II) on 29 November 1943. This is not to be excluded, but there is no conclusive proof as yet. According to the Slovenian historian Bo`o Repe, the decision was reached between the end of November 1943 and early 1944. He concludes that from the fact that Rodoljub ^olakovi}, one of the communist top brass and the secretary of the AVNOJ, announced the foreseen expulsion to the Slovenian partisan leaders in early 1944.<sup>143</sup> On the other hand, as late as September 1944, the Slovenian Party leadership was in favour of deciding the fate of the national minorities on the federal, i.e. Yugoslav, level.<sup>144</sup> This would imply that the definite decision was still not made by then. From what \ilas says, one is tempted to conclude that the *final* decision was reached only by the time the Poles and the Czechs have already started expelling their Germans, i.e. after the end of the war. By that time, the majority of the *Volksdeutsche* who had remained in Yugoslavia were already interned in concentration camps.<sup>145</sup>

Among reasons he adduces for the expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche* \ilas quotes the embitterment of the people and the army. Due to the misdeeds committed by part of the Ethnic-Germans, this ill-feeling certainly existed. Not even the communist

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<sup>143</sup> Bo`o Repe, "*Nemci*" na Slovenskem po drugi svetovni vojni, in: Du{an Ne}ak (ed.), p. 147.

<sup>144</sup> Ferenc, *Nemci*..., p. 120.

<sup>145</sup> This author had intended to have an interview with \ilas about the matter, but the old dissident died only a few days before the author could contact him.

bigwigs were immune from Germanophobia.<sup>146</sup> To be sure, they did not let themselves be carried away when making decisions. The fate of the Hungarians, who were spared, proves this. Measures taken against the *Volksdeutsche*, and other real or imagined enemies show a great degree of premeditation: they were by no means only venting of dudgeon. Everything suggests that they were part of a well designed plan. The Nazi crimes in Yugoslavia and abroad and population transfers triggered off by the war, coupled with Germanophobia which was prevailing all over Europe, set the stage for the cruel treatment of the Yugoslav German minority, of which the Vojvodina Swabians were the largest part.

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<sup>146</sup> \ilas writes in his memoirs of how he smashed the skull with a rifle butt and then cut the neck of a captured Swabian SS-man. His friend Raja Nedeljkovi} did the same. (\ilas, p. 292.)

## Chapter Five

### “Weggehen auf einige Tage”: Evacuation and Flight

The tide of war which was increasingly running against the Germans, by summer 1944 brought the front-line dangerously close to the regions inhabited by the Danube Swabians. The jeopardy that their homeland, which so far had for the greatest part been spared from wartime devastation, may be turned into a battlefield was growing daily. The situation was especially aggravated by Romania's changing sides on 23 August 1944. The necessity of a comprehensive evacuation plan for all the Ethnic-Germans of South-East Europe became acute. Unfortunately for the *Volksdeutsche* the main Reich German agency in charge of them, the *VoMi*, was taken by surprise, with evacuation plans at their incipient stage. Still worse for the Swabians, Hitler was not favourably disposed towards an evacuation and the *VoM*, knowing that hesitated to act.<sup>1</sup>

The almost undefended Yugoslav part of the Banat was there for the taking by the rapidly advancing Red Army. Bacska was only a whit less menaced. Symrium, thanks to its westernmost position, was in a somewhat better situation. However, for all the three parts of the Vojvodina, it was a matter

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<sup>1</sup> Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 251.

of days, or at best of a week or two. The time for planning, organizing and executing an evacuation was running out fast. In this chapter we shall see how the different geographical and political situations of the three regions fatefully influenced the lives of the local *Volksdeutsche*.

## **The Banat: The Evacuation Manqué or Confusion à la allemande**

After Romania's dropping out, the Banat was the first to be in the way of the advancing Red Army. Realizing that, the *Volksgruppenfuehrer* Janko convened the *Volksdeutsche* leaders to discuss the evacuation. The preparation of a detailed plan of the evacuation was entrusted to the former leader of the *Renewers*, Dr. Jakob Awender.<sup>2</sup> Janko's idea was that all the Swabians join the same trek. Dr. Elfried Kirschner, seconded by the SS-Division *Prinz Eugen* to the Banat, was in charge of organizing the evacuation of the sick and the disabled. Dr. Adam Maurus was saddled with the organization of the evacuation of all the pupils. In this he collaborated with Schacht from the Reich German *Kinderlandverschickung* (KLV) organization which was sending children from bombed towns to the country in the safer parts of the Reich. Janko got the idea to send the children away from Schacht himself during the latter's stay in the Banat. However, not enough trains were put at his disposal for the

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<sup>2</sup> Janko, p. 240; Josef Beer, *Flucht aus dem serbischen Banat*, in: Josef Schmidt (ed.), *Die Donauschwaben 1944-1964. Beitrage zur Zeitgeschichte*, Muenchen 1968, p. 32.



purpose.<sup>3</sup> It seems the action was only begun, but never completed.<sup>4</sup>

Ing. Peter Kullmann was given the task of building an auxiliary pontoon bridge over the Tisa near Aradac, (to the West from Be~kerek<sup>5</sup>) because there was no other crossing for the whole of middle Banat except by Titel. The works were carried out by the technical department of the *Kreisvorstehung* (district leadership).<sup>6</sup> *SS-Sturmbannfuehrer* and chief of the *Ergaenzungskommando der Waffen-SS* (recruiting office of the *Waffen-SS*) Johann Keks had to organize the defence with all the forces at his disposal. He accepted the task only to give it up later on health grounds. The task was then given to Karl Heim. He was ordered to organize 50 *Deutsche Mannschaft* men from each village to protect their respective treks from possible partisan attacks. The evacuation plan envisaged that pregnant women, those with little children and the elderly be evacuated by train first. The rest of the *Volksdeutsche* was to follow in organized groups.<sup>7</sup>

The plan was for the treks to cross the Tisa near Titel, @abalj and Aradac. The Pan~evo bridge, leading to Belgrade, could not be used by civilians, because for strategic reasons it had been reserved for the *Wehrmacht*.

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<sup>3</sup> WK, p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> AVII, microfilm London-N-4/ H 299250. The last children transports left from Kovin, Plo~ica, Omoljica and Banatski Karlovac on 1 October 1944. (*Dok.*, p. 88E.)

<sup>5</sup> Today's Zrenjanin. It was renamed after the war after a communist hero killed in its vicinity while trying to rape a school-teacher.

<sup>6</sup> Janko, p. 240; Beer, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Janko, p. 240.

The evacuation plan was finished in only three days.<sup>8</sup> It envisaged five march groups in accordance with the division of the Banat into five districts. Each group was to be headed by the respective *Kreisleiter*. The groups were subdivided into march columns, each of them led by a village or a part of a town in case of bigger towns. Other settlements were to join in with the leading place. There were 53 march columns. For greater mobility they were divided into the groups of ten (*Zehnergruppen*). Each of the 53 march columns was given guard, a leader, a physician, a midwife, youth assistant, women assistant, a wagon with medical equipment, spare parts and tools, archive, parish books as well as with coal and petrol.<sup>9</sup>

The following places were designated as the leading places: Mokrin, Bo~ar, Nema~ki Elemir, Nakovo, Molin, St. Hubert, Kikinda I, II, Hajfeld, Nema~ka Crnja, ^estereg, Sv. \ura|, Katarina, Be~kerek I, II, III, Lazarevo, Banatski Despotovac, Martinica, Pardanj, [upljaja, Kni}anin, Perlez, Modo{, Se~anj, Sar~a, Hajdu~ica, Mariolana, Alibunar, Gudurica, Vr{ac I, II, III, IV, Banatski Karlovac I, II, Bela Crkva I, II, Jabuka, Gloganj, Ka~arevo I,II, Opovo, Pan~evo I, II, III, IV, Mramorak I, II, Kovin, Banatski Brestovac, Omoljica, Plo~ica. It seems the plan was completed on 1 September 1944.<sup>10</sup>

The plan was extremely exhaustive. It determined with a true Teutonic precision the number of people in each column. It never surpassed 2800 while the moving speed was calculated at approximately 5 km per hour. Eleven columns were to cross the

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<sup>8</sup> Beer, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Janko, p. 241.

<sup>10</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 27-A, f. 2, d. 6.

pontoon near Novi Be~ej, twelve near Aradac and thirty near Titel. The exact composition of each column, the precise time of departure, the duration of the journey, the time of arrival to the Tisa and the hour of crossing were determined. Eventual lay-overs were not taken into account. If the travelers wanted to make use of them they had to count them in and set out earlier.<sup>11</sup>

On 8 September Awender summoned all the Banat mayors and *Ortsgruppenfuhrers* (village heads) to discuss the plan. They were given to understand that the Banat would become a battlefield and therefore had to be temporarily evacuated. No one thought that leaving home would be for good.<sup>12</sup>

Every family was instructed through a circular letter what was to be prepared for the journey: documents, foodstuffs, clothes, bed-linen, dishes, lamps, first aid equipment, etc. Each family received instruction what kind of horses were to be used, how to cover wagons etc. By mid-September all the details were clear. Every district commissioner had orders for the march of his group. As foreseen the whole evacuation was to be carried out in three days.<sup>13</sup>

It seems that the biggest technical problem was the organization of armed escort. The escort was to be made up of the old, disabled and youngsters, resembling the later Reich German *Volkssturm* which was meant as Hitler's last-ditch defense.<sup>14</sup> Apparently the main problem was a stoppage in arms distribution. This can be gleaned from the repeated order of the

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<sup>11</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 27-A, f. 2, d. 7.

<sup>12</sup> WK, p. 205.

<sup>13</sup> Janko, p. 241.

<sup>14</sup> Beer, p. 36.

*Deutsche Mannschaft* commander that the distribution be completed by 18 September.<sup>15</sup>

Technical preparations over, the leadership started preparing the people psychologically for departure. All the means of propaganda were used, the press and above all rallies. Many heads of the families who were serving in far away parts protested at their families being evacuated in their absence and demanded to be returned home to defend their nears and dears.<sup>16</sup> Opposition to the evacuation had been strong enough at home too, and had become even stronger few weeks before the catastrophe set in.<sup>17</sup> The people loved their homeland and property more than they feared the Russians and partisans.<sup>18</sup> In his memoirs, Janko claims that the majority was silent. The willingness to leave which had existed in the beginning was spoiled through “light-headed anti-propaganda”. The resolve to stay was strengthened by the refugees from the Romanian Banat and the propaganda of the *Volksgruppenfuehrung*.<sup>19</sup> Not only refugees from Romania were destroying the willingness to go, but

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<sup>15</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 27-A, f. 2, d. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Janko, p. 242.

<sup>17</sup> WK, p. 205.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; Beer, p. 41. A communist report from late September speaks about a conference of the Swabian leaders in Be~kerec. 80% of those present were against the evacuation. Similar voting, with similar outcome occurred in other places. Thus in Mokrin 60% of the *Volksdeutsche* were in favour of staying, whereas in Nakovo as many as 90% were oppose to leaving home. (Gojko Malovi}, *Vojna uprava u Banatu 1944-45* (MA paper, MS), Beograd 1979, p. 102. The present author is grateful and indebted to Mr. Malovi} for supplying him with a copy of this valuable work.)

<sup>19</sup> Janko, p. 242; Wuescht, *Beitrag...*, p. 135.

also the appearance of the vanguard of an SS-division awoke false hopes of the reversal of military luck.<sup>20</sup>

A crucial role in awaking these false hopes was played by an editorial by Georg Peierle “Wir bleiben!” (“We’re staying!”) in the official *Banater Beobachter* of 18 September 1944. Janko claims in his memoirs the article was meant for the greedy neighbours who were eagerly expecting the Swabian’s departure in order to lay hands on the *Volksdeutsche* property. The Swabians were allegedly seduced by the title, since they were too lazy to read the whole article.<sup>21</sup> This sounds strange: the text that was not even meant for the Germans seduced them because they were too lazy to read it. It seems that the *Volksdeutsche* leaders had to play for time while pending the final decision of the higher ups. They had to make people ready to leave but to reassure them that the danger was not imminent.

There were plenty of reasons for lingering. Ever since the Romanian Germans had started arriving, the orders from Belgrade forbade anyone from leaving the Serbian part of the Banat.<sup>22</sup> However, despite of the orders, the *Volksdeutsche* leadership managed to spirit out of towns part of the old and children.<sup>23</sup>

It is still not clear who was responsible for stopping the evacuation. Some authors blame Hitler who believing in the imminent Anglo-Russian conflict at the Straits, had been putting

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<sup>20</sup> Beer, p. 36.m

<sup>21</sup> Janko, p. 248.

<sup>22</sup> Beer, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

off the evacuation until it was too late.<sup>24</sup> The higher SS-police chief Hermann Behrends<sup>25</sup> who was empowered to give permission for evacuation repeatedly refused to do so, quoting Hitler's prohibition of 10 September, or at least Janko claims so.<sup>26</sup> It was the aim of this peppy and ambitious SS-*Gruppenfuehrer* to acquire the military kudos by recapturing Timisoira on 19 September with a motley handful of *Wehrmacht* soldiers, *Deutsche Mannschaft* members, SS-men on leave and Auxiliary policemen. As might have been expected, the attack was a flop, but Behrends was awarded a *Ritterkreuz* because his superiors were misinformed as to the true result of his action.<sup>27</sup> In any case, the episode proved of significance for the further fate of the *Volksdeutsche*: valuable time was lost, and the Soviets, who had been resting, were spurred to continue their advance.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Wuescht, *Ursachen...*, p. 34. See also: Scherer, p. 5. (The opinion that the conflict between the Soviets and the British was about to break out was shared also by Hitler's trouble-shooter for South-Eastern Europe Neubacher.)

<sup>25</sup> Behrends (1907-1947) was an old hand in the *Volksdeutsche* business. For several years he was the *VoMi* chief of staff, before being sent to the *Waffen-SS*. In the autumn of 1944 he was the higher SS-police chief in Serbia. (Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 51.)

<sup>26</sup> Janko, p. 255. This was claimed also by Werner Lorenz after the war. (Scherer, p. 9; Janko, p. 288.) Since both of them had reasons to shirk responsibility, one cannot but feel a bit skeptical. Behrends had been conveniently tried and executed by the Yugoslav authorities so he could not bring forth his own version.

<sup>27</sup> His deceit was discovered only later and he was duly punished. (*WK*, p. 212; Scherer, p. 9; Beer, p. 33.)

<sup>28</sup> *WK*, p. 207.

Partly stultifying his own statement about Behrends' guilt, Janko also claims that it was Himmler who forbade the evacuation of the Yugoslav Banat, since Arthur Phleps, who was in charge of evacuating the Romanian Banat, had by 5 September already surpassed the permitted quota of 30 000 *Volksdeutsche* refugees from that region. Janko states that Himmler had foreseen a quota of 80 000 for the Yugoslav Banat.<sup>29</sup> Now Behrends prohibited every evacuation and even ordered the Romanian Swabians back.<sup>30</sup>

Beer's account is somewhat different. He claims that Behrends had asked Himmler to permit the evacuation, but the *Reichsfuehrer-SS* refused, saying there were no reasons for such a measure. Behrends threatened to court-martial anyone furthering or organizing any evacuation.<sup>31</sup> The Banat was sealed off and even crossing the Danube in order to go to Belgrade was impossible<sup>32</sup>. On the other hand, Janko's and Beer's accounts both speak of the mood created by the refugees from the Romanian Banat which was in favour of staying put.<sup>33</sup>

According to Janko, Behrends refused to allow even the *Volksdeutsche* who had had relatives in the Bacska to cross over the Tisa. Without the permission of the SS and the Hungarians it was impossible to go over to Bacska, and they kept denying it. The roads were crammed with refugees, the higher ups in Belgrade refused to provide a ferry across the Tisa,

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<sup>29</sup> Janko, pp. 243-244.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 244; WK, p. 205.

<sup>31</sup> WK, p. 207.

<sup>32</sup> Beer, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Beer, p. 36; Janko, p. 244.

and initially even denied permission for building a pontoon near Aradac, so as to prevent the partisans from Bacska penetrating into the Banat in force. At long last Ing. Kullmann managed to clinch the pontoon issue and to build it. However, it was irreparably damaged before it could be of greater use.<sup>34</sup>

The resistance to the evacuation was not confined to part of the *Volksdeutsche* alone. The *Wehrmacht* was afraid of roads getting blocked and of the bad effect on the morale of the non-Germans who would stop being cooperative if they saw the Swabians leaving.<sup>35</sup>

Janko tried to have the Division *Prinz Eugen* returned to the Banat on 20 September 1944 to defend its homeland. However he made a mistake of addressing the military command in Belgrade instead of Himmler personally. He was referred to general Maximilian von Weichs, Commander-in-chief of all German forces in South East Europe who did not even deign him an answer. His later telegram to Himmler also went unanswered. Finally, *Obergruppenfuehrer* Berger from the *Waffen-SS* headquarters promised to intercede to have the division transferred, but as it was badly needed on the Bulgarian border, nothing came of it.<sup>36</sup>

It is typical that reports about the evacuation of the Banat diverge, depending on the author. It was in the Banat that the evacuation signally failed so all the responsible officials were accusing others, the higher ups (preferably the deceased ones) for the catastrophe. Although the accounts about the evacuation

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<sup>34</sup> Janko, p. 246.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; *WK*, p. 208.

<sup>36</sup> Scherer, pp. 9-10.



are often confused and contradictory, one can glean from them that neither the *Volksgruppenfuehrung* nor the VoMi (its commissioner *Sturmbannfuehrer* Hintze who was sent there in the last third of September, included) measured up.<sup>37</sup>

The first Soviet vanguards entered the Yugoslav Banat during the night 28/29 September 1944 near Modof and [up]laja. The Red Army met with almost no resistance passing through one by one of the Ethnic-German villages: Se~anj, Sar~a, Lazarevo, Banatski Despotovac... It was only near Be~kerek that the Germans managed to put up a more serious resistance.<sup>38</sup> The Soviets had reached Be~kerek on 1 October and Behrends, acting on alleged Himmler's go-ahead, finally gave permission for the evacuation.<sup>39</sup> By then, spontaneous fleeing had already started in some places. In Bela Crkva it was general Schneckenburg who urged the Swabians to join his withdrawing troops.<sup>40</sup>

Some more exposed villages started to or tried to flee even earlier. The inhabitants of Modof tried to flee on 29 September when they heard that the Russians were only 1,5 km away, but the local representative of the *Volksgruppenfuehrung* stopped them. The next day it was too late: the Soviets were already there.<sup>41</sup> The villagers of Se~anj were misinformed on 28

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<sup>37</sup> Wuescht, *Beitrag...*, p. 116; Florian Kraemer, *Flucht der Donauschwaben aus der Schwaebischen Tuerkei*, in: Schmidt (ed.), p. 71.

<sup>38</sup> WK, p. 210; Beer, pp. 39, 44.

<sup>39</sup> Scherer, p. 9; Beer, p. 41. Wuescht claims the permission was issued only on 2 October. (Wuescht, *Beitrag...*, p. 137.)

<sup>40</sup> Beer, pp. 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> Josef Burger, *Heimatsbuch der Gemeinde Modof im Banat und Ortschronik der Gemeinde Kaptalan*, s.l. 1964, p. 213.

September that they were quite safe, only to learn the next day that the Russians were in the nearby Modo{. General panic ensued, and the next day the Russians were in their village too.<sup>42</sup> The Swabians of Hajdu~ica complained later that the leaders had been spreading assertions that the Germans would stay at home , resuscitating thereby unfounded optimism. This then made the timely evacuation impossible.<sup>43</sup> On 1 October the mayor of Kovin received permission from Janko to set out, but by then those possessing wagons (the richer?) were no longer willing to go, whereas those who had no wagons (the poorer?) had no means of transport. Eventually only 11 wagons left.<sup>44</sup> In [up]laja the *Deutsche Mannschaft* tried to spur the people to leave, but the sound of the approaching battle had scared everybody into their cellars so nobody left while there was still time.<sup>45</sup>

By the time the first Red Army units started pouring into the Serbian Banat and the evacuation permission was finally given, the German administrative apparatus was already crumbling. Wildest rumors spread like a forest fire, disseminating panic or vain hopes. The Swabian leaders claimed after the war that, on Awender's instigation, at a certain point they had been on the verge of giving the signal to set out, but had then got cold feet for fear Behrends would stop them with the military and the police.<sup>46</sup> When permission was finally granted, they tried to inform by phone as many local leaders as possible, but lines to many places

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<sup>42</sup> Ludwig Toutnuit, Setschan. *Monographie einer detschen Gemeinde im mittleren Banat*, Freilassing 1962, p. 44.

<sup>43</sup> Sohl, p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> *Dok.*, p. 96-97.

<sup>45</sup> Beer, p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> *WK*, p. 209.

had already been cut off. On the other hand, many places exhausted by protracted uncertainty and fear, had no desire to leave any more.<sup>47</sup> Some settlements (Āestereg, Banatski Sveti \ural) vacillated since heavy rains had made roads unnegotiable. They decided to set out only the next morning, losing thereby precious time.<sup>48</sup> Only the citizens of the capital of the Serbian Banat, Be~kerek, were evacuated orderly and according to the plan, thanks to the *Wehrmacht* vehicles put at their disposal.<sup>49</sup> Johann Wuescht (himself a former member of the *Volksgruppenfuehrung*) saw the reason that many had not left in their habit to await instructions from the powers-that-be. When the order to start finally arrived, the majority were already psychically crushed, no longer wishing to leave.<sup>50</sup> It was for these psychological reasons that the northern Banat was not evacuated, although it had had whole five days before the Russian came. Indeed it was there that the opposition to leaving home was the strongest.<sup>51</sup> Wrong information sowed confusion preventing some people from setting forth or changing minds of those already on the road. A train from Vr{ac arrived to Be~kerek completely empty, because people thought the evacuation was already impossible.<sup>52</sup> According to Janko, half-empty trains were reaching Vienna for the next few days,

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<sup>47</sup> WK, p. 211.

<sup>48</sup> Beer, p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Wuescht, *Beitrag...*, p. 138.

<sup>51</sup> Beer, p. 46.

<sup>52</sup> WK, p. 210-211.

because the prohibition to cross over from the Banat to Belgrade was misunderstood in the opposite sense.<sup>53</sup>

The general confusion was increased by fast changing events on the spot. The partisans have quickly blocked the roads leading to Titel. Thus the auxiliary bridge near Aradac became the only way out and the desired goal of all those who had made up their minds to leave. After some groups of the fleeing *Volksdeutsche* had crossed it, it was (it turned out later) prematurely blown to pieces because there were no forces to protect it.<sup>54</sup>

The prevailing confusion was epitomized best by good or (which was more often the case) ill fortunes of various Ethnic-German villages. As we have already seen, the villages of Modo{, [upljaja, Banatski Despotovac, Se~anj, Sar~a, Lazarevo, Hajdu~ica and some others, were simply overrun by the Red Army and the partisans. The Swabians of Mramorak had set out, but then returned home at the Serbs' instigation. The villagers of Glogonj returned for fear of the partisans' fire.<sup>55</sup> The most important town of the Southern Banat, Pan~evo, held out for eight more days. During this time the *Luftwaffe* was ferrying civilians across the Danube to the nearby Zemun.<sup>56</sup> The *Volksdeutsche* of Molin, ^estereg and Banatski Sveti \ura| did not get very far because of to long vacillation. The Swabians from Molin returned scared of the partisans; the Ethnic-Germans of Banatski Sveti \ura| returned because they thought that the neighbouring village of Katarina through which their way led, had

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<sup>53</sup> Janko, p. 272.

<sup>54</sup> Beer, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> Janko, p. 271.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

been taken by the Russians.<sup>57</sup> The trek from Glogovac returned because the road to Kni}anin had been blocked.<sup>58</sup> Vr{ac, one of the three most important towns in the Yugoslav Banat, could not be evacuated in time because the local *Strurbannfuehrer* Bachmann had had a cranky idea of organizing a defence, which of course proved futile.<sup>59</sup> Some people left Bela Crkva by train. Also 23 wagons departed from this town.<sup>60</sup> According to Janko, it was only from Bo~ar that a larger number of people left.<sup>61</sup> Curiously enough, Perlez was taken by the partisans, but the local Germans were allowed to leave in peace.<sup>62</sup>

The capital of the *Volksdeutsche* Banat, Be~kerek, came under enemy fire on 30 September. Already on the next day the situation became critical for the Germans so the mayor Josef Gion, ordered the evacuation to start by the *Wehrmacht* trains. This was thwarted by Behrends' right hand man, *SS-Strurbannfuehrer* Fiedler. On 2 October the situation deteriorated further for the Germans so they started fleeing despite Fiedler's prohibition. *Ortsgruppe* and the *Deutsche Mannschaft* laid hands on two empty tow-boats and managed to evacuate part of the population as far as Vrbas. Gion managed to obtain trucks from the *Luftwaffe* which took the refugees to the Aradac bridge. When Behrends finally gave green light, Fiedler changed his tune, this time forcing the people to leave. On the other hand, secret propaganda was spreading the word that a

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>58</sup> *WK*, p. 211.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 230-231.

<sup>61</sup> Janko, p. 285.

<sup>62</sup> *Dok.*, p. 100.

deal had been struck with the influential Serbs that the Swabians would come to no harm, so there was no reason for running away.

At noon on 2 October the town commander ordered the town to be vacated since it was pressed by two Soviet divisions from which it could not be defended. At 2:15 PM Janko and the *Volksdeutsche* leaders left their capital. The town fell two hours later.<sup>63</sup>

In its report for October 1944 the Chief Bureau of the *VoMi* estimated that some 20 000 Ethnic-Germans had left the Serbian Banat. It was cca. 15 000 less than the people in Berlin thought at first.<sup>64</sup> To this number one should add several thousand Banat Swabians serving in various German units throughout Europe and Yugoslavia.<sup>65</sup> The West Germany's government's official publication on the fate of the Yugoslav Germans, suggests an even lower number of the evacuees: 12 000, this being roughly 10% of the *Volksdeutsche* from the Yugoslav Banat.

Due to a mixture of geographical and historical circumstances, it was the Banat Swabians who paid the highest price for their illusions and their role in the Second World War. Of all three parts of the Vojvodina it was in the Banat that the *Volksdeutsche* had the greatest power, often abusing it to the detriment of their non-German neighbours. The real power, be it

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<sup>63</sup> Janko, pp. 280-281.

<sup>64</sup> London- N- 4/H 299303-4.

<sup>65</sup> It is interesting but to a degree also understandably, that officer corps and 50% of the NCOs of the Bosnian-Muslim 13. SS "Hand'ar"-Division were the Vojvodina Swabians. (Enver Red'i}, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, Sarajevo 1998, p. 339.)

said once again, rested with the *Wehrmacht* commanders in Belgrade, and the ultimate one with the top Nazi chiefs in Berlin who were using the Swabians just like they had been using the Germans of the Reich for their own ends. However, it was the Swabians, who having been accomplices in many crimes of the Reich Germans, who had to bear the brunt of the revenge. The greatest part of the Vojvodina Germans who would suffer Calvary under the new communist regime, was from the Banat. It seemed that some cosmic justice was at work. However, can a cosmic justice account for passing in silence over good deeds the *Volksdeutsche* had done in order to protect their non-German neighbours, the deeds which were forgotten or had to remain unspoken of once the tables were turned. Can cosmic justice excuse the suffering of the innocent women, old men and children? Indeed not. But as we shall shortly see, the *revolutionary justice* felt it needed no justification.

### **Bacska: Partly Successful Evacuation**

Bacska is only little more to the West from the Banat, but this geographical fact presented the local *Volksdeutsche* with a few precious days that saved many Swabian lives. However, the more propitious position was offset by a number of aggravating circumstances. The main one was the fact that out of consideration for “the last ally of the Reich” (as Hungary was called), no plans for evacuation were made. The opinion that the morale of the Hungarians should not be sapped by plans of the evacuation of the *Volksdeutsche* was not completely unanimous,

but it was a prevalent one.<sup>66</sup> As the situation was growing worse for the Germans, the representative of the Reich in Budapest promised that Germany would defend Hungary's borders as her own.<sup>67</sup> A promise so solemnly worded could not be belied by a premature evacuation of the *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>68</sup> This was also the opinion of Werner Lorenz who was just then touring Hungary. According to an eyewitness, he would not hear of the evacuation and receiving the Swabians in the Reich.<sup>69</sup>

Another serious obstacle were the Hungarian authorities. They had lost faith in the ultimate German victory and they have written off Bacska. Their only worry was to bring their property to safety.<sup>70</sup>

For these reasons no plans of evacuation were made. The sole exception was the region around Novi Sad. However, due to the speedy advance of the Red Army, it could have been carried out only partly and as late as 4 through 9 October.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, apart from these political hindrances, technical and psychological ones also existed. The first technical difficulty was the lack of horses that were mercilessly requisitioned by the Hungarian and German military throughout the war years.<sup>72</sup> This difficulty was realized also by the *VoMi* at the beginning of the

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<sup>66</sup> Lorant Tilkovszky, *Ungarn und die deutsche "Volksgruppenpolitik" 1938-1945*, Budapest 1981, p. 328; *Dok.*, p. 87E.

<sup>67</sup> London-N- 4 / H 299303-4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*; *Dok.*, p. 134.

<sup>69</sup> *Dok.*, p. 134.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Dok.*, p. 87E.

<sup>72</sup> *Dok.*, p. 119; Martin Schneider, *Milititsch*, Freilassing 1968, p. 246.



evacuation, but it was overcome in the process.<sup>73</sup> Another technical difficulty was caused by the Magyar authorities: in the days of evacuation they were reducing instead of increasing the number of trains.<sup>74</sup> The Danube, which brought the ancestors of the Swabians to their new homeland 250 years ago, was mined and the number of ships and barges insufficient.<sup>75</sup> Telephone lines were inaccessible for private persons, the *Volksbund* and even for the *Wehrmacht* units. The police and the river guard were busy with themselves. They were only interested in their own safety and the safety of the communal money-boxes.<sup>76</sup>

In the last days of September, due to the rapidly advancing Red Army, the situation was extremely tense in the whole of Hungary.<sup>77</sup> The mood among the Bacska Germans was described by the referee for folk questions of the German embassy in Budapest as “alarming”.<sup>78</sup> In connection with the Soviet approach, the Germans feared a Serbian uprising and excesses against the *Volksdeutsche* there.<sup>79</sup>

The situation for the Swabians was made even more difficult by the fact that 1100 out of 1300 officials of the *Volksbund* had been called up, so the organization almost ceased to function: neither the economic service, soldiers’ aid, nor any other service

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<sup>73</sup> It was supposed that 30 000 to 40 000 Swabian families in Hungary had no wagons and horses. (AVII, Bonn 8 / 76.)

<sup>74</sup> *Dok.*, p. 137.

<sup>75</sup> *Dok.*, p. 135.

<sup>76</sup> *Dok.*, p. 137.

<sup>77</sup> London-N- 4 / H 299303-4.

<sup>78</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 325.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; London-N- 4 / H 299303-4; Tilkovszky, *Ungarn...*, p. 328.

functioned. The *Volksbund's* paramilitary units (the *Heimatschutz*) were poorly armed and trained.<sup>80</sup>

Psychologically, the Bacska Germans were affected by the lot of their brethren from the Banat. This increased their worries and dissatisfaction with the policy of the Reich.<sup>81</sup>

In such a situation, the Germans availed themselves of the order of the commander of the Szegeed military district issued on 4 October, to start evacuating.<sup>82</sup> This was announced on 6 October enabling thus the *Volksdeutsche* to start their own evacuation.<sup>83</sup> On 7 October, Lorenz, senior SS police chief in Hungary *SS-Obergruppenfuehrer* Winkelmann, the German ambassador to Hungary Edmund Veesenmayer and the leader of the Hungarian Germans Dr. Franz Basch ordered the evacuation to start.<sup>84</sup>

Bacska was divided into two evacuation zones: to the South of the Franz Joseph Canal (the Danube - Tisa Canal), and to the North of it. The evacuation of the southern zone was ordered on 7 October, and of the northern one on 10 October. By 11 October a 120 km long trek was leaving Sombor for Dunaföldvár via Baja.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the lack of evacuation plans, instructions as to what was to be taken on the journey appeared here too. One flier dated 3 October survives. It contains the exact list of the necessities to be packed: 15 kg flour pro person, 7 kg fat or oil,

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<sup>80</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 326.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> London-N-4 / H 299303-4.

<sup>84</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 327; Tilkovszky, *Ungarn...*, p. 328.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

7 kg ham or bacon, 3 kg jam etc. The list contained items of cloths and dishes to be taken, as well as tools: axes, hammers, ropes, French keys etc. It was emphasized that the refugees should take with them their personal documents, such as diplomas, military papers, bank-books, contracts etc. It was mandatory to take weapons and ammunition. As a means of transport horse drawn wagons were prescribed, each carrying 7 people.<sup>86</sup> It was envisaged that every settlement should have two blacksmiths with their equipment as well as two ambulance wagons: one for the sick, and the other for medicines. The *Frauenschaft* (female organization) was in charge of making lists of all evacuees.<sup>87</sup> At first sight, it may seem strange that such exhaustive instructions were prepared at such short notice. But then, the whole detailed plan for the evacuation of the Banat was made in only three days. However, the instructions were meant for the peasants only and it seems they could not be sufficiently disseminated among the people for lack of time. The organization of the evacuation on the national level in Hungary, and therefore on the regional level in Bacska, was lacking. (On the ethnically much more homogeneous territory of the pre-war Hungary, no desire to evacuate existed.)<sup>88</sup>

This is how the evacuation of Bacska was carried out by districts: the Apatin district was evacuated 8-12 October;

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<sup>86</sup> Eventually wagons of those who had refused to leave were requisitioned for those willing to go but lacked wagons. (Tilkovszky, *Ungarn...*, p. 328.)

<sup>87</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 328.

<sup>88</sup> Beer, p. 50. (This can be explained by weaker national consciousness, stronger pro-Hungarian feelings and absence of fear of Serbian retaliation in those parts.)

Crvenka was evacuated on 8 October, after the Reich and Ethnic-Germans had shot 700 Jews hauled there from the Bor mine in Serbia; the district of Ba-ka Palanka was vacated between 11 and 13 October; the Od`aci district from 9 to 12 October; the Kula district from 8 to 10 October; the northernmost district of Sombor was evacuated by mid-October.<sup>89</sup>

Dr. Mackel informed his superiors in the *Auswaertiges Amt* that in all some 60 to 70 thousand *Volksdeutsche* from Bacska had been evacuated.<sup>90</sup> This was far below the foreseen mark of 240 000. The intention was to evacuate c. 200 000 Ethnic-Germans from the Yugoslav part of Bacska and 40 000 more from the Hungarian part of the region.<sup>91</sup> Some 40 000 Swabians were serving in the *Waffen-SS*, the *Wehrmacht* or the *Honved*, so that approximately 60 to 70 000 Bacska Germans remained to await the tender mercies of the Red Army and the partisans.<sup>92</sup> Out of some 12 000 mostly elderly men, the 31st grenadier SS-division (sometimes called the Bacska division) was formed . It would take part in the important battle of Batina later on.<sup>93</sup>

Together with the lack of preparedness, there were other factors which militated against a successful outcome of the evacuation. The Chief Bureau of the *VoMi* in its report for October 1944 adduces the traditional attachment of the *Volksdeutsche* peasants to the soil. Furthermore, the

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<sup>89</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 329; Wuescht, *Beitrag...*, p. 118.

<sup>90</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 331.

<sup>91</sup> London-N-4 / H 299303-4.

<sup>92</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 331.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

propaganda of the Church was mentioned as an aggravating factor.<sup>94</sup> The Roman-Catholic clergy in accordance with the orders of their bishops, remained in their places and were propagandizing in favour of staying at home. Their influence was strongest over those already least disposed to move, i.e. the elderly.<sup>95</sup>

The majority of the *Volksdeutsche* who had joined the trek travelled the road Sombor-Bezdan-Baja-Kalocsa-Dunaföldvár. At the last-mentioned place, the Danube was crossed and the way led further to Austria, Bohemia and Germany.<sup>96</sup> The vast majority of treks travelled for the greatest part of the way unmolested and reached their destinations safely.<sup>97</sup> It seems the villagers of Sivac were among the rare unlucky ones who had to suffer an air raid.<sup>98</sup> More often than not people had to sleep outdoors or even outside of settlements.<sup>99</sup> The experiences with Hungarian peasants varied from very pleasant to extremely unpleasant.<sup>100</sup> The quoted *VoMi* report states that the behaviour of the Magyars as well as the Hungarian authorities differed considerably from case to case. It is interesting to mention an observation of the *VoMi* that the fleeing *Volksdeutsche* met with kinder reception in purely Hungarian villages than in those of the

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<sup>94</sup> The *Magyarons* were of course also in favour of staying. (London-N- 4 / H 299303-4; Wuescht, *Beitrag...*, p. 119.)

<sup>95</sup> Krimm (ed.), p. 186.

<sup>96</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 330.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Baer, Mueller, Rentner, *Siwatz 1766-1944* (henceforth: *Siwatz*), Freilassing 1963, p. 142.

<sup>99</sup> Schneider, p. 249; London-N- 4 / H 299306.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid; *Dok*, p. 123.

magyarized Swabians who tended to be offish.<sup>101</sup> In any case, it would turn out very soon that the behaviour of the Hungarians, as far as the ordinary people go, was not much different from the Swabians' conationals in Germany and Austria.

It seems that a considerable part of the Ethnic-Germans counted on unfriendly welcome, and that this, coupled with rain-drenched roads served as the main deterrent from setting out. The *Volksbund*, to all intents, broke up, with most of its officials conscripted or bitterly quarrelling with the Reich German officials.<sup>102</sup> Even in those places where a branch of the *Volksbund* was still functioning, no-one was willing to obey its orders any more.<sup>103</sup> Already often mentioned Johann Wuescht deemed it a mistake that the people were sent not far from their homes, and that they were told the evacuation was only a temporary short-time measure.<sup>104</sup> Thus for instance, the *Kreisleitung* of Buljkes was convincing people that they were

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<sup>101</sup> London-N- 4 / H 299308; Such was the experience of the Ethnic-Germans from Seki } in the village of Bikacs, Hungary. (Sandles, p. 279.)

<sup>102</sup> Basch was a case in point: he was recriminating the *SS-Standartenfuehrer* Weibgen who had been sent to Hungary by *VoMi* alongside 280 SS-men and 10 officers to carry out the evacuation, for unsuccessful evacuation of Baranya. (Scherer, p. 10; Tilkovszky, *Ungarn...*, p. 329.) In the second half of October Basch was already fed up with everything. He gave up his post and went to be a schoolteacher in some outback. Nothing illustrates the amount of prevailing confusion better than this bizarre episode. (Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 254.)

<sup>103</sup> Josef Volkmar Senz (ed.) *Apatiner Heimatbuch. Aufstieg, Leistung und Untergang der donauschwaebischen Grossfgemeinde Abthausen/Apatin im Batscher Land* (henceforth: AP), Straubing 1960, p. 560.

<sup>104</sup> Wuescht, *Beitrag...*, p. 117.

only going to neighbouring Baranya for three weeks. A *Hauptsturmfuehrer* was even trying to convince them to stay at home and to evacuate only the young. His line of argument was that it was already too late for evacuation, and that the Russians were also humans who would not harm anyone, only if wined and dined properly.<sup>105</sup>

This is what the inhabitants of Apatin, the greatest German commune in Bacska, thought about (as they had been told) a temporary evacuation to Western Hungary: why go to Western Hungary? What would they do there if they were not admitted to enter the Reich? Were they to return to the pillaged houses? If the things would turn out that way, why leave in the first place: it would be better to await the enemy on one's doorstep and if possible salvage what one could. Furthermore, they thought they had never harmed anyone, so they had nothing to fear, not even from the local Serbs.<sup>106</sup> The Swabian *Magyarons* were the most fervent supporters of this way of thinking. On the other hand, those having relatives in the *Waffen-SS*, the *Wehrmacht* or other organizations, the activists of the *Kulturbund* or the *Volksbund* and their relatives were the main champions of the evacuation throughout Bacska.<sup>107</sup> However, in a state of confusion, when it seemed that every organization had collapsed and the means of transport were lacking, many were inclined to accept the suggestions of the Apatin Germans which seemed most

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<sup>105</sup> *Dok.*, p. 119.

<sup>106</sup> *AP*, p. 560.

<sup>107</sup> Anton Zollitsch, *Filipowa. Entstehen, Wachsen und Vergehen einer donauschwaebischen Gemeinde in der Batschka*, Freilassing 1957, p. 177.

reasonable. Some *Volksdeutsche* were influenced by stories of many *Wehrmacht* soldiers, that the bomb-devastated Germany was not able to house and support the refugees.<sup>108</sup> This then had created such a mood that even when the necessary wagons were finally provided, the large majority did not want to leave.<sup>109</sup>

The situation of the Bacska German refugees (and indeed of all the Hungarian *Volksdeutsche* refugees) was made even more difficult by the unwillingness of the German authorities to admit them to the Reich. It was planned to have the Hungarian Germans remain in Western Hungary.<sup>110</sup> The powers-that-be in Berlin wanted to permit access to the Banat Swabians alone. They liked the Swabians as opulent peasants and valiant soldiers serving the cause of the Reich well enough, but when they became destitute thanks to the policy of the Reich, they were not so welcome any more.<sup>111</sup> *Gauleiters* had to finish haggling over the number of the refugees each of them would accept to his fief first. On the other hand, the Hungarian government's commissioner for the evacuation denied the right to stay on Hungarian soil to the Swabian refugees from the Serbian and Romanian Banat. However, since it was the Germans who were still calling the shots, the Magyars had to put up with the uninvited guests for some time.<sup>112</sup> It was only on 13 October that Himmler informed Lorenz that the Ethnic-Germans from South-East Europe may start entering the Reich's territory.<sup>113</sup> A day later

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<sup>108</sup> *Dok*, p. 130.

<sup>109</sup> *AP*, p. 561.

<sup>110</sup> Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 254.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>112</sup> Tilkovszky, *Ungarn...*, p. 329.

<sup>113</sup> Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 254.



general Keitel, the chief of the Supreme Command of the *Wehrmacht* informed the German commander of the South-East, the commander of the army-group South, the representative of the *Wehrmacht* in Hungary, the *Wehrmacht* commander in the *Independent State of Croatia*, the *VoMi* and the *Auswaertiges Amt* that Hitler had allowed 250 000 Ethnic-Germans from South-East Europe to be evacuated. *VoMi* was entrusted with carrying out the task.<sup>114</sup> Since Reich was unable to digest so many refugees at the time, the *VoMi* ordered successive evacuations from one point of support (*Stutzpunkt*) to another.<sup>115</sup>

Apart from these administrative difficulties, financial ones were also plaguing the evacuation. Just like wagons, the necessary money in Hungarian currency was also lacking. It was envisaged that 80% of the expenses would be covered by various institutions and 20% by the German *Volksgruppe* itself.<sup>116</sup>

The evacuations of the Banat and Bacska had some common features which however were made manifest in different degrees in the two regions. Above all they were panic, lack of time, late permission to get going and unwillingness to leave on the part of the *Volksdeutsche*. A dose of panic was quite understandable under the given circumstances. As for the lack of time, it was only a whit less acute in Bacska than in the Banat. The unnecessarily late permission to set out had in essence common reasons for both regions. Berlin hesitated with allowing

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<sup>114</sup> Ristovi}, p. 113.

<sup>115</sup> Scherer, p. 10.

<sup>116</sup> Mirni}, *Nemci...*, p. 327.

the evacuation so as not to alienate the Hungarians and to make a mess on the roads, as well as in the Reich which had enough DPs on its hands already. However, the unwillingness to leave was more strongly felt in Bacska. The reasons were obvious. Unlike the Banat Swabians who were organized in a small but rigidly disciplined *Volksgruppe* under the direct supervision from the Reich German agencies and individuals, their Bacska brethren, although (at least at the beginning of the war) more radical than was the Hungarian average, were part of a much larger and flabbier organization drained of its leaders by September 1944 and which practically ceased functioning. The Roman-Catholic clergy was openly spreading propaganda against departure and this went down well with many who were reluctant to go anyway. Although by then Hungary had already been occupied by the Germans, the attachment to the native soil, as well as pro-Hungarian sentiments of considerable part of the Swabians which militated against the evacuation, could be expressed more freely in Bacska than in the Banat.

However, the difference that was crucial was the geographical position which was more decisive than the realized or unrealized plans of evacuation and all other factors put together. It was geography that granted the Bacska Germans a few more days for deliberation, packing and leaving. Had they been unanimous in their desire to evacuate, they could perhaps have done so despite lack of plan, technical and administrative difficulties. In other words, the most important difference was that the *Volksdeutsche* of Bacska had time to leave. They had a chance of escape which was used only by a half of the Swabian population. The other half would have umpteen reasons during

the next four years to regret their stay. The advantages of geography were used to the full only by the Ethnic-Germans of Syrmium.

## **̄Syrmium: Like a Clockwork**

Syrmium was in a better situation thanks to its westernmost position. This geographical advantage was partly offset by the fact that the region, unlike Bacska and the Banat, was a locale of comparatively heavy fighting throughout the war. The terrain and the prevailing ethnic and political circumstances were favouring development of a stronger partisan movement. Furthermore, the region had already received a considerable number of refugees from Western Slavonia. The final departure of the Swabians also had its Slavonian prelude.

By early 1944 not even Syrmium was safe for the Ethnic-Germans any more. The number of partisan attacks was increasing daily. Thus, for example, the villagers of La}arak had to spend nights in the nearby town of Sremska Mitrovica where they had deposited part of their property too.<sup>117</sup> For this reason Hermann Neubacher, Hitler's plenipotentiary for South-East, proposed a temporary evacuation of some settlements of Eastern Syrmium (the villages of Obrevci, Grabovci, Grgurevci etc.) and resettling the *Volksdeutsche* from the endangered villages in the vicinity of Osijek, Vinkovci, Vukovar or in some other part of Eastern Syrmium.<sup>118</sup> Almost simultaneously, Himmler in the capacity of the Reich Commissar for strengthening of

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<sup>117</sup> AVII, k. 40-F, br. reg. 30/40.

<sup>118</sup> NAW-N-T-120, r. 3133 / s. 511200.

Germandom, ordered the *Volksdeutsche* from the endangered parts of Slavonia to be resettled to Symium, preferably to German settlements.<sup>119</sup> Since then, the evacuated Ethnic-Germans were resettled to homesteads of the Serbs who had joined the partisans. This was done with the *Ustashi* government's approval. On the occasion of the resettlement of the Swabians from Obre{ and Grabovac to Voganj, the local Serbs were removed to vacated German settlements.<sup>120</sup>

On 21 March 1944 the German ambassador to Zagreb Siegfried Kasche telegraphed his minister that he had heard that a large resettlement action had been under way. According to Himmler's orders some 25 000 people from some 30 communes were resettled.<sup>121</sup> Kasche was against such a step because it would undermine the morale of the Croats. He, who was in the habit of out-*ustashiing* the *Ustashi*, was willing to approve only of evacuation of isolated villages and of evacuating of women and children in case of danger. In his opinion, the evacuation of the Ethnic-Germans was giving the Croats a bad example: Germany was fighting and the Germans should be a paragon of courage and a bulwark against the partisans. He drew attention of his superior to the damage the evacuation was causing in the economy, transportation and public order. Furthermore, he mentioned that the Croats were also opposed to such actions.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> NAW-N-T-120, r. 3133 / s. 511195.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Mileti}, *Preseljenje...*, p. 18.

<sup>122</sup> NAW-N-T- 120, r. 3133 / s. 511191-192.

The German Ministry of Foreign Affaires ordered Kasche to undertake measures to stop the action.<sup>123</sup> For its part, the *Auswaertiges Amt* asked Himmler to stop the evacuation and discuss the matter with the Foreign Ministry.<sup>124</sup> It seems that this demand fell on deaf ears, because on 9 April Himmler ordered the action to be continued. He emphasised that it was only a “temporary evacuation” and not a permanent “resettlement”.<sup>125</sup> Lorenz chimed in with his boss, that it was only an evacuation. As for the Croatians’ attitude, he called it unreasonable, because the *Ustashi* government, although incapable of securing the safety of the *Volksdeutsche*, was opposing the evacuation.<sup>126</sup> The *VoMi* feared no possible bad political consequences that settling down of the *Volksdeutsche* in Serbian houses could have, ordering that the Swabians should be installed in them and the Serbs in the vacated *Volksdeutsche* villages.<sup>127</sup> However, the majority of the Ethnic-Germans were housed at local German families.<sup>128</sup> Obviously Himmler and the *VoMi* had it their way, overriding protests coming from Kasche, *Auswaertiges Amt* and the *Ustashi* government. In that way the *Volksdeutsche* of the *ISC* were further concentrated on an ever shrinking territory from whence they would soon leave their home country for keeps.

Although they had been brought to comparatively greater safety, the refugees were dissatisfied with their situation in

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<sup>123</sup> NAW-N-T- 120, r. 3133 / s. 511181.

<sup>124</sup> NAW-N-T- 120, r. 3133 / s. 511184, 511180.

<sup>125</sup> NAW-N-T- 175, F 21 / 2526722.

<sup>126</sup> NAW-N-T- 175 F 21 / 2526720-19.

<sup>127</sup> London-N-4 / H 294779.

<sup>128</sup> London-N-4 / H 299732-5.

Syrmium.<sup>129</sup> Housing problems occurred time and again.<sup>130</sup> Evacuees were lodged in private houses but were not always met with consideration.<sup>131</sup> Feeding the cattle the evacuees had brought with them was a special problem.<sup>132</sup> *Ortsleiter* of Sremska Mitrovica complained that no-one cared for the evacuees<sup>133</sup> and the refugees in Injija repined that they were treated like slaves, that their food was scanty, bad and irregular and that their children were sleeping on the floor.<sup>134</sup> Because of these conditions some of the refugees started returning home.<sup>135</sup> A considerable number of those who had returned was reported to have had established contacts with the “outlaws” and started acting as enemies of the *Volksgruppenfuehrung*.<sup>136</sup>

The Swabian refugees from Slavonia in Syrmium exercised bad influence on the morale of the local *Volksdeutsche* population. Not even the increased propaganda by the *Volksdeutsche* leadership managed to alter that.<sup>137</sup> The sapped morale would have untoward consequences during the evacuation. However, the Slavonian Germans were not the only ones to blame.

In September 1944 fear and insecurity were increased by the withdrawal of the German troops from Greece and the

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<sup>129</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 40-C, f. 2-II, d. 71, 73, 82.

<sup>130</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 40-C, f. 2, d. 61; f. 2-II, d. 97.

<sup>131</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 40-C, f. 2, d. 66.

<sup>132</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 40-C, f. 2-II, d. 75, 75, 114.

<sup>133</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 40-C, br. reg. 30/40.

<sup>134</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 40-C, f. 2-II, d. 81.

<sup>135</sup> AVII, Nema~ka arhiva, k. 40-C, f. 2-II, d. 74, 92, 102, 111.

<sup>136</sup> London-N- 4 / H 29925.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

advance of the Red Army. The feeling of insecurity was further accentuated by the ongoing process of crumbling of the Croatian army and by the partisans' activities.<sup>138</sup> For these reasons, the semi-assimilated *Volksdeutsche* who had declared themselves to be Germans only in 1940/41 (derisively called *Aprildeutschen*), started to manifest signs of despondency, apathy and defeatism. They were trying to deny their Germanness in various ways and to re-establish contacts with once the strongest Croatian party - the Croatian Peasants' Party.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, many Ethnic-Germans who had been called up for labour service failed to appear. (59 out of 101 in Syrmium alone.)

Because of this situation safety precautions against possible riots had to be met. The training of the armed units of the *Volksgruppe*, the *Heimatwacht*, was speeded up and the number of its companies was increased to four. Public buildings were put under guard.<sup>140</sup>

A *VoMi* report mentions a Chetnik group near the bank of the Sava in Syrmium, claiming that its appearance was being used by the "communist rabble-rousers" to encourage the Swabians to recognize the organs of the nascent partisan power, the "people's liberation councils" (*NOOs*), and to start collaborating with them. The partisans were spreading rumours that the Chetniks had orders to exterminate all the Swabians, and that their sole

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 432.

<sup>140</sup> London-N- 4 / H 29925

chance of escaping perdition was in joining the partisans.<sup>141</sup> The prevailing opinion among the Ethnic-Germans, however, was that they could expect no quarters from the enemy (the partisans and/or Chetniks) and that they needed the aid of the Reich to secure their survival.<sup>142</sup> The partisans' activities intensified from 10 September, especially in Eastern Syrmium along the Sava. At the same time, Germanophobia was on the rise among the Croats.<sup>143</sup>

This unwholesome situation in Syrmium was made even worse by the approaching front-line. Ever since the Romanian defection, people started thinking about the evacuation, although Branimir Altgayer, leader of the Ethnic-Germans in the *Independent State of Croatia*, claimed otherwise afterwards. This is what he answered the Yugoslav investigators after the war when asked how the evacuation plan was made:

“During my illness from October 1943 to February 1944 I made the plan of the resettlement of the German folk group from Croatia. I was spurred to do it by recognizing that survival of a national minority in a country with dirigiste economy was impossible. I gave the memo to Lorenz who had come to Croatia at that time to receive a medal from Paveli}. The plan envisaged the emigration of the German folk group with a proviso that Germany should resettle the Croats from Burgenland. Paveli} did not approve of the plan because it would have a bad influence on

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. In point of fact this is exactly what some of them did in Vrđnik, still under *Ustashi* control at that time. **Izvori za istoriju**

**SKJ 19**, pp. 448-449.)

<sup>142</sup> Bonn 3 / 928.

<sup>143</sup> London-N- 4 / H 299255.



the *Ustshi* morale if executed during the war. Kasche reproached me for this and told me that in his opinion it was not good to have the *Volksdeutsche* resettled then, and that Paveli}'s opinion was correct. In March 1944 Wolf, who had been an aide at Ribbentrop's, came as the referee for general minority affairs to the German embassy in Zagreb. He told me that my plan went down well in Berlin, but that during the war it would be difficult to carry it out. However, since the Russians were already advancing toward Yugoslavia, on 21 September group from Nova Topola, Aleksandrovac and Tro{elje from the vicinity of Banja Luka, toward which the partisans were advancing, was evacuated first to Osijek, and from there to Germany, i.e. Upper Austria and Styria.

When it became clear that the Romanians had defected, and after the order on the minorities (applying only to the German one) was issued, the Germans could not wait for the liberation of Yugoslavia and the resettlement had to start immediately. The resettlement started on 3 September in Zemun, and was ended on 6 November 1944. This group also left for Upper Austria and Styria. During this evacuation it was the Roman-Catholic clergy in particular that caused most difficulties by calling on the people not to go. They did this in order that the rage of the victors would be vented on the Germans and not on them."<sup>144</sup>

It would be difficult, pending further research, to say what is true in this report. One thing is certain: the date of the beginning of the evacuation is incorrect, but that must have been a laps of memory. However, under the circumstances prevailing in the *Independent State of Croatia*, it seems preposterous that

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<sup>144</sup> Altgayer, p. 367.

anyone would think of dirigiste economy as the reason for leaving the country, especially for one that was the incarnation of the dirigiste economy, second only to the Soviet Union. Therefore, this author is inclined to dismiss that part of Altgayer's report as a brainstorm caused by excessive consumption of hard beverages.<sup>145</sup> The fact that other accounts of the evacuation do not mention Altgayer's plan seem to warrant this opinion.<sup>146</sup>

Ferdinand Gasteiger ascribes the initiative to make plans for the evacuation to Professor of the Zagreb University Dr. Rudolf Ganslmayer and the Zagreb *Ortsleiter* Georg Kern who had been the first to sense the danger that ensued from the Romanians turning traitors. At their instigation, Gasteiger, one of the *Volksdeutsche* top-brass (*Amtsleiter der Volksgruppe*), alerted the higher ups to save the Ethnic-Germans of Croatia from catastrophe.<sup>147</sup> Concerning the timing, the reports are somewhat contradictory. It is known that Ambassador Kasche, Himmler's plenipotentiary Konstantin Kammerhofer, Altgayer, Fieldmarshal von Weichs and Gasteiger had discussed the matter as early as 3 September. The *Volksdeutsche* leaders and *Ustashi* officials from Vara`din, Vukovar, Osijek and Vinkovci were also present. It was agreed that the evacuation should be carried out in case of

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<sup>145</sup> There is a document, not necessarily true, accusing him of being a tippler and druggie. (NAW-N-T- 175, F 21/ 2526860-6.)

<sup>146</sup> Mileti} (*Preseljenje...*, p. 19) does mention the plan, but it seems he has just taken Altgayer's statement for granted. Ferdinand Gasteiger in his first-hand account does not mention it ( *Evakuierung der Deutschen aus Kroatien*, in: Schmidt (ed.)), nor does any other author. (See the quoted works by Krni}, Wehler, Annabring and Oberkersch.)

<sup>147</sup> Gasteiger, p. 54.

emergency. However, Kasche, true to himself, claimed that only Hitler could make a final decision about that.<sup>148</sup>

During the talks three zones of evacuation had been determined which were actually observed once the evacuation started. They were:

- 1) Eastern Symrium (to the East from Sremska Mitrovica);
- 2) Western Symrium;
- 3) Eastern Slavonia around Osijek.<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, it was decided that the harvest was to be also evacuated.<sup>150</sup> As for the population to be evacuated, it was divided into two groups:

- 1) Women and children up to 15 years of age;
- 2) All other non-combatants. It was stressed that the evacuation of this second group should by no means start prematurely.<sup>151</sup> This qualification was presumably inserted on Kasche's instigation.

During his tour of Slavonia and Symrium Kasche met the district prefect Elicker (a *Volksdeutsche*) and a high *Ustashi* official (*sto`ernik*) Gec. It was agreed that in case of emergency the *Ustashi* would evacuate women and children to Vinkovci, whereas the further fate of those people would be decided in agreement with the Zagreb government.<sup>152</sup>

The *Auswaertiges Amt* approved of the evacuation of the Ethnic-Germans from the *ICS* in case of danger on 9 September.

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<sup>148</sup> Bonn 3 / 907-913.

<sup>149</sup> Bonn 3 / 914-915; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 436.

<sup>150</sup> Bonn 3 / 907-913.

<sup>151</sup> Bonn 3 / 914-915; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 436.

<sup>152</sup> Bonn, 3 / 916.

Kasche was instructed to reach an agreement on everything with Kammerhofer.<sup>153</sup> As for Kammerhofer, he received authorization from the *VoMi* between 5 and 10 September which empowered him to make decisions concerning the evacuation.<sup>154</sup> In his opinion all the Ethnic-Germans of Croatia should be evacuated in any of the following cases:

- 1) If the *Volksdeutsche* were evacuated from the Banat because of the Red Army advance;
- 2) If the Anglo-Americans landed and invaded Styria;
- 3) If the enemy landed on the Dalmatian coast and pushed on towards the Sava.<sup>155</sup>

Although empowered to order the evacuation if the situation necessitated it, Kammerhofer nevertheless had limitations set by the *VoMi* to his freedom of decision-making. These limitations were in fact quite strict instructions as to the way the evacuation should be carried out. They envisaged:

- 1) That in case of emergency children were to be evacuated by train from Osijek to Vienna;
- 2) The bulk of the *Volksdeutsche* was to be evacuated by trek via Osijek, crossing the Drava to Hungary, and proceeding in the direction of Neusiedler See.

The departure of these transports was to be decided in the following cases:

- a) The children transport was to set out when the Banat Swabians (and children from Eastern Sylvania) had been evacuated due to the advance of the Soviets;

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<sup>153</sup> Bonn 8 / 467.

<sup>154</sup> Bonn 8 / 460.

<sup>155</sup> Bonn 8 / 464; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 434.

b) In case of an Allied landing in Styria, the whole *Volksgruppe* was to be evacuated;

c) The children transport was to be sent away if the Anglo-Americans landed on the Croatian coast and dashed towards the Sava. Should they approach the Sava, the *Volksgruppe* was to be evacuated in one or more groups.

However, even the *VoMi* stressed the qualification that the final decision rested with the Fuehrer.<sup>156</sup> Thus a typical Nazi red-tape situation was created: the permission was granted but with qualifications. The empowered could make use of it, but only under certain conditions, the most important of them being Hitler's go-ahead. It was not known if Hitler would allow the permission to be used, and if so, when. Just like in all other matters, the permission was in abeyance awaiting his decision.

It seems that Hitler gave his placet on 12 September. For that reason Himmler ordered on the next day that each *Volksgruppe* had to be assigned a quota of the evacuees.<sup>157</sup> It clearly shows that the Berlin wire-pullers were not willing to accept all the endangered *Volksdeutsche*. However, the criteria on which quotas were allotted are not known.

All these decisions had already been made or were in the process of being made by the time Gasteiger claimed that he had been accosted by Ganslmayer and Kern i.e. only on 5/6 September. Furthermore he claimed that he had admonished Altgayer only after that, which shows that his memory was not quite fresh at the time of his writing, as well as that he was not

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<sup>156</sup> Bonn 8 /460.

<sup>157</sup> Oberkersch, Die Deutschen..., p. 435.

informed about all that was going on,<sup>158</sup> which was the typical treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* leaders by the Reich German big shots.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that serious plans of the evacuation were being made only from early September. In order to overcome the traditional opposition to any sort of evacuation on the part of the German ambassador, Altgayer sent Gasteiger by plain to Berlin between 11 and 14 September. On 12 September he managed there to see (most probably) the undersecretary in the *Auswaertiges Amt*, Steengracht and to procure, what Gasteiger construed as the permission for the evacuation.<sup>159</sup> It is questionable if Valentin Oberkersch is right when he doubts this version: undersecretaries were indeed not empowered to make such momentous decisions, but as we have seen, the Foreign Ministry had given its consent as early as 9 September.<sup>160</sup> Hitler had given his green light most probably on the very same day of Gasteiger's meeting with Steengracht, although it is certain that all concerned have learned it only later. Therefore, Gasteiger, just like Kammerhofer, could have been given the permission of the *Auswaertiges Amt* through Steengracht, although certainly without a fixed departure date. As for the indomitable Kasche, deep down he remained averse to the evacuation. He thought that an ethnic soil once lost, was lost forever. He was willing to admit that in similar situations human losses were understandably inevitable, but that it was more important to preserve the ethnic soil. Out of conviction and, in

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<sup>158</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 432.

<sup>159</sup> Gasteiger, pp. 54-55.

<sup>160</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 434.

this case opportunism, he was also leaving the final decision to Hitler.<sup>161</sup>

Equipped with a vague overall permission, the *Volksdeutsche* leadership set about working out the evacuation plan, or one should better say, completing it. The authors of the Franztal homeland book claim that it was made only after Gasteiger's return from Berlin.<sup>162</sup> However, it is certain that on 16 September the local leaders (*Ortsleiter*) received sealed envelopes with instructions.<sup>163</sup> This would mean that the plan was made in less than two days, and that was certainly not the case. As we have seen, some of the preliminary proposals were built into the final plan that would ultimately be executed, which shows that the plan had been much longer in making. Indeed we may assume that the *Volksgruppenfuehrung* and other relevant factors were working on the plan throughout the first half of September with some of the initial proposals being dropped and some matters worked out to greater precision. When it was completed, the plan was precise indeed.

The instructions for the evacuation were sent to each local group in sealed envelopes to be opened only at the notice from the local *Kreisleiter* (district leader) sent via courier, the neighbouring local group, or the local gendarmerie post. The password was ominous: "*Heimatnot*" (plight of the homeland). The envelope was to be strictly guarded and not to be opened under any other conditions save those mentioned above. Only the *Ortsleiter*, his deputy and the commander of the place guard

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<sup>161</sup> Bonn 8 / 464-465; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 434.

<sup>162</sup> *FT*, p. 192.

<sup>163</sup> Ka~avenda, p. 141.

(*Ortsheimatwachtfuhrer*) were to have knowledge of the envelope's existence. In case of absence, the local leader had to entrust his deputy with the envelope. Premature opening, loss or mislaying of the envelope was punishable as disclosure of a military secret. The district leader and his men, the organs of the *Volksgruppenfuhrung*, as well as the representatives of the German police had the task of controlling the safe-keeping of the envelopes at all times. The circular in which these instructions were contained, ended with the words: "Issuing of this command and deliverance of the sealed envelope are safety precautions which give no call for anxiety. The whole population should continue to go about their usual business."<sup>164</sup> Despite these reassuring words, the previous text left little doubt as to how serious the situation and what the contents of the envelope had been.

However, very few ordinary people knew about these preparations. As late as the end of September, Branimir Altgayer, speaking from the balcony of the town hall in In|ija, was assuring his audience that the front-line would hold out and that there would be no retreat.<sup>165</sup>

Each envelope contained the following orders for the local leaders:

1) On the receipt of the password, all the members of the *Volksgruppe* should be summoned and the proclamation of the leadership should be read to them. After reading, it was obligatory to ask the people if they had any questions and to

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<sup>164</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, r. 200, s. 7461429-41.

<sup>165</sup> Oberkersch, *India*, p. 322.



explain them the meaning of the proclamation.. Aliens were strictly forbidden from attending these rallies.

2) After reading the proclamation, all the members of the *Volksgruppe* should be ordered the following:

a) To get ready all the wagons, the best horses, automobiles and bicycles;

b) To load on the wagons exactly determined foodstuffs, clothes, dishes, fodder, soap, tools, spare parts for wagons, medical materials. It was strictly forbidden to take furniture, carpets, pictures, books, as well as greater quantities of wine and liquor.

c) The Swabians with not enough food were to be provided from other people's surpluses;

d) The rest of the clothes, dishes and other valuables were to be buried if there was time;

f) All the wagons should assemble at a venue determined by the *Ortsleiter*, as soon as possible.

The local leader had to distribute the wagons. If the wagons were lacking within the German community, they were to be taken from the non-Germans inimically dispossessed towards the *Volksdeutsche* and from those refusing to be evacuated.<sup>166</sup> Families with several wagons had to put their extra vehicles at the *Ortsleiter's* disposal. In principle it was envisaged that only children, the old and the sick ride on the wagons, whereas

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<sup>166</sup> Gasteiger recorded an interesting episode: the *Volksdeutsche* from Nova Pazova hired some 300 Serbian drivers with their wagons from the neighbouring partisan village of Vojka. They had driven the Swabians to Pecs, Hungary, where they were dismissed after being paid in cash and foodstuffs. (Gasteiger, p. 56.)

everybody else was to walk beside. The wagons ready to leave were to assemble on the road designated in the sealed envelope. The local leader and his aides were to check out if all orders and instructions had been fulfilled. All the surplus luggage was to be “ruthlessly unloaded”.

Columns were to be divided into groups of 5-6 wagons led by a *Gruppenfuhrer*. The non-Germans “who did not want to submit to the enemy power, especially the families of the soldiers who had been fighting on the side of Germany” were also to be taken on. If possible, cattle was also to be taken.

Columns were to be secured by the units of the *Heimawacht*. The youngest third of these men were to be put at the disposal of the district column leaders for special tasks.

From local archives, only name lists, treasury books and conscription lists were to be taken. From the archives of the local cooperatives, only treasury book, the ledger, the book of wares, deposits book, register of the members, bills of exchange and other most important items were to be packed. The rest was to be burned.

State and communal officials of German nationality were also to be evacuated. Only the post and railway officials were to stay and await the instructions of their superiors or the transport and traffic services of the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>167</sup>

After having gathered in certain places, columns were to set out in the given direction. The places where the connection with district columns would be established had been determined. Further instructions were to be had from them.

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<sup>167</sup> Nothing shows better the contempt the Germans felt for the *Independent State of Croatia*.

The strictest order and discipline were to be maintained during the march. Local leaders and their superiors had to take care that discipline was maintained and to prevent all attempts at rioting and panic by all possible means, including firearms. This was to be made understood to everyone before departure. The evacuees and the refugees who happened to be in the evacuating place, were to be treated like the rest of the population.

In the end of this instruction, severest punishment was threatened for any disobedience of these orders.<sup>168</sup>

For carrying out of the evacuation of the *Volksdeutsche* from the *Independent State of Croatia*, the relevant agencies in Berlin had foreseen 15 mil. Reichsmarks.<sup>169</sup>

On the *Wehrmacht*'s part, the evacuation of the *Volksdeutsche* goods, as welcome as the Swabians themselves, was entrusted to the 2nd Armoured Army which in turn saddled lieutenant-colonel Helmuth Kiesow, the chief of its commissariat, with the task. He set up his evacuation headquarters in Ruma, from whence it was moved to [id on 20 October. Nine days later it was moved to Vinkovci where it stayed until the end of the action on 7 December. Kiesow had two commissariat companies, auxiliary evacuation staff "East" with its 7 branch offices, 9 (later as many as 27) agricultural referees at his disposal.<sup>170</sup> The Reich German powers-that-be wanted to avoid the repetition of the case of Bacska, where only people and not

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<sup>168</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, r. 200, s. 7461429-41.

<sup>169</sup> NAW-N-T- 580 F 59 / 177-178.

<sup>170</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, r. 212, s. 7475643-60; Mileti}, *Preseljenje...*, p. 20.

their property (foodstuffs in the first place) were evacuated, with the destitute people only being new burden to the Reich.<sup>171</sup>

Himmler's trouble-shooter Kammerhofer was directing the evacuation. As we have seen, Syrmium was divided in three zones to the east from the line Vrpolje-\akovo-Na{\ice-Donji Miholjac. the number of the *Volksdeutsche* living in the area was estimated at some 150 000.<sup>172</sup>

On 3 October the permission to start the evacuation was granted from Berlin.<sup>173</sup> The next day in the village of Nu{\tar, Kammerhofer and the commander of the 2nd Armored Army, de Angelis, reached agreement about the last unclear details.<sup>174</sup> On the same day the evacuation of the first zone (to the East of the line Sremska Mitrovica - Bano{\tor) began. The evacuation of the second zone (to the South of the line Vukovar-Vinkovci-Vrpolje) was ordered on 13 October.<sup>175</sup> The rule was that no place was allowed to depart before the settlement to the East of it had set out.<sup>176</sup>

The people were taken by surprise once the orders were revealed. This was no less true of the people of Franztal<sup>177</sup>, who should have known better, since their village was practically overlooking the Banat from where the refugees were already pouring out. The whole plan was kept so hush-hush that the

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<sup>171</sup> London-N- 4 / H 299330.

<sup>172</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 212 / 7475643-60.

<sup>173</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 435; Gasteiger, p. 55; Wuescht, *Beitrag...*, p. 122.

<sup>174</sup> Bonn 3 / 925.

<sup>175</sup> NAW-N-T-313, F 212 / 7475643-60.

<sup>176</sup> Gasteiger, p. 55.

<sup>177</sup> *FT*, p. 175.

people realized that they had to leave only when told to pack their things on a few hours' notice.

The first to hit the road were the Swabians from Novi Slankamen on 3/4 October.<sup>178</sup> Franztal was evacuated on 5 October and the Zemun district on 6 October, together with Nova Pazova and Novi Banovci. Inlija set out on 9 October, Be{ka and Kr~edin on 10 October.<sup>179</sup> Although he had previously given his consent that Kammerhofer could make decisions alone in case of emergency, (which he did by transmitting the green light from Berlin), Kasche was opposed as late as 8 October to the total evacuation of the territory between Novi Slankamen and Zemun. As usual, he was squeamish of hurting the Croats' morale.<sup>180</sup>

However, once set in motion , the evacuation was unstoppable. Especially so since the Russians were steadily advancing. The treks from the 1st zone were leaving by the road Ruma-Sremska Mitrovica-Tovarnik-Sotin-Vukovar-Sarva{-Osijek. After crossing the Drava they entered Hungary and continued by the road (skirting) Pecs-Szigetvar-near Balaton Lake and Sarvar-Sopron into Austria. The evacuation of the first zone (in which we are primarily interested) lasted two weeks. The majority of the inhabitants left Putinci by train, with men trekking behind on 17 October. On the same day the first transport left Ruma and [idski Banovci. On 19 October Ila~a and Gospojinci were vacated. Vinkova~ko Novo Selo was evacuated on 20 October, and other places more to the West in

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<sup>178</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 435.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

the next days.<sup>181</sup> The treks from the first two zones went mostly to Upper Austria, while those from the third one headed towards Styria. Part of the population could not join the treks because they had no wagons due to the motorization of agriculture during the last few years. For lack of wagons towns, as well as children, the old and the sick were transported by train when possible, or by ship if their settlements happened to be situated on the banks of the Danube.<sup>182</sup>

For the greatest part the evacuation was carried out peacefully. It seems that the partisan units were ordered to let the *Volksdeutsche* leave in peace, but there are no conclusive proofs for this. The local Serbs were also glad to see them go, or so the Swabians thought.<sup>183</sup> Major difficulties were caused by the rains which had made some roads impassable so that sometimes alternative routes had to be thought out *ad hoc*.<sup>184</sup>

By 14 October only some 10 000 Swabians were left to the East of the mouth of the Drina-Erdevik-Ilok line. Some 2000 out of the total were women. 2000 or so were still in the predominantly German town of Ruma, 3000 in Sremska Mitrovica and approximately 1000 in La}arak and ^alma. The command of the 2nd Armoured Army demanded of Kiesow that these people, if they were not employed for dispatching grain or were not serving in the *Heimatwacht*, be evacuated.<sup>185</sup> Children, women, the sick and the disabled were to be

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 437.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 438.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 437.

<sup>184</sup> Gasteiger, p. 57.

<sup>185</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461701.

evacuated as soon as possible by train or by trucks. Men were to follow later by trek on Kammerhofer's order. As for the members of the *Heimatwacht*, they could be evacuated only with the permission of their superiors; the evacuees were to be sent to Osijek, and from there further on.<sup>186</sup>

On the same day Ante Paveli} proclaimed martial law in the counties of Vuka, Baranja and Posavlje.<sup>187</sup> This was the territory to the East of the mouth of the Drina-Ilok line. General Artur Gustovi} was named commander of the area.<sup>188</sup>

The evacuation of the third zone was ordered on 22 October and it was completed by 7 November.<sup>189</sup> Until this latter date some 90 000 Swabians were evacuated. About 28 000 more were serving in the *Waffen-SS*, and another 15 000 in the labour service (*Arbeitsdienst*) in Germany. The *Heimatwacht* remained in Syrmium to protect the *Volksdeutsche* farms.<sup>190</sup> The rest were people of German origin who had refused to declare themselves Germans and to be evacuated.<sup>191</sup> On the whole, the evacuation was carried out on voluntary basis. Only in Sarva{ the police forced back into the trek few people who had changed their minds and wished to

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<sup>186</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461696-7.

<sup>187</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461662.

<sup>188</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461652.

<sup>189</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461720-3; 7475643-60.

<sup>190</sup> London-N- 4 / H 299350. The number of the evacuees was not quite certain. Kasche estimated that 110 000 *Volksdeutsche* had left. Gasteiger for his part claims the number of the evacuated to have been as high as 120 000. (Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 441.)

<sup>191</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 212 / 7475643-60.

stay.<sup>192</sup> The peasants left for the greater part gladly. In towns however, the response was much less enthusiastic: it was estimated that only some 50% of the townees decided to leave their homeland.<sup>193</sup> According to Gasteiger, it was the elderly possessive people and those whose children had been living in ethnically mixed marriages and who thought that was a sufficient guarantee for their safety, who remained at home.<sup>194</sup> The Ethnic-Germans who had not been evacuated often even counter-acted the evacuation measures.<sup>195</sup>

The evacuation was carried out under the constant control by the 2nd Armoured Army and its evacuation staffs. The Army was helping the evacuation by all means at its disposal: by lending vehicles, food, medical equipment etc. As for the evacuation of the *Volksdeutsche* goods, which were the Army's main concern, it was started too late. The premature departure of the Ethnic-Germans caused lack of labour force as well as wagons and teams.<sup>196</sup> When the evacuation of goods began, the evacuation of the people had been already under way for some time, and the *Volksdeutsche* along the Danube, scared by the goings-on in the Banat had already fled. A sizable number of the officials of the *Volksgruppe* had also fled.<sup>197</sup> The majority of the

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<sup>192</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 441; Gasteiger, p. 58.

<sup>193</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 441.

<sup>194</sup> Gasteiger, p. 58.

<sup>195</sup> A case where the *Volksdeutsche* in the Croatian army uniforms shot at an evacuation commando was recorded. (NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461825-4.)

<sup>196</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461825-4.

<sup>197</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 212 / 7475643-60.



*Volksdeutsche* leaders did their best to hide away or sell their property, and so did wealthy peasants and merchants.<sup>198</sup>

Because of the early Swabians' flight, a considerable property remained untended: 28 000 swine, 5000 heads of cattle, 15 880 tons of wheat, 4 740 tons of sunflower etc. Between Zemun and Petrovaradin the cattle were roaming and great quantities of unpacked and undispached cereals were to be found.<sup>199</sup> Since the *Heimatwacht* men had left their posts, this property was prey to marauders of other nationalities. Later on some *Volksdeutsche* were forced to return to take care and expedite the derelict property. However, since they had not been acquainted with the meaning of the action, they cooperated only grudgingly. Despite the 2nd Armoured Army's demand that specialized workforce such as bakers, butchers, dairymen etc. should remain on their posts, this did not happen.<sup>200</sup> The *Volksdeutsche* agrarian cooperative *Agraria* sold all its stocks to the Croatian state-run cooperative *Depos*. In that way it had settled its debts towards the *Depos*, but since the *Ustashi* authorities allowed export only of the Swabians' belongings, it deprived the Reich of a large quantity of grain. During the first six days of the evacuation, the results in sending off goods were everything but impressive.

In this respect the situation improved only after Kiesow's staff moved to [id and Vinkovci and when the systematic action began. Most of the transportation was done by rail and only smaller part by trucks. 800 tons of cereals was shipped off by

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<sup>198</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461825-4.

<sup>199</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 212 / 7475643-60.

<sup>200</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461825-4.

barges on the Danube. Apart from large quantities of grain, cattle and other foodstuffs, between 6 November and 7 December 428 rail wagons of military equipment were also shipped.

A considerable part of the derelict *Volksdeutsche* goods was given to the troops for covering their current needs.

During the evacuation, the German agencies had to cooperate with the *Ustashi* authorities. Since 14 October, the latter were headed by general Gustovi}. The German embassy in Zagreb delegated its chief of the trade-political department, counsellor of the embassy Dr. Kuehn. He was supposed to help resolve all moot points and enable urgent measures to be taken. With the same aim in mind, Ing. Klaus was seconded to the evacuation staff of the 2nd Armoured Army. The agreement with the Croats could always be reached thanks to the helpfulness of Gustovi} and lieutenant Vosak in [id, who by supplying labour force and information helped to locate and transport the *Volksdeutsche* property.

However, the lower *Ustashi* officials were causing trouble by their passivity or even obstruction. General Gustovi} did nothing to prevent such behaviour. Furthermore, the central military authorities from Zagreb often interfered with and annulled Gustovi}'s decisions.

The *Ustashi* authorities refused the offered German help when evacuating Croatian property claiming they had enough possibilities of doing it themselves. The Germans were visibly sorry to have only Ethnic-Germans' property to salvage. It also happened that the *Ustashi* authorities denied that the property to be shipped off was *Volksdeutsche* at all. Cases of poor

organization also occurred here and there, and the Germans tended to put the blame on the Croats.<sup>201</sup>

The *Volksdeutsche* property which was not evacuated devolved on the Croatian state.<sup>202</sup> Despite this, Kasche complained on 14 November that the *Ustashi* authorities were installing the Croats in the deserted Swabian houses.<sup>203</sup>

By 7 November the evacuation of the *Volksdeutsche* from the *Independent State of Croatia* was completed. The results were assessed as “very good” by the Chief Bureau of the *VoMi*.<sup>204</sup> The evacuation was, for the greatest part, carried out in orderly treks with the *Wehrmacht* assistance. However, the orders of the *Volksgruppenfuehrung* were not often strictly adhered to.<sup>205</sup> Despite that, no other *Volksgruppe* was evacuated from South-East Europe in such an orderly manner and with so little losses.<sup>206</sup>

Although the evacuation of the Swabians’ goods left much to be desired here too, compared to Bacska and the Banat it was a smashing success. This was especially true if one keeps in mind that the departing Ethnic-Germans also took considerable quantities of goods and cattle with them.<sup>207</sup> In January 1945 Himmler himself expresses his satisfaction with the quantity of goods rescued from the South-East.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 212 / 2475643-60

<sup>202</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461825-4.

<sup>203</sup> Bonn 3 / 944.

<sup>204</sup> NAW-N-T- 313, F 200 / 7461825-4.

<sup>205</sup> *Dok.*, p. 87E.

<sup>206</sup> Scherer, p. 12.

<sup>207</sup> Gasteiger, p. 59; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen*..., p. 438.

<sup>208</sup> AVII, Nema-ka arhiva, k. 32-I, 54-Ia.

The *Volksdeutsche* leaving Syrmium took the road from Osijek via Baranja and Southern Hungary to the then border of the Reich.<sup>209</sup> It was most difficult for the first treks. However, when 11 feeding-stations were organized between Osijek and Wiener Neustadt, the things visibly improved.<sup>210</sup> Only a smaller part of the Swabians was evacuated by train. Paradoxically enough, the journey by train was often more fatiguing than by trek. The railway-lines were crammed so that journeys often took weeks. The refugee trains were frequently side-tracked and had to wait for days to continue their journey.<sup>211</sup>

Just like their brethren from Bacska, the Syrmium Germans on their way through Hungary had mixed experiences with the Magyars.<sup>212</sup> Sometimes the distrustful natives refused to let the refugees enter their estates or court-yards whereas sometimes they were quite hospitable. In some cases the treatment was outright ruthless: the Swabians from Franztal had their bicycles, clothes and food stolen by the locals in a Hungarian village in the night 14/15 October. Apart from this and heavy rains which turned roads into sludge, the vast majority reached Austria safe and sound. However, blacksmiths had to work overtime every night.<sup>213</sup>

The final phase of the journey was the most difficult. Western Hungary was overcrowded with refugees awaiting permission to enter the Reich's territory. It became impossible to

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<sup>209</sup> *Dok.*, p. 87E.

<sup>210</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 439.

<sup>211</sup> *FT*, p.616.

<sup>212</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 439.

<sup>213</sup> *FT*, pp. 181-184.

find lodgings, so the people had to sleep outdoors in fairly low temperatures of late October. The German authorities were admitting the Romanian Germans first, the Swabians from the Yugoslav Banat next, then the refugees from Bacska and the *Volksdeutsche* of Syrmium last.<sup>214</sup> The Ethnic-German from the *Independent State of Croatia*, for the greatest part, found refuge in Austria and Silesia whence many of them had to flee again before the Red Army in 1945.<sup>215</sup>

The great majority of the Syrmium Swabians left their homes in the course of a model evacuation. The geographical position of their homeland granted them the necessary time span that would save their lives. However those who consented to be evacuated had no intention of leaving permanently. This was also not the intention of the Reich German powers-that-be.<sup>216</sup>

Those *Volksdeutsche* who preferred to stay at home were recruited from the ranks of those who had already been at an advanced stage of Croatization and who were often mentioned in the reports of the *VoMi* and other Reich German agencies. Part of those who had never been actively involved in politics also remained, although we may safely presume that a considerable number of those also left, propelled by quite understandable fear for their lives. Individuals who had relatives among the Serbs also stayed, as well as the people who were prevailed upon by their Serbian friends who promised to put in a good word for them. Furthermore, the old communists and socialists, as well as those Swabians who had been supporting the partisans, also remained.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>215</sup> *Dok.*, p. 87E.

<sup>216</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen....*, p. 441.

However, it seems the largest part of those unwilling to go was to be found among the old folks who had no wish or possibility to leave.<sup>217</sup>

The evacuees would soon have reasons to be satisfied with their decision to go away .On the other hand, those who refused to leave would soon realize they had missed the train, and not only literally speaking.

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<sup>217</sup> Oberkersch, *India*, p. 326; *FT*, p. 196.

## Chapter Six

### **Homecoming or Exile? The Vojvodina Swabians in Germany and Austria**

After usually a month or so of traveling, the Swabian refugees from the Banat, Bacska and Syrmium were reaching the then border of the German Reich which would for next few months still comprise not only Germany proper, but Austria, Bohemia and the annexed territories of Poland and Yugoslavia too. This chapter will deal with the reception with which the fleeing *Volksdeutsche* met in the Reich, as well as with the institutions and measures taken by them in order to house, feed and employ the refugees.

The measures necessary for receiving refugees in Germany were agreed upon by the representative of the General Plenipotentiary for Work, the Minister of Nutrition of the Reich, the Reich Peasants' Leader, Economic Chamber of the Reich, Reich Master Craftsman and the Leader of the Group of Crafts and Commerce, the Reich Commissar for Housing and Reich Minister for Armament and War Production, through mediation of the *VoMi*.<sup>1</sup>

On their coming to the Reich, the refugees were allowed to keep their wagons, horses, dishes etc. in order to be able to use them afterwards in their agricultural work. The horses suitable for

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<sup>1</sup> London-N-4 / H 299325.

military purposes were requisitioned for the *Wehrmacht* or the *Waffen-SS*, but only after their owners had reached the final destination. The food the evacuees had brought with them was left them, but the cattle and poultry were butchered on the border for fear of contagion. For the slaughtered animals vouchers were issued so that the Peasants' Union could indemnify the Swabians once they set out on their journey back home.<sup>2</sup>

The refugees were allowed to exchange money at most propitious rate, but only in the Reich.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, this advantage could be used only for sums up to 1000 Reichsmarks per person, or 3000 RM per family.<sup>4</sup> By the decree of the Finance Minister, the *Volksdeutsche* were treated as foreigners stemming from foreign currency countries. The Swabians' savings were treated in the same way like the foreign currency cash they had brought with them.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to note that the money for evacuation and subsequent accommodation of the *Volksdeutsche* from Hungary and Croatia stemmed from their internal loan.<sup>6</sup> For the Hungarian Germans the loan was 60 mil. Pengös, and for the Swabians from the *ISC* 550 mil. Kunas. These sums were also put at the disposal of the *Wehrmacht* and Reich German agencies for buying wheat and other goods<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> London-N-4 / H 299324.

<sup>3</sup> London-N-4 / H 299348.

<sup>4</sup> London-N-4 / H 299324.

<sup>5</sup> London-N-4 / H 299363.

<sup>6</sup> London-N-4 / H 299323.

<sup>7</sup> Scherer, p. 12.



The refugees were not always accepted kindly.<sup>8</sup> In Austria they were regarded with suspicion because the locals had heard that the Gypsies were coming.<sup>9</sup> It seems that the Nazi authorities were aware that 11 years of building a *national community* (*Volksgemeinschaft*) did not yield the desired degree of national solidarity yet, so fliers were published explaining the reasons for the evacuation of the fellow-Germans from South Eastern Europe to the natives.<sup>10</sup> The reception was particularly frosty in parts of Germany under the strong influence of the Church. There were attempts there to treat the refugees in the same way like POWs or foreign labour force. The welcome was not very warm either in those parts where people, for lack of labour force, were hoping for dismissal of the local men from the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>11</sup> The arrival of the *Volksdeutsche* labour force dashed these hopes. However, it seems that distribution of the newly arrived labour force was not always carried out wisely: the agricultural parts of the country which had no need of extra hands received them, whereas industrial areas hungering for workers did not.<sup>12</sup> It is however more than probable that the assimilationist moment

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<sup>8</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 441; Benedikt Halminger (ed.), *Bukiner Heimatbuch. Werdegang, Aufstieg und Untergang der deutschen Gemeinde Bukin in der Batschka /Jugoslawien*, Magstadt 1974, p. 230; *WK*, pp. 229, 292. A refugee from Seki } testified that the evacuees were regarded as criminals in Austria. (*Dok.*, p. 104.) The refugees from the same village were told by an Austrian policeman that they should have remained at home: "The Russians wouldn't eat you!" (Philip Sandles (ed.), *50 Jahre Vertreibung* (henceforth: *50 Jahre*), Sindelfingen 1994, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Lenz, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> London-N-4 / H 299350.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Grosser, pp. 286-287.

played a part: the peasants were sent to rural areas more familiar to them, even though these parts did not always need work force.

Smaller part of the evacuees was lodged at farms, but the majority had to make do with refugee camps. Thus for instance, out of some 90 000 evacuees from the *Independent State of Croatia* only some 20 000 were housed at private farms, whereas the rest were put up in camps.<sup>13</sup>

How the peasants' welcome looked like, we learn from the Franztal *homebook*. The refugees arrived to the Austrian village of Mondsee. The locals came out to meet the newcomers. Every native chose a refugee family he would host. The decisive factor was the size of the refugee family, or even more importantly, the shape of horses a particular family had brought along. (The natives' horses had been long requisitioned for the *Wehrmacht*.) However, the newly-arrived horses were soon requisitioned too.<sup>14</sup>

In Germany and Austria the exiled Swabians faced a completely new situation, not only because of the mountains they had never had a chance to see in their homeland. Much more shocking than the towering mountains were the food shortage and concomitant coupons for foodstuffs that were something unknown to them back home.<sup>15</sup> It was hard to get used to the fact that after several hours of queuing up one was happy to get a few potatoes or some flour.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> London-N-4 / 299350.

<sup>14</sup> *FT*, p. 614.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 616.

<sup>16</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 29.

Soon after arrival to the Reich, most of the youths were sent to the front.<sup>17</sup> Those who had been left behind as refugees and had not been installed at private farms, were put into the camps of the Reich Labour Service, the previous residents of which had also been sent to the front. The refugees often had to take shelter in schools too. The barracks were vast and unsuitable for housing families consisting mainly of old men, women and children. Big rooms were divided into cubicles by sheets and blankets. Provisional bunks were set up with a makeshift table in the middle. Trunks were used as chairs. Usually at one corner of these big rooms there was a herd which was used by six or more families for preparing food. Very soon in and around camps a lively trade in food and things earned or brought from home would develop.<sup>18</sup>

In legal terms, as far as the accommodation went, the *Volksdeutsche* refugees were treated like the Reich Germans whose houses had been destroyed in air raids. This was agreed with the Reich Commissar for Housing. Where the lodging facilities were insufficient, the Swabian newcomers had immediately to set about building barracks.<sup>19</sup>

The camps were overcrowded but the end of the war brought no relief. On the contrary, the number of refugees in them increased through the influx from the Eastern parts occupied by the Russians. Furthermore, some of the foreign workers refused to be repatriated to their home countries which had fallen under

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<sup>17</sup> *FT*, p.617.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; *WK*, p. 291.

<sup>19</sup> London-N-4 / H 299326.

the Soviet domination.<sup>20</sup> Over and above, part of those refugees previously put up at farms had to shift to camps because the original dwellers had returned to their homes.

The misery of the refugees reached its apex in August 1945. When the expulsion of the Ethnic-Germans from Hungary began, some of the refugee *Volksdeutsche* dissatisfied with living conditions in Austrian camps, availed themselves of the opportunity to jump trains with the Hungarian Swabians in order to cross over to Germany where living conditions were more tolerable and the economic situation a whit more promising.

Since the spring of 1945 the Soviets started gathering the *Volksdeutsche* refugees and sending them back to Yugoslavia. After the end of the war, the Americans started doing the same: they would spray the refugees with DDT, supply them with blankets and food and send them, usually by train, back home. However, the transports sent by the Soviets had greater chances of being admitted into Yugoslavia.<sup>21</sup> The Yugoslav Minister for Agrarian Reform and Colonization Sreten Vukosavljevi}, informed the presidium of the Council of Ministers of this on 26 July 1945. He asked that the infiltration of the larger number of the Swabians into the Vojvodina or their concentration on the Yugoslav-Hungarian border be prevented. He demanded that the Allies should be asked not to send transports of the *Volksdeutsche* and that the Yugoslav authorities should not accept such transports any more.<sup>22</sup> His demand was complied with: the Yugoslav officials were letting no more transports pass,

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<sup>20</sup> *FT*, p. 617; *WK*, p. 292.

<sup>21</sup> *FT*, p. 618; *50 Jahre*, pp. 100, 102.

<sup>22</sup> *AJ*, F 97, 3/35.

or were evicting them immediately back across the border, as we shall presently see.<sup>23</sup>

Some of the main camps in Austria where the Vojvodina Swabians were housed were Linz, Heid bei Ansfeld, Eisenerz, Wagna, Judenburg in Styria, Fefernitz in Carinthia and Haiming in Tyrol.<sup>24</sup> The best known camps in Germany were Piding in Bavaria, Braunschweig, Balingen, Wiesloch bei Heilbron, Hexenwiese near Stuttgart, Ludwigshafen and others.<sup>25</sup> Life in them differed little from the one in Austrian camps. They were overcrowded, food was scarce, hygiene was poor and lice reigned supreme.<sup>26</sup>

Despite similar living conditions, the main wish of the overwhelming majority of the *Volksdeutsche* in Austria was to get somehow to Germany which seemed to promise chances of faster economic recovery. However, the immigration procedure lasted for years, and even in case of successful completion, at first it only meant transfer from one refugee camp to another. One had to wait there for the permission from some place in Germany to be able to go and settle down in it. Afterwards several years could pass before a refugee could find a job or get a flat.<sup>27</sup>

At first emigration to the United States and other overseas countries was not possible.<sup>28</sup> Only the *Volksdeutsche* who had relatives in the States could nurture hopes of emigrating there. The American relatives had to guarantee the job and lodgings for

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<sup>23</sup> Beer, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> *FT*, p. 619; *WK*, p. 291.

<sup>25</sup> *FT*, p. 645.

<sup>26</sup> *WK*, pp. 229, 292.

<sup>27</sup> *FT*, p. 620; *50 Jahre*, p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 476.

the immigrants. In other words, this option was reserved for the lucky few.<sup>29</sup> It was only in 1950/51 when the American immigration quota for the Germans was raised to 54 000 a year, that a larger number of Swabians was able to migrate there.<sup>30</sup> Canada was a somewhat easier proposition.<sup>31</sup> Eventually a number of the exiled Swabians found their way to various European and especially overseas countries of Latin America.<sup>32</sup>

The number of the evacuees and places of their accommodation were agreed between the Minister of the Interior and SS-*Oberfuehrer* Ellermaier from the XI Bureau of the *VoMi*. The original idea was to leave as many refugees as possible in Western Hungary so as not to encumber the Reich with the problem of feeding them. Himmler's initial idea was to admit only 215 000 *Volksdeutsche* refugees to the Reich. They were to be accommodated throughout the *Gaus* in the following way: Beyreuth - 20 000, Munich - 30 000, Lower Silesia - 40 000, Salzburg - 5 000, Upper Danube - 60 000, Styria - 10 000, Sudetengau - 10 000, Thuringia - 20 000 and the Protectorate - 20 000.

The advance of the Red Army and the concomitant increase in the number of the refugees have made corrections of this plan necessary. The Hungarian government refused to concentrate refugees in Western Hungary pleading lack of food. On the other hand, the Chief Bureau of the *VoMi* claimed there was plenty of food there, but it was denied the Reich due to the sabotage of

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<sup>29</sup> *FT*, p. 628.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 623; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 476.

<sup>31</sup> *FT*, p. 633.

<sup>32</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, pp. 476-477.

the lower Hungarian officials. For this reason 254 000 more refugees had to be taken over by the Reich. The instructions for their distribution envisaged that the *Gaus* would receive the following numbers of the refugees: Lower Danube - 80 000, Upper Danube - 20 000, Styria - 20 000, Salzburg - 4 000, Beureuth - 20 000, Tyrol - 20 000, Sudetengau - 10 000, Munich - 10 000, Lower Silesia - 20 000, the Protectorate - 50 000.<sup>33</sup> Due to the constantly changing situation, these numbers probably had to be altered once again later on.<sup>34</sup>

In principle, the Nazi authorities wanted to install the *Volksdeutsche* from one country together into one or two *Gaus*. For political reasons, it was desirable even to resettle the people from one village in one place, but that depended on housing possibilities. However, air raids at the region around Vienna had partly upset these plans already in October 1944.<sup>35</sup>

In mid-October Himmler entrusted the *VoMi* and the nationalist organization *Volksbund fuer das Deutschtum im Ausland* (Popular Union for the Germans Abroad - *VDA*) with the care of the refugees.<sup>36</sup> The main tack in that respect was given in his order of 26 October 1944:

“The members of the folk groups from the South-East, at present for security reasons harboured in the Reich, are to be regarded as temporary refugees, and I must reserve the right to use them again at a given moment. During their stay, as regards

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<sup>33</sup> London-N-4 / H 299308.

<sup>34</sup> London-N-4 / H 299309.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 253; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 441.

the leadership, the Chief Bureau of the *VoMi* is still in charge of them. Inasmuch as they are not gathered in the *VoMi* camps, *the VDA* will be in charge of this group of people, aided by the State and the Party. The *VoMi* is to give instructions to the responsible agencies for total war effort for employment of the members of the folk groups in the war economy of the recipient areas.”<sup>37</sup>

This is how Himmler’s order was clarified to the subaltern officials:

“The Ethnic-Germans evacuated to the Reich from the South-East are, legally speaking, still the citizens of their respective countries which are currently occupied by the Bolsheviks, and towards these states they retain all their legal demands, rights, income claims, professional concessions, demands for reparation of damages, status rights, rights of property in all fields of economy etc., as well as their duties.”<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that the explanation enumerates in great detail the rights of the *Volksdeutsche* but hardly ever touches upon their duties. This explanation is also important because it shows indisputably that the Nazi top brass considered the refugee *Volksdeutsche* to be foreign citizens, which indeed they had been. However, the Reich observed that fact only when it was in its interest to do so. In that way the Ethnic-Germans were effectively excluded from the rights (such as they were) enjoyed by the Reich citizens on the one hand, while keeping their rights in their respective countries as a convenient excuse for the interference on the part of the Reich in the internal affairs of other countries, on the other. Next to nothing is said of the

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<sup>37</sup> London-N-4 / H 299309.

<sup>38</sup> Bonn 8 / 425.



*Volksdeutsche* rights in the Reich as well as of their obligations to their home countries. As we have seen the Nazi agencies were not squeamish when it came to recruiting foreign citizens into the *Waffen-SS*, which was a blatant violation of the international laws of war.<sup>39</sup> The quoted passage shows clearly that the Nazi bigwigs considered the *Volksdeutsche* only as a tool of their policy.

This much is said in the same document. It stipulates that the leaderships of the folk groups should remain in existence as instruments of the Reich's policy, as well as the representations of the remaining *Volksdeutsche*. If the newly arrived Ethnic-Germans blended with the local population, they could not serve as an instrument of the Reich any more.<sup>40</sup> Very few other documents show with more impudent frankness that most of the leading Nazis considered the Ethnic-Germans only as an *instrument*<sup>41</sup> of the Reich's policy. If the *Volksdeutsche* rank and file had known that, they and their non-German neighbours would have been spared a sea of miseries.

Immediately on the arrival of the *Volksdeutsche* the Chief Bureau of the *VoMi* started making a card-index of the refugees. Its purpose was to enable to bring together members of the families separated during the flight and to provide information about people serving in the *Waffen-SS* or Labour Service and their relatives. The card-index was to be made on the basis of

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<sup>39</sup> Gavro \. Perazi}, *Me/unarodno ratno pravo*, Beograd 1966, pp. 213-214; Vuko Gozze-Gu~eti}, *The Law of War Rulings Applied to the Occupation by the Third Reich on the Territory of Occupied Yugoslavia*, in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*, p. 724.

<sup>40</sup> Bonn 8 / 425.

<sup>41</sup> The word was repeated several times in the document.

information supplied by *Einsatzfuhrers* ( chief employment officials) of the *Gaus* in which the Ethnic-Germans have found shelter.<sup>42</sup> Although that was not mentioned in the quoted document, the card-index's main purpose was certainly to enable controlling the refugees.

On their arrival, the evacuees were issued temporary identity cards by *Gaueinsatzfuhrer* or other officials of the *VDA*. They were to be valid for three months. After that the refugees were to get permanent identity cards. For expediency's sake the procedure of proving that a person really belonged to a certain folk group could be skipped if a note to that effect was registered in the temporary identity card. If not, a *Volksdeutsche* had to pass the regular procedure.<sup>43</sup>

During the accommodation of the newcomers, the Nazi authorities tried to rely as much as possible on the *Volksdeutsche* leaderships. Berlin was assigned as their new centre. There they were joined to the Chief Bureau of the *VoMi*. The staffs of the *Volksgruppenfuhrers* were reduced to a minimum of aides necessary for accommodation and directing of the refugees.<sup>44</sup> Despite this, Janko tried to set up his own centre in Vienna and to keep in touch with his charge in the Banat.<sup>45</sup>

Differences of opinions between the *VoMi* and the administration of Gaus occurred concerning the *Volksdeutsche*. The *Gau* administration wanted to merge the Ethnic-Germans completely into the everyday life and economic activities of the

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<sup>42</sup> London-N-4 / H 299310.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Altgayer, p. 249.

<sup>45</sup> Beer, p. 52.

rest of the population, whereas the *VoMi* wanted to preserve the newcomers as a separate entity, at least for the time being. The *VoMi* wanted them to remain under its tutelage, preserving their separate schools, youth, female, humanitarian and other organizations. Indeed, the *VoMi* started to build up new organizations common to all the refugees irrespective of the country of their origin, but from the get-go they proved a failure.<sup>46</sup>

A fierce struggle ensued among the folk groups themselves for the leading posts in new organizations, with officials favouring their own fellow-countrymen. These goings-on coupled with other difficulties experienced by the refugees, have of course further retarded the incorporation of the *Volksdeutsche* into normal life. The Ethnic-German leaders had to win over the *Reichsstaathalters* (Reich governors) for the *VoMi* scheme on the one hand, and to pacify the understandably dissatisfied *Volksdeutsche* on the other.

In some places the process of integration of the newcomers into the Reich German society went faster. That was the case with the Ethnic-Germans in Upper Austria and South-Eastern Bavaria. Some Swabians went to other parts of Germany on their own accord seeking work. The state and municipal authorities started giving them jobs, sidestepping the *VoMi*.<sup>47</sup> Apparently the *VoMi* wanted to preserve the folk groups intact in order to justify its existence. So did the *Volksdeutsche* leaders. However, their aspirations were seriously challenged by the *Gau* administrations jealous of their prerogatives on their respective territories. While

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<sup>46</sup> Altgayer, p. 249.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

the clash between these two power groups, as well as among the Ethnic-German leaders themselves, was going on, the refugees had to fend for themselves. Those more enterprising fared better. The less capable rest had to vegetate waiting for better times to come.

As we have already seen, the costs of the evacuation were partly covered by the folk groups themselves. As for the expenses for the lodgings, they were covered by the Reich. Financial aid and special subsidies until they could find a job were granted to the refugees. The subsidies were provided as allowances for paying the rent, for the sick, mothers-to-be, women in childbed, rearing of children, professional training, as well as for settling the costs of funerals and the like.<sup>48</sup>

On Himmler's orders, the Chief Bureau of the *VoMi* headed by *SS-Standartenfuhrer* Dr. Puls was entrusted with making a plan for the education of the *Volksdeutsche* children and youngsters. The schooling was organized on all levels from kindergarten to university. It was envisaged that all nursery maids and female leaders of the youth would be at the authority's disposal. They were employed to take care of the refugee children and were paid by the *VDA*.<sup>49</sup>

The *Volksdeutsche* pupils and teachers were made equal with their Reich opposite numbers, although the authorities tried to make allowances for their special needs. The students of higher schools were enrolled in the same grades they had attended back home. In case they lacked a proper diploma, a certificate by a school office was sufficient. Teachers were

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<sup>48</sup> London-N-4 / H 299311.

<sup>49</sup> London-N-4 / H 299311.

employed in cooperation between the *VoMi* and educational authorities. They received the same salaries as their Reich German colleagues but were paid by the *VDA*.<sup>50</sup> Primary school pupils attended lessons in camps of the *VoMi* or the *Kinderlandverschickung (KLV)* organization. On the whole, they were incorporated in the Reich German school system.

Pupils of the lower grades of high schools were sent to special *KLV* camps after the process of selection. On the other hand, pupils of the higher grades were, on Himmler's special desire, sent to special homes run by the agency of *SS-Obergruppenfuhrer* Heissmayer. Teachers training colleges had to contact the local school authorities and enter their service. However, they would be counted as serving the *VoMi* or the *VDA*.<sup>51</sup> The Teachers Training College resumed working in St. Poelten, Austria, and part of the Banat children was sent to Austria and Bavaria.<sup>52</sup> Employing teachers and educating the *Volksdeutsche* children remained under the decisive influence of the school offices of the respective folk groups.

When studying was concerned, it remained restricted in the same way it was for the Reich Germans. At the time of total war effort, it was extremely hard for able-bodied youths to obtain permission to study.

The Reich authorities wanted to include all the young into the labour service, and it was supposed that all the youth which did not attend school should be articulated to learn a craft. The time of

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<sup>50</sup> London-N-4 / H 299312-3.

<sup>51</sup> London-N-4 / H 299313.

<sup>52</sup> *WK*, p. 210.

training spent back home was recognized. The change of one's craft was allowed only in exceptional cases.<sup>53</sup>

Health care was entrusted to the General Leader of the German Red Cross, *SS-Sturmbannfuehrer* Keusen. He was assisted by the *Volksdeutsche* medical experts from Romania, the Banat and Croatia who had been put at his disposal by the *VoMi*. During the evacuation 150 women and 12 men from the German Red Cross headquarters in Budapest were seconded for administering health services to the refugees.<sup>54</sup> For the greater part they were concentrated on main stations through which the treks were passing.

*SS-Sturmbannfuehrer* Dr. Wakalek, the former chief of the Main Office for the People's Health of the German folk group in Romania was assigned the task of providing medical care. Medical care was also directed from the headquarters in Budapest. All physicians who had been in the treks were taken out and employed at the stations along the trek road. In Sopron on the Hungarian-German border, an ancillary hospital with 50 bunks was set up. Just like first aid dispensaries on the main stops of the treks, it too was organized by the German Red Cross and the *VoMi*.

The Committee for Foreign Countries of the Reich Chamber of Medical Doctors in Vienna set up a central reception point run by *SS-Obersturmbannfuehrer* Dr. Loew. It took care of receiving doctors, nurses and midwives coming to the Reich. From there they were directed to refugee camps around Vienna and in other parts. Reception of sick-nurses and their

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<sup>53</sup> London-N-4 / H 299315.

<sup>54</sup> London-N-4 / H 299306.

incorporation into their professional organization was also organized in Vienna. However, they remained at the *VoMi*'s disposal in cases of need.<sup>55</sup>

Medical care in the railway transports was described in official German reports as “insufficient”. The rail traffic was irregular, and consequently medical care on the trains equally so. The Hungarian authorities were not very helpful in this matter.

Arriving to Germany was certainly a bitter disappointment for the majority of the Swabians. Despite quite good organization of their journey through Hungary and reception in the Reich, the ruined country with not enough to eat and only makeshift accommodation was a far cry from the splendid notion most of them had cherished of their mighty protector. However, they were in no position to choose. Even those who had tried unsuccessfully to go home after the war, realized in the event how lucky they had been to fail. Devastated Germany and Austria were bad enough, but the old homeland, now under communist sway, was worse still. It is to those who had remained in their home-country that we shall now turn. The rest of this work will deal with their bitter fate.

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<sup>55</sup> London-N-4 / H 299307.

## Chapter Seven

### The Day After: The Ethnic-Germans of the Vojvodina from October to December 1944

With the withdrawal of German and Hungarian military, the Calvary of the Vojvodina Swabians began. The fall under the communist rule marked the greatest tragedy in their history. This chapter will deal with the first (and worst) wave of terror which would usher the Swabians into three and half years of crucible.

The Red Army took the Banat between 28 September and 8 October 1944.<sup>1</sup> By 13 October Bacska fell too.<sup>2</sup> Some ten odd days later the front-line in Symmium stabilized and remained unaltered until the partisan breakthrough on 11 April next year. Some 200 000 *Volkseutsche* fell into the victors' hands.<sup>3</sup>

In most cases it was the Soviets who entered Swabian villages first, with the partisans coming only a few days later.<sup>4</sup> However, sometimes their ingress was joint,<sup>5</sup> and in some cases the partisans came alone.<sup>6</sup> With the exception of few larger towns the advance of the Red Army and the partisans met with

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<sup>1</sup> *WK*, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> *LW*, p. 390.

<sup>3</sup> *Dok.*, p. 89E.

<sup>4</sup> *AP*, p. 561; Toutnoui, p. 42; Zollitsch, p. 178; Burger, p. 213; *Dok.*, pp. 205, 222, 247, 262.

<sup>5</sup> Lenz, p. 122; *Dok.*, p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 208, 247, 287; Sohl, p. 54.



no resistance.<sup>7</sup> For this reason the majority of places suffered no devastation. Thus they were preserved intact for plundering, economic exploitation, and colonization later on.

Almost immediately on their arrival the Soviets and the partisans started pillaging the Swabian houses.<sup>8</sup> The Russians were especially greedy for food and wine in which the Swabian cellars abounded, as well as for wrist watches and other smaller valuables suitable to be taken away on their long journey westward. The partisans were also stealing valuables, but mostly clothes and money. This was partly understandable. Looting has been an inseparable part of every war since time immemorial. As for the partisans, more often than not, they originated from the poorest strata envious of the rich, and especially of the hated Swabians. Furthermore, during their struggle the need of clothes has always been acute.<sup>9</sup> The attempts at confining the plundering to empty houses alone failed.<sup>10</sup> Looting on large scale was recorded in Kovin, Glogonj, Omoljica, ^estereg, Banatski Dvor, Nema~ka Crnja, Sar~a, Neuzina, Katarina, [upljaja, St. Hubert, Rusko Selo, Nakovo, Krnjaja, Ri|ica, ^onoplja, Prigrevica Sv. Ivan, Ba~ki Brestovac, Filipovo, Srpski Mileti], Od`aci, Nova

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<sup>7</sup> Seki } was one of the rare villages taken after some fighting. (Sandles, p. 284.)

<sup>8</sup> *LW*, pp. 61, 79, 143, 147, 176, 179, 180, 217, 232, 237, 259, 273, 279, 297, 301, 324, 339, 375, 376, 382, 418, 427, 430, 435, 454, 481, 485, 493, 494, 513, 515, 553, 588, 597, 616, 661, 666, 674, 676, 679, 682, 694, 713; Sandles, pp. 284-285; Toutnout, p. 44; Burger, p. 218; *50 Jahre*, p. 19; *Dok.*, p. 218; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 463.

<sup>9</sup> A *Volksdeutsche* eye-witness described the partisans who had entered Bela Crkva as “ragged and haggard.” (*WK*, p. 230.)

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*; *LW*, p. 605.

Gajdobra, Novi Futog, Tor`a, Crvenka, Vrbas, Sivac, Buljkes, Pa{i}evo, [ove, Nema~ka Crnja, Zemun, Franztal and other places.<sup>11</sup>

Plundering was sometimes disguised as requisition of horses, wagons, cows etc., but more often it took forms of house search-cum-outright robbery, seasoned with rudeness and manhandling. In some places the *Volksdeutsche* were ordered to bring their radios, bicycles, typewriters, and sometimes other things or vehicles to town hall. This happened in Nakovo, Stani{i}, Filipovo, Od`aci, Vrbas and some other places.<sup>12</sup>

Important part in the pillaging that accompanied the partisans' take-over was played by the local non-German population. There was little difference between the Serbs, who were expected to take revenge, and the Hungarians, Slovaks and Romanians. The marauders were often from neighbouring villages, but there were also frequent cases of neighbours taking advantage of the Ethnic-Germans' plight, just like it had happened the other way around in 1941. Prominent part in the looting was played by the colonists who had settled down in the Vojvodina only between the two world wars, and who were not only most hit by the occupation, but had also been more nationalistically inclined from the start. Looting soon reached imposing proportions, not only by the number of participants, but also by the quantity of goods stolen. The first looters had been individuals, but soon they started arriving in groups, equipped with wagons, and started taking away everything from Swabian houses - derelict as well as from the still inhabited ones. Sacking

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<sup>11</sup> See footnote 8.

<sup>12</sup> *LW*, pp. 170, 375-376, 430, 435, 502, 532, 609.

was often accompanied with insulting and beating of the residents.<sup>13</sup> The scale of the plundering was testified best by the fact that the Extraordinary Control Commission for the Banat assessed the stolen property as “invaluable”.<sup>14</sup>

This deplorable behaviour was only a continuation of the partisans’ practice established already during the war. Now that they became top-dogs, there were no bounds to their greed. Just like some of the *Volksdeutsche* in 1941 thought everything was allowed, the partisans and part of the local civilian population now thought the time had come to put right all the real or imagined wrongs.

The proportions of the partisans’ arbitrariness and robbery were so great that they could not fail to leave at least some traces even in the meticulously expurgated Yugoslav archives. Thus it was recorded that the *KNOJ* (the partisan police) was bullying the population, maltreating train passengers and pilfering their belongings. In this particular case the victims of the policemen were the “liberated” Slavs who compared the policemen’s behaviour with the situation “during the time of Fascism” in the sense unfavourable for the new authorities.<sup>15</sup>

We were not able to find documents depicting the plundering of the Swabians by the partisans, but we managed to uncover an extremely interesting document from 20 November

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<sup>13</sup> Lenz, p. 122; *WK*, pp. 235-236; Sandles, p. 284; Toutnoui, p. 44; Martin Schneider, *Milititsch*, Freilassing 1968, p. 254; Zollitsch, p. 179; Halminger, p. 239; *AP*, pp. 561-562; Hans Stein, *Rekvizicija sudbine*, p. 98; Lorenz Baron, *Nepodignuti krst u Kni}aninu*, p. 112; Heinrich Koeller, *Tri uniforme tate Kelera*, p. 135, all in: Stefanovi} (ed.).

<sup>14</sup> *AJ*, F 513, k. 25, III-3/ 137.

<sup>15</sup> *AJ*, F 513, k. 25, III-3/ 138.

1942, which proves that pillaging was a traditional mode of procedure of the communist partisans. It reads:

“Looting by the civilian population and mutual robbing and filching among the partisans, undermine the morale of some of our units. The partisans not only tolerate the looting committed by the civilian population, but, what is even more deplorable, they themselves lead the way in plundering of warehouses and private flats etc., thus giving a bad example for the plunder-prone elements within the population.

That deplorable phenomenon desecrated our military successes, besmeared the flag of the people’s liberation struggle and alienated from us the inhabitants of the newly liberated parts, creating enemies out of those who would otherwise become our allies and friends. Looting gives bad press to our Party and our People’s Liberation Army, preventing and making it difficult to unify all the popular forces in the struggle against the *Ustashi* and Chetnik flunkies.

Pillaging and marauding tendencies cause, apart from grave political harm, also great material damage to the people’s liberation struggle because the prey and property are being destroyed, houses damaged as well as the furniture and other things so necessary for our army and the civilian population...

Many members of the Party, indeed, military commanders (for instance commanders of battalions) also took part in looting and set an example for other partisans to pillage.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite careful sifting of documents by the communist Yugoslav authorities, this author managed to find some documents concerning plundering in the first months of the new

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<sup>16</sup> Microfilm in the AVII: IAPKSKV 2 /139-140.

administration. On 17 November 1944 a *people's liberation committee* (narodno-oslobodila~ki odbor - *NOO*) of Zemun, which was a nucleus of the new administrative apparatus, complained that the task of preserving the derelict Swabian property was not carried out successfully. It complained that lot of goods had been either stolen or destroyed. Therefore the strictest measures were imposed in order to salvage what had remained. As measures to achieve this goal coercion and propaganda had been foreseen.<sup>17</sup>

In its report to the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party for the Vojvodina, the District Committee for the Southern Banat writes:

“After the liberation, it was a difficult task to prevent looting which had become widespread, but after undertaking severe measures, on the whole, it was prevented. During the interning of the Germans into the camps, plundering occurred again, because the military agencies had not foreseen it and had not taken steps to prevent the looting... Certain individuals were taking flats irresponsibly, using the food and things from them...”<sup>18</sup>

Abuses of the *Volksdeutsche* property by the new officials were rather numerous.<sup>19</sup> Thus for example all members of the local *NOO* in Parabu } had something of the Swabian property, since the members have distributed it among themselves.<sup>20</sup>

The damage once done was hard to repair. Thus the commander of the [id district issued an order in December 1944

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<sup>17</sup> IAPKSKV 5 / 238.

<sup>18</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 714.

<sup>19</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 138.

<sup>20</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 137.

to collect the remaining Swabian property, saying that “ so far the orders to hand in the derelict enemy property had not found enough response among the population.”<sup>21</sup>

All these documents concerned spontaneous pillaging by the army and the civilians. A different thing, at least as far as the organization went, were mass confiscations of the *Volksdeutsche* property and its collection in special warehouses. These confiscations were carried out by the new authorities.<sup>22</sup> Especially prominent role in the process was played by the members of the partisans female organization, the *Antifascist Front of Women (AF@)*.<sup>23</sup> They were loading things on wagons and sometimes were putting on confiscated clothes on the spot. Despite the organized requisitions, individuals were still playing for their own hand. Military agencies often acted arbitrarily, ignoring completely the civil administration.<sup>24</sup> The distinctions between requisition, confiscation and outright looting became extremely blurred, and the German population (but the non-German too) did not really care much for the official title of the expropriations, nor if they had been carried out with or without a warrant.

What the situation was like we can discern from the letter of 1 November the secretary of the Regional Committee of the CPY for the Vojvodina, Jovan Veselinov @arke to Tito's right hand Aleksandar Rankovi}. In it @arke complains of the arbitrariness of the XII proletarian brigade which seconded its delegates for all sectors of the administration which acted on their

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<sup>21</sup> AVII, Vojne oblasti (henceforth:VO), k. 1222, f. 5/1, dok. 31/1.

<sup>22</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 463.

<sup>23</sup> WK, p. 235.

<sup>24</sup> Malovi}, p. 76.

own, disregarding the civilian authorities. “Everything they consider they need, they take, they even dispose of flats in the town, they press-gang without contacts with our mobilization centre, they requisition cattle from the peasants, ignoring completely our administrative apparatus.”<sup>25</sup>

Similar instances of arbitrariness on the part of the rough-neck troops were numerous enough. In only one letter of the Military District for the Banat to the Military Administration for the Banat, Ba-ka and Baranja of 13 November, three gross examples were adduced.<sup>26</sup> Such practices were hard to eradicate, especially because the top-brass also not only participated, but often set the pace. \ilas writes in his memoirs that the furniture from the *Volksdeutsche* houses found its way to the officials’ houses and offices.<sup>27</sup> Everybody, individuals and institutions alike, were taking what they liked.

The military despotism died hard indeed. However, it is important to emphasize once more that its victims were by no means the Ethnic-Germans alone. As late as May 1945 Tito himself had to issue an order in which he complained :

“Some staffs, commands, units and agencies of the Army and the Navy, in order to satisfy their needs, confiscate, requisition or take away the beasts of burden, cattle for slaughtering, foodstuffs, vehicles etc., disregarding the institutions of people’s power or they issue arbitrarily some orders.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> AJ, A- CK KPJ 1944 /389.

<sup>26</sup> AVII, VO, k. 122, f. 4 / I, dok. 3.

<sup>27</sup> \ilas, p. 411.

<sup>28</sup> AVII, VO, k. 25-A, reg. br. 21-2.

Looting of the *Volksdeutsche* property occurred on such a large scale that not even the muzzled official press could ignore it. Of course, only anonymous “population” or some lower officials at best could be named as perpetrators. Understandably, the robberies and anarchy of the rough-neck troops could not be mentioned.

The official communist organ, the *Borba*, wrote in summer 1945 that the *NOO* in the village of Sonta, had allowed the irresponsible villagers to pillage the German property. “They have permitted that every inhabitant take freely from the people’s property what he chose, so that in a short time a vast wealth has been carried away. They have construed the meaning of *people’s property* incorrectly and tendenciously, squandered it and allowed looting in the guise of ostensible munificence and “liberty”. Unauthorized, they were promising land, cattle and other property of the runaway Fascists to the people.”<sup>29</sup> In November 1944 a similar case was reported in the leading, always pro-government, Serbian daily the *Politika*.<sup>30</sup>

Expectedly, the paper which reported most overtly on the looting of the *Volksdeutsche* property was the main communist organ in the Vojvodina, the *Slobodna Vojvodina*. In the summer of 1945 in the article *To whom belongs the derelict Fascist property* one can read, among other things, the following:

“However, there were people then, and not few of them either, who did not care about the main task of the state ? i.e. the struggle against the enemy, taking care of the wounded and

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<sup>29</sup> [teto~insko rasipanje imovine od strane bivšeg odbora u ba~kom selu Sonti, *Borba* 20 August 1945, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Nova narodna dobra*, *Politika* 24 November 1944, p. 2.



cultivation of the land ?. Their main aim was to appropriate as many things from the enemy houses as they could, to supply their own houses with necessary things, cattle and various tools. This was done by the authorized and by the unauthorized, but mostly by the unauthorized. Everyone excused his behaviour claiming that he too had been robbed by the enemy army etc... Our sacred duty is to help in every way that part of the people which had given most to the people's liberation struggle, and to preserve things from the enemy houses for them ?i.e. for the partisan colonists?. But what happens in practice?

1) In practice it occurs that many a native who has a poorer house moves into a house from which the enemy was evicted or had fled...

2) In practice it happens that on the enemies' flight, their livestock and horses were appropriated by some private individuals...With the cattle and tools stolen at the same time, some individuals have tilled as many as 50 acres of land; in other words a considerable profit was made under very propitious conditions...

3) Wireless sets and bicycles were also stolen. Thus for instance, only in Vrbas there are some 300 bicycles from the abandoned houses which have been allotted to various individuals." The author of the article complains that state couriers must go on foot, whereas private individuals are riding on bicycles, and that some citizens have Swabian radios while state agencies have none.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Kome pripada napuštenu fa{isti-ka imovina*, Slobodna Vojvodina 24 August 1945, p. 1.

In order to prevent the Swabian property from being stolen, the authorities sometimes entrusted Slavonic neighbours with guarding empty *Volksdeutsche* houses. Where the Ethnic-Germans were still living in their houses, they themselves were in charge of keeping their own property.<sup>32</sup>

We may conclude that looting was a very widespread phenomenon. It did not occur only in the first days or weeks after the partisan takeover. It lasted until summer 1945 i.e. until partisan colonists were given the Swabian houses and the remnants of the *Volksdeutsche* movables. Although looting had started as a corollary of the takeover and the accompanying military despotism which often verged on anarchy, the pillagers were by no means only partisans or the Soviet soldiers. On the contrary, plundering was really a popular movement in the truest sense of the word. As for the nationality of perpetrators, they belonged to all ethnic groups. We may presume that the Serbs (and other Slavs) were overrepresented but this cannot be ascribed to their eventual greater greed. They were simply in better position to loot since the new authorities had a much more lenient attitude towards them than towards non-Slav nationalities, as we shall presently see. However, one should also keep in mind that, as far as the property went, the military showed no special respect for the property of the Slavs as compared to the property of the non-Slavic inhabitants.

Coupled with plundering and petty manhandling, already in the first days of the new regime, numerous rapes occurred. It seems that the Soviets indulged in this much more often than the partisans. The latter would sometimes instruct them as to in which

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<sup>32</sup> Malovi}, p. 120.

house a pretty young Swabian girl was to be found. No one can tell how many rapes were committed because such crimes often go unreported. Furthermore, some of the victims were killed after being raped first.

It was reported that in Banatski Karlovci the Russians had raped 200 women, infecting many with venereal diseases in the process.<sup>33</sup> Some women were raped before their husbands, parents or children.<sup>34</sup> The age of victims was often of no importance: cases of raped women over 60 were reported.<sup>35</sup> In Nema~ka Crnja a case of a nine year old girl raped by nine villains was reported. After the crime the mother killed the girl and than committed suicide.<sup>36</sup> In Prigrevica Sveti Ivan, the Soviets, together with some other women, raped a mother-to-be in her eighth month of pregnancy.<sup>37</sup> Suicides out of shame were also committed.<sup>38</sup> Rapes were also recorded in Glogonj, Omoljica (from 20 to 60 cases), Klenak, Banatski Dvor, Neuzina, Sar~a (where a Soviet officer Arthur made a name for himself), [upljaja, St. Hubert, Kru{evlje, Rijica, Apatin, Ba~ki Brestovac, Gakovo, Ba~ka Palanka, Crvenka, [ove, Ba~ki Jarak etc.<sup>39</sup>

This is what chaplain Paul Pfuhl wrote of the Russians:

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<sup>33</sup> *LW*, p. 60.

<sup>34</sup> *LW*, pp. 60, 181, 667.

<sup>35</sup> *LW*, pp. 120 (Gudurica), 356 (St. Hubert), 662 (Vrbas), 587 (Tor`a), 429 (Stani{i}).

<sup>36</sup> *LW*, p. 238.

<sup>37</sup> *LW*, p. 451.

<sup>38</sup> *LW*, p. 238.

<sup>39</sup> *LW*, pp. 176, 181, 259, 272, 290, 301, 324, 365, 418, 426, 427, 481, 482, 532, 597, 602, 667, 676, 680, 713.

“First came the Russians. When they were sober, they would hardly harm anyone. Unfortunately in our parts there is lot of wine and liquor, so the soldiers were seldom sober. And then, no woman or girl was safe, and many who did not want to yield to their lust had to pay with their lives. Out of my former pupils in a village through which the Russians passed, two were shot, plus a young woman and her mother...Some women and girls were victims of several (5-10) of these brutes in a row. I know of several cases when the victims died afterwards.”<sup>40</sup>

However, victims were not only Swabian females. The authors of the Apatin *homebook* say that “nationality often did not matter.”<sup>41</sup> Due to this fact, just like in case of looting, we find confirmation in Yugoslav sources. This is what Tito says in his memoirs about the rapes:

“On the other hand, the behaviour of many officers and soldiers of those ?i.e. Soviet? units passing through Yugoslavia was not what our people had imagined the behaviour of the fighters of the Red Army should have been. Wherever the units of the Red Army passed, people complained about excesses of many officers and soldiers. Lot of women and girls were attacked, many were raped, murders and plundering have been reported. At first, there were attempts at explaining that those had been only isolated cases, but the number of those crimes was steadily increasing...Atrocities had spread to such extent that they became a serious political problem.

In all, 1219 rapes, 359 attempted rapes, 111 rapes with murder, 248 rapes with attempted murders and 1204 cases of

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<sup>40</sup> *Dok.*, p. 262.

<sup>41</sup> *AP*, p. 561.

robbery with injuries committed by the Red Army officers and soldiers were reported to our authorities. Among the raped girls there was a comrade secretary of the District Youth Committee of the Vojvodina. Even the wife of a member of the National Committee was attacked. In Belgrade itself, there were several cases of rape which provoked displeasure among our military and citizenry.” After enumerating several rape cases in Belgrade, Tito proceeds:

“After this case, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia summoned the chief of the Soviet military mission, general Kornyejev, in order to draw his attention to the fact that these unseemly acts blemished the reputation of the Red Army...Milovan \ilas said on this occasion that these excesses were particularly inconvenient in so far as the Belgrade bourgeoisie was using them against the Red Army saying that English officers were ... more civil than the Soviet ones.”<sup>42</sup> Kornyejev repudiated the complaints as groundless and expressed his protest at them.<sup>43</sup> However, \ilas writes that eventually the Soviet command started putting their house in order and that the number of incidents decreased.<sup>44</sup> In autumn 1945 on occasion of \ilas’ visit to Moscow, Stalin did not deny the existence of the excesses, but tried to play them down on the account of the hard fighting conditions of the Red Army.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita, I*, Zagreb 1980, pp. 410-411.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>44</sup> \ilas, p. 408.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

To be sure, the Yugoslav leaders did not protest at the rapes of the Swabian women, although it is possible that some of them had been included in the official figures adduced by Tito. Be that as it may, these quotations from Tito's and \ilas' memoirs prove that raping was widespread.

It is only fair to state that not all the rapes were committed by the Soviets. The partisans took part in these crimes too, although more rarely. They were recorded as perpetrators in Nema~ka Crnja, Neuzina, St. Hubert, Vrba and some other places.<sup>46</sup>

There were also cases in which the Soviets behaved better than the partisans, even protecting the Swabians from the latter's violence.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes it was a great boon to have Russian soldiers, and particularly officers billeted in one's house. It could be a veritable insurance policy.<sup>48</sup> One Anna Goettel from Kula testified later that her family had been saved by seven Soviet officers from rape and robbery, as well as that a Russian officer had killed a hoodlum who had tried to rape a Swabian woman.<sup>49</sup> In places controlled solely by the Soviets there were no mass executions such as occurred in the places under partisan sway.<sup>50</sup> The Red Army officers and soldiers sometimes managed to save larger groups of the *Volksdeutsche* from being maltreated or arrested by the new Yugoslav authorities.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *LW*, pp. 230, 272, 324, 602.

<sup>47</sup> *AK*, p. 116.

<sup>48</sup> *AP*, p. 562; *LW*, pp. 123, 144, 176.

<sup>49</sup> *LW*, p. 522.

<sup>50</sup> *50 Jahre*, pp. 18, 33.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Manhandling and torture of the Ethnic-Germans started only a few days after the partisan take-over. In some places little earlier and in some little later arrests also set in. The first to be taken under arrest were the members of the *Deutsche Mannschaft*, officials of the occupation administrative apparatus, soldiers of the SS-Division *Prinz Eugen*, leaders of the *Volksdeutsche* organizations and other undesirables.<sup>52</sup> As a rule, captives were tortured, sometimes quite brutally. Various kinds of torture were used.<sup>53</sup> In Alibunar the arrested Germans had toe-nails torn out and paper burnt between their toes.<sup>54</sup> In Vr{ac, where people from other places were also brought, the prisoners had their limbs broken, skulls smashed, eyes gouged out and their testicles squashed.<sup>55</sup> In Veliko Plandi{te broken limbs and teeth also abounded. Allegedly the partisans tied arms and legs of a Peter Molter together and put a stick through them before started playing football with him.<sup>56</sup> In Pan~evo noses and private parts were purportedly cut off, bodies ripped open and hearts torn out. Allegedly a watchmaker Michael Eichert had several ribs carved out, whereas one Anton Gaier was impaled on a spade by Gypsies and thrown into the grave while still alive.<sup>57</sup> It

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<sup>52</sup> *Dok.*, p. 91E; *WK*, p. 222.

<sup>53</sup> *LW*, pp. 54-55, 64-69, 75, 79, 85-96, 89, 108, 110, 112, 119, 124, 128, 132, 136-137, 143, 146-147, 149, 151, 161, 167, 182, 189, 191, 207, 210, 219, 248, 250, 257; *50 Jahre*, pp. 11, 19, 20, 53, 71, 84; *Dok.*, pp. 206, 210, 224, 232, 249; Gaus, p. 192; Halminger, p. 239; Anton Lehmann, *Rudolfsgnad. Chronik einer deutsch-banater Militaer-Grenz-Gemeinde*, s.l. 1966, p. 60; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 463.

<sup>54</sup> *LW*, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> *LW*, p. 86.

<sup>56</sup> *LW*, p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> *LW*, p. 132.

was reported that a man had had both his arms cut off before he was killed with nine other Germans.<sup>58</sup> In Be~keerek a young man purportedly had his genitals cut off and stuck into his mouth. A Swabian woman was killed there by a shot into her pudendum.<sup>59</sup> In Katarina captured *Volksdeutsche* were tortured by smashing their testicles between two sticks.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, unlike looting and rapes, there are practically no proofs in Yugoslav documents which would corroborate these allegations from the Swabians' testimonies. However, since assertions about pillaging and rapes have been substantiated by Yugoslav sources, we may assume that these claims too contain a considerable dose of truth, although the number of people arrested and tortured was presumably somewhat lower than one might glean from the *Volksdeutsche* testimonies.

This author managed to find only one Yugoslav document which lends credibility to the Swabian allegation. This document speaks about the situation in the concentration camps for the Ethnic-Germans in the later period, but we can assume that assertions about mishandling of the prisoners in the first days of the new regime were also for the greater part true.<sup>61</sup>

Together with robberies, rapes, arrests and manhandling, the *Volksdeutsche* were also subjected to murders. From their testimonies, which are our main source of knowledge, it is often difficult to discern the real or purported motives of these killings.

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<sup>58</sup> LW, p. 146.

<sup>59</sup> LW, p. 230.

<sup>60</sup> LW, p. 257.

<sup>61</sup> In the document it is complained that "the treatment of the inmates is not always correct, and that there are cases of beating and rape." (AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 138.)



In any case they must be regarded as a revenge for similar misdeeds committed by the Reich and Ethnic-Germans during the war.

Murders sometimes started already in the first days after the arrival of the partisans.<sup>62</sup> Most of the murders were committed by the partisans, with Russians killing only individuals trying to oppose them.<sup>63</sup> There were individual, group and mass murders. Individual murders were occurring also throughout the next three and a half years of the existence of concentration camps for the *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>64</sup>

Motives of individual killings varied. They ranged from apurtenance to one of the incriminated German organizations, personal vendettas,<sup>65</sup> to sadism pure and simple. Sometimes class and national hatred went hand in hand.<sup>66</sup> Some murders resulted from the denunciations by people of other nationalities.<sup>67</sup> With prevalent military arbitrariness, revolutionary dictatorship and the still ongoing war, the possibilities of losing one's life were innumerable. Unfortunately, in their accounts, the *Volksdeutsche* rarely adduce the reasons why a person had been killed.

One of the cases when it was done is the *homebook* of Bela Crkva. One can read there that a Rudolf Tittiger was killed for requisitioning too much during the war (according to the opinion of the Serbs who denounced him); one Wilhelm Schmidt was

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<sup>62</sup> Toutnouit, p. 44; Lenz, p. 122; *LW*, p. 532.

<sup>63</sup> Mari~i}, p. 262; *LW*, pp. 418, 439, 442, 513, 597.

<sup>64</sup> *LW*, pp. 153, 232, 250.

<sup>65</sup> *LW*, p. 59; *Dok.*, p. 289.

<sup>66</sup> *LW*, pp. 59, 682, 697; *Dok.*, pp. 253, 289; *50 Jahre*, p. 61; *WK*, pp. 241, 243.

<sup>67</sup> *LW*, p. 110.

murdered because for his dead son 50 partisans had been shot in 1943; the same was true of his brother; a Franz Kehl had enemies in Romania and was killed on influential Romanian communists' instigation; a Franz Bonitza was denounced by a Serbian relative for possessing a rifle; at Franz Neukam's ammo box from the First World War had been found and he was shot for it; similar was the fate of a Franz Trenn who was killed for having a bayonet; one Franz Jeanplong was denounced by one of his workers for possessing (purportedly) an unusable rifle, etc.<sup>68</sup> In Banatski Karlovac two girls were shot for dating the *Wehrmacht* soldiers during the war, and a woman for having been the leader of the local *Frauenschaft*.<sup>69</sup> Some Swabians were killed by mistake: they were taken for other people wanted by the new authorities.<sup>70</sup> Some had to pay with their lives for being so saucy as to try to defend their property.<sup>71</sup> In some cases the victim and the executioner were personal acquaintances.<sup>72</sup>

It always happens that in times of trouble neighbours avail themselves of the opportunity to quit scores, no matter who is right. This rule was proved in 1944 no less than in 1941. It is next to impossible to judge about the eventual guilt of the murdered basing our judgment only on the accounts of the *Volksdeutsche* who have survived, because usually they tell us nothing of the

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<sup>68</sup> WK, p. 241.

<sup>69</sup> Hans Sonnleitner, *Aktion Intelligenzija in Karlsdorf. Tatsachen und Hintergruende. Reflexion zur Sinnfrage ueber Mord und Todt. Gedenkschrift 1944-1984 ueber die Ermordung von 36 Karlsdorfern*, Muenchen 1986, pp. 119, 133.

<sup>70</sup> WK, p. 243.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> WK, p. 244; *Dok.*, p. 289.

reasons why someone had been murdered. However, what is unacceptable is the principle that anyone could be killed without a fair trial that would establish his guilt beyond doubt. The new powers-that-be did not grant a fair trial even to those who were lucky enough to be brought before a court at all. This was done in order to clear the way for building a new social system, but in the event did more damage to it than the enemies it ostensibly wanted to eliminate. All those punished without a trial or after a mock trial not only blemished the new authorities, but enabled also the guilty to protest their innocence and to pose as inculpable victims of a totalitarian regime. Suffering of the innocent *Volksdeutsche* was used as a mask by the guilty ones in order to cover up their own misdeeds.

If individual murders can be accounted for (with or without a real reason), no plausible moral explanation can be given for the mass executions of (mostly) men apprehended at random. The reason could be found only in thirsting for revenge, emulating the Nazi example of mass retaliation on the innocent civilians and the wish to frighten the Swabians. There are no proofs that they were carried out as part of an *Aktion Intelligencija* about which some *Volksdeutsche* authors write.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Geiger, p. 28. The main proponent of the *Action intelligenzia* thesis is Hans Sonleitner. He claims there was a plan of exterminating the *Volksdeutsche* intellectuals in order to deprive the Swabians of their leaders. (Sonleitner, *Aktion Intelligencija*, p. 16.) Wehler also espouses this supposition. (*Dok.*, p. 92E.) However, the fact that Sonleitner, then a teenager, was also arrested (p. 27), stultifies the theory. So do numerous murders for various reasons, of people who could not have been called exactly prominent.

Mass executions occurred in many places. In some of them concentration camps had been set up where the *Volksdeutsche* from neighbouring villages were being brought. This was usually the case in bigger centres such as Pan~evo, Vr{ac, Kikinda, Be~kerek, Zemun etc. Sometimes the inhabitants of a village were killed in their village, and sometimes they were taken to adjacent village to be executed. The exact number of the murdered is impossible to determine because there are imprecisions in the Swabian reports which are our only source. These incongruities concern the numbers of the killed as well as the dates and places. This is quite understandable, since the accounts were penned only afterwards, relying on memory, whereas at the time of tragic events the eyewitnesses had been excited and scared for their lives.<sup>74</sup> Mass murders were committed in Vr{ac, Alibunar, Veliko Plandi{te, Pan~evo, Kovin, Mramorak (in the vicinity of which a trek of 700 people was allegedly slaughtered), Omoljica, Star~evo, Be~kerek, Nema~ka Crnja, Ruma (in the so-called Croatian House, accompanied by the music of an accordion to stifle the sound of screams), Stara Pazova, Zemun, Sivac (where 60 Hungarians and only 7 Germans were shot), Vrbas, Ba~ka Palanka, Sremska Mitrovica (40 Swabians were shot in the concentration camp for four escapees), Banatski Despotovac (where Janko's father died after a torture), Sar~a, Kikinda ( with 28 women from Sanad purportedly among the shot) , [arlvil, Mastort (with

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<sup>74</sup> Some eyewitnesses have literally escaped from the grave, which hardly improved their objectivity. (*Dok.*, p. 202.)

two children among 30 shot) and Banatski Karlovac.<sup>75</sup> A large number of POWs was killed in Oku~ani.<sup>76</sup>

The number of the victims in these execution varied from 20 in Sar~a, to over 150 in bigger centres. In bigger towns there were several mass shootings during October and November. Some of the executions were publicly announced by posters with the victims' names. Such instances occurred in Bela Crkva, Kikinda (for 31 SS-men of the *Prinz-Eugen* Division), Vr{ac and some other places.<sup>77</sup> There are no proofs for Wehler's supposition that the killing was done by specialized mobile units

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<sup>75</sup> *LW*, pp. 59, 80, 83, 109, 111, 122, 125, 128, 130-133, 137, 139, 140, 165, 207, 220, 222-224, 241, 242, 244, 250, 280, 290, 298, 312, 319-321, 329, 344, 355, 358-360, 365, 499, 527-528, 535, 604-605, 616, 727-728, 732, 735, 755; *Dok.*, pp. 202, 206, 253-257; *Siwatz*, p. 144; Gaus (ed.), p. 192; *FT*, pp. 197-202; Sonnleitner, *Karlsdorf.*, p. 65; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 463; *AK*, pp. 96-97, 102, 104-112.

<sup>76</sup> *LW*, p. 484. Reportedly several thousand of Swabian POWs, especially those from the *Prinz-Eugen* Division were slaughtered without mercy, or died in the course of death marches through Yugoslavia. This however happened after the end of the war in spring 1945. (K. W. Boehme, *Die deutsche Kriegsgefangenen in Jugoslawien 1941-1949*, Bielefeld 1976, pp. 107-108; Otto Kumm, "Vorwaerts Prinz-Eugen!" *Geschichte der 7. SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen"*, Osnabrueck 1978, pp. 383-384; Ludwig Schumacher, *Die Vertreibungsverluste der Deutschen in Jugoslawien im Spiegel der Statistik*, in: *Jahrbuch der Deutschen aus Jugoslawien. Volkskalender 1960*, p. 131.) On 14 May 1945 Tito ordered the killings of POWs to stop. (Arhiv Institut za Zgodovino delavskega gibanja SR Slovenije, Ljubljana, k. 41, f. III.) May be this order was spurred by mass executions of POWs near Zagreb in May 1945. (*LW*, p. 314.)

<sup>77</sup> *LW*, p. 69; *Dok.*, p. 249; Sonnleitner, *Aktion Intelligenzija*, p. 86; Malovi}, p. 36.

going from one place to another. Steady mass murders in big centres seem to speak against this hypothesis.<sup>78</sup>

Be that as it may, murders although massive enough were still far from genocide of which some Swabian authors speak.<sup>79</sup> The number of people killed is much too small to warrant such an accusation.<sup>80</sup>

There are no available Yugoslav documents which would confirm the allegations about mass murders. However, the very fact that they are lacking suggests that there is a great deal of truth in the Swabian testimonies. Furthermore, the *Volksdeutsche* reports are too numerous and they concur on most major points to be easily discarded as untrue. Unless the Yugoslav documents become available (which is not very likely to happen in the near future), the only way of proving the correctness of the *Volksdeutsche* testimonies would be to exhume the mass graves. However, that method would be coupled with a number of other problems.

It should however be noted that it was not only the Ethnic-Germans who were subjected to mass murders. People of all nationalities were liable to be killed, only if they were, or at least were perceived as a menace for the new powers-that-be. The Hungarian nationalists claimed that as many as 40 000 Ethnic-Hungarians were killed in the first wave of retaliation.<sup>81</sup> Revenge

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<sup>78</sup> *Dok.*, p. 92E.

<sup>79</sup> For instance Sonnleitner. (*Karlsdorf...*, p. 68.)

<sup>80</sup> Approximately 7 200 Ethnic-Germans were killed, and some 5700 of them were the Danube Swabians. However, we shall deal with the problem of numbers at the end of the book.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Aspeslagh, *Trianon Dissolved: The Status of Vojvodina Reconsidered?*, Yearbook of European Studies, 5, 1992, p. 127; Tibor

on the Hungarians was severe enough, but nothing like so cruel, which is testified not least by much smaller number of the murdered *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>82</sup> Indeed the members of Slavonic peoples were also wiped out in their thousands if they happened to hold different political views or have fought on the opposite side from the communists.<sup>83</sup> The Albanians, whom the communists tried so hard to woo, also had to pay a high price for their uncooperativeness.<sup>84</sup> To put it in a nutshell: the communists set about building a totalitarian system of the Russian stamp, eliminating ruthlessly every real or imagined opponent. The murders of the Ethnic-Germans must be seen in this context.

Apart from plundering, rapes, arrests, torture and murders, the Swabians were subjected to forced labour for the new top-dogs. It usually began only a few days after the partisan take-

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Cseres suggests a slightly lower number: 34 491. (Tibor Cseres, *Vérbosszu Bacskában*, Budapest 1991.)

<sup>82</sup> More about the treatment of the Ethnic-Hungarians by the communist authorities see in: Aleksandar Kasa{, *Ma|ari u Vojvodini 1941-1946*, Novi Sad 1996.

<sup>83</sup> An estimate has it that some 10 000 Serbs were killed in Belgrade alone in October 1944. (Du{an T. Batakovi}, *Kosovo. La spirale de la haine. Les faits. Les acteurs. L' histoire*, Lausanne 1993, p. 54.) An overinflated number of the Croats and some Serbian Chetniks and Slovenian Quislings was also reported to have perished by the communist hand at the end of the war. (*Bleiburg*, Zagreb 1990; Boris Vla{i}, Aleksandar Vojinovi}, *Kri`ni put*, Zagreb 1991.)

<sup>84</sup> Malcolm, p. 312; Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian*, London 1998, p. 148. (Although the numbers they adduce are as dutiable as any.)

over.<sup>85</sup> Forced labour was imposed on all Swabians from 12 to 60 years of age. Under guard they had to work in the fields, cut wood, work in the vineyards, clear ruins, work at building or repairing roads, railway-lines, air-fields and bridges and perform similar manual tasks.<sup>86</sup> However, the effects of their work were assessed by the authorities as only one quarter of the possible and desired.<sup>87</sup> The reason was that most of the able-bodied men were away, so all the work had to be done by women, children and the old. At first, forced labour was introduced for the male Hungarians from 18 to 30 years too, as well as for part of the Romanians. “Mandatory but not forced labour” was introduced for the Slavonic population too. (This was sometimes pertinently called *corvee* by the people.)<sup>88</sup> The *Volksdeutsche* were given short deadlines in which they had to finish particular jobs.<sup>89</sup>

The Ethnic-Germans forced to work for the new authorities sometimes lived at their homes and went to work every day, or were rounded up (together with Hungarians) into specialized labour camps from where they were taken under guard to work every morning.<sup>90</sup>

Those Swabians who were interned in labour camps lived under bad conditions. Lodgings were poor and food monotonous

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<sup>85</sup> Halminger, p. 239; *AP*, p. 562; Lenz, p. 123; Sohl, p. 59; *WK*, p. 222; Toutnout, p. 44; Schneider, p. 251; Zollitsch, p. 178; *50 Jahre*, pp. 20, 52, 86, 95.

<sup>86</sup> *LW*, pp. 45, 62, 79, 82, 98-100, 184, 319, 328, 342, 372, 379, 410, 420, 485, 597, 674, 697, 715, 749.

<sup>87</sup> Malovi}, pp. 106, 121.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>90</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 212, 235-236, 291.



and insufficient.<sup>91</sup> As a former inmate described it: "It was too little to survive on, and yet too much to die on."<sup>92</sup>

Although the treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* was harsh throughout the Vojvodina from the very start, it seems the intentions of the new powers-that-be as to what was to be done with the Swabians were not known to all the subaltern authorities in the first days after the take-over.<sup>93</sup> The treatment was milder in the Northern than in the Southern Banat. In some places the Ethnic-Germans were represented in the new government apparatus (the *NOO*).<sup>94</sup> In Nema~ki Elemir the old German administration was still functioning several days after the place had been taken by the Red Army and the partisans, but that was an exception.<sup>95</sup>

As soon the partisan army took over, it put the Swabians under its direct control. However, this was not reserved for the *Volksdeutsche* alone: the military were to be the only power in

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<sup>91</sup> Nikolaus Engelmann, *Vertreibung, Flucht und Verfolgung*, in: Hans Wolfram Hockl (ed.), *Heimatsbuch der Donauschwaben*, Muenchen 1959, p. 220.

<sup>92</sup> *LW*, p. 45.

<sup>93</sup> As early as 9 October the *Main People's Liberation Committee for the Vojvodina (GNOOV)* issued a proclamation: "Our new people's state had promised rights to the national minorities too. But, let all the Germans know that the new state will not give them reward for their systematic crimes. Those desirous of living among us must deserve their rights." (Malovi), p. 33.)

<sup>94</sup> Malovi), p. 33; That for instance was the case in Sivac and Be~kerek, where Johann Keks, one of the most prominent *Volksdeutsche* leaders, was a member of the local *NOO*. (Siwatz, p. 143; *Dok.*, p. 91E.)

<sup>95</sup> *Dok.*, p. 209.

all the national minority settlements.<sup>96</sup> Thus for example, the military rule was foreseen for 102 out of 180 towns and villages in the Banat i.e. for all places in which the non-Slavs had a majority.<sup>97</sup>

Because the ethnic make-up of the Vojvodina population and the disposition of the non-Slavic part of the inhabitants were not propitious for the new rulers, the Military Administration for the Banat, Bacska and Baranja was imposed by Tito's decree on 17 October 1944. It was envisaged to last until the end of the war. The Administration was divided into the Military District for the Banat and the Military District for Bacska and Baranja. These were subdivided into regional and place commands and village military stations.<sup>98</sup> A Croat, major-general Ivan Rukavina was made the commander of the Military Administration. The Administration functioned until early February 1945. In other words, it lasted shorter than envisaged.<sup>99</sup> The tasks of the Military Administration were determined so as to:

- 1) Remove the hardships caused by the Germans, Hungarians and Quislings and punish the guilty;
- 2) Capacitate the *NOOs* to exercise power after the Military Administration is abolished.

This is how the reasons for imposing the Military Administration were explained:

“Aided by the anti-people's fifth columnist regimes in the old Yugoslavia, the national minorities held all the leading

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<sup>96</sup> Malovi}, p. 35.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>98</sup> AVII, VO, k. 1661, f. 1, d. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela 24*, Beograd, Zagreb 1982, pp. 96-97.

economic posts (banking, commerce), and due to the arrival of the occupants and by using violent means (taking away of land, compulsory sale of crops to the authorities), they became the absolute masters in the field of economy. Furthermore, the use of sanguinary terror ? by them? in the field of politics, reduced us ? i.e. the Slavs? to rightless slaves. In order to dispose of such a state of affairs, as well as to ensure the firmness and systematicallity in enforcing the fitting measures, the Military Administration is necessary.

The degree of responsibility of various minorities will not be forgotten in the process. Thus for instance, while the Germans appear as the main criminals in the Banat, other minorities were only helping them or remained passive, the Hungarians in the Bacska are equally guilty and deserve the same treatment as the Germans.<sup>100</sup> The same anti-minority mood was echoed in the second order by the commander of the Military District for the Banat which prescribed stringent measures against the *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>101</sup>

The introduction of the Military Administration was clearly aimed against the national minorities, who were actually a majority in the Vojvodina. Thus after trying to win over the national minorities (the Ethnic-Germans included) for the partisan movement, once in power, the communists started reserving the base of their power only for the Slavic population in the first days after the take-over.<sup>102</sup> The Military Administration abolished the *NOOs* in places with non-Slavonic majority and prevented new

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<sup>100</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 654-655.

<sup>101</sup> Malovi}, apendix, p. III.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 47, 80.

ones from being set up.<sup>103</sup> However, as we have already seen, the *NOOs* were for greater part paper institutions wielding no real power. It was the Army that reigned supreme in all matters.

In all minority places, military stations were organized. The Ethnic-Germans were forbidden from leaving their places without permission. The *Volksdeutsche* who had left their houses before could not return to them and were to be interned into concentration camps and court-marshalled later on. The German language was prohibited in public and private use. All German firms were put under state control. German sign posts had to be removed in 12 hours on pain of severe punishment (in case of the *Volksdeutsche*, of death.) All these orders were valid also for the Hungarians and the Romanians.<sup>104</sup> Although these measures were aimed against the non-Slavic national minorities in the first place, the communists could not rely on the majority of the Slavonic population either.<sup>105</sup> It was for this reason, as well as because of the preponderance the army usually has in wars, that all the real power rested with the Military Administration with the *NOOs* taking the back seat at best.<sup>106</sup>

However, despite the tough attitude of the new authorities towards the Hungarians and Romanians in the first days after the take-over, it gradually started to change. As early as 20 November the Military Administration ordered the change of treatment of the Hungarians.<sup>107</sup> On 1 December release of the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 33, 66.

<sup>104</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 654-655; Malovi}, apendix p. III; Branko Petranovi}, *Istorija Jugoslavije II*, Beograd 1988, p. 421.

<sup>105</sup> Petranovi}, p. 421.

<sup>106</sup> Malovi}, p. 69.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

Hungarians from concentration camps was ordered.<sup>108</sup> The new winds started to blow first in words only. The leading communists were paying lip service to the equality of the Yugoslav peoples and the national minorities.<sup>109</sup> The actual situation was much slower in changing. True enough, many Hungarians and Romanians were set free and even granted a dubitable blessing of recruitment into the partisan army (the Romanians compulsory and the Hungarians only on voluntary basis).<sup>110</sup> However, as late as May 1945 a considerable number of Hungarians was still incarcerated in concentration camps together with the *Volksdeutsche* and other unreliable elements.<sup>111</sup>

While the situation of other national minorities was improving steadily if haltingly, the situation of the *Volksdeutsche* was constantly growing worse. On 21 November the partisan quasi-parliament (AVNOJ) on its third session deprived them not only of their civil rights but of all their property.<sup>112</sup> Already in mid-October first concentration camps for the Swabians were organized.<sup>113</sup> As we have seen one of the purposes of these camps was to gather the male labour force in one place in order to use it for various working tasks. On the other hand, some

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<sup>108</sup> AVII, VO, k. 1661, f. 1, d. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.; Malovi}, p. 83.

<sup>110</sup> It was envisaged that the Hungarian men aged 18 to 30 who did not volunteer for the Army could be recruited into labour units. People of other national minorities could also be recruited into these units which were to be equal to the combat units in all respects, but unarmed. (AVII, k. 1661, f. 1, d. 1; Malovi}, p. 83.)

<sup>111</sup> AJ, F 513, III-3 / 139; LW, p. 393.

<sup>112</sup> These measures will be discussed more thoroughly later on.

<sup>113</sup> Malovi}, p. 105.

camps served as places for incarceration of the Ethnic-Germans before their execution. However, concentration camps proper were set up to house the Ethnic-Germans from towns and villages which were to be vacated for various reasons. The first such camps were set up in mid-October, alongside the work camps and death camps. The first to be vacated were places with smaller number of the *Volksdeutsche* who were removed to predominantly German settlements or parts thereof and larger towns. This was a prelude to internment into concentration camps.<sup>114</sup>

Tito himself ordered the ethnic cleansing of Vr{ac during his stay in the town from 16 to 25 October, dispatching one of his crack brigades to town to do the job.<sup>115</sup> It seems that cleansing of other towns and villages was left to subaltern authorities, whereas the internment of the male population was conducted by the Military Administration.<sup>116</sup> In the districts of Novi Sad, Titel and @abalj the Ethnic-Germans were interned in early December, with the rest of the Swabians elsewhere remaining for the greater part free.<sup>117</sup>

There were two factors which were slowing down the process of the internment into the concentration camps. The first one has already been mentioned: the Swabians were needed at their homes in order to preserve their property until it could be

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<sup>114</sup> *Dok.*, p. 92E.

<sup>115</sup> AVII, VO, k. 26, reg. br. 10-3 / 13. A murder of a Soviet officer which was ascribed to the *Volksdeutsche* served as a pretext for this measure. Although no conclusive proof could be furnished, several Swabians were shot for retaliation. (Tito, p. 267; Malovi}, p. 36; K. Mitrovi}, p. 223.)

<sup>116</sup> AVII, VO, k. 1661, f. 1, d. 19.

<sup>117</sup> *LW*, p. 395.

stored before the partisan colonists came. The second one was the need to have the autumn field-works completed.<sup>118</sup>

However, by late November a German military action spurred the partisan authorities to accelerate the pace of internment. It was the landing of the German paratroopers in Bacska. Because of it on 29 November general Rukavina ordered an urgent internment of all Swabian males aged 16 to 60 into concentration camps.<sup>119</sup> According to needs, this was done much more thoroughly in Bacska than in the Banat.<sup>120</sup> The supposition of Hans-Ulrich Wehler that the preparations for the breaching of the Sarmatian front in spring 1945 also accelerated the internment<sup>121</sup> still lack substantial proof.

Documents on the life in the concentration camps are extremely rare. One of them from January 1945 tells of the conditions obtaining in the camps in Vr{ac, Gudurica and Veliko Sredi{te. 623 Swabians and Hungarians were incarcerated there. The inmates of the Vr{ac camp worked on various jobs in the town and debris clearing while those of the other two camps were cutting wood in forests or working in the fields. The camp administration assessed the effects of the work as not quite satisfactory because of the short daylight, lack of tools and reduced number of the inmates.<sup>122</sup> Also this document

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<sup>118</sup> Malovi}, p. 105.

<sup>119</sup> He also ordered the village guards to be reinforced, the control over the free Swabians to be tightened, their freedom of movement further curtailed, and the civilians who abetted the paratroopers to be court-marshalled. (AVII, k. 1661, f. 1, dok. 19.)

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>121</sup> Dok., p. 108E.

<sup>122</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 41-43.

substantiates the assertions which recur time and again in the *Volksdeutsche* accounts about how on entering the camps the better Swabian clothes were forcibly swapped for the ragged ones of the guards or simply taken away with no compensation at all.<sup>123</sup> This was usual practice on internment into the camps -first into, labour ones, but also, later on, into permanent ones. Understandably, poorly dressed and equipped Swabians could not do their utmost. Furthermore, the treatment of the incarcerated Ethnic-Germans was more often than not harsh and unjust. This was admitted by the Special Control Commission for the Banat which stated that “the treatment of the inmates is not proper.”<sup>124</sup> That the *Volksdeutsche* reports about rough treatment contain more than one grain of truth is confirmed in the order as to how the Germans and Hungarians were to be treated, issued by the Military Administration of 1 December. It reads:

“In many places incorrect behaviour toward the Hungarians and Germans occurred, tainting our military agencies and harming the interests of our people and our state.”<sup>125</sup> The partisans who handled the *Volksdeutsche* stemmed more often than not from those parts of Yugoslavia most devastated by the war, also which happened to be the most backward ones. The people of those parts tough and uncultivated as they had been, were made even rougher by four years of a cruel war. After everything they had been through, most of them had no liking for the Germans. Expectedly, the latter received no kid-gloved treatment from those uncouth highlanders. However, it would be treason to the

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<sup>123</sup> LW, p. 151, 404, 598, 610, 632, 676, 685, 714, 737, 740, 743.

<sup>124</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 138.

<sup>125</sup> AVII, VO, k. 1661, f. 1, d. 1.



historical truth if one would imagine all the camp guards as rabid Swabian-baiters. Indeed, in the *Volksdeutsche* accounts there are also testimonies to the contrary.<sup>126</sup>

The authors of the report on the three camps quoted above, described housing and health conditions of the inmates as “satisfactory under the given circumstances.”<sup>127</sup> As ever, everything was relative: for the partisan commanders used to frugal survival in backwoods, the situation was satisfactory. For the well-to-do Swabians used to comfortable and clean houses and ample food, the conditions were far from satisfactory. However, one must keep in mind the time when all that was going on. True enough, there was enough food in the Vojvodina for the province’s needs, but with the liberation of the whole East half of the country, the Vojvodina became once again the “the granary of Yugoslavia”. This influenced the nourishment in the camps, which, coupled with hard work and untoward autumn and winter conditions endangered the health of the inmates.<sup>128</sup>

Furthermore, accommodation was only make-shift: people slept on straw or bare floor in barracks or cellars. For the partisans used to sleeping out of doors, this was not that bad, but for the civilized Swabians it was bad indeed. In any case, the authorities did next to nothing to alleviate the plight of the imprisoned *Volksdeutsche*. On the contrary, the arbitrariness of many a camp commander made life of the inmates unbearable.

This was the beginning of the process of rounding up the *Volksdeutsche* in concentration camps. It started in the first

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<sup>126</sup> *Dok.*, p. 234; *LW*, pp. 417, 681; *AK*, p. 184.

<sup>127</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 41-44.

<sup>128</sup> *Dok.*, p. 293.

weeks after the partisan take-over and was to last until the summer of the next year. Eventually the camps which at first had housed only the labour force or people destined to die, would become permanent dwellings for almost all the Yugoslav Ethnic-Germans.

What were then the legal foundations of such a treatment of the whole German national minority? The answer is: none. Under the Military Administration they were discriminated against only on the Administration's orders or through arbitrary behaviour of local commanders, soldiers or indeed, civilian population. The orders issued by the Military Administration were only temporary measures during an interregnum, before the new state apparatus could be built up. The military rule curtailed civil rights of all inhabitants of the Vojvodina, but the Swabians' rights, civil and even human, were curtailed most. This however was at variance with the resolution of the AVNOJ II of 29 November 1943 which posed as a partisan parliament, promising national rights and equality to all national minorities.<sup>129</sup>

This humane attitude was modified on the AVNOJ's third session in Belgrade on 21 November 1944. At this session confiscation of the enemy property was proclaimed.<sup>130</sup> This decision enabled the state to impound the property of all the *Volksdeutsche* save those who had fought within the partisan units and the Ethnic-Germans who were citizens of neutral countries and who had not behaved inimically during the war. The running of the *Volksdeutsche* property was entrusted to the

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<sup>129</sup> Petranovi}, p. 284.

<sup>130</sup> Slu`beni list DFJ, I / 1945, br. 2.

Direction of the People's Goods (Dr`avna uprava narodnih dobara - DUND).

The presidium of the AVNOJ explained on 8 June 1945 who was to be included into the stipulations of the quoted decision and who was not. It included:

1) All Yugoslav citizens of German stock who declared themselves German during the war, or had been considered Germans, irrespective of declaring themselves German or having passed for assimilated Croats, Slovenes or Serbs;

2) The following Yugoslav nationals of German origin would not be denied their property and civic rights (which, by the way, were not mentioned in the decision of 21 November 1944):

a) those who participated in the people's liberation struggle or supported it;

b) those assimilated already before the war (and who consequently were no longer Germans );

c) those refusing to declare themselves German during the war;

d) those living in marriage with non-Germans.<sup>131</sup>

This last stipulation was not always observed, or was observed only partly: people were arrested and then, not without some difficulty, set free.<sup>132</sup> Some poor devils were incarcerated despite their honourable (in communist terms) bearing during the war.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Slu`beni list DFJ, I / 1945, br. 39.

<sup>132</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 768.

<sup>133</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 139-7.

The law of 31 July 1946 retroactively legalized the decision of the interim quasi-parliament of 21 November 1944.<sup>134</sup> The law on registers of voters of 10 August 1945 excluded almost all the *Volkseutsche* from enjoying the right to vote, because all members of the SDKB (which, at least on paper, comprised 450 000 out of 500 000 Yugoslav Germans), the members of military and paramilitary units fighting the partisans, as well as the members of their families, were barred from voting.<sup>135</sup> This effectively prevented almost all the Swabians from using one of the basic civil rights. However, by the time the law was enacted, the vast majority of the Ethnic-Germans had already been interned into concentration camps and prevented from using any civic or human right at all.

The law on citizenship of 23 August 1945 did not envisage general and automatic cancellation of the Yugoslav citizenship of the *Volksdeutsche*. Indeed they were not even mentioned in the law, although it stipulated that certain categories of persons (among whom the Ethnic-Germans could also rank) *could* be deprived of their Yugoslav citizenship.<sup>136</sup>

Numerous German, and even more numerous Yugoslav authors claimed that the AVNOJ III deprived the *Volksdeutsche* of the Yugoslav citizenship. As we have seen, that was not so. Even the civic rights were (theoretically at least) taken away only by the interpretation of the decision of 21 November 1944 and not by the decision itself. In practice, the *Volksdeutsche* had already forfeited their civic rights.

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<sup>134</sup> Slu`beni list FNRJ, II / 1946, br. 63.

<sup>135</sup> Slu`beni list FNRJ, I / 1945, br. 59.

<sup>136</sup> Slu`beni list FNRJ, I / 1945, br. 64.

The Swabians were not apprised of all these decisions,<sup>137</sup> but that was of no great importance since the treatment they incurred surpassed by far anything the orders or laws of the new powers-that-be stipulated.

Clearly, there were no laws or even quasi-laws of the communist quasi-parliament which would legalize mass murders, torture, rapes, looting and internment. No law, not even of the communist state sanctified these practices. However, it was not only in those troubled days of the ending war and incipient peace that the communist state disregarded its own laws, orders and proclamations. Indeed, respect for its own laws would never be its forte, not even many decades after the war.<sup>138</sup> Revolutionary justice claimed to be above ordinary human justice, forgetting that in that way it became synonymous to injustice. However, the communist powers-that-be were not interested in justice but only in political expediency. True enough, much of what happened to the *Volksdeutsche* was not explicitly ordered by the authorities (although much of it was: mass murders, round-ups, confiscation). But the Ethnic-Germans were outlawed and crimes against them were rarely punished. If the Habsburg Monarchy was aptly described as “autocracy mitigated by sloppiness”, Tito’s Yugoslavia could be described as “autocracy aggravated by sloppiness”. This was particularly true of its first years. Practically anyone could do practically anything with the

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<sup>137</sup> *Dok.*, p. 137.

<sup>138</sup> It is only fair to point out that the fate of the *Volksdeutsche* was not a whit better in countries with much longer and stronger tradition of the legal state, such as Czechoslovakia. (*Dok.* IV, pp. 70-72, 88, 103, 106, 112-113, 174; Zayas, pp. 104-105, 124-125.)

*Volksdeutsche*. The only thing that was forbidden to do was to help them.<sup>139</sup> Anyway, they could expect little help from anyone in the times of military arbitrariness which did not spare even the “liberated” Slavonic population.<sup>140</sup> Paradoxically, the Swabians who had managed to flee and had considered themselves miserable for being refugees, soon realized that amidst their tragedy they should in fact be happy to be away.<sup>141</sup>

The next year brought about the completion of the process of internment into concentration camps. Mass executions would give way to occasional individual murders which would occur throughout the next three years.<sup>142</sup> From now on, the highest toll would be caused not by heavy human hand but by human negligence: tens of thousands would die as a result of hunger, sickness, cold and hard labour. The Swabians did not have to worry any more about their once considerable property; however, the preservation of the last tiny remnants of it which served to satisfy their most basic needs became often the question of life and death.

As a fitting boundary between the two fateful years for the *Volksdeutsche*, the deportations to forced labour in the Soviet Union took place at the end of 1944 and at the beginning of 1945. Just like mass murders, they came in handily for the communist authorities to get rid of some more unwelcome Ethnic-Germans. The next chapter will deal with that painful episode.

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<sup>139</sup> *LW*, pp. 417, 542; *AK*, p. 116, 160.

<sup>140</sup> *AVII*, VO, k. 214, f. 6, d. 23.

<sup>141</sup> *FT*, p. 617.

<sup>142</sup> *LW*, pp. 387, 508, 511, 597, 605, 637-638, 677, 699, 701, 703, 738, 740, 740, 745.



## Chapter Eight

### **“Mother Russia”: Deportation of the Vojvodina Germans to Forced Labour in the Soviet Union**

This title may seem a cynical mockery, but by the end of the chapter it will be clear that it is not. The comparison of the living conditions in Yugoslav and Soviet camps will prove that. For accuracy's sake, one should keep in mind that the majority of the deported *Volksdeutsche* were sent not to Russia proper but to Ukraine. However, it little mattered to the exiled Swabians.

Just like the nazification before the war and expulsion of the Ethnic-Germans after the war, the deportation to the Soviet Union was a European phenomenon. The action of capturing and transporting the German labour force lasted from December 1944 to April 1945. It encompassed all countries of Eastern Europe under the Soviet sway. The Red Army commanders in those countries were ordered to round up and send to the Soviet Union a given number of forced labourers who would help rebuild the devastated First Country of Socialism. Each of the four Soviet army groups East of the Oder-Neisse line was ordered to capture 90 000 Germans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LW, p. 924.



In Eastern parts of Germany and (for the greater part) Hungary, man-hunting was done by the Red Army. In Southern Hungary Yugoslav partisans also took part in the chase. In Romania the action was carried out under the Soviet supervision but by the Romanian military and part of the civilians.<sup>2</sup> During the action in Hungary, not only Swabians, but also Hungarians (civilians and soldiers alike), as well as the Jews, and even the Slavs were deported.<sup>3</sup> In Poland the local authorities carried out the action under the Russian auspices.<sup>4</sup>

In Yugoslavia rounding up of the *Volksdeutsche* was performed by the new communist authorities. Only the recruiting commissions and doctors for the medical check up were supplied by the Soviets.<sup>5</sup> The action lasted for a fortnight,<sup>6</sup> although it seems in some places the preparations took two more weeks. Thus for instance, in the concentration camps in Vr{ac, Gudurica and Veliko Sredi{te, on Russian demand, a census of the incarcerated *Volksdeutsche* and their families was taken.<sup>7</sup> Apparently it was meant to be used for recruitment of the deportees later on.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid; *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mittleuropa. Bd. III. Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Romaenien* (henceforth: *Dok. III*), Bonn 1957, p. 79E.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mittleuropa. Bd. II. Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Ungarn* (henceforth: *Dok. II*), Bonn 1956, p. 72E.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 94E-95E, 314.

<sup>6</sup> *LW*, p. 924.

<sup>7</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 41-44.

In the minutes of the meeting between Tito and Stalin and their aides on 22 November 1944, it was recorded that in the presence of the Yugoslav delegation Stalin rang up marshal Tolbuchin and ordered him to send immediately all the Ethnic-Germans from the Banat of both sexes aged 16 to 50, whom he considered his POWs, to forced labour to the Soviet Union. He allowed that they should take with them only what they could carry in their hands.<sup>8</sup> The Yugoslav communists did not protest at such arbitrary and unlawful deportation of the Yugoslav citizens because they did not dare oppose their Moscow master and because they were glad to be rid of as many *Volksdeutsche* as possible.

Later developments showed that Stalin's orders were not carried out to the full. It seems they were changed in the meantime: not all the Swabians were deported from the Banat, but many were deported from Bacska too. In any case, the number of the deportees was much lower than it would have been had Stalin's order been executed in its original form.

During the medical check up by the Soviet doctors, the obviously ill, mothers with toddlers, pregnant women and physically disabled were weeded out. The vast majority of those singled out for deportation, were women. In some transports they outnumbered men six or even eight to one.<sup>9</sup> Males aged 15 to 45 and females aged 17 to 35 were accepted.<sup>10</sup> Some mothers

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<sup>8</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 680.

<sup>9</sup> *Dok.*, p. 95E.

<sup>10</sup> *LW*, p. 930; Lehmann, p. 60.

volunteered to join their daughters,<sup>11</sup> some wives their husbands,<sup>12</sup> and some children their parents.<sup>13</sup>

The transports were leaving by train from bigger places with good railway connections: Sombor, Kula, Apatin, Od`aci, Kikinda, Pan~evo, Be~kerek, Vr{ac or from the surrounding villages.<sup>14</sup>

The schedule of transport was as follows: Sombor 29 - December 1944, January 1945; Apatin - 27, 29, 31 December 1944; Kula - 26/27 December 1944, 1 January 1945; Od`aci - 28 and 31 December 1944; Kikinda - 25-27 and 29-31 December 1944; Pan~evo - 1-2 and 6-7 January 1945; Be~kerek 28 and 31 December 1944, and possibly one more transport; Vr{ac - 6 January 1945 and maybe one more transport.<sup>15</sup>

Very often the deportees did not know where they headed before they reached Romania.<sup>16</sup> 30 to 40 people were crammed in one freight-car.<sup>17</sup> Every train had 40 to 50 wagons.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes wagons had floors covered with straw and were supplied with stoves<sup>19</sup> and sometimes not.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes the wagons were locked and were never opened during the

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<sup>11</sup> *Dok.*, p. 295; *LW*, p. 933.

<sup>12</sup> *LW*, p. 937; *Dok.*, p. 303.

<sup>13</sup> *LW*, p. 954.

<sup>14</sup> *Dok.*, p. 94E.

<sup>15</sup> *Dok.*, p. 97E.

<sup>16</sup> *Dok.*, p. 95E.

<sup>17</sup> *LW*, pp. 51, 665; *Dok.*, pp. 301, 320, 339.

<sup>18</sup> *Dok.*, p. 95E.

<sup>19</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 63; *Dok.*, pp. 314, 320; *LW*, pp. 434, 968, 975.

<sup>20</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 303, 310; *50 Jahre*, p. 48.

journey.<sup>21</sup> The deportees had to ease nature in them throwing ordure out in bags.<sup>22</sup> However, most of the transports stopped: some of them at least once a day for taking water and satisfying bodily needs;<sup>23</sup> other transports stopped every two or three days in order to take water and firewood.<sup>24</sup> Under such conditions many contracted diarrhea.<sup>25</sup>

The wagons were very cold and lack of water was chronic.<sup>26</sup> Food was also scarce: people usually had to make do with what they had brought from home.<sup>27</sup> Since the journeys lasted three or four weeks, it is no wonder that death cases also occurred.<sup>28</sup> Amputations of frozen limbs were recorded too.<sup>29</sup>

Most of the transports headed for the Donyets basin where the Swabians worked in the local mines and on building sites. Sometimes they also worked at unloading stations, in industry or at kolkhozes.<sup>30</sup>

On reaching their destination, more often than not, the Swabians themselves had to make habitable the lodgings allotted to them. As a rule their accommodation consisted of half-ruined houses or buildings with broken or walled up windows.<sup>31</sup> In the

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<sup>21</sup> *LW*, p. 665.

<sup>22</sup> *LW*, pp. 665, 946; *Dok.*, p. 338.

<sup>23</sup> *LW*, pp. 435, 952; *50 Jahre*, p. 63; *Dok.*, p. 315.

<sup>24</sup> *Dok.*, p. 310.

<sup>25</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 310, 321.

<sup>26</sup> *50 Jahre*, pp. 45, 77; *Dok.*, p. 339.

<sup>27</sup> *Dok.*, p. 95E, 315. Sometimes the Russians gave the *Volksdeutsche* canned food, sugar, hardtack and even coffee. (*LW*, pp. 937, 967.)

<sup>28</sup> *Dok.*, p. 339.

<sup>29</sup> *LW*, p. 967.

<sup>30</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 95E, 301, 303; *50 Jahre*, pp. 45, 52; *LW*, pp. 952, 955.

<sup>31</sup> *LW*, pp. 618, 946, 961; *50 Jahre*, pp. 45, 77; *Dok.*, pp. 301, 310, 315, 339.

village of Ivanovka a decrepit parish church was used for housing the Ethnic-Germans from the Vojvodina.<sup>32</sup> Some deportees were accommodated in the barracks together with some POWs.<sup>33</sup> In some cases unfinished new buildings were also used.<sup>34</sup>

What was common to all these habitations was the fact that all of them were in very poor state. There were no bunks; these had to be improvised of planks put in two or three tiers by the *Volksdeutsche* men. As for the Soviets, they did not bother much to make life of the newcomers easier. The new-arrivals were given neither warm clothes nor blankets.<sup>35</sup> In the camp of Toshkovka the Swabians had to sleep on the bare earthen floor for the first eight nights.<sup>36</sup> One can imagine what an unforgettable experience sleeping like that in Russian winter temperatures was. The *Volksdeutsche* had to build stoves themselves, and occasionally even the walls.<sup>37</sup> The apotheoses of cynicism was that in some places the inmates themselves had to build a barbed-wire fence around the camp in which they were imprisoned.<sup>38</sup>

The first seven to twenty days were devoted to such activities and resting. During that time the Ethnic-Germans did not have to work on work places assigned them.<sup>39</sup> In some places

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<sup>32</sup> *Dok.*, p. 321.

<sup>33</sup> *Dok.*, p. 305; *LW*, p. 973.

<sup>34</sup> *LW*, p. 430.

<sup>35</sup> *LW*, p. 618.

<sup>36</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> *LW*, pp. 963, 972, 975.

<sup>38</sup> *LW*, p. 969.

<sup>39</sup> *LW*, pp. 666, 672, 973, 969; *50 Jahre*, pp. 53, 77.

the Russians used this time to train the inmates for their new jobs.<sup>40</sup>

The camps were encompassed by double or treble barbed wire and guarded by armed watchmen who were rarely soldiers, and more often 14 or 15 year-olds or women.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes it was old men who were guarding the *Volksdeutsche* camps.<sup>42</sup> This can be explained by huge losses of the Soviet Union and large number of menfolk engaged in the Red Army or war industry.

In contrast to the Yugoslav camps where corporal punishments were the rule, it seems in the Soviet ones no unified practice prevailed: in some camps the inmates were brutally beaten for every trifle or in order to spur them to greater working effort,<sup>43</sup> whereas in other places no physical chastisement existed.<sup>44</sup> Apparently in camps where beating was common, the worst persecutors were short-tempered teenagers who would trounce an inmate for a trifle.<sup>45</sup> There were even camps where beatings were strictly forbidden.<sup>46</sup> In places where the unsatisfactory work effects were not castigated by thrashing, it was done by assigning extra work or by imprisonment.<sup>47</sup> In other

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<sup>40</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 63.

<sup>41</sup> *LW*, pp. 53, 672, 965.

<sup>42</sup> *LW*, p. 939.

<sup>43</sup> *LW*, pp. 668, 670, 672, 937, 939; *Dok.*, pp. 304, 324; *WK*, p. 248.

<sup>44</sup> *LW*, p. 431; *50 Jahre*, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> *LW*, p. 672.

<sup>46</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> *Dok.*, p. 327.

camps the punishment was a harder job, transfer to penitentiary camp or reduction of already too skimpy rations.<sup>48</sup>

Food in Soviet camps, just like in Yugoslav ones, was insufficient and vapid.<sup>49</sup> In most cases the size of rations depended on the effects of one's work.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes the quantity (and kind) of food dependent on the job an inmate was doing.<sup>51</sup> In some camps bread rations were prescribed for certain categories: 700 g for men, 600 g for women and 400 g for children.<sup>52</sup> As a rule, bread was bitter, half-baked, sticky and almost inedible. According to its description, it resembled very much the bread until recently served in better Russian hotels, which implies that the then civilian population also had to eat the same stuff. Apart from this kind of bread, food consisted mainly of watery soups made of potatoes, cabbage or sauerkraut as well as of several kinds of cereal gruels.<sup>53</sup> Small pieces of meat were a rarity and were reserved for the workers doing the hardest jobs.<sup>54</sup> A dead horse was a real feast.<sup>55</sup>

Meager menu was supplemented in three ways: by stealing, begging and trade, i.e. swapping.

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<sup>48</sup> *Dok.*, p. 340; *LW*, p. 950; Schneider, p. 273.

<sup>49</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 297, 301, 304-305, 311, 313, 316-317, 327, 335, 340; *LW*, pp. 430, 618, 649, 666, 668, 937, 939, 952, 954, 962-963, 967, 969, 975; *50 Jahre*, pp. 45, 49, 78.

<sup>50</sup> *LW*, p. 967; *50 Jahre*, p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> *LW*, p. 949.

<sup>53</sup> See note 49.

<sup>54</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Stealing was rampant and the Russians gave the Swabians an example as to the customs prevailing in the land of the Soviets.<sup>56</sup> The situation being like that, the *Volksdeutsche* also did not shrink from stealing whatever they could wherever possible. The usual acquisitions were potatoes and turnip from the fields.<sup>57</sup> Stealing made barter possible. The Swabians working in coal-mines brought coal from their work-places.<sup>58</sup> Part of this coal was used for heating the *Volksdeutsche* lodgings, and part was swapped for food. Many Ethnic-Germans had their “mamka”, a Russian (or more probably Ukrainian) woman who would give them food in exchange for coal which was in short supply.<sup>59</sup> Things brought from home were also bartered with the natives.<sup>60</sup>

Together with stealing and barter, begging was one of the ways to obtain supplementary food. The Swabians would steal away from camps or used the opportunity when they were out on work to beg some food from the locals.<sup>61</sup> However, it seems this practice was far less widespread than in camps back home. The reasons were greater poverty of the indigenous population compared to that of the Vojvodina, language barrier and scanty knowledge of local geography. In the Vojvodina the Swabians could count on solidarity of the part of the local population. It was easier to know there who was disposed to give them something and who was not. Furthermore, a larger number of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 45, 63; *Dok.*, p. 334.

<sup>57</sup> *LW*, p. 963; *Dok.*, p. 320.

<sup>58</sup> *50 Jahre*, pp. 45, 78; *LW*, p. 972.

<sup>59</sup> *LW*, p. 975; *50 Jahre*, p. 78.

<sup>60</sup> *50 Jahre*, pp. 46, 52, 78.

<sup>61</sup> *Dok.*, p. 316, 331; *LW*, p. 672; *50 Jahre*, p. 45.



children there on the one hand spurred people (especially women) to risk going around begging, whereas the children themselves often went knocking on people's doors on the other. Last but not least, food in Soviet camps was meager and insufficient but still more abundant than in the Yugoslav ones.

In later years of their internment in the Soviet Union, a possibility of going to the bazaar and buying food and even clothes on “free market” appeared. The possibility was illegal at first (i.e. one had to bribe the guards), but became legal later on if one fulfilled the set working norm.<sup>62</sup> The inmates went to the bazaar usually once a month.<sup>63</sup> The year 1947 was a watershed in respect of living standards. On 16 December that year a monetary reform was introduced and supply coupons were abolished.<sup>64</sup> This improved the living conditions not only of the natives, but of the *Volksdeutsche* too.<sup>65</sup> At that time it was already possible to eat one's fill.<sup>66</sup>

Although the food shortage was not so unbearable as in Yugoslavia, people were dying of hunger because undernourishment was coupled with hard labour, filth and disease. For these reasons many died, but their number was never so big as in the Vojvodina camps.<sup>67</sup> Most frequent maladies were typhus, dysentery and TB<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Schneider, p. 273; *LW*, p. 975.

<sup>63</sup> *Schneider*, p. 273; *Dok.*, pp. 318, 329-330, 343.

<sup>64</sup> *Dok.*, p. 96E.

<sup>65</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 299, 318.

<sup>66</sup> *Dok.*, p. 381; *Schneider*, p. 274; *Halminger*, p. 247.

<sup>67</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 297, 301, 303, 311; *50 Jahre*, pp. 49, 63, 77; *LW*, pp. 431, 666, 670, 672, 967.

<sup>68</sup> *Dok.*, p. 297; *LW*, pp. 618, 672.

Just like food, medical care was insufficient. For the greater part, the sick received no extra food and no medicines either, not even in places where a doctor was available.<sup>69</sup> An inmate was considered ill if he had temperature over 38 degrees.<sup>70</sup> In some camps the sick were put to prison instead of ambulance so the people were scared to admit they were ill.<sup>71</sup> In some camps the dying were left out of doors over night to die faster.<sup>72</sup> There were also examples to the contrary, of the *Volksdeutsche* treated in Soviet hospitals together with the Soviet wounded. They were given the same food, cigarettes and even chocolate!<sup>73</sup> Such cases, however, seemed to be exceptions; lack of medicines and rough treatment were the rule.

The work the *Volksdeutsche* had to do was (just like the work of the Soviet deportees and free workers) done in accordance with prescribed work quotas. The diligent Swabians used to hard work did their best to fulfill the quota. However it was then raised by the Russians which effectively cooled the Ethnic-Germans' working ardour.<sup>74</sup> If the quota was not fulfilled, the inmates had to work overtime and on holidays.<sup>75</sup> In some camps work was done on Sundays too.<sup>76</sup> In others, Sundays were not work days, but one had to do various odd jobs then, such as bringing bread or wood into the camp, washing or

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<sup>69</sup> LW, p. 618; *Dok.*, pp. 335-336.

<sup>70</sup> LW, pp. 618, 666; *Dok.*, p. 298.

<sup>71</sup> LW, p. 939.

<sup>72</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 47.

<sup>73</sup> *Sandles*, p. 202.

<sup>74</sup> *Dok.*, p. 348; Schneider, p. 271.

<sup>75</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 47.

<sup>76</sup> LW, pp. 666, 672.

cleaning or doing some service to the officers of the guard.<sup>77</sup> In camps where one worked on Sundays and holidays, on great holidays one had to fulfill the double quota (the so-called “dobitch”).<sup>78</sup>

Work usually took eight hours a day,<sup>79</sup> although there were camps where they worked for ten, eleven or even twelve hours a day.<sup>80</sup> Where the working day was eight hours, it work was done in three shifts, and in places where the working day lasted twelve hours, usually in two.<sup>81</sup>

Since mid-1945 the *Volksdeutsche* were paid for their work, being thus formally equalized with the Soviet workers. Depending on the job, camp and effectiveness, pay varied between 200 and 600 rubles.<sup>82</sup> 120 to 150 rubles were automatically subtracted for food and lodgings.<sup>83</sup> Wages did not depend only on working results, but also on the working place: some (shaft builders for example) never managed to fulfill the quota, whereas others (miners for instance) could secure a satisfactory living.<sup>84</sup> The money left after subtraction of food and lodging costs, was spent mostly on additional victuals and in later years on clothes.

In order to cheer up the chapfallen *Volksdeutsche* who after some time would not be so easily deluded with the talk of

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<sup>77</sup> *50 Jahre*, pp. 47, 81; *Dok.*, p. 296.

<sup>78</sup> *50 Jahre*, pp. 63, 80.

<sup>79</sup> *LW*, pp. 666, 937, 939, 974; *Dok.*, p. 303.

<sup>80</sup> *LW*, pp. 430, 937, 939, 965; *Dok.*, p.303.

<sup>81</sup> *Dok.*, p. 86E; *LW*, p. 969.

<sup>82</sup> *LW*, pp. 618, 649, 666; *50 Jahre*, p. 49; *Dok.*, pp. 298, 311.

<sup>83</sup> *LW*, pp. 618, 666, 649; *50 Jahre*, p. 49.

<sup>84</sup> *LW*, pp. 366, 952.

going home in the near future any more, the Soviets organized performances, concerts, theatre companies and dances. Attendance was mandatory, although the Swabians, exhausted by hard work, were little interested in dancing and similar pastimes. In that way what was meant to be entertainment turned into just another unpleasant duty.<sup>85</sup> However, with improvements in life in the last two years of their internment, the Swabians' interest in such entertainment increased.<sup>86</sup> This was in accordance with general improvement of the living conditions in Soviet camps in 1948 and 1949.

Religious ceremonies and offices did not go down well with the camp authorities, but were tacitly connived at.<sup>87</sup> Where possible people attended the local Russian church, because there was no other available. Going to church had an advantage not only of satisfying spiritual needs of the inmates, but also of presenting a chance for the *Volksdeutsche* to receive corn cakes from Russian old women.<sup>88</sup> It is very likely that for some a cake on earth was more important than pie in the sky.

Apart from entertainment, the Soviet authorities organized political instruction in order to acquaint the Ethnic-Germans with basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism. In this way they probably wanted to prepare them for life in their homeland or Eastern, Soviet-occupied part of Germany, which had in the meantime

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<sup>85</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 61; Halminger, p. 247; Schneider, p. 271; *Dok.*, p. 299, 330.

<sup>86</sup> *Dok.*, p. 341.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*; Schneider, p. 271.

<sup>88</sup> *LW*, p. 618.

turned communist.<sup>89</sup> This is how one of the woman inmates described Marxist lectures and the Swabians' interest in them:

“Since the interest of the people for these lectures was nil, we were simply forced to them. The lectures were given by a Russian political officer aided by antifascist officials from the POWs camp. Since there was no interest in these lectures, they were coupled with cultural performances. The topic of each lecture was based on Marxist-Leninist tenets. The expounding was very high-brow so it was incomprehensible for politically uneducated, and therefor awfully boring. Some could make up for the lost sleep. Here is an example of lack of interest. During a political inspection a woman was asked: “Who is Karl Marx?” She readily replied: “I don’t know all the people in the camp.” Despite great effort of the political officials, no-one could score any significant success.”<sup>90</sup>

Together with political lectures, the Swabians incurred spying and denouncing by dastards from their own ranks who were bought over by the political commissar for a slice of bread, one helping of soup or few cigarettes.<sup>91</sup>

Official correspondence with the homeland started only in 1947.<sup>92</sup> Before that date, correspondence with the relatives back home was possible only through disabled inmates who were sent home by trains or through the Soviet colleagues who were sending German mail.<sup>93</sup> However, even when the post started

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<sup>89</sup> Schneider, p. 271.

<sup>90</sup> *Dok.*, p. 342.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*; *LW*, p. 962; *50 Jahre*, p. 47.

<sup>92</sup> *Dok.*, p. 343; Schneider, p. 273.

<sup>93</sup> *Dok.*, p. 343.

functioning legally via the Soviet Red Cross, it was extremely irregular.<sup>94</sup> In the camp of Chasov Yar, German mail was torn to pieces and thrown into the dust-bin from where it was picked up, reassembled and delivered by a Swabian cleaning lady.<sup>95</sup>

Lack of food, terrible filth, vermin, diseases as well as numerous accidents at work caused by lack of training and protective gear<sup>96</sup> drove many to their deaths, disabling through sickness or maiming, many more. From the summer of 1945 the disabled were sent home, or more often to Eastern Germany,( as a rule to Frankfurt on the Oder.)<sup>97</sup> Only a smaller number of these repatriates was actually sent to Yugoslavia because the Yugoslav authorities refused to accept the majority of such transports.<sup>98</sup> These transports would finally also land in Germany and Austria, after roaming through Romania and Hungary for many days.<sup>99</sup> Sometimes arriving at the Austrian or German border did not mean an end to tribulations. Being already overburdened with refugees and DPs, the Austrian and German authorities also often refused admittance to these poor devils. In such cases everyone had to fend for himself.<sup>100</sup>

Apart from serious sickness and invalidity, there was one more reason for being sent home: pregnancy. On the whole, contacts between men and women were forbidden. If a smooching couple was caught red-handed, the woman was

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<sup>94</sup> *Dok.*, p. 312; *50 Jahre*, pp. 52, 63, 82.

<sup>95</sup> *Dok.*, p. 298.

<sup>96</sup> *LW*, pp. 670, 939, 962, 965, 969; *WK*, p. 247.

<sup>97</sup> *Dok.*, p. 96E; *WK*, p. 248.

<sup>98</sup> *Dok.*, p. 307, 343; *LW*, p. 939.

<sup>99</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 307-308.

<sup>100</sup> *Dok.*, p. 308.

locked up for few days with reduced rations, whereas the man would get off scot-free. Since until 1948 mothers-to-be were released from camps, there were women and girls who strove to conceive in order to be set free. However, once the Russians were up to the trick, pregnancy was no longer the reason for release. From then on, the Soviets would try to talk the pregnant woman into aborting. If she refused, the permission was asked of the father-to-be. If he too refused, both would be put in prison.<sup>101</sup> In case a child was born, the mother had to go to work only few days after the parturition; children were looked after by a specially designated woman.<sup>102</sup>

The general release from the Soviet labour camps came about in October and November 1949.<sup>103</sup> Usually the inmates would stop working a week or two before their release. They were given better food and new clothes. On leaving, they were allowed to take with them the little chattels they had, but no photos, diaries, writings or books, not even the Marxian ones.<sup>104</sup> During five years of internment there were attempts at escaping, but for understandable reasons, they were far less numerous than in the Vojvodina.<sup>105</sup>

The deportation of the Vojvodina Swabians to forced labour in the Soviet Union was a consequence of the Soviet need of work force on the one hand and the wish of the Yugoslav communists to get rid of as many *Volksdeutsche* as possible on

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<sup>101</sup> *Dok.*, p. 301; *LW*, p. 937. This is a curious example of the Soviet notion of equality of sexes.

<sup>102</sup> *Dok.*, p. 302.

<sup>103</sup> *Dok.*, p. 96E.

<sup>104</sup> *Dok.*, p. 299, 302, 312, 318, 337, 344.

<sup>105</sup> *Dok.*, p. 333.

the other. It is estimated that between 27 000 and 30 000 Ethnic-Germans were deported.<sup>106</sup> For greater part they worked in the following places: Harkov, Rostov, Budenovka, Shachtia, Krupskaya, Chasov Yar, Toshkovka, Krivoyi Rog, Stalino, Mukayevka and Voroshilovgrad. According to the Swabian estimates, 1.994 Vojvodina Germans died in Soviet camps.<sup>107</sup> This number, the result of the latest calculations, is much smaller than earlier reckoning which claimed that as many as 16% of those deported died in the Soviet Union.<sup>108</sup> To be sure, dying was pretty massive, but nothing like so massive as it seemed to the eyewitnesses. In any case dying was much less frequent than in the Yugoslav camps.

Life was hard in Soviet concentration camps, especially in winter, but nevertheless easier than in the camps back home. It seems there were fewer manhandling cases, and indeed fewer contacts of any kind between the guards and camp managements and the inmates. Sometimes the *Volksdeutsche* went to work accompanied by only a civilian warden.<sup>109</sup> Stealing was rampant.<sup>110</sup> The inmates naturally shirked work whenever and wherever they could, and apparently there were many more opportunities for it than in the Vojvodina.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Dok., p. 96E.

<sup>107</sup> Franz Strinja, Hans Volk, *Menschenverluste, Namen, Zahlen der Bevoelkerung von Karlsdorf im Banat von 1941. bis 1952*, Muenchen 1995, p. 41.

<sup>108</sup> Dok., p. 97E.

<sup>109</sup> Dok., p. 298.

<sup>110</sup> *50 Jahre*, pp. 45, 63, 80; Dok., p. 334.

<sup>111</sup> Dok., p. 328.



Cultural and religious needs of the Ethnic-Germans were partly taken care of, and they were allowed to acquire a small private property. Contacts with the local population were frequent at bazaars, at work or in churches. Surprisingly (when one recalls the behaviour of the Red Army soldiers in Yugoslavia), there were no rapes in Soviet camps.<sup>112</sup>

On the whole, the life of the inmates was hard enough, but a tendency of gradual improvement was much more perceptible than was the case in Yugoslav camps. On the other hand, the Soviet camps were only disbanded a year and a half after the Yugoslav ones. However, most of the *Volksdeutsche* from the disbanded Yugoslav camps lived little better than their countrymen who were still incarcerated in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the surviving Ethnic-Germans in Yugoslavia were forced to stay for three more years at their work places not of their choosing, i.e. eventually they regained their freedom to move later than the Swabians from the Soviet camps. The *Volksdeutsche* interned in Russia had the advantage of going from labour camps straight to Germany, skipping thus an onerous and (sometimes several years) long bureaucratic procedure the Swabians migrating from Yugoslavia had to undergo.

At the end of the day, it seems the title “Mother Russia” is much less cynical than it seemed at the first glance. After the description of the fate of the *Volksdeutsche* in Yugoslav camps in the next chapter, it will look even more appropriate. By way of conclusion which will underscore this assertion, we can adduce the numbers of people who died in Yugoslav and Russian camps respectively. According to the latest reckoning 48 447 Ethnic-

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<sup>112</sup> *LW*, p. 972.

Germans died in Yugoslav and 1.994 in Soviet camps. After the deportation of some 30 000 *Volksdeutsche* to the Soviet Union, some 160 000 Ethnic-Germans remained in Yugoslav camps. That means that the percentage of those who perished was 6% and 30% in Russian and Yugoslav camps respectively. However, the reason for such significant difference was not only in somewhat better treatment (and earlier release of the unfit), but also in better age and health make-up of the deportees in the Soviet Union.

## Chapter Nine

# Punishment for the Innocent: Concentration Camps for the *Volksdeutsche* in the Vojvodina

In chapter seven we have described the beginning of the process of internment of the Swabians into concentration camps in autumn 1944. The first camps were set up as labour camps for the *Volksdeutsche* males. More massive internment was caused by the danger of the German paratroopers and the wish to cleanse bigger towns. In early November the Swabians were removed from them to the surrounding villages.<sup>1</sup> As early as 1 December, general Rukavina envisaged rounding of all Ethnic-Germans from particular villages and towns, “into other villages where they could be put under better control”. This was to be done “in cases when the military situation or security of our rear warrant it”.<sup>2</sup> During December the German population of the Southern Bacska was duly interned.<sup>3</sup>

This process which began in autumn 1944 was continued in March and April 1945. In early March the *Volksdeutsche* of the North-Western Bacska was interned. The people were put into new or already existing camps. In the rest of Bacska this process

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<sup>1</sup> *Dok.*, p. 92E.

<sup>2</sup> AVII, VO, k. 1661, f. 1, d. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *LW*, p. 395.

started or (one should better say) was continued on 26-27 March. The same was done in the Banat. The final round-up took place on 18-19 April 1945.<sup>4</sup> The rounding up of the remaining Swabians was finished mainly by June although some of them could stay in their houses as long as August.<sup>5</sup> The *Volksdeutsche* were interned in a whole village, part of it or only in one village street.<sup>6</sup>

One of the rare available documents about the internment is a report-cum-suggestion of the Regional Committee for the Northern Banat written on 20 April 1945, i.e. at the time rounding-up was in full swing.<sup>7</sup> In it the way the Swabians had been interned in Northern Banat is described, and the same procedure recommended to the comrades in other parts of the Vojvodina.

In each district the action was run by a member of the Regional Committee. Beforehand, everything was arranged with the military, civilian authorities, and the Administration of People's Goods. It was agreed that all members of the Communist Party, the communist youth organization (*SKOJ*), other youths, as well as military and civilian authorities of all levels should participate in the action.

If several German neighbouring villages existed in one district, the authorities saw to it that all the Swabians were put

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<sup>4</sup> Dok., pp. 107E, 351, 360, 377, 414; Volk, p. 50; Sohl, p. 60; *Siwatz*, p. 143; Halminger, p. 252.

<sup>5</sup> In Srpski Miletij the *Volksdeutsche* could stay in their homes until 26 June 1945. (Schneider, p. 252.) The villagers of Ba~ki Breg, Kolut, Rijica and Stani{i} were interned as late as July and early August. (*LW*, p. 396.)

<sup>6</sup> Dok., p. 107E.

<sup>7</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 63.

into one of them. Attention was paid to the need for such villages to be far from the border and easily economically exploited.

The action would start suddenly, at night, by a blockade of a village. In the morning, all the *Volksdeutsche* would be summoned before the municipal hall. There they would be searched and their valuables would be taken away. Some Swabians were trying to destroy or to throw away such objects so as to prevent them from being taken away. In order to prevent this, the Regional Committee for the Northern Banat recommended their comrades that the Ethnic-Germans when summoned be told that they were being sent to Germany.

The *Volksdeutsche* about to be interned were to be carefully searched. At the same time, the youths and other activists would be ransacking their houses.

An internment had to be prepared in advance. A necessary number of houses would be chosen for easier supervision of the inmates. Children up to five years of age would be incarcerated separately, with only few mothers to look after them. The same would be done with the children aged five to ten and ten to fifteen. The only difference was that in the last group boys and girls were to be interned separately. It was envisaged that these oldest children would be used for easier work.

Adults were to be housed separately from children. Here too, men would be separated from women. Grown-ups were also to be “used for work”. The Regional Committee emphasized that intellectuals should be isolated into a separate group.

The property from the *Volksdeutsche* houses was to be stored in certain places: the cattle in one place, poultry in another, furniture in the next etc. Animals should be vaccinated against

diseases. This concentration of the Swabian property was to be carried out on state estates. Breeding horses were to be given to state estates and the rest to the Army.

At the end of the document it is stressed: "All this should be done with the help of the Army, the police, the youth etc."

This document is, as we have already said, one of the rare on the subject. Its special value lies in the fact that it confirms many allegations from the *Volksdeutsche* reports. It gives important data about who took part in the rounding-up, something the Swabian accounts tell us next to nothing - presumably because the Ethnic-Germans did not care who was carrying out the action.

The importance of this document lies also in the fact that it proves that there was no central instruction as to how the rounding-up was to be executed. Apparently it was meant that the authorities on lower levels should find their own way of interning the Swabians according to the motto "do-it-yourself, comrade". The report of the Special Control Commission for the Banat confirms this. It states that "the internment of the Germans was nowhere carried out correctly, and this came about because interning was done in haste and with no correctly set criterion."<sup>8</sup>

However, despite this there can be no doubt that the whole action was centrally organized, even if the details were left to the lower authorities. This is testified not only by numerous *Volksdeutsche* accounts, but also by the Regional Committee's report itself: with no circumlocution, it goes bluntly into the heart of the matter, which shows that all the subaltern authorities had already been apprised of what was to be done with the

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<sup>8</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 138.

Swabians. It is clear from this document that it was the Communist Party and its affiliations which played the main role; at that time the Army was no longer in charge and all orders were issued by the only real power in the country - the Communist Party.

The report-cum-suggestion speaks about interning the Swabians into a village or a part of it which tallies completely with the testimonies of the surviving *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>9</sup> Only the part of the recommendation suggesting internment of the Ethnic-Germans far from the border was not observed. Indeed, some of the largest camps, such as Gakovo and Kru{evlje, were dangerously close to the frontier. But then, these were camps for the disabled and the unfit for work, i.e. the old, the sick and children who were more likely to die than to run away. It would turn out during 1947 that this exception as regards the placement of the camps came in handy.

The often repeated assertions in the *Volksdeutsche* reports on things taken away on internment are confirmed in this document.<sup>10</sup> This was also confirmed by another, somewhat older document, the protocol about the internment of the Swabians in Bela Crkva between 14 and 23 December 1944. The protocol was written on 5 January 1945 and the money taken from the *Volksdeutsche* was given to a political commissar Bora Cvetkovi}.<sup>11</sup> A document about the internment of the Swabians of Seki} (where the inmates were put into the vacated

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<sup>9</sup> See the footnote four.

<sup>10</sup> *LW*, pp. 110, 133, 143, 147, 150, 151, 322, 378, 410, 507, 538, 592, 598, 610, 623, 632, 642, 676, 685, 714, 728, 740; Sohl, p. 61; *50 Jahre*, pp. 44, 94.

<sup>11</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 55-57.

half of the village<sup>12</sup>) also survives. It contains the information that the money and valuables taken from the Ethnic-Germans were given to the Serbian Commercial Bank.<sup>13</sup>

The quoted report-cum-suggestion of the Regional Committee for the Northern Banat stipulates that the “valuables” were to be taken from the Swabians. However, the document does not explain what is understood under “valuables”. Money and jewelry were not mentioned but were certainly meant. Did “valuables” mean anything else? Judging by the Swabians’ accounts, it did.<sup>14</sup> What were “valuables” in those hard wartime days? They could be ordinary things for everyday use which in times of peace are not considered “valuables”: a pair of boots or a good overcoat were considered a real luxury in the days of wartime privations. Lack of clothes among the partisans was a regular feature of their units.<sup>15</sup> This is how an eyewitness described the partisan and Soviet troops which entered Banatski Dvor:

“The Russian troops, just like the partisans, were ragged, and for greater part had no shoes, but only rags wrapped around their feet. Over their heads, they mostly had only horse blankets...”<sup>16</sup> Another eyewitness characterized them as “ragged and haggard”.<sup>17</sup> Under such conditions, “valuables” became a rather vague term, usually understood in broadest sense.

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<sup>12</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Arhiv Vojvodine (henceforth: AV), F 171 III-919/944.

<sup>14</sup> See the footnote ten.

<sup>15</sup> IAPKSKV 2 / 63.

<sup>16</sup> *LW*, p. 231.

<sup>17</sup> *WK*, p. 236.



The quoted document of the Regional Committee for the Northern Banat also confirms the *Volksdeutsche* allegations that on internment into local camps or soon after it the children were separated from their parents or relatives.<sup>18</sup> In concentration camps for those fit for work, the children were put into separate children's quarters. Contacts between the children and their parents were strictly forbidden there too,<sup>19</sup> although sometimes exceptions which confirmed the rule occurred<sup>20</sup>.

The interned children who were considered orphans because one of or both their parents had perished, were abroad or simply in some other camp, in the concentration camps for the disabled and unfit for work Gakovo and Kni}anin, were gathered a after typhus epidemics in mid-1946 and sent off to orphanages throughout Yugoslavia.<sup>21</sup> There they received sufficient care, good food and other material benefits. Some of the children had German nurses in the beginning but only until they started attending primary school which was always in one of the official Slavonic languages. The use of German language was then forbidden and children often completely forgot it, especially because they were living amid Slavonic children.<sup>22</sup> It took the parents and relatives a lot of time and trouble to retrieve their children once the camps were disbanded. Indeed, the procedure

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<sup>18</sup> *Dok.*, p. 11E; *LW*, pp. 548, 552.

<sup>19</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 505, 507; Sandles, pp. 305-306; Lenz, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> This was the case in the concentration camp in Sremska Mitrovica in 1946. (*FT*, p. 120.) It seems at other times this was not so there either. (Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 466.)

<sup>21</sup> The number of these orphanages surpassed 100. (*AK*, p. 243.)

<sup>22</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 505,507; *LW*, pp. 49, 52, 134, 369-370, 444, 512, 556; Halminger, n.d., p. 253.

often lasted several years.<sup>23</sup> this was made even more difficult by the fact that some children passed through as many as 15 orphanages.<sup>24</sup> The difficulties were aggravated by obstacles created by the Yugoslav authorities.<sup>25</sup>

The quoted document of the Regional Committee states that children aged 10 - 15 should be utilized for work. This indeed was the practice. In one case the superiors were so unrealistic or so cruel as to assign 13-year olds for work at building a bridge over the Danube between Belgrade and Pan~evo.<sup>26</sup>

The valuable document quoted above also gives some information, often appearing in other available documents and Swabians' testimonies, about the *Volksdeutsche* property. The topic of German property has already been addressed in this book but could be a subject for a study in its own right. Suffice it here to say only that the Ethnic-Germans sometimes had to help with the inventorying and depositing of their own property.<sup>27</sup> The Extraordinary Control Commission for the Banat found that in no one single place had the property of the interned Germans been correctly inventoried and that a considerable quantity of goods had either been stolen or distributed among the officials.

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<sup>23</sup> *LW*, pp. 52, 558.

<sup>24</sup> *AK*, p. 243.

<sup>25</sup> *AK*, p. 253. For a more comprehensive, somewhat literary account on the fate of the Swabian children, albeit not without factual errors see: A.K. Gauss, *Kinder im Schatten*, Salzburg 1950.

<sup>26</sup> This particular group was refused (although not without calling names) by more sensible officials on the building site and sent away. Eventually the group was sent to work in the fields around Bela Crkva. (*LW*, pp. 99-100.)

<sup>27</sup> Schneider, p. 252; *50 Jahre*, p. 32.

Furthermore, the confiscated cattle were being kept under insalubrious conditions dying from disease and the victuals were being spoiled.<sup>28</sup> In some places, immediately after the Ethnic-Germans had been evicted from their homes and interned, local officials started sticking pieces of paper with their (officials') names or names of some institutions on Swabian houses' front doors in order to reserve them for themselves.<sup>29</sup> Thus the internment of the Swabians brought about another wave of plundering, almost on the same scale like the first one in the first weeks of the communist power.

The Swabian author Anton Tafferner divided the camps for the *Volksdeutsche* into four groups:

- 1) Concentration camps;
- 2) Collection camps (*Sammellager*);
- 3) Labour camps;
- 4) Sick and children's camps.<sup>30</sup>

His list comprises 54 camps, the vast majority of them in the Vojvodina. These were:

- 1) Concentration camps:
  - Kni}anin (October 1944-March 1948). Some 33 000 inmates passed through this camp.
  - Kikinda (November 1944-November 1946)
  - Molin (September 1945 - April 1947) After the camp was closed down, some 7 000 inmates were transferred to Gakovo.

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<sup>28</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III- 3 / 138.

<sup>29</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 145.

<sup>30</sup> Anton Tafferner, *Donauschwaben in den Todeslagern der Titopartisanen 1944-48*, in: Schmidt (ed.), p. 128.

- Gakovo ( 15 March 1945 - January 1948) The camp accommodated 17 000 Swabians at a time.

- Kru{evlje (12 March 1945 - the end of 1947) The camp housed some 7 000 inmates at a time.

- Ba~ki Jarak ( 3 November 1944 - 13 April 1946) Some 15 000 people were incarcerated there, 9 300 of them died.

- Sremska Mitrovica ( The camp existed only for a shorter time in autumn 1945.)

- Krndija, Croatia (15 August 1945 - 15 May 1946) The camp housed 3000 inmates at a time.

2) Collection and labour camps: Sombor, Seki}, Crvenka, Apatin, Kula, Vrbas, Pa{i}evo, Tor`a, Filipovo, Od`aci, Parabu}, [ove, Ba~ka Palanka, Stari Futog, Novi Sad, Ruma, Zemun, Pan~evo, Kovin, Bela Crkva, Vr{ac, Nema~ki Elemir, [upljaja, Nema~ka E~ka, Banatski Despotovac, Se~anj, Sar~a, Lazarevo, Be~kerek, Ja{a Tomi}, Pardanjan, ^estereg, Nova Crnja, Banatska Topola. Furthermore, camps like Podravlje, Valpovo, Josipovac and Tenje existed in Croatia.

3) Camps for the sick were: Begej Sveti \ura|, Katarina and Banatski Karlovac.

4) Camps for children were operating in Vljakovac, Debelja~a, Banatsko Novo Selo and Jabuka.

This list however, is incomplete. One of the few available Yugoslav documents about the camps for the *Volksdeutsche* is the list of concentration camps in the Vojvodina, most probably from May 1945, i.e. from the time the process of rounding up was still going on. The list mentions the following camps: Novi Sad, Ba~ka Palanka, Ba~ki Jarak, Pa{i}evo, Nove [ove, Stepanovi}evo, Kulpin, Titel, Stari Vrbas, Tor`a, Stari Futog,

Ba~ka Palanka ( a concentration camp for the Ethnic-Hungarians), Subotica, Seki}, Sombor, Od`aci, Beli Manastir, Zmajevac, Gakovo, Kru{evlje, Vr{ac, Gudurica, Bela Crkva, Pan~evo, Kovin, Banatski Despotovac, Banatski Karlovac, [u{ara, Mariolana, Petrovgrad (i.e. Be~kerek), Kikinda, Srpska Crnja, Nakovo, Banatska Topola, [arlvil, Soltur, St. Hubert, Katarina, Klek and Sremska Mitrovica.<sup>31</sup>

For unknown reasons Tafferner does not mention 16 of the camps from the Yugoslav authorities' list. If we add these 16 to his 54 we arrive at the number of 70. This tallies with the results of the latest research of Vladimir Geiger.<sup>32</sup> However, the latest *Volksdeutsche* results show a total of as many as 87 camps in the whole of Yugoslavia, 75 of them in the Vojvodina.<sup>33</sup>

***To be sure most of the camps were in the Vojvodina because most of the Ethnic-Germans lived there.*** Within the Vojvodina the majority of camps was in the Banat for the same reason. However, one should always keep in mind that not all of the camps existed simultaneously. Indeed, some of them were disbanded and others set up in their stead, or the inmates from a closed down camp were moved to another one already existing. The reasons for these changes must have been of practical nature, but we are still in the dark as to the details.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 139.

<sup>32</sup> Vladimir Geiger, *Sudbina folksdoj~era u biv{oj Jugoslaviji (s posebnim osvrtom na razdoblje nakon Drugog svjetskog rata)*, in: Geiger, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> AK, p. 320.

<sup>34</sup> In some cases the camps were closed down and the *Volksdeutsche* moved to other places in order to make room for the colonists. (AJ, F 97, 2/18.)

As for Tafferner's classification, its basis is not quite clear. This goes especially for the difference between concentration and collection camps. To all intents, it is one and the same thing. There is neither a linguistic nor a real difference between these camps. The same could be said of labour camps: in a way all camps were labour camps because all inmates were obliged to work no matter which kind of camp they were imprisoned in.

The Yugoslav communist authorities' list shows that by May 1945 74 918 *Volksdeutsche* were interned in the Vojvodina. Apart from them, 1 179 German POWs, 4638 Ethnic-Hungarians (out of them 3632 in Ba-ki Jarak, 147 in the all-Hungarian camp in Pa{i}evo and a handful scattered throughout other camps), as well as 232 other non-Germans were interned at that time. This means that the total number of inmates in the Vojvodina was 79 903, most of them Swabians. The second largest group were the Ethnic-Hungarians, but their number was incomparably smaller than that of the *Volksdeutsche*: while the process of rounding up the Swabians was still not finished, the process of setting the Hungarians free was drawing to an end.

The document speaks about four Germans being released from the Tor'a camp for supporting the partisans, as well as of 76 children under 16 set free on account of their age. Since the process of interning was not finished until several months later, it is not to be excluded that these children were interned again later on.

According to the officially published Yugoslav data, in all 96 769 Ethnic-Germans were interned. Out of that number 24 403 were children, 19 953 people over 65, and 52 413 fit for

work.<sup>35</sup> According to the same data 2000 people escaped and 3121 were taken to the Soviet Union. Approximately 2600 were set free for supporting the partisans or for being married to non-Germans. The total of the interned *Volksdeutsche* in all of Yugoslavia was given at approximately 110 000. According to these data 9 680 inmates died.

All these numbers differ considerably from the figures the *Volksdeutsche* authors adduce. This is true for the total number of the imprisoned, and especially so for the number of the deportees to the Soviet Union which was reduced by ten times, as well as for the number of the people who died in Yugoslav camps, reduced by five times. The exiled Swabians quote research work done for several decades; as for the Yugoslav authorities, they do not adduce their sources which are still hush-hush as most of the things concerning this period of the Swabians' history in Yugoslavia. As ever, the figures adduced by the national minority are higher, than those quoted by the state which does its best to diminish them. Historians are as yet unable to pass judgment on the whole affair on the basis of the relevant Yugoslav documents which remain unavailable.

The quoted list of the Vojvodina concentration camps from May 1945 speaks of the numbers of inmates in each camp, the number of guards (ranging from a single one in the small camp of Stepanovi}evo to a whole battalion in one of the largest camps in Ba-ki Jarak), and of the work done by the inmates. Some camps had no barbed wire fence, but were heavily guarded.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Slobodan Kljakovi}, *Kakvi su bili logori za folksdoj-ere*, Politika 28 March 1994.

<sup>36</sup> *AK*, pp. 146, 171.

As for the camp discipline, it was assessed differently, depending on the number of guards: as a rule where their number was small, the discipline was poor. The same was said of the effects of the Swabians' work, which however did not depend only on the number of watchmen but of the number of the unfit for work too. In the camps for the disabled, Gakovo and Kru{evlje, there were 10 397 and 5836 unfit for work respectively. Together with the disabled, the sick and those from the camps with special purpose (Nakovo, Banatska Topola, [arlvil, Soltur, St. Hubert, Katarina and Klek), the total number of those unfit for work reached at that time 25 052. Out of that number, 12 575 were women. In Ba~ki Jarak out of 4095 Swabians, only 400 could be used for some work.

As we have said, the number of guards was different in various camps. So was the number of hot meals daily, which seem to indicate that at that time either no central instruction as to how the camps were to be run existed, or that it was impossible to put it into practice.

The quoted document mentions no distinction among the camps, save that the camps for the unfit are specially marked. The official division differed from Tafferner's. It was used by Hans-Ulrich Wehler and it has only three categories: central labour camps, local camps and camps for the unfit for work.

Since spring 1945 the running of the camps was assigned to the Camps Department of the district administrations, which were in turn subordinated to Camps Sections of the Interior Ministries of respective republics. Since then, guarding the camps was entrusted to the regular army and the police.<sup>37</sup> However, this

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<sup>37</sup> *Dok.*, p. 108E.



was not always a boon.<sup>38</sup> Later on the Administration of People's Goods took over running the local camps which weakened discipline in them.<sup>39</sup> The survivors from the concentration camps, claimed afterwards that the first supreme chief of all the camps in the country was one of the communist top-brass, a Jewish intellectual, translator of Marx , journalist, painter and one of the main communist law-makers, Mo{a Pijade (1890-1957)<sup>40</sup>. There are no conclusive proofs of this, and of course his orthodox biographers never mention that facet of his activities. And yet there are indications that the Swabian allegations are not completely fictitious. The fact that the list of the Vojvodina camps is to be found in his legacy in the Archive of Yugoslavia seems to suggest that he was directly implicated.

According to the *Volksdeutsche* testimonies, Pijade was succeeded by Vid Dodik.<sup>41</sup> Unlike his predecessor who seems never to have visited his charge, Dodik, according to what the Ethnic-Germans tell us, did. His visit to the camp in Banatski Brestovac and his speech on the occasion were recorded. He told the inmates that there was no place for the Germans in Yugoslavia any more, and that all of them would be resettled in Germany. However, he was not able to say exactly when this would happen. He also promised better food, which came true: for some time the imprisoned children were given powdered

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<sup>38</sup> AK, p. 184.

<sup>39</sup> Dok., p. 108E..

<sup>40</sup> LW, p. 94.

<sup>41</sup> LW, pp. 83, 355, 693.

milk.<sup>42</sup> Visits to the camps by various commissions also brought improvements, but only for a time .<sup>43</sup>

What were then the living conditions in these camps? They were far from being so good as the representatives of the government depicted them in their reports, to say the least. However, in the beginning they were, at least in some places , quite bearable. Thus for instance the already often quoted list of the concentration camps in the Vojvodina states that in Banatski Brestovac, Banatski Karlovac, [u{ara, Mariolana, Vr{ac, Pan~evo, Gudurica, Kovin and Bela Crkva food was so good, thanks to the food packages that were being brought (presumably by the relatives still at liberty), that there was no need for cooking. <sup>44</sup> It may well have been an exaggeration, but it confirms the impression one gets from the *Volksdeutsche* reports, that as long there was food in abandoned Swabian houses, and as long there were free Swabians, the situation of the interned was sufferable. From their reports we learn that, at least in some places, it was still comparatively easy to steal out and buy some food in those days. <sup>45</sup> In Seki} it was possible for some time to get some extra food hidden in empty German houses.<sup>46</sup> In this particular village a Swabian girl could ride on bike to the neighbouring village of I|o{ to buy medicines for the camp.<sup>47</sup> Similar things were recorded elsewhere too. To be sure, the fate of those interned out of their home-place, and especially

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<sup>42</sup> LW, p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> Dok., pp. 408, 432, 472, 504; LW, pp. 604, 639.

<sup>44</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 139.

<sup>45</sup> Schneider, p. 263.

<sup>46</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

of those in bigger central camps, was much worse. Those in their home-places at least knew the place and could often count on assistance from their non-German neighbours.

As a rule, people were accommodated in vacated Swabian houses, and in case room was lacking in pigsties and stables.<sup>48</sup> Inmates slept on the floor which was sometimes covered with some straw.<sup>49</sup> In larger camps, people also slept on the floor.<sup>50</sup> In such places as many as 500 inmates were put into a barrack or a single factory building.<sup>51</sup> This is confirmed by Yugoslav documents: in May 1945 no less than 716 *Volksdeutsche* were sleeping in the former starch factory in Subotica.<sup>52</sup> In camps small or large, private houses or factory workshops, everywhere and at all times lodgings were overcrowded. This can also be gleaned from the quoted report on the camps in the Vojvodina if one compares the number of inmates to available space. Thus the Swabians often could not so much as stretch and have some rest at the end of a hard working day.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the official division of camps into labour and camps for the unfit for work, the inmates had to work in all camps. The *Volksdeutsche* went to work accompanied by an armed guard or a supervisor, although camps with no supervision also existed.<sup>54</sup> Ethnic-German commissars in charge of parts of the camp also existed. They had to bring the inmates to meeting-

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<sup>48</sup> AK, p. 171; *50 Jahre*, pp. 58, 84, 85; Sohl, p. 61; WK, pp. 261, 275.

<sup>49</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 93; LW, p. 635; Lehmann, p. 61.

<sup>50</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 107; WK, p. 260.

<sup>51</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 107; FT, p. 203; WK, p. 261; LW, 539.

<sup>52</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25. III-3 / 139.

<sup>53</sup> Schneider, p. 253; Zollitsch, p. 186; *50 Jahre*, p. 50; LW, p. 643.

<sup>54</sup> AJ, F 513, k. 25. III-3 / 139.

place before these were sent to work. Their superiors were higher-commissars.<sup>55</sup>

The work was done from for seven hours a day in the camp for the unfit in Ba~ki Jarak, to ten hours in other places and from dawn to sundown in some camps.<sup>56</sup> In most cases the Swabians worked in the fields, but often also building roads, railwaytracks, bridges, in factories or at clearing works and the like.<sup>57</sup> The children were forced to work too.<sup>58</sup> Many Swabians had steady jobs in kitchens, laundries, saw-mills, hospitals, kinder-gartens, workshops or as coachmen.<sup>59</sup> This group was in better position than the rest who were used wherever needed, depending on season and work to be done. The worst off were undoubtedly those clearing mine-fields in Syrmium,<sup>60</sup> and those exhuming partisan corpses in order to have them decently buried.<sup>61</sup>

In a way, the privileged among the Swabians were, apart from those working in kitchens, laundries and hospitals, also those rented to individuals (mostly peasants) or state institutions, as well as the Swabian women and girls employed as maids in homes of many officials of different rank.

The lack of the work-force in the Vojvodina which could not be made up even by bringing workers from outside the

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<sup>55</sup> *LW*, p. 686.

<sup>56</sup> *AJ*, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 139.

<sup>57</sup> *LW*, pp. 194, 199, 232, 254, 271, 301, 306, 331, 427, 615, 623, 628, 686-697, 703, 744; *50 Jahre*, pp. 35, 50, 86, 88, 107; *WK*, pp. 246-247, 262.

<sup>58</sup> *IAPKSKV 2 / 680*; *LW*, pp. 146, 623; *WK*, p. 276.

<sup>59</sup> *WK*, p. 265; *AJ*, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 139.

<sup>60</sup> *LW*, p. 105.

<sup>61</sup> *LW*, p. 106.

province,<sup>62</sup> caused a widespread utilization of the *Volksdeutsche* labourers by the individuals and government agencies. The camps were hiring out inmates, usually to the farmers from the neighbourhood. The daily prices ranged from 35-40 dinars for children to 50-100 for grown-ups. One could rent a Swabian also for a month for 1000-1500 dinars.<sup>63</sup> A curious instance of a Swabian being let for 13 months for 1350 dinars a month was recorded<sup>64</sup>. The price depended on the “slave’s” intelligence and strength.<sup>65</sup> At first payment was in cash to the camp administration, and later, at least in some places, to an account in the Postal savings-bank<sup>66</sup> which suggests that camp managements were not immune to financial irregularities. The *Volksdeutsche* were not rented only by individuals but also by agencies and firms.<sup>67</sup> The inmates were hired out by piece and not by name, so the camp administration had no way of knowing who was where.<sup>68</sup>

This trade in people, however shameful and demeaning it had been, was welcome for the Ethnic-Germans. Their temporary “masters” usually fed them well and treated them humanely. This was a chance for them to leave camps for a time,

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<sup>62</sup> *Borba*, 18 August 1945, p. 3; 17 October 1945, p. 4; *Politika* 10 December 1944, p. 7; 6-7 May 1945, p. 7; 20 May 1945, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Dok., pp. 240, 389, 396, 400, 411, 434, 531, 536; LW, p. 51, 102, 134, 283, 286, 299, 305, 323, 331, 345, 403, 425, 501, 540, 535, 590, 592, 593, 673, 676, 677, 717; *WK*, p. 276; Halminger, p. 253.

<sup>64</sup> *LW*, p. 593.

<sup>65</sup> *LW*, p. 425.

<sup>66</sup> *LW*, p. 676.

<sup>67</sup> *LW*, pp. 673, 676.

<sup>68</sup> *LW*, p. 425.

fill their bellies, recoup, to save some money and food, or sometimes even to make preparations for an escape.<sup>69</sup> A *Volksdeutsche* testified that his “master” treated him like his own son.<sup>70</sup> A Serbian family from Stari Be~ej helped an Ethnic-German woman to take her children from one camp and bring them to another in which she was incarcerated.<sup>71</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler correctly points out that it would be hard even to imagine how the imprisoned Swabians could have survived without such help. The non-Germans were helping their former neighbours, friends and relatives, but it seems more often, perfect strangers. This makes their magnanimity even greater.

To be sure, things were far from being ideal. Not all the masters were necessarily good and humane. Some Swabians had to do very hard work under difficult conditions, sometimes treated to curses by their “masters”.<sup>72</sup> Sometimes the *Volksdeutsche* were shamelessly exploited but they were eager to go on nevertheless, because the food, even at bad masters’ was better than in the camp.<sup>73</sup> A case of a former partisan from Grabovac who used to hire young Swabian girls only to beat them up and than rape them was recorded. When the case became known, the Ethnic-German women managed to exempt themselves from the duty to go to work for this despicable individual. As for him, it seems he was not punished for his

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<sup>69</sup> *Dok.*, p. 240, 389, 396, 400, 411, 418, 434, 536, 551; *LW*, pp. 162, 283, 331, 345, 403, 425, 501, 540; *WK*, p. 266; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 466.

<sup>70</sup> *LW*, p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> *LW*, p. 540.

<sup>72</sup> *LW*, pp. 41, 102.

<sup>73</sup> *WK*, p. 276.

misdeeds.<sup>74</sup> This however, seems to have been an exceptional case. On the whole, even at bad masters' it was better than in camps.

An especially privileged group consisted of the Swabian women working as maids in officials' households.<sup>75</sup> We find confirmation for this also in Yugoslav sources. \ilas writes about these excellent *Volksdeutsche* maids, prized by Yugoslav officials' wives. The Central Committee of the Communist Party allegedly prohibited this practice as shameful later on.<sup>76</sup> If this was really done, it was done in order to preserve the officials' and not the Swabian women's reputation. To be sure, this kind of house work was not always free of shame for the Ethnic-German women and girls. In late July 1945 the "Slobodna Vojvodina" was writing of abuses by the Administration of People's Goods in Seki:

"The labour force (consisting mainly of girls and women) is at the disposal of the Administration of People's Goods. However, they are placed according to their beauty and age. The manager Babajev assigns "special duties" to pretty Swabian girls who are allowed to live outside the camp, he gives them food on coupons - because they deserve it.

At Vuka{in Crni}'s cute young Swabian girls aged 14 to 22 are employed. Ostensibly because all of them have sick lungs and cannot stand hard work. Apart from this, that "work" means a pair of shoes for [ustika, a dress for Katica - everything from the Administration's depot...The handsome cook Sofija also

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<sup>74</sup> LW, p. 717.

<sup>75</sup> LW, p. 270; WK, p. 266.

<sup>76</sup> \ilas, p. 411.

serves with Vuka{in Crni}. A pretty, young member of the *Volksbund*. She works at his place as cook. In her free hours she serves for personal pleasure of the warehouse-manager. Sofija was transferred to work. She was toiling there for only two days. At the warehouse-manager's intervention, she is again "in his service".

The horse-keeper, drives his lover, again a Swabian girl from the camp, to Senta. He allowed her to deviate to her former farm. She attacks workers there, demanding sheets, eggs and chickens from them... At Sandor's, the gardener, also the most beautiful girls are employed."<sup>77</sup>

On the occasion of the trial of this group in late December that year, it was said of Babaja that he "was carousing and making orgies"; of Vuka{in Crni} that he lived "publicly a life of fornication" and of a member of the Administration of People's Goods, Mirko Novakovi}, that he had "illicit relations with several female inmates".<sup>78</sup> These were perhaps some cases of prostitution which, according to \ilas, was thriving in camps.<sup>79</sup> In the published *Volksdeutsche* accounts we find no mention of prostitution, presumably because it would be shameful to admit such a thing and would desecrate the Swabian Calvary.

Unfortunately, living conditions in the camps were so bad as to drive many not only to prostitute their bodies, but, what was even worse, their souls too. That was the case with capos and

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<sup>77</sup> *Nesavesni rad ~inovnika Uprave narodnih dobara u Seki}u, Slobodna Vojvodina* 27 July 1945, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> *Babaja, Marsalek, Maki} i ostali organizovano su plja-kali narodnu imovinu, Slobodna Vojvodina* 27 December 1945, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> \ilas, p. 411.



camp dilators. *Volksdeutsche* capos, as is often the case, frequently surpassed guards in their cruelty towards their conationals.<sup>80</sup> Dilators were probably worse still.

One Alexander Koch, a surviving inmate, gave a thumb-nail biography of one such character. G. L. was a lower official of the Sports Department of the SDKB. When the situation started taking turn for the worse for the Reich, he turned his coat and started collaborating with the communist partisans in order to secure himself from that quarters too. After the war he worked as a dilator in several concentration camps. In the camp of Kalvarija in Zemun, he even had an office like a regular official.

Famous dilators were also Jakob Heck, Johann Heidecker and Hans Partke. Heck worked in many camps as dilator. The partisans called him Ja{a. In Banatski Despotovac while all other inmates lived crammed 30 to 80 persons a house, he lived alone in his home. He was shouting at other inmates and had their heads shaved. His power and malignity were great in Kni}anin too.<sup>81</sup>

The judge Heidecker was somewhat more lenient. Partke was eavesdropping on other inmates and reporting to the camp administration. In Be~kerek one Johann Meng was snitching on his fellow-sufferers. Many an unfortunate inmate perished for his trumped-up accusations. In Kni}anain a bunker supervisor Josef Sehr made a name for himself by taking away food from women and children who tried to smuggle it into the camp, manhandling them to boot.<sup>82</sup> These are only few examples of baseness of

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<sup>80</sup> Schneider, p. 258; *WK*, p. 280.

<sup>81</sup> *LW*, p. 55.

<sup>82</sup> *LW*, p. 256.

which some inmates were capable. Apart from their human shortcomings, they were led to sink so low by the camp life. What was it actually like? An answer could be, the same as in the Soviet camps, only much worse.

As we have already seen, from the very beginning the inmates had to live in overcrowded houses, farm offices or factories, sleeping on floors. They were deprived of most of their belongings on entering the camp. In most cases they were left only one suit, usually a ragged one. Heating was forbidden in the camps, and the same was true of cooking.<sup>83</sup> Heavily armed guards were patrolling the camp, beating inmates of those houses from which smoke was rising. Furthermore, there were precious few things to be burned or cooked anyway. Everything had to be obtained stealthily. This was achieved by stealing during the work in the fields or by begging in the villages around the camp.<sup>84</sup> Going out of the camp to beg was usually difficult and a risky proposition. Depending on the camp, the camp commander and time - as a rule more severe punishments were meted out in the first years - those who were so unlucky as to get caught red-handed were deprived of their prey, beaten up, locked up in cellars or even shot here and there.<sup>85</sup> The executions, which were sometimes done in public, occurred in Ba~ki Jarak, Gakovo, Kni}anin and other places.<sup>86</sup> In later years shootings ceased and the transgressors got away with only a few days in prison.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *50 Jahre*, p. 33.

<sup>84</sup> *LW*, pp. 97-98, 163, 194, 202, 330-331, 411, 419, 426, 453, 482-483, 489, 508, 562, 681, 738, 745, 751; Lenz, p. 126.

<sup>85</sup> *LW*, pp. 152, 453, 387, 479, 508, 597, 638, 738, 740, 745.

<sup>86</sup> *LW*, p. 739.

<sup>87</sup> *LW*, pp. 411, 482, 489, 562.

In order to survive people caught cats, dogs, pigeons and sparrows, and cooked or fried them in secret.<sup>88</sup> True enough, unlike in the Soviet Union, the food provided by the camp management was free, but it fell far short of the inmates needs. The *Volksdeutsche* were usually given watery soups with flour or cereals, few beans or peas and as often as not with bugs and beetles instead.<sup>89</sup> With nutrition like that, no wonder the inmates were not full of beans. Coupled with hard work (and for a starving man every work is hard),<sup>90</sup> constant maltreating and thrashing which accompanied the camp life,<sup>91</sup> as well as with horrendous dirt personified by flees and lice, starvation facilitated the spread of diseases.<sup>92</sup> What the hygiene was, one can glean from the account of one of the former inmates who writes that clothes on the ground moved by itself for lice, and that they ate the eyes, the nose and the mouth of a Swabian who was completely emaciated, but still alive.<sup>93</sup> A similar thing happened in Banatski Karlovac, where worms started to eat a still living woman.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> LW, pp. 699, 739; 50 Jahre, p. 56.

<sup>89</sup> *Dok.*, p. 374, 405-406, 428, 499; *WK*, p. 278; *LW*, pp. 45, 51, 83, 89, 111, 146, 151, 200, 274, 318, 417, 485, 488-489, 504, 512-513, 600, 615, 635, 642-643, 715, 717; Schneider, p. 267; Zollitsch, p. 189; Sandles, p. 302; Halminger, p. 253; Lehmann, p. 63.

<sup>90</sup> According to a *Volksdeutsche* report, there were children four or five years old unable to walk for hunger. (Lenz, p. 125.)

<sup>91</sup> *LW*, pp. 503-504, 507, 538-539, 541, 551, 611, 632-633, 640, 673, 676, 677, 680, 687, 696, 714, 737, 745.

<sup>92</sup> Lehmann, p. 62.

<sup>93</sup> *LW*, p. 89.

<sup>94</sup> *LW*, p. 273.

Under such conditions disease was rampant. There was no medication. Because of hunger,<sup>95</sup> typhus, dysentery, and exhaustion thousands of people died.<sup>96</sup> In some places in times of epidemics, as many as 50 people a day died.<sup>97</sup> The dead would be buried into mass graves of up to 500 corpses. The first deceased were still inhumed in individual graves with wooden crosses. Later on when wood became scarce, the dead were buried with bottles in their hands, containing their general particulars. Finally when dying reached so large scale, the defunct were simply dredged into mass ossuaries. The relatives were prevented from attending funerals. Grave-diggers with a cart would pass through the camp streets every morning, picking up corpses of those who had died overnight and were laid in front of houses in order to be carried to the pit. There the bodies would be interred without a ceremony. After some time, the wooden crosses would end up in cooking stoves.<sup>98</sup>

The number of the dead was understandably highest in the camps for the disabled: Kni}anin, Ba~ki Jarak, Gakovo and Kru{evlje. In Kni}anin out of 33 000 inmates who passed through the camp, some 10 000 died.<sup>99</sup> In Ba~ki Jarak where only typhus, dysentery and diphtheria were officially recognized as maladies, between 6 000 and 7 000 people died.<sup>100</sup> In Gakovo the death toll was some 8 900, whereas in somewhat

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<sup>95</sup> *LW*, pp. 45, 195, 276, 300, 489, 541, 579, 715; Sandles, p. 304.

<sup>96</sup> *LW*, pp. 168, 195, 276, 479, 506, 601, 643, 646, 681, 715; Gaus (ed.), pp. 143-144; *AP*, p. 566; Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 467.

<sup>97</sup> *LW*, p. 675.

<sup>98</sup> *LW*, pp. 411, 420, 511, 677, 679, 759; *WK*, p. 202, 281.

<sup>99</sup> *Dok.*, p. 108E, 499, 505, 509; Lehmann, p. 62.

<sup>100</sup> *LW*, pp. 393, 643; *Dok.*, p. 397.

smaller Kru{evlje the number of dead totalled 3 600.<sup>101</sup> As usual, these figures are not 100% accurate. It was forbidden to make lists of the dead, although some disregarded the prohibition. In Gakovo it was done by a grave-digger Johann Hebel,<sup>102</sup> in Kni}anin Katharina Fricker and Franz Springmann, in Banatski Karlovac Peter Kurjak.<sup>103</sup> In the concentration camp “Svilara” (silk factory) in Sremska Mitrovica, Hans Volk made a list of his departed fellow-villagers.<sup>104</sup> The fact that many who made lists of the dead, counted only their own countrymen (which was of course easier than counting all those who perished), renders a full reckoning of the number of the deceased more difficult.

Apart from all these hardships, the inmates had to suffer whims of the camp guards and commanders who were often sadistically inclined. In Mramorak, the camp commander Bulatovi} is reported to have said of the sick Swabians:” They may just as well croak, they are only Fascist malingerers anyway!”<sup>105</sup> There were also other malignant commanders who did their utmost to increase the number of the dead through torture, too hard labour, prison and manhandling of all descriptions.<sup>106</sup> A Jana Dragojlovi} from Bano{tor in Syrmium was remembered as one of the worst. Only a girl of 22 or 23 she was in command of the Ba-ki Jarak concentration camp. Her favorite pastime was to ride on a horse through the camp whipping the *Volksdeutsche*. She used to have them tied to

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<sup>101</sup> LW, p. 398.

<sup>102</sup> LW, p. 411.

<sup>103</sup> Strinja, Volk, p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> LW, p. 141.

<sup>106</sup> LW, pp. 146, 411.

trees and would thrash them. She plucked women's hair and forced them to drag carts full of ordure, firewood, leaves, straw and the like spurred on by blows of the guards.<sup>107</sup> The last kind of torture was not only her specialty: the inmates in Gakovo<sup>108</sup> and Kru{evlje<sup>109</sup> were tortured in the same way.

There were good commanders too, who did not want to make life for the Swabians unbearable. Indeed some tried to make it easier for the inmates.<sup>110</sup> However, due to the generally hard conditions prevailing in the whole country at the time<sup>111</sup>, camp commanders could do little to make the life of the *Volksdeutsche* easier. On the other hand, they could do (and indeed often did) much to make a hell of inmates' life.

Since 1946, and especially since 1947, the living conditions started to improve somewhat.<sup>112</sup> Receiving parcels was made possible,<sup>113</sup> although they sometimes remained undelivered in the management offices until mice had gnawed and soiled them.<sup>114</sup> In 1946 torture was allegedly prohibited, and the good news was imparted to the inmates in some places<sup>115</sup>. However, mishandling on smaller or larger scale continued unabated.<sup>116</sup> The good thing was that murders, quite numerous in the beginning, especially

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<sup>107</sup> *LW*, pp. 222, 680-681, 699.

<sup>108</sup> *LW*, p. 740.

<sup>109</sup> *LW*, p. 681.

<sup>110</sup> *LW*, pp. 266, 417, 594-595.

<sup>111</sup> Boehme, pp. 102, 138, 182, 184.

<sup>112</sup> *Dok.*, p. 112E.

<sup>113</sup> *Dok.*, p. 405, 469.

<sup>114</sup> *LW*, p. 284.

<sup>115</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 407, 431.

<sup>116</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 390, 405.

when the sick and effete were concerned,<sup>117</sup> now almost ceased. At that time the families scattered through several camps were brought together. Parcels from the relatives in the USA and the DDT made life for many not only easier, but sometimes possible in the first place. Hans-Ulrich Wehler tends to ascribe these improvements to the activities of the Relief Committee headed by P. Wagner from the USA, the Evangelic Church in Stuttgart, as well as to the Pope's action. As internal policy reasons for this improvement of the Ethnic-Germans' life (which nevertheless remained miserable), he adduces the completion of the process of rebuilding the war devastated country and the fact that by then the colonists had established themselves on the Swabian farms they had been given.<sup>118</sup> Therefore the reasons for further keeping of the *Volksdeutsche* in concentration camps lost in importance. For these reasons, as well as because of pressure put by some foreign powers on the Yugoslav government, the regime in the camps was somewhat slackened.

The communist Yugoslav authorities did not know what to do with the remaining Swabians. Clearly, the Ethnic-Germans were undesirable from the first days of the new regime. This was not only shown by proclamations and opinions of some of the new topbrass, but also unmistakably proven in practice. The treatment of those *Volksdeutsche* who had remained in the country was, as we have seen, cruel, whereas the Swabian evacuees who tried to return home were either refused entrance

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<sup>117</sup> *LW*, pp. 134, 162, 224, 232, 257, 321, 327, 335, 345, 364, 715, 720, 729.

<sup>118</sup> *Dok.*, p. 113E.

or were expelled after a short span,<sup>119</sup> or were interned with the rest.<sup>120</sup>

In order to get rid of as many Ethnic-Germans as possible, from autumn 1946, and especially from 1947, the Yugoslav authorities started not only tolerating, but indeed facilitating their escape abroad.<sup>121</sup> Thus for instance, the concentration camp in Gudurica was guarded only during daylight in 1947. This enabled as many as 20 to 30 inmates a night to flee to Romania.<sup>122</sup> At some time when the escaping was at its peak, 10 groups of 50 people would leave during one single night.<sup>123</sup>

Mass escapes started already in late 1946 when first larger groups ran away from Gakovo and Mramorak. Until April next year, some 3000 Swabians escaped from these two camps.<sup>124</sup>

Organizing escapes soon developed into a very profitable business. There were two kinds of escape, and both of them had to be paid for. The first, it seems more frequent, safer and therefore much more expensive, was the so called “white running”, which meant escape with foreknowledge and approval of the camp administration. For a little matter of 800 to 1000 dinars a person, a guide would take the escapees across the border to Hungary. He shared his earnings with the camp commander. Sometimes the guides were Serbs, sometimes watchmen in mufti, or even uniform(!), and sometimes

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<sup>119</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 177, 179, 190; *LW*, p. 279.

<sup>120</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 171, 182, 387; *LW*, pp. 332, 488, 553, 602, 722, 737, 739, 743, 749.

<sup>121</sup> *Dok.*, p. 113E; *WK*, p. 286; *LW*, pp. 74, 82, 411.

<sup>122</sup> *LW*, p. 84.

<sup>123</sup> *AK*, p. 272.

<sup>124</sup> *Dok.*, p. 466.



*Volksdeutsche* working for the camp management.<sup>125</sup> How interested indeed were the authorities furthering this profitable departure of the unwanted Ethnic-Germans, one can discern from the fact that special transports were obligingly taken to border camps of Gakovo and Kru{evlje from upcountry camps in order to facilitate the Swabians' escape to Hungary.

Apart from the "white" there was also "black escape". It meant leaving without the camp administration's knowledge. It was much cheaper: instead of 1000 dinars a person, it happened sometimes that as many as 30 persons were guided to freedom for only 5000 dinars.<sup>126</sup> Such illegal groups could be caught, but by 1947 it was no longer that dangerous. By then the usual punishments were prison and occasionally beating. For the impecunious Swabians the vainly spent money was a much greater loss.

It is an interesting question where the inmates who were stripped of everything on entering camps and were constantly searched and robbed by the guards<sup>127</sup> got the money from to bankroll their escape. Some received the necessary money from their Slavonic relatives.<sup>128</sup> Others sold the few belongings they managed to accumulate or hide. In order to get the funds for the escape, some would sell their last pieces of underwear or shoes.<sup>129</sup> Some sold the contents of the parcels they received.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 436, 467, 470, 473; *LW*, p. 117, 420-421, 425, 604-605, 678; *WK*, pp. 286-287.

<sup>126</sup> *LW*, p. 602.

<sup>127</sup> *AJ*, F 513, k. 25, III-3 / 139-137; *LW*, pp. 410, 415, 419, 673, 740.

<sup>128</sup> *LW*, p. 604.

<sup>129</sup> *LW*, pp. 605, 678.

<sup>130</sup> *WK*, p. 287.

After crossing to Hungary, the escapees reached Austria in many adventurous ways: on foot, by train or otherwise. They were helped in the process by their relatives and conationals. Some had again to cross into inhospitable Austria illegally or with a paid guide. Some even stayed in Hungary for several more years.<sup>131</sup> These were the escapes of the year 1947. To be sure there were individual escapes before too, but they defy generalization. It is estimated that in all some 35 000 Swabians escaped to Hungary and Romania.<sup>132</sup>

Although running away continued throughout 1947 (until December), from mid-year it became clear that new winds were beginning to blow. It seemed that the Yugoslav leaders changed their mind again as to what was to be done with the *Volksdeutsche*. At the same time, the Hungarian authorities became less disposed to accept refugees who were now often hunted down and imprisoned before an attempt to send them back to Yugoslavia was made<sup>133</sup>.

Already in summer recruiting for the “voluntary labour service” started. It foreboded the disbanding of the camps in the next year. Those who volunteered for work in a mine, factory or kolkhoz, were promised liberty, enough food and pay. The offer was usually taken by those Ethnic-Germans who were too indigent to finance an escape, or were interned too far upland to be able to flee. In other words, it was the people who did not want to starve, but could not run away.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Dok.*, p. 114E.

<sup>132</sup> *AK*, p. 271.

<sup>133</sup> *AK*, p. 272.

<sup>134</sup> *WK*, p. 288.

It seems that the second half of 1947 was the time the Yugoslav bigwigs were mulling over what was to be done with the remaining Ethnic-Germans. Their keeping in camps was no longer that profitable: the colonists have already taken the Swabian's place in the agriculture, albeit at first far less successfully. The "building up of socialism" was in full swing with bourgeoisie and kulaks dispossessed. The surviving *Volksdeutsche* were few and innocuous on the one hand, whereas their further stay in the camps gave the regime bad press in the world. It seems these were the reasons for disbanding the camps in 1948.

The camps for the Ethnic-Germans were gradually disbanded by March 1948.<sup>135</sup> The first to be set free were able-bodied who signed contracts for three years' work in mines, factories or at kolkhozs.<sup>136</sup> They lived under difficult conditions, which, however, were not much better for the rest of the country's population. However, it was more difficult for the Swabians, because they had to start from the scratch. Lodging was the greatest problem: rooms and flats were hard to find, so many had to continue living in stables, pigsties, sheds and the like, often still sleeping on bare earthen floors.<sup>137</sup> Some had to sign contracts for three years' work in mines literally at gun point.<sup>138</sup> Others had to work without wages, so that their living conditions differed little from their life in concentration camps.<sup>139</sup> Some

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<sup>135</sup> *Dok.*, p. 114E.

<sup>136</sup> Lehmann, p. 65.

<sup>137</sup> *Dok.*, p. 379, 510, 593-594, 597-598, 605, 616, 618, 627; *WK*, p. 288; *LW*, pp. 45, 74, 102-103, 285-288, 540.

<sup>138</sup> *LW*, p. 74.

<sup>139</sup> *LW*, p. 540.

kolkhozs still had armed guards.<sup>140</sup> Other former inmates were forbidden to leave their place of work<sup>141</sup> or to work without a permit.

How little the existence of many Swabians improved is testified by a document from April 1949 depicting life on the kolkhoz “Novi Beograd”. It writes about lack of food, clothes and accommodation. Furthermore we can read the following:

“ In “Novi Beograd” 59 Germans released from the camp live in an adapted pigsty under very unhygienic conditions. Almost on every bunk someone is lying sick and there is no medical control.”<sup>142</sup>

This description tallies with the description given by a woman inmate, also engaged in agriculture. She noted that the barrack in which the *Volksdeutsche* were lodged was leaking and draughty.<sup>143</sup>

\\ilas recorded in his memoirs a visit he and Tito paid to similar dwellings at the kolkhoz of “Belje” while hunting with other communist grandees. They saw a long barrack with linen hanging to dry and tattered women and children around it. The bigwigs entered and saw that fifteen odd families lived in the barrack divided into cubicles by blankets and canvases. They complained they worked without pay, rights and medical care. The Minister of the Interior, Aleksandar Rankovi} said there

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<sup>140</sup> LW, pp. 287-288.

<sup>141</sup> The freedom of movement for the refugee *Volksdeutsche* in Austria was restricted to 10 km from the place they were living, and later to the occupation zone. (Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, p. 476.)

<sup>142</sup> Memorijalni centar Josip Broz Tito, Arhiv Josipa Broza Tita, Kabinet mar{ala Jugoslavije - II - 3-a -2 / 19.

<sup>143</sup> LW, pp. 287-288.

were 30 000 more living like this. They remained because the labour force was needed, he explained. \ilas proceeds:” We were horrified, as if that was not happening in our country, under our power. Tito cut in: ”Give them civic right, like the others.”<sup>144</sup>

This quotation confirms the claims from the *Volksdeutsche* accounts, but at the same time shows that the Yugoslav top-brass (apart from Rankovi}, who, as the Minister of the Interior, was in a way in charge of the Ethnic-Germans) were poorly informed of the true living conditions of the Swabians during and after their internment.

This can be gleaned also from one of Tito’s order from May 1945:

“ According to the reports I received, the labour force from the German camps in the Vojvodina is being uneconomically used: a considerable part of men and women does not go to work at all, others work only for a short time because they lose too much time in going to work and coming back. There are many who are loath to go out of the camp to work. However, agriculture in the Vojvodina lacks labour force very much right now. In order to use the Germans from the camps as well and rationally as possible, I command the German labour force to be used as much as possible on the kolkhozs in the Vojvodina. The treatment in the camps must be such, as to encourage the Germans to go to work in the fields gladly, gaining privileges if they consent to do so.”<sup>145</sup>

Apparently Tito lived in cloud-cuckoo land of his communist Utopia. To be sure he knew about the camps since he

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<sup>144</sup> \ilas, p. 411.

<sup>145</sup> AZDG SR Slovenije, k. 18, f. I.

was the supreme decision-maker, but he did not know about the true details of the real everyday life in them. As is usually the case with reports in totalitarian countries, the reports he received on the concentration camps were garbled. Just like Hitler, he never visited concentration camps himself, and had no first-hand experience of them. However, it seems he never wanted to know the bitter truth, which rather aggravates than alleviates his guilt.<sup>146</sup>

After the lapse of three years of forced work, the process of legal emigration of the Vojvodina Swabians to Germany and Austria began. Their internment lasted some three years, and it took them three more years to regain full liberty (if there is such a thing in a communist country).

During their internment, the *Volksdeutsche* suffered much indeed. However, they were not aware that the life of the free civilian population was also very hard in a war devastated country confronting the West and under a totalitarian regime which wiped out ruthlessly every trace of opposition. Typhus was raging in the camps, but also outside them.<sup>147</sup> The inmates were starving, but the free people were hungering too.<sup>148</sup> Isolated and suffering, the *Volksdeutsche* often were not aware of this, or if they were, they did not care. However, it is only fair to say that their sufferings were much greater than they could have been under a more humane regime. But then, a more humane regime

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<sup>146</sup> In words of Albert Speer, Hitler's minister for ammunition and his court architect: "It is not that important whether I knew or not 'about the Nazi crimes?', *I had to know*."

<sup>147</sup> AV, F 198 GNOOV, 2234 / 45; GNOOV 2246 /45; In Gakovo the camp guards were also afflicted by typhus (with eleven death cases). (AK, p. 190.

<sup>148</sup> WK, p. 266.

would not in the first place persecute the whole national minority for the crimes committed only by some, who at that, for greater part, showed a clean pair of heels in time anyway.

A quasi-legal basis for internment of the Ethnic-Germans was created *post festum* by the *Law on acts against the people and the state* of 25 August 1945.<sup>149</sup> It had several shortcomings. Above all, like other laws touching upon the Ethnic-Germans, it was applied retroactively. This was against one of the basic legal principles *nulla crimen sine lege*. Moreover, it was implemented for punishing the *Volksdeutsche* for many deeds for which the communist leaders themselves could be prosecuted. Furthermore, the majority of the Swabians were interned even before the law was enacted. The unjust principle of collective guilt was applied, and retroactively at that. Nazi crimes, but practices of the Soviet masters set an example.

The treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* was at variance also with the decisions of the AVNOJ II, which laid the foundations for the equality of nations and national minorities in the post-war Yugoslavia. To wit, it was against the UN Charter, signed by communist Yugoslavia too. The only laws under which the Ethnic-Germans could be tried were those of the pre-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia. However, the communists were not only breaking and ignoring those laws, but were not interested in separating the guilty from the innocent, nor in gradating the transgressors and punishing them accordingly at all.

The revived Yugoslav state treated its German minority exceptionally cruelly, deserved only by some, most of whom had in time fled the country, leaving others to take the rap. Even

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<sup>149</sup> Slu`beni list FNRJ I / 1945, br. 66.

according to the official Yugoslav data, a quarter of the interned were children, and almost one fifth old people over 65. Among the rest, women were more numerous than men.<sup>150</sup> In other words, the punishment deserved by some was suffered by others in their stead. In that way justice turned into grave injustice, the main vehicle of which were the concentration camps. Just like the Nazi concentration camps, they were the most malignant expression of a totalitarian regime.

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<sup>150</sup> Nezavisni 16 to 30 June 1994, p. 9.



## Chapter Ten

### **Apotheosis of Hypocrisy: The Ethnic-Germans and the Yugoslav Diplomacy**

This chapter was meant to be more comprehensive but since this author waited in vain for 15 months to be granted a permission to do research in the Diplomatic Archive of the Yugoslav Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was finally refused with an explanation that the problem of the *Volksdeutsche* is still politically present, he had no choice but to write this part of the book with the scarce material at his disposal.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of the Ethnic-Germans was but one among the bones of contention between Yugoslavia and the Western Allies. It must be viewed in the context of incipient Cold War (with Yugoslavia becoming daily the most prominent Soviet satellite),

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<sup>1</sup> How ticklish for some circles in Yugoslavia the matter still is, is shown also by this author's other experience with the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry. In autumn 1997 the Ministry failed to give its go-ahead to the Yugoslav Embassy in Bonn to issue the author a letter of introduction necessary for researching in the Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry. Thankfully the German authorities gave the lie to the deep-rooted stereotype of Teutonic priggishness by enabling the present author to carry out his research without the necessary letter of introduction.

and the wish of the communist Yugoslav authorities to get rid of the remaining *Volksdeutsche*.

In order to achieve their goal, the communist bigwigs started expelling the interned Ethnic-Germans in October 1945. Of course, for geographical reasons, considerable part of the expelees were not from the Vojvodina, but from Slovenia and Croatia.<sup>2</sup> The British readily protested at this.<sup>3</sup> The Allied Council in Vienna also decided on 10 November 1945 to protest at the Yugoslav, Hungarian and Czechoslovak expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche* to Austria.<sup>4</sup> The Yugoslav government replied on 11 December stating: “The Yugoslav authorities did not and do not instigate any expulsion of Germanic people from Yugoslavia. They would, however, be loath to permit the return of those who live at present abroad and have left this country on their own account.”<sup>5</sup> The Yugoslav authorities believed their wish was in accordance with the intentions of the Allies expressed in the Potsdam decisions. In January 1946 the American diplomacy did not share this view. However, they were willing to take the Yugoslav demand into consideration if the Yugoslavs ceased the

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<sup>2</sup> Du{an Ne}jak, *O problemu “raszeljenih oseb” (DPs) in jugoslovanskih “Volksdeutscherjev” v Avstriji ter o britanski ideji njihove zamenjave s koro{kimi Slovenci (1945-1947)*, Zgodovinski ~asopis, 4, 1996, p. 569.

<sup>3</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers 1945*, (henceforth: *FRUS II*) Vol. II, Washington 1967, p. 1323.

<sup>4</sup> *FRUS II*, p. 1315.

<sup>5</sup> *FRUS II*, p. 1323.

wild-cat expulsions.<sup>6</sup> These were duly stopped in order to enhance the chances of Yugoslav demands being met.<sup>7</sup>

On 16 January next year the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs handed a note to the British, American, Soviet and French representatives which restated the Yugoslav government's decision to resettle the remaining Ethnic-Germans in Germany. The Potsdam Protocol was again adduced as a proof of concordance of the Yugoslav and Allied intentions. It was said in the note that the chief of the Yugoslav military mission in Berlin would ask of the Control Council for Germany to include the Yugoslav Germans in the resettlement scheme. The Yugoslav government hoped the four allied governments would support their demand. Furthermore, the Yugoslav authorities asked for "their" *Volksdeutsche* to be resettled first. The reasons adduced for this were:

1) The worst crimes committed by the Ethnic-Germans were in Yugoslavia, so rancour against them was great throughout the country and the government had to make allowances for that;

2) The *Volksdeutsche* who were still in the country were comparatively few, so the technical problem of their expulsion could be easily solved.

The Yugoslav government enclosed a memo about the life and treason of the Ethnic-Germans during the Second World War.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States 1946 1946. Vol. V* (henceforth: *FRUS V*), Washington 1969, p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> Nejak, p. 569.

<sup>8</sup> Bilten MIP, 1, 20 January 1946, pp. 6-7.

This note was shelved with the explanation that Yugoslavia had not been mentioned in the Potsdam Protocol. Therefore the Yugoslav government repeated their demand in June 1946, reiterating reasons given in the note of 16 January.<sup>9</sup>

The world public learned something more about the conditions of the Yugoslav Germans only after professor Hans Grieser escaped from the camp in Novi Sad in spring 1946 and after a lengthy and (sometimes almost unbelievably) adventurous journey reached the Vatican and allegedly the Pope Pius XII himself. His report on the situation in the Yugoslav concentration camps for the *Volksdeutsche* was translated into six languages and sent around the globe. It awoke interest of the British, French and American embassies in Rome too.<sup>10</sup>

By the time his allegations became known, the State Department accused the Yugoslav government of keeping American citizens in concentration camps. Already on 24 July the accusation that Tito's regime was keeping between 500 and 2500 Americans, denying them all rights and especially the right to leave the country, was published in the American press.<sup>11</sup> In several American notes the Yugoslav authorities were accused of keeping people with American citizenship whose guilt could not be proven in concentration camps, under conditions worse than those during the war.<sup>12</sup> The Yugoslav authorities answered these charges by claiming there had been only ten cases of dual citizenship, eight of which had been cleared with the American

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<sup>9</sup> Bilten MIP, 7, 4 June 1946, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Gaus (ed.), *Erinnerungen...*, p. 168.

<sup>11</sup> Bilten MIP, 13, 1 October 1946, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> *Dok.*, p. 435.

Embassy. The remaining two inmates were not recognized as American subjects by the Yugoslavs.<sup>13</sup> They claimed that their behaviour had been in complete accordance with laws and customs of the civilized world.<sup>14</sup>

On 29 August the Embassy handed the list of claimants to American citizenship. The Yugoslav authorities agreed to see into the matter and to inform the State Department of their principled attitude towards the *Volksdeutsche* and dual citizenship in general.

This was done in the second half of September. The Yugoslav Foreign Ministry again resolutely denied the American charges. It accused the Americans of using the *Volksdeutsche* as yet another means in the inimical campaign against Yugoslavia. The American Embassy asked for ten Swabians to be released so they could be registered as asking for the American citizenship at the Embassy. However, the Embassy could not confirm that they were American citizens, so they could not be set free from the concentration camps. The Yugoslav authorities proposed that forms be sent to the camps for the *Volksdeutsche* to fill them in, or that the Embassy take all ten dubious *Volksdeutsche* out of the country. The Embassy refused both proposals, but it submitted a list of some 500 claimants to American citizenship.<sup>15</sup> The Yugoslav Foreign Ministry informed the Embassy that only the Yugoslav authorities are empowered to determine the citizenship of the interned *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>16</sup> However, the

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<sup>13</sup> Bilten MIP, 13, 1 October 1946, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Dok., p. 435.

<sup>15</sup> Bilten MIP, 12, 1-15 October 1946, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> Bilten MIP, 13, 1 October 1946, p. 49.

Yugoslav powers-that-be were willing to let go all those Swabians whom the Embassy recognized as American citizens and if it took upon itself to take them out of the country.<sup>17</sup> This only goes to show how keen the communist top brass were to get rid of the *Volksdeutsche*: it was not important who they were or if they were guilty - it was only important to send them away.

In the note the American ambassador handed on 18 October, it was claimed that the inmates had been “used for slave work, manhandled and persecuted” or even “deported to Russia”. Such procedure was condemned as contrary to the law of nations.<sup>18</sup> The accusations were rejected the same evening by the Yugoslav *charge d'affaires* in Washington who stated that no Americans were subjected to forced labour in his country and that indeed no such thing as slave labour existed. As for 110 000 odd interned Ethnic-Germans, he said that his government had repeatedly asked of the Allied Control Council in Berlin to have these people resettled in Germany, in keeping with the Potsdam Protocol. He also stated that the Yugoslav government had asked the American Embassy on 19 January and 16 May for its good offices in order to win over the Control Council in Berlin for the Yugoslav demands, but had received no reply.<sup>19</sup>

The next day the squabble was taken up by the *New York Times*.<sup>20</sup> The official Yugoslav communist organ, the *Borba*, spurred by all this and Ambassador Patterson's protests during his visit to Tito, replied four days later in an article *The*

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<sup>17</sup> Bilten MIP, 12, 1-15 September 1946, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; Bilten MIP, 13, 1 October 1946, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Dok., p. 435.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

*“Volksdeutsche” from the SS-Division “Prinz Eugen” and the Kulturbund - protégés of the American diplomacy.*<sup>21</sup>

Its aim was of course to present the official government’s position. The article writes about the American diplomatic pressure on Yugoslavia, explaining that it was the reason of the American interest in the *Volksdeutsche* in the first place. Among other things, the author of the article says:

“Finally the whole ado about the “persecution of the American citizens” in Yugoslavia was completely clarified. It is about a group of Germans living in Yugoslavia, who declared themselves Germans during the war becoming thus the citizens of the Third Reich. These “*Volksdeutsche*” are put into civilian camps, where they await the question of their resettlement to be solved. For many of these persons who had been taken under the American Embassy’s auspices, not even the Embassy of the USA in Belgrade could guarantee they were American citizens.”

According to the *Borba*, the Embassy demanded for all persons who yet had to ask for the American citizenship to be released, but it had not accepted the obligation to repatriate them, so this requirement was not fulfilled. The American representatives were prevented from visiting the camps and ascertaining who had the American citizenship or who had the right to claim it, because that would impinge on Yugoslav sovereignty. The author of the article claimed that some *Volksdeutsche* had been released and had already left the country. He goes on to state:

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<sup>21</sup> *Folksdoj-eri iz SS-divizije “Princ Eugen” i Kulturbunda - {ti}jenici ameri-ke diplomatije*, *Borba* 23 October 1946, p. 3.

“ For instance a notorious Fascist and fifth-columnist Anna Breitenbach, the leader of the *Hitlerjugend*, is among the protégés of the American diplomacy.” Allegedly, she was received in the American Embassy. However, the author of the text failed to explain how that was possible. “A well-known hitlerite Dominik Lewand is also one of the “American citizens” among the SS-men from the “Prinz Eugen” Division and the Kulturbund...Jakob Rosmanic was born in Yugoslavia. He is noted for being a hitlerite agent provocateur and a rabid Fascist. The American Embassy in Belgrade interceded on his behalf too, although it is not quite certain that he is an American citizen. Similar is the case of the Nazi Rudolf Heger and his daughter, members of the Kulturbund both of them.”

The article speaks about several things which featured as official dogmas of the then Yugoslav propaganda. Declaring oneself German became criminal only after the communist take-over, although belonging to no nationality can be considered a crime. Indeed, there was no reason for a person who had declared himself German before the war, to cease declaring himself as such during the war. Furthermore, in the pre-war it was not illegal to declare oneself German; it was made punishable only by the post-war communist authorities by decision which smelled rather of extremely malignant nationalism of the Nazi stamp, than of *proletarian internationalism*. Contrary to the often repeated assertion by Yugoslav politicians, journalists, historians and even legal experts, by declaring oneself German, one did not automatically become a German subject. This was a stock-in-trade of the communist propaganda, reiterated in the quoted article too. In fact, not even joining up



some of the Reich German military formations brought the dubious boon of German citizenship with itself as a matter of course.<sup>22</sup> These falsehoods were necessary in order to denigrate the whole national minority and to justify the claim for their resettlement, i.e. expulsion.

However, unwittingly, the author of the article admitted that the official version was a fake. By reading between the lines, one can conclude that not only were the majority of the Ethnic-Germans innocent, but that the guilty were few. Only several individuals were named as criminals, but next to nothing was said of their putative crimes. The Yugoslav government's inconsistency was further evinced by the stated fact that some people had already been released and left the country. If *all* the *Volksdeutsche* were guilty, how was it possible to let the criminals go only because they could prove they had been American citizens?<sup>23</sup> That the vast majority of the *Volksdeutsche* interned in concentration camps were no criminals is implied also by the refusal of the commission of the Yugoslav Interior Ministry

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<sup>22</sup> AVII, Bonn 8 / 533, 90-91; London-N- 4 / H 2993947; London-N- 1 / H 297385, 297380; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxilliaries*, p. 236; Mirni}, *The Enlistment...*, p. 630; Schlarp, p. 353; PA Inland II c, D 526465; D VIII 3772.

<sup>23</sup> This was indeed not possible. When they wanted, the Yugoslav authorities did not discriminate against the war criminals on the basis of their citizenship. Thus the IX Department of the Ministry of the Interior registered the following numbers of the war criminals according to their citizenship under the POWs in the country: 4071 Reich Germans, 1223 Austrians, 3618 Italians, 3325 Hungarians, 1568 Bulgarians, 247 Albanians, 17 Czechs, 21 Frenchmen, 88 Norwegians, 22 Slovaks, 388 Russians, 4 Danes, 17 Poles, 6 others, 8700 Yugoslavs and 2560 *Volksdeutsche*. Later on the figures were somewhat reduced. (AJ, F 110, f. 2.)

at the negotiations with the Hungarians in Budapest on 8 July 1946 to permit access to the country of the Ethnic-German repatriates, *save the war criminals*.<sup>24</sup>

More or less the same arguments for public consumption proffered in the article in the *Borba*, were adduced in a Yugoslav government's memo which was handed on the same day the article appeared. In the memo the Ethnic-Germans were also falsely accused of becoming German subjects, but also of setting up the "Prinz Eugen" Division (sic!) which was proclaimed a criminal organization at Nuremberg trials. Since the Americans kept espousing their cause, the Yugoslav authorities declared themselves willing to set free all those *Volksdeutsche* to whom the American Embassy would give an American passport. On 12 October 86 Ethnic-Germans indeed left the country. Therefore, the Yugoslav foreign ministry expressed its surprise at the American note of 18 October and ambassador Patterson's statement to the press on 20 October in which he said that "nowhere in Europe so horrible camps existed as in Yugoslavia".

Kos, the chief of the Press Department of the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry, repudiated these charges and repeated his government's willingness to set free and to issue visas to all the *Volksdeutsche* the American Embassy would provide with passports. In his words, "only the Ethnic-Germans, the accomplices and abettors of the war criminals were interned pending their resettlement". Unwittingly he too made a distinction between the *Volksdeutsche* on the one hand, and the war criminals and their accomplices on the other. At the same time, he

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<sup>24</sup> The Yugoslav delegation claimed the refugees had forfeited their Yugoslav citizenship. (AJ, 103, 135 / 474.)

caustically pointed out, that in Yugoslavia, unlike the United States, slavery was never practiced.

A member of the American Embassy tried to gloss over the note of 18 October statement pleading bad timing: allegedly it was published in Washington on 16 October, at the time Yugoslav government's cooperatives was still not known there. Patterson's statement purportedly concerned the time Yugoslav helpfulness was still not proved. The Yugoslav Foreign Ministry repudiated this, claiming that the American government learned of the Yugoslav attitude already on 26 September, whereas the freed *Volksdeutsche* left on 12 October. The American behaviour was described as political manoeuvre aimed at denigrating Yugoslavia exactly at the time the just Yugoslav claims were being advanced in Paris and New York. The Yugoslav powers-that-be were quite aware that these attacks against Yugoslavia were indirectly aimed against the Soviet Union and also served as a trial balloon how far with such attacks one could go.<sup>25</sup>

The official *Borba* commented the whole kick-up the Americans started over the American-*Volksdeutsche* once again on 28 October, adducing more or less the same facts in order to prove that no concentration camps existed in Yugoslavia. To carry out his point, the author of the article perorates:

“Some of those *Volksdeutsche* are today led before the objectives and journalists' note-books of Hurst's and McCormack's reporters as ostensible “Americans” liberated from the “slave labour in the concentration camps of Yugoslavia”.

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<sup>25</sup> Bilten MIP, 15, 1 November 1946, p. 44.

Of course they pass in silence over the fact that it is the *Volksdeutsche*, war criminals and executors of Hitler's will over the enslaved peoples of Yugoslavia. These reactionary circles will not, of course, admit that it was only thanks to the sincere wish of the Yugoslav government to show helpfulness and friendship towards the real Americans, the real friends of our country - that these sham Americans have left unpunished to enjoy the benefits of the back side of American liberty, to carry on the Fascist work they had been doing as the *Volksdeutsche*, and which they are sure to do as "Americans".<sup>26</sup>

Again it is plain to see that the communist bigwigs were not interested in separating the innocent from the guilty and in punishing the latter, but only in getting rid of as many *Volksdeutsche* as possible. At the same time, the American diplomacy was hypocritically espousing the Ethnic-Germans' cause, but was not willing to facilitate their departure for the USA.<sup>27</sup> American accusations were even more hypocritical if one remembers the fate of the Japanese-Americans, who had also been interned in concentration camps after the disaster in Pearl Harbor, and some of whom were still not free by 1946.<sup>28</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> *Ameri~ki folksdoj~eri i klevetni~ka kampanja protiv Jugoslavije*, Borba 28 October 1946, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, such an opportunity presented itself only in 1950/51. (*FT*, p. 623.)

<sup>28</sup> In early 1942 some 120 000 Japanese from California, two thirds of whom were American citizens, were rounded up and sent to ten concentration camps in inhospitable parts of Wyoming, Colorado and Arkansas, although guilty of no crime. The rumours circulating among the white Californians that the Japanese-Americans were spying, preparing sabotages, and that they would help the possible Japanese landing proved to be completely groundless. Their deportation was an

Yugoslav Ethnic-Germans were just utilized as cat's-paw by the American diplomacy, just like they had once been by Germany's.

The Yugoslav authorities were urgent in their demands to have the remaining *Volksdeutsche* resettled to Germany. The Yugoslav delegate at the conference of the deputy-foreign ministers in London that was preparing the peace treaty with Germany, Dr. Mladen Ivekovi}, submitted a memo on 28 January 1947 in which the demand that 110 000 Ethnic-Germans be resettled in Germany.<sup>29</sup> As for the *Volksdeutsche* with American citizenship, the problem was still on the agenda. On 13 February 1947 at the meeting between the Yugoslav ambassador to Washington Sava Kosanovi}, who was, it will be remembered, one of the worst German-baiters among the Yugoslav top-brass, and the American undersecretary Barbour, the Chief of the Division of Southern European Affairs, Kosanovi} claimed that all such *Volksdeutsche* were helping the Nazis, and were consequently bad Americans. In other words, he admitted that there were persons of American citizenship languishing in concentration camps. As for Barbour, he stated

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orgy of racism and misplaced patriotism. At the same time the Japanese units of the US Army were the most decorated in American history. More about this shameful episode see in: Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed. Politics and the Japanese Evacuation*, Chicago 1949. See also: Hugh Bragan, *The Penguin's History of the United States of America*, London 1990, p. 586; William Miller, *A New History of the United States of America*, New York 1962, p. 437; Richard N. Current, T. Harry Williams, Frank Freidel, *American History. A Survey*, New York 1971, pp. 689-691; Henri Bemford Parks, *Istorija SAD*, Beograd 1985, p. 663.

<sup>29</sup> *Dok.*, p. 468.

that the American lists did not prove the Yugoslav allegations.<sup>30</sup> A larger number of the American *Volksdeutsche* could be set free only after the relations between the two countries improved in mid-1947.<sup>31</sup>

The question of the *Volksdeutsche* had a high priority in foreign policy of Yugoslavia. The wish of the Yugoslav big-shots was to get rid of all the remaining Ethnic-Germans. Considerable diplomatic effort was devoted to this goal. However, the results were meager. It seems that some agreements were reached with the British and the Soviet authorities in Austria, but little is known about them. In any case, it seems they were never put to practice.<sup>32</sup> Eventually, a general permission to resettle the surviving Ethnic-Germans was never granted. The reasons could be divided into formal and real ones. Among the formal ones, the most important was that Yugoslavia had not been mentioned in the Potsdam Protocol. As for the real ones, the two were decisive: firstly, the Western Allies had already more refugees than they could handle; secondly, being a Soviet satellite Yugoslavia was not very likely to be treated with consideration by the Western powers. This was best shown by the attitude of the United States. The American diplomats kept shedding crocodile tears over the poor little *Volksdeutsche* slaving in concentration camps, but did little to help them out. There is no doubt that their concern for the Ethnic-Germans with alleged American citizenship was part of the pressure that was being put

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<sup>30</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States 1947. Vol. IV* (henceforth: *FRUS IV*), Washington 1972, p. 759.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 822.

<sup>32</sup> Repe, p. 167.

on Yugoslavia in the first, and an expression of genuine interest in American citizens only in the second place. The Yugoslav authorities were willing to let all the *Volksdeutsche* go and to forget about all of them being war criminals, only if the four Powers would have them. Since nothing came of it, the Ethnic-Germans had to continue dying in the concentration camps, unless they managed to escape across the border.

Once the legal emigration of the surviving *Volksdeutsche* started in 1950, it came about not as a result of a diplomatic action proper, but of the agreement reached by the Yugoslav Red Cross and the International Red Cross. At first, priority was given to separated family members. The Yugoslav authorities were delaying giving permission for emigration, excusing this hypocritically by the fact that the Ethnic-Germans who were leaving the country would lose every citizenship, which was at variance with the General Declaration of Human Rights, signed also by Yugoslavia. This cynical explanation was dropped only in 1952 when the Yugoslav authorities consented to treat the leaving Ethnic-Germans as the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany. Since then the emigration proceeded apace.<sup>33</sup> In 1954 the *Protocol on mutual notifying about the naturalization of the citizens of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany* was signed.<sup>34</sup> The emigrants had to pay a fee for dismissal from the Yugoslav citizenship to the effect of 1500 dinars a person at first, and as much as 12 000 dinars later on. Many had to save for

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<sup>33</sup> *Dok.*, pp. 116E-117E.

<sup>34</sup> Dodatak Slu`benog lista FNRJ br. 5, 15 July 1955.

years to afford the pleasure of leaving their mother-country which had treated them so step-motherly.



## Chapter Eleven

# **Uniform Diversity: Expulsion of the Ethnic-Germans from Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland - A Brief Comparison**

At first glance, one can notice that the Soviet Union is omitted from the title of this chapter. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, the Ethnic-Germans in the land of the Soviets had a considerably different fate than those of other East European countries. In the opinion of this author, this warrants their omission from this survey. Secondly, the problem of the Russian *Volksdeutsche* has already been, cursorily but for the purpose of this book sufficiently, addressed in chapter four.

What all the East European countries mentioned in the title had in common were the sizable German minorities which lived in them and the Soviet occupation in the autumn of 1944 and the spring of 1945. Unlike Yugoslavia, the Red Army came to all other above mentioned countries to stay. However, even in countries which were considered liberated, the Soviet military were not always greeted enthusiastically. On the other hand, the animosity towards the local Ethnic-Germans differed only in degree.

This aversion was smallest in Romania. Unlike some other peoples, the Romanians had no particularly bad experiences with

the *Volksdeutsche* and Germans in general. After the capitulation of Romania on 23 August 1944, some 3000 prominent Ethnic-Germans were arrested, but were treated well.<sup>1</sup> There were no mass excesses against the *Volksdeutsche* in Romania, although individual cases of manhandling occurred now and then.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, no important expulsion plans were made.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Romanian government tried to mitigate the deportation of the *Volksdeutsche* to the Soviet Union in January 1945 on humanitarian, economic and legal grounds.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, the Ethnic-Germans were stripped of their civic rights, dispossessed and partly deported to labour camps.<sup>5</sup> In the course of the agrarian reform out of 1 450 000 acres of confiscated land, 536 000 acres were taken from small and medium *Volksdeutsche* landowners.<sup>6</sup> The Ethnic-Germans were thus discriminated against, but their survival in the country was never questioned. Indeed, the education in German became fairly well developed after the Second World War.<sup>7</sup>

In the neighbouring Hungary, known for her intolerance of minorities, animosity towards the local Ethnic-Germans, most of whom, be it said, were fervent Hungarian patriots, was of long

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<sup>1</sup> *Dok.*, III, p. 63E.

<sup>2</sup> *Dok.* III, p. 64E.

<sup>3</sup> *Dok.* III, p. 85E.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph B. Schechtmann, *The Elimination of German Minorities in Southeastern Europe*, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1946, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> *Dok.* III, pp. 86E-87E.

<sup>6</sup> *Dok.* III, p. 88E.

<sup>7</sup> *Dok.* III, pp. 91E-93E.

standing.<sup>8</sup> Many decades of Magyarisation yielded perceptible results, but the German minority in the country was still considerable. Hungarian nationalists had plans for expelling the Swabians even before the war.<sup>9</sup> That indeed was avowedly the goal of Hitler's ally, Hungarian regent, admiral Horthy too.<sup>10</sup> The lost war enhanced such demands immensely. Now it was the time to get rid of what the Magyar nationalists saw as the eternal oppressors of the Hungarians. All Hungarian parties were agreed that the Ethnic-Germans should be expelled, but they differed on just how many and which of them.<sup>11</sup> Expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche* was seen as a means of reestablishing Hungarian honour and getting rid of the largest national minority.<sup>12</sup> The Swabians were to be used as a scapegoat. However, in the first months after the war, that was not decisive.

Even before the war, many Hungarian peasants were land-hungry.<sup>13</sup> After the war, the lack of land was aggravated by influx of a large number of Hungarian refugees and expelees from Yugoslavia, Romania and particularly Czechoslovakia. The land-hunger could not be satiated only by dispossessing individuals.<sup>14</sup> Thus in the first after-war months, it was not so important to

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<sup>8</sup> Johann Weidlein, *Das Bild des Deutschen in der ungarischen Literatur; Das ungarlaendische Deutschtum in der ungarischen politischen Literatur der 1930-er Jahre; Ungarn und das Potsdamer Abkommen*, all in: Weidlein, *Pannonica*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, passim.

<sup>10</sup> Weidlein, *Die nationale Bodenpolitik Ungarns*, p. 322; The same author, *Ungarn und das Potsdamer Abkommen*, p. 354.

<sup>11</sup> Weidlein, *Potsdamer Abkommen*, p. 359.

<sup>12</sup> Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte...*, p. 175; *Dok. II*, p. 46E.

<sup>13</sup> *Dok. II*, p. 47E.

<sup>14</sup> Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte...*, pp. 178-179.

punish the really guilty Swabians, but to grab as much land as possible for the landless local Hungarians and the incoming refugees.<sup>15</sup> The Soviets made things even worse for the *Volksdeutsche*, demanding that the Hungarian government expel not only 200 000 members of the *Volksbund* and the *Waffen-SS* with their families, but as many as 450 000 to 500 000 Swabians.<sup>16</sup> Therefore the law of 1 July 1945 which envisaged gradation of guilt and punishment in four categories was not observed any more.<sup>17</sup> The criterion of guilt was soon replaced by the criterion of economic and geographic desirability of vacating certain parts of the country. The first to be expelled were the Ethnic-Germans from around Budapest and Burgenland on the Austrian border. Next came anti-Communists who were transferred to the Soviet zone of Germany.<sup>18</sup> The Hungarian authorities could not muster as many guilty *Volksdeutsche* as the Russians had asked to be resettled, so the fact that one declared himself German in the census of 1941, was enough to be kicked out.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the group of people liable to be expelled was so defined as to enable constant widening if need be.<sup>20</sup> Expulsion resembled resettlement in as much as it proceeded more or less

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<sup>15</sup> Agnes Toth, *Zwang oder Moeglichkeit? Die Annahme der Maxime von Kollektivschuld und die Bestrafung der deutschen Minderheit in Ungarn*, in: Richard G. Plaschka, Horst Haselstein, Arnold Suppan, Anna M. Drabek (eds.), *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung in der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn 1938-1948*, Wien 1997, pp. 90, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte...*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>17</sup> *Dok. II*, p. 63E-64E.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Toth, p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

humanely and in as much as the expellees were allowed to take with them a comparatively large quantity of luggage. By mid-1949 when the action was stopped because the Allies refused to accept any more expellees, some 170 000 Swabians had been sent packing.<sup>21</sup>

The whole action was officially called off in March 1950 and some of the expellees were even allowed to return.<sup>22</sup> Since then the *Volksdeutsche* were no longer denied all rights, but the property that had been taken away from them in the previous five years was not restored.<sup>23</sup> However, remaining true to the traditions of the Hungarian state, the communist authorities failed to enable the development of culture and education in German language.

As we have seen, the Czechoslovak politicians were the first to propose expulsion of the Ethnic-Germans. That is understandable if one keeps in mind that Czechoslovakia was the first victim of the Nazi aggression. However, it is only fair to state that few countries fared better and survived the war so peacefully, and even with a modicum of *war prosperity*, as the occupied Czech lands where the vast majority of the Czechoslovak Germans lived. Thus the hatred of Germans can be ascribed more to the pre-war grudges and traditional animosity going back to the 19th century and earlier, rather than to the actual war-time German crimes which were petty compared to atrocities committed by the Nazis elsewhere in Europe. The treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* was rather a spree

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<sup>21</sup> Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte*..., p. 181-184.

<sup>22</sup> *Dok. II*, p. 69E.

<sup>23</sup> Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte*..., p. 184.

of the Czech nationalism than a reaction to actual crimes such as had been committed in Poland or the Soviet Union.

The Czechoslovak politicians were encouraging a mood of revenge among the rank and file by propounding the collective guilt thesis.<sup>24</sup> The expulsion of the Ethnic-Germans was one of the few things on which more or less all Czechs were of one mind.<sup>25</sup> These ideas were put into practice as soon as the Revolutionary Guard and the Free Army took over.<sup>26</sup> These were the so-called “wild-cat expulsions” which lasted from May to July 1945.<sup>27</sup> Some 700 000 to 800 000 *Volksdeutsche* were expelled in this way.<sup>28</sup> However, although “wild-cat”, these procedures had the connivance of and sometimes even help from the authorities.<sup>29</sup> Concomitant with the expulsions was the massive spontaneous colonization of the vacated areas by hundreds of thousands of Czechs.<sup>30</sup>

By a presidential decree, the Ethnic-Germans were deprived of their property and citizenship.<sup>31</sup> The rationale for the latter measure was the fact that the Czechoslovak government abolished the Munich decisions of 1938 and the Reich German sovereignty over the Czech territory, but not over the Czech Germans.<sup>32</sup> Forced labour was imposed on the Ethnic-Germans

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<sup>24</sup> Stanek, pp. 177-178.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 177, 180.

<sup>26</sup> *Dok. IV/1*, p. 106.

<sup>27</sup> Stanek, p. 178; *Dok. IV/1*, p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> *Dok. IV/1*, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 83-84.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

(and Hungarians) aged 14 to 60<sup>33</sup>. Smaller part of the *Volksdeutsche* was interned in concentration camps, but the majority remained at their homes until expulsion, albeit with restricted rights. It is calculated that some 350 000 *Volksdeutsche* spent shorter or longer time in one of the 1215 concentration camps, 346 labour camps and 215 prisons. Due to hard living conditions, many died in them.<sup>34</sup>

In June 1945 the Czechoslovak government asked the Allies for permission to expel some 2 to 2,5 million Germans. As we have already seen, the final approval was granted at the Potsdam Conference.<sup>35</sup> After Potsdam the expulsions were regularized. By the end of 1946 some 1,8 million Ethnic-Germans were expelled.<sup>36</sup> During 1947 some 65 000 more were expelled. After the communist coup in February 1948 another 24 000 *Volksdeutsche* were expelled illegally into the American Zone in Germany. In 1949 24 000 Ethnic-Germans rejoined their families in Germany and additional 16 800 were expelled as late as 1950/51.<sup>37</sup> As for Slovakia, out of 140 000 *Volksdeutsche* living there before the war, some 120 000 were evacuated in time. In this, just like in her sham independence during the war, Slovakia resembled Croatia. The remaining Ethnic-Germans were put in

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-94.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 112; Stanek, p. 179.

<sup>35</sup> Stanek, p. 179.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 182; Similar data also in: *Dok. IV / 1*, pp. 123-125. However, according to some sources, by the end of 1946 as many as 2,2 millions left. (Stanek, p. 183.)

<sup>37</sup> *Dok. IV / 1*, pp. 123, 126-127.

concentration camps where many starved to death.<sup>38</sup> Here too were the *Volksdeutsche* hired out as slaves.<sup>39</sup>

Like its Hungarian opposite number, the Czechoslovak government determined categories of the Ethnic-Germans to be expelled or kept in the country. For the latter category, the communists, social-democrats and people from mixed marriages were earmarked. However, just like in the Hungarian case, these distinctions were not observed, although here this was due to nationalism and not to the Russian pressure. Soon the “good Germans” were expelled together with the “bad” ones. The orgy of nationalism went so far that the German-speaking Jews were also expelled. The “politically correct” *Volksdeutsche* were left at the mercies of the so-called *National Commissions* deciding on expulsion and the political power balance within them.<sup>40</sup> Although expulsion from Czechoslovakia was comparatively well organized and the expellees were allowed to take necessary luggage with them, encroachments, plundering and violence occurred too.<sup>41</sup> What distinguished Czechoslovakia from other expelling countries was a massive loss of human lives through mass murders, lynch, starvation and the like.<sup>42</sup> The number of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 171-173.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-103; Stanek, p. 181.

<sup>41</sup> Stanek, p. 181.

<sup>42</sup> *Dok. IV / I*, p. 135; Stanek, p. 178. To be sure, many died in Yugoslavia too, but the vast majority died because they could not be expelled and not during the expulsion process. The rest were the victims of the revenge in the first days of the new regime.



people who perished in the process is still very much in dispute.<sup>43</sup> The calculations range from some 24 000 or 40 000 according to the latest Czech reckoning<sup>44</sup> to 200 000 adduced in the official German version<sup>45</sup> or even as many as 250 000 claimed by German nationalists already in the 1950s.<sup>46</sup>

Expulsion from Czechoslovakia was subsequently stopped for foreign-policy reasons, i.e. because of deteriorating relations with the West. However, by then this was not so important as the bulk of the *Volksdeutsche* had already been expelled. The remaining Ethnic-Germans received unofficially a somewhat better treatment only from 1949 on, once they had become an insignificant minority among the overall population. It was only on 29 November 1949 that it was made easier for the *Volksdeutsche* to apply to regain the Czechoslovak citizenship. However it was only in 1953 that their citizenship was legally recognized again.<sup>47</sup>

Poland was the most complicated case among the compared countries. It was the only country in this group whose old borders were not restored after the war. It suffered substantial territorial losses to the Soviet Union, but offset them in the West at the expense of Germany. These new Western territories were inhabited predominantly by the Germans, who

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<sup>43</sup> Jaroslav Kučera, *Statistische Berechnung der Vertreibungsverluste - Schlusswort oder Sackgasse*, in: Brandes, Kural (eds.); the same author, *Statistik auf dem Holzweg: Einige Bemerkungen zu Berechnungen der sudetendeutschen Vertreibungsverluste*, in: Plaschka et al. (eds.).

<sup>44</sup> Stanek, p. 184.

<sup>45</sup> *Dok. IV/1*, p. 135.

<sup>46</sup> Kučera, *Statistik...*, p. 143.

<sup>47</sup> *Dok. IV/1*, p. 133.

until the end of the war were the citizens of the Reich. Only the Germans living in the pre-war part of the newly-defined Polish territory were Polish citizens before the war. Thus Poland expelled for the greater part not her *Volksdeutsche* citizens but the Reich-Germans from the annexed parts of the Reich. Furthermore, a considerable number of German resettlers from all over Europe were living in the territories that had been or would become Polish.

As for the process of expulsion, one must keep in mind that some 5 millions Reich Germans had left the territories which fell to Poland (and the Soviet Union - the northern part of Eastern Prussia) before the Red Army moved in. This was seen by the Reich German authorities and the people involved as a temporary inner-German evacuation.<sup>48</sup> Also half of the 1,6 million Ethnic-Germans living in the pre-war Poland had left even before the Polish administration was reintroduced. All these people left helter-skelter in the bitter cold during the first few months of 1945.<sup>49</sup> The attempts at returning after the end of hostilities were only partly successful due to effective hindrances set by the Poles or due to the fact that their houses were either plundered, full of Russians or burned down.<sup>50</sup>

The treatment of the Germans who fell under the Russian-Polish power was understandably cruel. Since those two nations suffered most under Nazi occupation, it was to be expected that

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<sup>48</sup> *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevoelkerung aus den Gebieten oestlich der Oder-Neisse. Bd. I/1* (henceforth: *Dok. I/1*), Bonn 1953, p. 23E.

<sup>49</sup> *Dok. I/1*, pp. 26E-59E.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72E-77E.

they would treat the Germans roughly once the tables were turned. Like in Yugoslavia, the Germans were subjected to forced labour manhandling, starvation and disease<sup>51</sup>, mass arrests,<sup>52</sup> plundering and violence.<sup>53</sup> For that part of the German population concentration camps were set up which would be disbanded only in 1950.<sup>54</sup> Soon the concentration camps were confined only to the pre-war Polish territory.<sup>55</sup> All these measures were coupled with unorganized colonization of the Poles (and Russians in northern part of East Prussia) who, often with government support, started ousting the remaining Germans from their homes.<sup>56</sup> Sometimes the Germans were used as slaves working for the Poles.<sup>57</sup> By January 1947 some 2,5 million Poles settled in the new Western territories.<sup>58</sup> Although in Poland the powers-that-be also envisaged gradation of guilt, the decree of 13 September 1946 envisaged expulsion of all Germans. The decree was repealed only in 1950 when the civic rights of the Germans were restored.<sup>59</sup>

The process of expulsion lasted several years, to be ended paradoxically, similarly like in Yugoslavia, by prohibition of emigration for those Germans who were not expelled.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 89E-90E.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 98E, 110E.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 89E, 99E.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 111E.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 131E-133E.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 93E, 115E, 116E.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 117E.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 119E.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 129E.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 141E.

Expulsion was carried out in several waves. The first one was the worst and it lasted until July 1945 when it was checked in order to prevent a catastrophe in the Soviet zone of Germany. Some 300 000 people were expelled while it lasted. During August and September, expulsions to the Russian zone were continued. During October and November 1945 large scale expulsions were undertaken with people sent away at shortest possible notice. In Upper Silesia and Pommerania the Germans were interned in concentration camps before expulsion.<sup>61</sup> During this period some were leaving on their own accord when they realized they had no possibilities for survival in their old homeland.<sup>62</sup> Another great wave started in spring 1946 and lasted until autumn. The expulsions of that year were directed primarily to the British occupation zone of Germany. However, during the winter 1946/47 the British refused further transports.<sup>63</sup> The final phase was the expulsion of some 0,5 millions into the Soviet zone in 1947. This was the end of organized expulsion. After that, expulsions came to a standstill because Poland needed labour force. During 1950 and 1951 some 44 000 Germans left Poland in order to rejoin their families.<sup>64</sup> By then some 3,5 million Germans were expelled, while several hundred thousand died in the process<sup>65</sup>. That left approximately 1 million more living within the new Polish boundaries. These were now prevented from leaving and forced to take Polish citizenship.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 144E.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 146E.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 147E.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 154E.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 155E.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 154E-155E.

The reasons for expulsion of the Germans from the East European countries show a great deal of uniformity, but also of diversity at the same time. Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland were victims of the Nazi aggression, whereas Hungary and Romania were Hitler's allies and accomplices. Anti-German feelings had a long tradition in Poland, Czechoslovakia (Bohemia and Moravia in the first place) as well as in Hungary. These animosities stemmed from historical experience of being subjected to German power (or power that was, rightly or wrongly, perceived as German) which left a bitter legacy of ethnic strife. The real or imagined historical wrongs suffered at the hands of the Germans throughout history, blended with the latest injustices and crimes committed by them served to spur anti-German feelings to an unprecedented pitch. The end of the war, victorious or not, presented the nationalist circles with a welcome opportunity to quit scores with the obnoxious intruders once and for all.

In Poland historical injustices and war crimes were coupled with the need to cleanse the newly-acquired territories. As we have seen, it was done with the full approval of the Allies. The Czechs had more of a historical resentment than the real crimes committed during the Second World War to put at the Germans' door. However, they had an extra reason of their own to get rid of their *Volksdeutsche*: for although historically deep-rooted, they inhabited the border regions of Czech lands and have proved that they could become a dangerous fifth column in case of German resurgence. The Hungarians had to put the blame on someone for the war they imprudently entered and lost. The Swabians were the obvious choice: they were Germans, and it

was Germany which lured Hungary into the disastrous war. Furthermore, tradition of German-baiting was long indeed in Hungary. It was not bare of a national inferiority complex: it has always been the Germans who brought culture to Hungary, dominated her economy and thwarted her independence (through the house of Habsburg which was wrongly perceived as an embodiment of Germanness). Finally, it was the German Reich, that was blamed for the ultimate Hungarian disaster, whereas the temporary successes scored with its aid were forgotten. However, the Soviets were forcing the Hungarians even further than they would have gone themselves. Romania was yet another case. The Romanians' chief *bete noir* were the Hungarians, not the Germans. Persecution of the Ethnic-Germans was rather Russian-inspired than a home-grown action. Because of the fact that Hungary and Romania were allies of the Reich and not completely occupied countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia, and because historical animosities against the Ethnic-Germans were weaker there, the expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche* was not carried out so thoroughly and so brutally as in the countries which had been victims of the Nazi aggression.<sup>67</sup> In other words, historical animosity, recent resentment caused by Nazi practices, the Soviet influence, but , as we have seen in chapter four, the interests of the Western allies too, all played their part in the tragic fate of the Germans of Eastern Europe. Another important factor was the need of land for the landless peasantry or the

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<sup>67</sup> The thesis of the *Volksdeutsche* author Johann Wuescht that the Ethnic-Germans fared better in Hungary and Romania because these two are ethnic islands in the Slavonic ocean (Wuescht, *Ursachen...*, p. 13.), does not hold water.

refugees and resettlers. Finally, security reasons were decisive too, especially in the cases of Poland and Czechoslovakia.

How does Yugoslavia fit into this pattern? On the whole, she fits fine. As we shall see in the last chapter, national hatred (old and new), fear of the fifth column and the need of land were at work here too. In other words, the disappearance of the Ethnic-Germans from Yugoslavia and the Vojvodina, is firmly anchored in a broader European context without which it would be completely incomprehensible.

## Chapter Twelve

### **The Pot Calls a Kettle Black: By Way of Conclusion**

The original goal of this author's research was to discover the real reasons for the direct and indirect (by depriving the Swabians of the basic living conditions<sup>1</sup>) expulsion of the Ethnic-Germans from the Vojvodina. Unfortunately, it turned out that the documents which would shed some light on the motives of the communist policy-makers are still not available. The only documents this author managed to uncover are exceedingly accidental and rare. As a rule they do not stem from the highest officials who made fateful decisions. To be sure, some more, similar documents most probably could be found, but that would be looking for a needle in a haystack, and the whole picture would not change much. Therefore we are not able to give undisputed proofs based on the Yugoslav documents what the reasons for the cruel treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* were.

In default of other evidence, we must rely on the available published sources, scarce though they are. Most about the problem was said by \ilas in his wartime memoirs which we have

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<sup>1</sup> Fray, p. 115.



already quoted.<sup>2</sup> In his words, the main reasons were the rancour and land hunger.<sup>3</sup>

Hatred of the Germans in general and the *Volksdeutsche* in particular, was a corollary of the war. Before the war, animosity towards the Ethnic-Germans was confined to nationalistic circles. Due to the war crimes committed by the Reich and Ethnic-Germans, but also the crimes committed by others but made possible by the German aggression, animosity to the Germans and to all things German became widespread. However, it was never general as in some other countries. Germanophobia made itself felt on the lowest level, i.e. in the personal intercourse and treatment of the Swabians by the partisans, lower officials and part of their former neighbours. Numerous cases of torture, manhandling, plunder, unjust accusations and murder can be explained (but not excused), apart from other innate psychological reasons, by rancour and (sometimes) justified thirst for revenge. However, it is open to debate how great a role indignation and vindictiveness played in the decision-making circles of the communist top-brass. \ilas himself admitted to have cut the throat of a captured *Volksdeutsche* SS-man,<sup>4</sup> but than, he was known as short-tempered, quick to send to glory people he disliked. It is questionable if other communist bigwigs were so hot-tempered. Their undisputed leader, Tito certainly was not. According to \ilas, during the deliberation on the future of the German minority, Tito remained silent “because he thought it had

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<sup>2</sup> Because of his sudden death of \ilas, this author could not make an envisaged interview and obtain some more information from him.

<sup>3</sup> \ilas, p. 410.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

to be that way.’<sup>5</sup> We do not know if he ever expressed that opinion, even in a private conversation, or was it just \ilas’ impression. But then, maybe he did not want to commit himself and left ostensibly the momentous decision to his aides so as to keep his hands clean? We do not know the answers to these questions.

There are proofs, albeit indirect, that most of the communist big shots were level-headed in reaching their decisions and that they only used anti-German sentiments of part of the grass-roots for carrying out their policy. The main objective of that policy was gratifying the land-hunger, rampant in more backward parts of the country mentioned by \ilas and many *Volksdeutsche* authors<sup>6</sup>. It seems there is a great deal of truth in this. The recipients of the Swabian land and farms were for the greater part people from the underdeveloped, war-devastated parts of the country who supported the partisan movement. One of the main upholders of such a solution was the minister for colonization, Sreten Vukosavljevi} who also championed expulsion of a considerable number of the Ethnic-Hungarians in order to “improve” the national make-up of the Vojvodina.<sup>7</sup> In this way the new powers-that-be solved the problem of overpopulation of the backward and infertile parts of the country, buying at the same time the loyalty of the colonized partisans and their families.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, part of the *Volksdeutsche*

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 410.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; Wuescht, *Ursachen...*, p. 13; *WK*, p. 153; *LW*, p. 34;

<sup>7</sup> *AJ*, F 97, 3 / 35.

<sup>8</sup> The loyalty of the settlers was so unswerving that 50 years later the former predominantly German and now predominantly colonist communes

landholdings were handed over to the state-run kolkhozs, laying thus the foundations for the collectivist socialist agriculture. The *Volksdeutsche* mills, breweries, brick-works and the like, became part of the state-owned industry. The chief Yugoslav communist ideologue, Edvard Kardelj, declared in 1957 that the expropriation of the *people's enemies* (i.e. the Ethnic-Germans and the capitalists) created the basis for the development of socialism.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, 38,73% of the confiscated land belonged to the Ethnic-Germans.<sup>10</sup> The AVNOJ decision on confiscation of the *Volksdeutsche* property was called “expropriation on patriotic basis” by the leading communist economist Boris Kidrič.<sup>11</sup> It seems that at that time no-one thought of the part the problem of the restitution of the *Volksdeutsche* property could play in the future.

Thus we touch upon another reason for the destruction of the German national minority. It was the “nationalization” of the Vojvodina, as the pre-war bourgeois authors used to call it. The aim was to “improve” the ethnic make-up of the province in favour of the Slavonic inhabitants. This meant that not only Swabians, but the Ethnic-Hungarians too were to be kicked out. The most vociferous champions of this idea were not the old communists, but the bourgeois intellectuals noted for their

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still vote the Socialist Party of Serbia, the renamed successor of the Communist Party.

<sup>9</sup> Wuescht, *Ursachen...*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Nikola L. Gaje{a, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Jugoslaviji 1945-1948*, Novi Sad 1984, p. 367.

<sup>11</sup> @eljko Kru{elj, Vladimir Geiger, *Imovina pod pe~atom*, Danas 19 june 1990, pp. 61-64.

intolerance of minorities, Sreten Vukosavljevi} <sup>12</sup> and Prof. Vaso ^ubrilovi}.<sup>13</sup> However, it was the communist leaders who carried out the ideas of these two, because they dove-tailed nicely with their own. This “improvement” of the national make-up had also the advantage of depriving Germany in case of her resurgence, of a pretence for interfering with the Yugoslav domestic affairs at some point in the future.

All these conclusions are founded more on indirect than on direct proofs. It is understandable that the communist leaders were not eager to leave evidence about their outright criminal treatment of a whole national minority in the period 1944-1948. However, the indirect proofs at our disposal warrant our conclusions with a considerable degree of certainty. The fact that the disappearance of the Ethnic-Germans was part of the same process throughout Eastern Europe lends credibility to our assertions. Despite some differences, in several countries some of the main reasons were the same. Yugoslavia too was the victim of the Nazi aggression; her Germans also greeted the occupiers enthusiastically and often helped them in many ways; the hatred they incurred thereby was similar to that in other countries; national prejudice, old and new, played the part in the Yugoslav case too; lack of land was acute in Yugoslavia just like in other East European countries; the new powers-that-be knew how to use these facts to their own advantage.

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<sup>12</sup> See his proposals to decision making bodies in : AJ, F 97, 3 / 35.

<sup>13</sup> See his lengthy memo on the expulsion of all national minorities sent to the new communist authorities in November 1944 in: Nedeljni telegraf 18 September 1997, pp. 43-47; Nedeljni telegraf 25 September 1996, pp. 40-43.

The Swabians lived in the Vojvodina for almost 2.5 centuries. For greater part of that time their coexistence with their non-German neighbours was peaceful and friendly. They brought with them a better developed technology and skills and taught to them their new fellow-countrymen. On the other hand, they learned about their new homeland from the locals, and about political culture and national awakening later on.

Great political tempests in European history occasionally marred the good-neighbourly relations, but never completely and never for good. Not even the supreme crucible of the Second World War could spoil completely the friendly ties that existed through centuries.<sup>14</sup> For the reasons adduced above, the new authorities labeled the whole national minority criminal, and that remained an undisputed dogma until the collapse of communism, and indeed, for many, even to this day. The real reasons of the *Volksdeutsche* Calvary were never explained to the Yugoslav public. However, the lack of an official explanation speaks volumes.

By declaring the whole national minority culpable and criminal, and punishing it accordingly, the communist leaders themselves committed a grave injustice. Although the number of the declared war criminals among the Ethnic-Germans was comparatively small, the whole national minority was proclaimed

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the cases of non-German neighbours helping the Swabians were fairly numerous. They are an additional proof that the communist and nationalist thesis that all the *Volksdeutsche* had been criminals has nothing to do with the truth. (AK, pp. 113, 115, 116, 160, 184, 262; LW, pp. 102, 111, 307, 395, 417, 433, 513, 532, 535, 540, 552, 563, 676, 679, 745, 755. )

guilty, and without even a kangaroo trial at that.<sup>15</sup> Never were so many punished so severely for the crimes of so few. Indeed, unjust, unlawful and cruel punishment of the innocent made it possible for the culpable to hide their guilt behind the unjust suffering of their innocent countrymen. To be sure, the behaviour of the majority of the Swabians was far from loyal toward the Yugoslav state. However, it must be seen against the backdrop of their unsatisfactory and unequal position in the pre-war Yugoslavia, as well as the Nazi manipulation of a national minority which was only reaching national consciousness at the time of Hitler's ascendancy. The Ethnic-Germans were the only people in Yugoslavia denied the right to make mistakes all other peoples and national minorities made and were forgiven. Thus a collective punishment, unjust in itself, was made twice unjust by its selective application. On the other hand, the communist top brass who meted out such a severe chastisement, quite out of keeping with the proletarian internationalism, were guilty of similar crimes they were accusing the *Volksdeutsche*. To be sure, many groups of people of different nationality were given short shrift without a trial of any kind, but the Ethnic-Germans were the only to be declared guilty in a body on the basis of their nationality.

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<sup>15</sup> The IX department of the Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior found 2 560 *Volksdeutsche* war criminals among the POWs. After additional sifting, the number of *all Reich and Ethnic-German* war criminals was reduced to only 1362. (AJ, F 110, f. 2.) The number of the Swabians declared war criminals in the Bacska (the Yugoslav region with the highest number of the *Volksdeutsche* inhabitants) was only 929, out of some 170 000 Ethnic-Germans in the region. (Mirni), *Nemci...*, p. 331.)

This latter fact spurred some *Volksdeutsche* authors to ascribe the unjust treatment of the Ethnic-Germans to Serbian nationalism.<sup>16</sup> Nothing is wider off the mark than this opinion. We have already seen that anti-German sentiments and plans for the expulsion were by no means particular to the Serbs. Just like in the pre-war Yugoslavia, Slovenian hatred of the Germans left its mark after the war too. There was no love lost between the Croats and their wartime “allies”, the *Volksdeutsche*. The decisions concerning the Ethnic-Germans were made on the federal level among the communist big shots who, often were not Serbian.<sup>17</sup> The then communist leadership thought and acted in Yugoslav terms. Any nationalism, and the Serbian one particularly, were an anathema for them. What happened to the *Volksdeutsche* was the doing of the communist top brass and not a consequence of Serbian (or any other) nationalism. Nationalism played a part on the lower, everyday level, but on the decision-making level other factors were decisive. There one could only speak of Yugoslavism which motivated the actions of the communist bosses. We may conclude with Vladimir Geiger:

“However, we must not forget that the *Volksdeutsche* were not expelled by the Serbs, Croats or others, not even by communists, but the concrete Croats, concrete Serbs: from

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<sup>16</sup> AK, p. 73; Sonnleitner, *Aktion Intelligenzija*, p. 16; the same author, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed Tito was a Croat, his chief ideologue Edvard Kardelj was a Slovene. So was his leading economic expert Boris Kidrič. The alleged supervisor of the concentration camps Močarije was a Jew. The most prominent Serbs among the communist bigwigs were Đilas and the Minister of the Interior Aleksandar Ranković. Although powerful enough, the latter was rather an executor than a policy-maker.

those who issued orders to those who carried them out.”<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, as for the concrete master-minds of the whole affair, we are still in the dark. We only know that it was a small group of the communist top-brass headed by Tito himself, but who exactly among them was the most fervent supporter of the expulsion idea, we do not know. At all events, whoever they had been, they wanted to kill two birds with one stone: they were after the *Volksdeutsche* land to reward and bribe their supporters and to solve the problem of agrarian overpopulation, and, at the same time, they wanted to get rid of a pesky national minority that could again become troublesome in case of Germany’s resurgence. As for justice, they never cared a whit about it. Their aim was to build a society in which everyone would have their rights, by trampling on the rights of everyone. The Ethnic-Germans, partly because of their inadvertent behaviour before and during the war were the greatest victims. First they had been used as cat’s-paw by the Nazis, and than as a scape-goat by the communists. They were so unfortunate as to reach a degree of national maturity (albeit not of political one too) exactly at the time of Nazi ascendancy and the Second World War. Like all parties involved, they had to pay dearly. Just how dearly, is the matter of calculation. We shall deal with that tricky question in the concluding chapter of this book.

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<sup>18</sup> Vladimir Geiger, *Koncentracijski logor Krndija godine 1945/ 1946*, in: Geiger, *Nestanak folksdoj-era*, p. 71.



## Chapter Eleven

### The Pot Calls a Kettle Black: By Way of Conclusion

The original goal of this author's research was to discover the real reasons for the direct and indirect (by depriving the Swabians of the basic living conditions<sup>19</sup>) expulsion of the Ethnic-Germans from the Vojvodina. Unfortunately, it turned out that the documents which would shed some light on the motives of the communist policy-makers are still not available. The only documents this author managed to uncover are exceedingly accidental and rare. As a rule they do not stem from the highest officials who made fateful decisions. To be sure, some more, similar documents most probably could be found, but that would be looking for a needle in a haystack, and the whole picture would not change much. Therefore we are not able to give undisputed proofs based on the Yugoslav documents what the reasons for the cruel treatment of the *Volksdeutsche* were.

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Hatred of the Germans in general and the *Volksdeutsche* in particular, was a corollary of the war. Before the war, animosity towards the Ethnic-Germans was confined to nationalistic circles. Due to the war crimes committed by the Reich and Ethnic-Germans, but also the crimes committed by others but made possible by the German aggression, animosity to the Germans and to all things German became widespread. However, it was never general as in some other countries. Germanophobia made itself felt on the lowest level, i.e. in the personal intercourse and treatment of the Swabians by the partisans, lower officials and part of their former neighbours. Numerous cases of torture, manhandling, plunder, unjust accusations and murder can be explained (but not excused), apart from other innate psychological reasons, by rancour and (sometimes) justified thirst for revenge. However, it is open to debate how great a role indignation and vindictiveness played in the decision-making circles of the communist top-brass. \ilas himself admitted to have cut the throat of a captured *Volksdeutsche* SS-man,<sup>22</sup> but than, he was known as short-tempered, quick to send to glory people he disliked. It is questionable if other communist bigwigs were so hot-tempered. Their undisputed leader, Tito certainly was not. According to \ilas, during the deliberation on the future of the German minority, Tito remained silent “because he thought it had

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

to be that way.’<sup>23</sup> We do not know if he ever expressed that opinion, even in a private conversation, or was it just \ilas’ impression. But then, maybe he did not want to commit himself and left ostensibly the momentous decision to his aides so as to keep his hands clean? We do not know the answers to these questions.

There are proofs, albeit indirect, that most of the communist big shots were level-headed in reaching their decisions and that they only used anti-German sentiments of part of the grass-roots for carrying out their policy. The main objective of that policy was gratifying the land-hunger, rampant in more backward parts of the country mentioned by \ilas and many *Volksdeutsche* authors<sup>24</sup>. It seems there is a great deal of truth in this. The recipients of the Swabian land and farms were for the greater part people from the underdeveloped, war-devastated parts of the country who supported the partisan movement. One of the main upholders of such a solution was the minister for colonization, Sreten Vukosavljevi} who also championed expulsion of a considerable number of the Ethnic-Hungarians in order to “improve” the national make-up of the Vojvodina.<sup>25</sup> In this way the new powers-that-be solved the problem of overpopulation of the backward and infertile parts of the country, buying at the same time the loyalty of the colonized partisans and their families.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, part of the *Volksdeutsche*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 410.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.; Wuescht, *Ursachen...*, p. 13; *WK*, p. 153; *LW*, p. 34;

<sup>25</sup> *AJ*, F 97, 3 / 35.

<sup>26</sup> The loyalty of the settlers was so unswerving that 50 years later the former predominantly German and now predominantly colonist communes

landholdings were handed over to the state-run kolkhozs, laying thus the foundations for the collectivist socialist agriculture. The *Volksdeutsche* mills, breweries, brick-works and the like, became part of the state-owned industry. The chief Yugoslav communist ideologue, Edvard Kardelj, declared in 1957 that the expropriation of the *people's enemies* (i.e. the Ethnic-Germans and the capitalists) created the basis for the development of socialism.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, 38,73% of the confiscated land belonged to the Ethnic-Germans.<sup>28</sup> The AVNOJ decision on confiscation of the *Volksdeutsche* property was called “expropriation on patriotic basis” by the leading communist economist Boris Kidrič.<sup>29</sup> It seems that at that time no-one thought of the part the problem of the restitution of the *Volksdeutsche* property could play in the future.

Thus we touch upon another reason for the destruction of the German national minority. It was the “nationalization” of the Vojvodina, as the pre-war bourgeois authors used to call it. The aim was to “improve” the ethnic make-up of the province in favour of the Slavonic inhabitants. This meant that not only Swabians, but the Ethnic-Hungarians too were to be kicked out. The most vociferous champions of this idea were not the old communists, but the bourgeois intellectuals noted for their

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still vote the Socialist Party of Serbia, the renamed successor of the Communist Party.

<sup>27</sup> Wuescht, *Ursachen...*, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Nikola L. Gaje{a, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Jugoslaviji 1945-1948*, Novi Sad 1984, p. 367.

<sup>29</sup> @eljko Kru{elj, Vladimir Geiger, *Imovina pod pe~atom*, Danas 19 june 1990, pp. 61-64.

intolerance of minorities, Sreten Vukosavljevi} <sup>30</sup> and Prof. Vaso ^ubrilovi}.<sup>31</sup> However, it was the communist leaders who carried out the ideas of these two, because they dove-tailed nicely with their own. This “improvement” of the national make-up had also the advantage of depriving Germany in case of her resurgence, of a pretence for interfering with the Yugoslav domestic affairs at some point in the future.

All these conclusions are founded more on indirect than on direct proofs. It is understandable that the communist leaders were not eager to leave evidence about their outright criminal treatment of a whole national minority in the period 1944-1948. However, the indirect proofs at our disposal warrant our conclusions with a considerable degree of certainty. The fact that the disappearance of the Ethnic-Germans was part of the same process throughout Eastern Europe lends credibility to our assertions. Despite some differences, in several countries some of the main reasons were the same. Yugoslavia too was the victim of the Nazi aggression; her Germans also greeted the occupiers enthusiastically and often helped them in many ways; the hatred they incurred thereby was similar to that in other countries; national prejudice, old and new, played the part in the Yugoslav case too; lack of land was acute in Yugoslavia just like in other East European countries; the new powers-that-be knew how to use these facts to their own advantage.

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<sup>30</sup> See his proposals to decision making bodies in : AJ, F 97, 3 / 35.

<sup>31</sup> See his lengthy memo on the expulsion of all national minorities sent to the new communist authorities in November 1944 in: Nedeljni telegraf 18 September 1997, pp. 43-47; Nedeljni telegraf 25 September 1996, pp. 40-43.

The Swabians lived in the Vojvodina for almost 2.5 centuries. For greater part of that time their coexistence with their non-German neighbours was peaceful and friendly. They brought with them a better developed technology and skills and taught to them their new fellow-countrymen. On the other hand, they learned about their new homeland from the locals, and about political culture and national awakening later on.

Great political tempests in European history occasionally marred the good-neighbourly relations, but never completely and never for good. Not even the supreme crucible of the Second World War could spoil completely the friendly ties that existed through centuries.<sup>32</sup> For the reasons adduced above, the new authorities labeled the whole national minority criminal, and that remained an undisputed dogma until the collapse of communism, and indeed, for many, even to this day. The real reasons of the *Volksdeutsche* Calvary were never explained to the Yugoslav public. However, the lack of an official explanation speaks volumes.

By declaring the whole national minority culpable and criminal, and punishing it accordingly, the communist leaders themselves committed a grave injustice. Although the number of the declared war criminals among the Ethnic-Germans was comparatively small, the whole national minority was proclaimed

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the cases of non-German neighbours helping the Swabians were fairly numerous. They are an additional proof that the communist and nationalist thesis that all the *Volksdeutsche* had been criminals has nothing to do with the truth. (AK, pp. 113, 115, 116, 160, 184, 262; LW, pp. 102, 111, 307, 395, 417, 433, 513, 532, 535, 540, 552, 563, 676, 679, 745, 755. )

guilty, and without even a kangaroo trial at that.<sup>33</sup> Never were so many punished so severely for the crimes of so few. Indeed, unjust, unlawful and cruel punishment of the innocent made it possible for the culpable to hide their guilt behind the unjust suffering of their innocent countrymen. To be sure, the behaviour of the majority of the Swabians was far from loyal toward the Yugoslav state. However, it must be seen against the backdrop of their unsatisfactory and unequal position in the pre-war Yugoslavia, as well as the Nazi manipulation of a national minority which was only reaching national consciousness at the time of Hitler's ascendancy. The Ethnic-Germans were the only people in Yugoslavia denied the right to make mistakes all other peoples and national minorities made and were forgiven. Thus a collective punishment, unjust in itself, was made twice unjust by its selective application. On the other hand, the communist top brass who meted out such a severe chastisement, quite out of keeping with the proletarian internationalism, were guilty of similar crimes they were accusing the *Volksdeutsche*. To be sure, many groups of people of different nationality were given short shrift without a trial of any kind, but the Ethnic-Germans were the only to be declared guilty in a body on the basis of their nationality.

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<sup>33</sup> The IX department of the Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior found 2 560 *Volksdeutsche* war criminals among the POWs. After additional sifting, the number of *all Reich and Ethnic-German* war criminals was reduced to only 1362. (AJ, F 110, f. 2.) The number of the Swabians declared war criminals in the Bacska (the Yugoslav region with the highest number of the *Volksdeutsche* inhabitants) was only 929, out of some 170 000 Ethnic-Germans in the region. (Mirni), *Nemci...*, p. 331.)

This latter fact spurred some *Volksdeutsche* authors to ascribe the unjust treatment of the Ethnic-Germans to Serbian nationalism.<sup>34</sup> Nothing is wider off the mark than this opinion. We have already seen that anti-German sentiments and plans for the expulsion were by no means particular to the Serbs. Just like in the pre-war Yugoslavia, Slovenian hatred of the Germans left its mark after the war too. There was no love lost between the Croats and their wartime “allies”, the *Volksdeutsche*. The decisions concerning the Ethnic-Germans were made on the federal level among the communist big shots who, often were not Serbian.<sup>35</sup> The then communist leadership thought and acted in Yugoslav terms. Any nationalism, and the Serbian one particularly, were an anathema for them. What happened to the *Volksdeutsche* was the doing of the communist top brass and not a consequence of Serbian (or any other) nationalism. Nationalism played a part on the lower, everyday level, but on the decision-making level other factors were decisive. There one could only speak of Yugoslavism which motivated the actions of the communist bosses. We may conclude with Vladimir Geiger:

“However, we must not forget that the *Volksdeutsche* were not expelled by the Serbs, Croats or others, not even by communists, but the concrete Croats, concrete Serbs: from

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<sup>34</sup> AK, p. 73; Sonnleitner, *Aktion Intelligenzija*, p. 16; the same author, p. 68.

<sup>35</sup> Indeed Tito was a Croat, his chief ideologue Edvard Kardelj was a Slovene. So was his leading economic expert Boris Kidrič. The alleged supervisor of the concentration camps Močarije was a Jew. The most prominent Serbs among the communist bigwigs were Đilas and the Minister of the Interior Aleksandar Ranković. Although powerful enough, the latter was rather an executor than a policy-maker.



those who issued orders to those who carried them out.”<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, as for the concrete master-minds of the whole affair, we are still in the dark. We only know that it was a small group of the communist top-brass headed by Tito himself, but who exactly among them was the most fervent supporter of the expulsion idea, we do not know. At all events, whoever they had been, they wanted to kill two birds with one stone: they were after the *Volksdeutsche* land to reward and bribe their supporters and to solve the problem of agrarian overpopulation, and, at the same time, they wanted to get rid of a pesky national minority that could again become troublesome in case of Germany’s resurgence. As for justice, they never cared a whit about it. Their aim was to build a society in which everyone would have their rights, by trampling on the rights of everyone. The Ethnic-Germans, partly because of their inadvertent behaviour before and during the war were the greatest victims. First they had been used as cat’s-paw by the Nazis, and than as a scape-goat by the communists. They were so unfortunate as to reach a degree of national maturity (albeit not of political one too) exactly at the time of Nazi ascendancy and the Second World War. Like all parties involved, they had to pay dearly. Just how dearly, is the matter of calculation. We shall deal with that tricky question in the concluding chapter of this book.

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<sup>36</sup> Vladimir Geiger, *Koncentracijski logor Krndija godine 1945/ 1946*, in: Geiger, *Nestanak folksdoj-era*, p. 71.

## Chapter Thirteen

### The Naked and the Dead: A Statistical Survey

As we have already said, the Vojvodina Swabians had to pay dearly for their misplaced national enthusiasm. They were used as Hitler's (or one should better say Himmler's) cannon fodder first, than shot *en masse* by the communist partisans at the end of the war, only to be decimated by starvation, sickness, maltreatment and hard labour throughout the three post-war years in concentration camps. Greater part of them lost their homeland when the communists came to power and the survivors from the camps left it in the course of the next few years.<sup>37</sup> Almost all of them lost all their goods and chattels. This chapter will deal with the numbers of the Ethnic-Germans who died

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<sup>37</sup> After disbanding concentration camps, the Yugoslav authorities were willing to grant the *Volksdeutsche* all minority rights other national minorities were already enjoying. Schools in German were opened, a German magazine appeared, cultural and sport clubs set up. However, the *Volksdeutsche* property was not restored so the Ethnic-Germans had to start from the scratch. Furthermore, most of them already had relatives in Germany and Austria whom they wanted to re-join. The facilities for free national development were not enough to keep them in Yugoslavia. As the *Volksdeutsche* emigrated, their schools and institutions gradually died out. (Goran Nikoli}, @ivot nakon skidanja sa krsta, in: Stefanovi} (ed.), pp. 221-226.)

during the war and after it, as well as with those who fled or emigrated.

How great were the casualties of the Vojvodina Swabians? As is usually the case, it is difficult to answer that question precisely because we do not have all the necessary data for a calculation which would yield a 100% accurate result.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the last 55 years, different numbers were suggested by various authors.<sup>39</sup> Considerable differences between these estimations and calculations were caused by the initial number of the *Volksdeutsche* living in Yugoslavia before the war which varies from 505 000 to fantastic 750 000 and which was taken as the point of departure for the whole computation.<sup>40</sup> As for the Vojvodina, the things were made even more difficult due to the fact that its borders were determined only after the war, as well as by moving of the inmates from camps in the Vojvodina into Croatia and vice versa, and indeed sometimes into other parts of the country too. For that reason, some people from the Vojvodina died elsewhere, whereas some from other parts of the country died in the Vojvodina camps.

What these calculations have in common is their tendency to be more accurate over years. At first, the numbers which appeared in public were more of a guesstimate than the results of

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<sup>38</sup> Sonnleitner, *Aktion Intelligenzija*, p. 77; Schumacher, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> Gotthold Rhode claimed that on the whole 395 000 *Volksdeutsche* died in Yugoslavia; W. Krallert adduced 260 000; Gerhart Wolfrum's estimate was 183 000; Johann Wuescht's calculation was 97 612 (68 664 civilians and 28 948 soldiers) (Johann Wuescht, *Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Jugoslawien*, in: Schmidt (ed.), p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

serious computations. Some of them were an outright expression of fear or excitement of the eyewitnesses.<sup>41</sup>

Keeping in mind that one should always take all casualties computations with a grain of salt, we shall reproduce here the results of these 50 years long calculations for the whole of Yugoslavia at their present-day stage.<sup>42</sup>

CIVILIANS WHO DIED BEFORE THE INTERNMENT:

men	total	children	women
	Killed	61	806
6332	7199		
	Committed suicide	11	82
61	154		
	<u>Missing</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>152</u>
504	696		
	Total	112	1040
6897	8049		

DIED IN CONCENTRATION CAMPS

	Starved	5524	25740
16390	47654		

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<sup>41</sup> Thus for instance a report speaks about 10 000 killed Swabians in Kikinda during the first weeks of the partisans' power. (Engelmann, p. 224.) The former Yugoslav MP Wilhelm Neuner claimed 6000 Ethnic-Germans had been killed in Vr{ac. (Wilhelm Neuner, *Der Untergang der Deutschen von Werschetz*, in: Hockl (ed.), p. 225.) Subsequent research proved how over-estimated these figures had been.

<sup>42</sup> AK, p. 314; Strinja, Volk, p. 41.

	Killed	14	157
396	558		
	Committed suicide	4	32
24	60		
	<u>Missing</u>	40	40
95	175		
	Total	5582	25987
16878	4844	-----	

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PERISHED DURING ESCAPE

	In consequences of the escape	21	67
55	143		
	Killed	10	34
35	79		
	<u>Missing</u>	1	10
7	18		
	Total		32
111	97	240	

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	Civilian victims in Yugoslavia	5726
27138	23872	56736
	In Soviet camps	
888	1106	1994
	<u>During the war, not in Tito's power</u>	143
234	228	605
	Total of civilian victims	5869
28260	25206	59335

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 SOLDIERS

Killed	14243
Missing	9711
Died in other ways	609
<u>Killed in Yugoslavia</u>	<u>692</u>

Total 26064<sup>43</sup>

According to the *Volksdeutsche* reckoning, 93% of the Ethnic-Germans who died during the war and after were the Danube Swabians.<sup>44</sup> Approximately 90% of casualties were from the Vojvodina and Baranja.<sup>45</sup>

Let us now turn to the lucky ones who escaped or survived concentration camps thanks to the timely evacuation, flight or strong corporal constitution. On 29 October 1946 the number of the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* in Germany was as follows:

	IN THE BRITISH ZONE:	IN THE AMERICAN ZONE:
Schleswig-Holstein	1229	Bremen
65		
Hamburg	929	Hessen
7449		

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<sup>43</sup> One should keep in mind that the numbers adduced in the tables are the *lowest* possible by the *Volksdeutsche* computations. The highest possible would be 62 301 and 27 367 dead civilians and soldiers respectively. (AK, p. 311.)

<sup>44</sup> AK, p. 309.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

Lower Saxony	4157	Baden-
Wuerttemberg 28074		
<u>Nord-Rhein-Westfalen</u>	<u>1710</u>	<u>Bavaria</u>
<u>52722</u>		
Total	7243	Total
88310		
IN THE FRENCH ZONE:		IN THE
SOVIET ZONE:		
Baden		215
Brandenburg 3542		
Wuerttemberg-Hohenzollern		747
Mecklenburg 7227		
<u>Rheinland-Pfalz</u>	<u>805</u>	Sachsen-
Anhalt 5034		
Total	1767	Thuringia
5957		
		<u>Saxony</u>
<u>1969</u>		
		Total
23729		
Berlin 753		
<u>Saarland 38</u>		
Total 791		

This means there were 121 840 *Volksdeutsche* from Yugoslavia in Germany.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately we cannot tell how many of them were from the Vojvodina.

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<sup>46</sup> Schumacher, p. 133.

In autumn 1950, i.e. two years after the concentration camps in Yugoslavia were disbanded, the number of the Ethnic-Germans in Germany was as follows:

Rheinland-Pfalz	4669	Saarland
38		
Baden-Wuerttemberg	51917	Bavaria
67454		
Schleswig-Holstein	1299	Hamburg
400		
Lower Saxony	6830	Bremen
101		
Nord-Rhein-Westfalen	4142	Hessen
10709		
Berlin (West)	480	Berlin (East)
cca. 150		
The Soviet zone	cca. 15000	
Total	163 162 <sup>47</sup>	

More massive emigration of the surviving *Volksdeutsche* to Western Germany started only in 1950s. It proceeded apace until the second half of 1960s. Between 1950 and 1968 78 796 Ethnic-Germans from Yugoslavia (most of them from the Vojvodina) settled down in the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>48</sup>

1950 - 179	1956 - 7314	1962 - 2003
1968 - 1398		

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<sup>47</sup> Schumacher, p. 134; Alfred Bohman, *Menschen und Grenzen. Bd. 2. Bevoelkerung und Nationalitaeten in Suedosteuropa*, Koeln 1969, p. 304.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.



1951 - 3668	1957 - 5130	1963 - 2543
1952 - 3407	1958 - 4708	1964 - 2331
1953 - 7972	1959 - 3819	1965 - 3684
1954 - 9481	1960 - 3308	1966 - 2078
1955 - 11839	1961 - 2053	1967 - 1887

In mid-1960s the number of the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* outside Yugoslavia was as follows:<sup>49</sup>

Western Germany / West Berlin	264 863
(72,1%)	
Eastern Germany / East Berlin	4 795
(1,3%)	
Other European countries (mainly Austria)	74 643
(20,3%)	
<u>Outside Europe</u>	<u>23</u>
047 (6,3%)	
Total	367
348 (100%)	

According to the region of origin the division of the émigré Yugoslav Ethnic-Germans was as follows:<sup>50</sup>

		W. Germany	E. Germany
Europe	Outside Europe		
Banat		62 662	518
10 538	4 321		
Baranja		7 333	721
921	171		

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Bacska	107 399	1 740
12 109 6 373		
Syrmium	27 761	631
9 399 1 874		
<u>Other areas</u>	<u>60 368</u>	<u>1 185</u>
41 616 10 308		
Total	264 863	4 795
74 643 23 047		

It is clear from the last two tables that very few *Volksdeutsche* wanted to stay in Eastern Germany. The reasons can be easily guessed. Even the Ethnic-Germans released from the Soviet camps who were sent to East Germany had no desire to remain there. Therefore it was only a stop-over on their way to the West.

This is how the dispersal of the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* in the West German lands looked like in April 1964:<sup>51</sup>

Schleswig-Holstein	0 (0 %)	Hamburg
2 000 (0,9%)		
L. Saxony	9000 (3,4%)	Bremen
0 (0 %)		
N. Rhein-Westfalen	20 000 (7,5%)	Hessen
18 000 (6,8%)		
Rheinland-Pfalz	14 000 (5,3%)	Baden-
Wuerttemberg	126 000(47,4%)	
Bavaria	75 000 (28,2%)	Saar
2 000 (0,8%)		
W. Berlin	1 000 (0,4%)	

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

According to her attractiveness for the refugees and resettlers, Austria was somewhere inbetween Western and Eastern Germany. Life there was harder than in Western Germany and the authorities even less forthcoming, but it was still better than the Soviet-occupied Eastern Germany. The economic upswing was slower in coming there than in West Germany. It was only in mid-1950 that better possibilities for the integration of the *Volksdeutsche* into the Austrian society were created. Therefore most of the *Volksdeutsche* wanted to leave and try their luck in Western Germany or some other country.<sup>52</sup> For these reasons the fluctuation of the number of the Ethnic-Germans was considerable:<sup>53</sup>

1946 - 103 873	1949 - 140 029	1952 - 126 181
1947 - 91 710	1950 - 129 944	1953 - 119 602
1948 - 139 539	1951 - 134 225	1954 - 118 209

In January 1948 there were 139 539 Yugoslav Germans in Austria, in April 1951, 119 383. On 1 January 1952 the number and dispersal of the Yugoslav Germans throughout Austrian provinces was as follows:<sup>54</sup>

Vienna	8 370 (7,9%)	Lower Austria	5 573 (5,2%)
Upper Austria	44 516 (41, 9%)	Salzburg	7 387 (6,9%)
Burgenland	1 015 (1,0%)	Styria	29 990 (28,2%)

<sup>52</sup> Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, pp. 473-475.

<sup>53</sup> *Dok.*, p. 127E.

<sup>54</sup> Bohmann, p. 307; Schumacher, p. 134.

Carinthia	6 994 (6,6%)	Tyrol
1 880 (1,8%)		
Voralberg	516 (0,5%)	
<hr/>		
Total		
106 241		

Because of hard living conditions the following number of the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* left Austria between 1951 and 1959 for overseas countries:<sup>55</sup>

USA	16 210	Brazil	2 540	Argentina
42				
Canada	2 641	Venezuela	43	Australia
1339				

In 1959 there were 85 194 *Volksdeutsche* from Yugoslavia living in Austria.<sup>56</sup> However, one should keep in mind that considerable portion of them were not the Vojvodina Swabians, but the Ethnic-Germans from Slovenia who felt more attached to Austria, and who were more welcome than the “Banatians”, as the Swabians were derogatorily called there.<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, the number of the Ethnic-Germans in Yugoslavia was, for understandable reasons, also subjected to constant changes. Their number according to the 1948 census was:<sup>58</sup>

Serbia	41 757 (31 882 in the Vojvodina)	Bosnia-Herzegovina
1 263		

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<sup>55</sup> Bohmann, p. 309.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>57</sup> Ne}ak, p. 563

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

Croatia		10	993
Montenegro	385		
<u>Slovenia</u>		2	406
<u>Macedonia</u>	<u>376</u>		
Total			
57 180			

According to the census of 1953, the Ethnic-Germans numbered.<sup>59</sup>

Serbia	46 000
Croatia	12 000
Slovenia	2 000
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1 000
<u>Montenegro and Macedonia</u>	<u>500</u>
Total	61 000

In the next census 1961, they totalled.<sup>60</sup>

Serbia	47 800
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1 263
Croatia	10 993
Macedonia	376
Slovenia	2 406
<u>Montenegro</u>	<u>385</u>
Total	63 223

The number of the Ethnic-Germans recorded in 1953 or in 1961 was higher than in 1948. This curious fact is easily

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 293-296.

explained if one knows that in 1948 many preferred to declare themselves as belonging to other nationalities, rather than German.<sup>61</sup> Thus approximately 48 000 *Volksdeutsche* declared themselves Hungarians, 12 000 Croats and some 3000 Serbs.<sup>62</sup> Many did not muster courage to admit their true nationality even later, so estimates are that in 1953 some 75 000 *Volksdeutsche* lived in the country, most of them in the Vojvodina. In any case, between 1949 and 1969 some 86 100 Ethnic-Germans migrated to the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>63</sup>

Even a cursory glance at the adduced figures shows how difficult it is to ascertain the exact numbers of the killed, died, evacuees, escapees, migrants and other Ethnic-Germans. It would be even more difficult to determine the precise figures for the Vojvodina: the *Volksdeutsche* from other parts of the country were brought to the concentration camps in the Vojvodina, whereas the Vojvodina Swabians were often scattered throughout Yugoslavia. It would take a special study to determine precise figures, which could nevertheless easily be challenged. However, imprecise though they are, the adduced numbers reflect the troubled history of the Yugoslav and the Vojvodina Germans during and after the Second World War - not as a mirror, but as a good illustration.

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<sup>61</sup> Wehler, p. 94.

<sup>62</sup> Nikoli}, p. 223.

<sup>63</sup> Wehler, p. 94.

