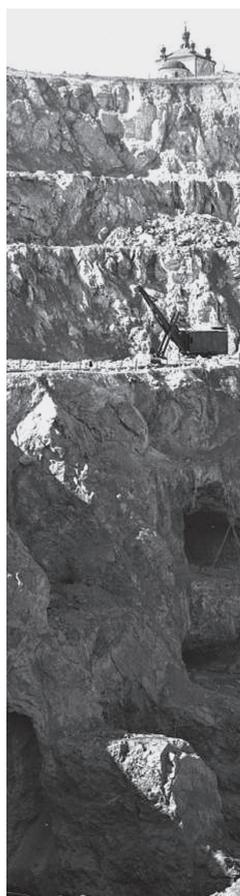




# Forced Labour in Serbia

Producers, Consumers and Consequences  
of Forced Labour **1941 - 1944**



**EDITED BY:**

Sanela Schmid  
Milovan Pisarri

Tomislav Dulić

Zoran Janjetović

Milan Koljanin

Milovan Pisarri

Thomas Porena

Sabine Rutar

Sanela Schmid





Project partners:



Project supported by:



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### **PUBLISHED BY:**

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### **PUBLISHER:**

Nikola Radić

### **EDITORS:**

Sanela Schmid and Milovan Pissarri

### **AUTHORS:**

Tomislav Dulić  
Zoran Janjetović  
Milan Koljanin  
Milovan Pissarri  
Thomas Porena  
Sabine Rutar  
Sanela Schmid

### **PROOFREADING:**

Marija Šapić, Marc Brogan

### **ENGLISH TRANSLATION:**

Irena Žnidaršić-Trbojević

### **GERMAN TRANSLATION:**

Jovana Ivanović

### **GRAPHIC DESIGN:**

Nikola Radić

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## CONTENTS

- 6 Introduction - **Sanela Schmid** and **Milovan Pissarri**
- 12 **Milovan Pissarri**  
“I Saw Jews Carrying Dead Bodies On Stretchers”:  
Forced Labour and The Holocaust in Occupied Serbia
- 30 **Zoran Janjetović**  
Forced Labour in Banat Under Occupation 1941 - 1944
- 44 **Milan Koljanin**  
Camps as a Source of Forced Labour in Serbia 1941 - 1944
- 54 Photographs 1
- 62 **Sabine Rutar**  
Physical Labour and Survival. Supplying Miners in Yugoslavia
- 82 **Sanela Schmid**  
Serbian Civilian Workers in Nuremberg 1941 - 1945
- 110 Photographs 2
- 118 **Tomislav Dulić**  
Among the Hyperboreans: Yugoslav Prisoners in Norway 1942 - 1945
- 140 **Thomas Porena**  
The Repatriation Policy for Yugoslav Deportees From Germany  
in Yugoslav State Entities Between 1944-1947 (with focus on Serbia)
- 156 Authors

## INTRODUCTION

Sanela Schmid and Milovan Pisarri

The work of foreigners in German (arms) factories and in agriculture was the main pillar of the national socialist wartime economy. Of the 31 million workers who worked for the German Reich in September 1944, 26% were foreigners. With the reversal of the war in the winter of 1941, when the entire German economy was reorganized, it was necessary to make racist ideas somehow conform to the problem of labour shortages. The newly elected economic representative Fritz Sauckel solved this problem by exploiting labour in the territories occupied by Germany. From the spring of 1942, millions of Soviet citizens were deported to Germany for forced labour,<sup>1</sup> adding to those from many European countries that were already in the Reich. The declaration of the total war in February 1943 led to further radicalization in forced labour. Foreign workers who were already in the Reich were banned from returning home because of a lack of available experienced workers, caused by the uncertain military situation. When their contracts expired, the workers were obliged to remain in forced labour, and the recruitment of new workers was increased in occupied territories. In this way the last elements of voluntary work disappeared, if they ever existed.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, in 1943, almost all inmates of concentration camps, about a million, were forced to work in the military industry.<sup>3</sup> Among these people were also Serbs who came in various ways to work in Germany: some were recruited in Serbia, some sent from the Independent State of Croatia, some were prisoners of war or captured “rebels” deported to work in Germany or Norway. But keeping in mind the extent of the threat of forced labour, they represented a very small contingent. When the war ended in 1945, most of them returned to Yugoslavia and did not talk about what they experienced as foreign workers in Germany. On the other hand, Yugoslav society at the time was preoccupied with many other issues so that the fate of forced labourers was not of interest to anyone at that time.

In Germany, the pioneering work on foreign workers conducted by Ulrich Herbert from 1985 was the first milestone in the historiographic analysis of this topic of National Socialism.<sup>4</sup> A widespread and intense study began in the 1990s, and was initiated due to

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1 Jens Binner, „Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus“, *Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte* 13, no. 1 (2012): 36; Hans Christoph Seidel, „Der verspätete Ausländereinsatz. Arbeitseinsatz und Zwangsarbeit im Saarrevier 1935 bis 1945“, in *Zwangsarbeit im Bergwerk: der Arbeitseinsatz im Kohlenbergbau des Deutschen Reiches und der besetzten Gebiete im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 1: *Forschungen*, ed. Klaus Tenfelde and Hans-Christoph Seidel (Essen: Klartext, 2005), 241.

2 Carina Baganz, „Lager für ausländische zivile Zwangsarbeiter“, in *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Bd. 9: Arbeitserziehungslager, Ghettos, Jugendschuttlager, Polizeiflughafen, Sonderlager, Zigeunerlager, Zwangsarbeiterlager*, ed. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (München: Beck, 2009), 254.

3 Volkhard Knigge and Jens Binner, *Zwangsarbeit - Die Deutschen, die Zwangsarbeiter und der Krieg: Begleitband zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung* (Weimar: Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora, 2010), 181.

4 Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des ‚Ausländer-Einsatzes‘ in der Kriegswirtschaft des*

big lawsuits from former forced labourers of the Jewish community and the debate over their compensation. In such a context, the Foundation “Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft” (“Remembrance, Responsibility, Future”) was founded which initially paid the compensation that the industry and the Federal Republic of Germany had made available for former forced labourers. When this task was completed, the Foundation continued to promote, among other things, scientific research into the subject of forced labour through various scholarship programs.

Since then, numerous studies have been published on many aspects of forced labour, both in Germany and in the countries once occupied by Germany. The works related to Germany in particular show on the one hand an abundance of regional and local studies, and on the other studies dedicated to individual industries or companies. Many historians have explored the fate of the two largest groups of forced labourers, the so-called Eastern workers and Poles. Eastern workers were civil workers from the Soviet Union, (with the exception of the Latvians and the Estonians), who with 2.5 million people represented the largest, but most heterogeneous, labour force contingent. They were subject to particularly discriminatory regulations. The fate of Serbian forced labourers was barely addressed in Germany.<sup>5</sup>

For historical investigation, the question which first arises is the definition of the “forced labourer”. Mark Spoerer classifies forced labourers who were mainly foreigners into three groups: civilian workers from abroad, prisoners of war and inmates. Since the living conditions within individual groups could vary significantly, it seems necessary to set additional criteria for further division. He proposes the following criteria: “exit”, “voice” and “probability of survival”.<sup>6</sup> To be classified as a forced labourer, your work in Germany could have initially been voluntary and subsequently changed to forced labour. This was the case, for example, when a worker was prevented from returning home after his contract expired. In that case, he had no legal means by which to terminate his employment. The only thing left to him was to escape.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, most foreign workers had very little influence over their working conditions, so they lacked a “voice”. For example, civilian Serb workers had representatives of the Government of Serbia who periodically checked their living and working conditions and played the role of partners in negotiations with German

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*Dritten Reiches* (Bonn: Dietz 1985).

5 See: Sanela Hodžić and Christian Schölzel, *Zwangsarbeit und der Unabhängige Staat Kroatien: 1941-1945* (Münster: LIT, 2013); Zoran Janjetović, „Arbeiterrekrutierung unter deutscher Militärverwaltung in Serbien 1941-1944“, in *Arbeitskräfte als Kriegsbeute. Der Fall Ost- und Südosteuropa 1939-1945*, ed. Karsten Linne and Florian Dierl (Berlin: Metropol, 2011); Sabine Rutar, „Arbeit und Überleben in Serbien. Das Kupfererzbergwerk Bor im Zweiten Weltkrieg“, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1, no. 31 (2005): 101-134.

6 Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unterm Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich und im deutsch besetzten Europa 1939-1945* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2001), 13-19; Jochen Fleischhacker and Mark Spoerer, „Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers, and Survivors“, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (2002): 174.

7 Therefore, it is not surprising that the Gestapo reported monthly up to 45.000 cases of flight from work at the end of 1943. Binner, „*Zwangsarbeit*“, 37-38.

companies and authorities.<sup>8</sup> Given the low standing of the Serbian government with the national socialists, it is easy to imagine how little this influence essentially was. However, the Serbian workers themselves could hardly express, let alone pursue their interests, because most of them did not speak German. The final criterion grouped the workforce based on its chances of survival. Generally speaking, for the Serbian civil workers as well as prisoners of war, these were good when compared with Polish or Soviet civilian workers and prisoners of war.<sup>9</sup>

According to these categories, Spoerer organises forced labourers in four different groups: voluntary foreign civil workers, forced labourers with little impact on their own living conditions and a mildly higher mortality, forced labourers with little impact on their own living conditions and an above average mortality, and finally, forced labourers without any impact on their own living conditions and with a very high mortality. Serbian civil workers in Germany were mostly in the first category. Marc Buggeln, however, makes another distinction in the first category: he categorizes workers from the German Allied countries, as well as workers from France, Belgium and the Netherlands by the end of 1942, as free civilian workers, while Serbs and the Baltic nations from the very beginning are categorized as forced labourers.<sup>10</sup> Spoerer also places Yugoslav, primarily Serb prisoners of war in the second group. The third group includes civilian workers from Poland, as well as Polish and Italian prisoners of war.<sup>11</sup> Those in the fourth and last category are appropriately referred to as “less than slaves” and were Polish-Jewish and Soviet prisoners of war, detainees in concentration camps and labour education camps (*Arbeitserziehungslager*) and “Jewish labourers”.<sup>12</sup> This category includes all Yugoslav detainees in German concentration camps as well as those deported as forced labourers to northern Norway.

Among the conceptual difficulties that the project had to overcome was in part a clear definition of the subject of its investigation, that is, the Serbian forced labourers. The main reason for these difficulties is that before 1941 in common with all other Yugoslav citizens the Serbs were Yugoslavs and also after 1945, if they had been otherwise named in the meantime, they returned again to being Yugoslavs. For example, civilian workers from Serbia in the official statistics from the *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Deutschen Reich* (Work assignment in the German Reich) were always put under the heading “Yugoslavia without

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8 Vojni Arhiv Republike Srbije (Military Archive of the Republic of Serbia), Beograd, Nedićeva arhiva, k. 34, Several reports by the representative of the Serbian Government in Germany.

9 Marc Buggeln considers other criteria such as housing, nutrition, wages and violence also important to make an even better assessment of the status of forced laborers. Marc Buggeln, „Unfreie Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus. Begrifflichkeiten und Vergleichsaspekte zu den Arbeitsbedingungen im Deutschen Reich und in den besetzten Gebieten“, in *Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Marc Buggeln and Michael Wildt (München: De-Gruyter Oldenbourg 2014), 239

10 Buggeln, „*Unfreie Arbeit*“, 240-241.

11 Yugoslav prisoners of war that were considered Croats were, as allies, relatively quickly dismissed.

12 Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*, 14-17; Spoerer and Fleischhacker, „Forced labourers“, 176.

Croatia". At the same time, many "Croats", civil workers from the Independent State of Croatia, were ethnic Serbs.<sup>13</sup> Serbs sent to Norway for forced labour were from Serbia, as well as from the Independent State of Croatia. How these people referred to themselves remains largely unclear. On the basis of all this, the question arises by which criteria the term "Serb" should be more narrowly defined and how useful is it at all. Therefore, the category "Serb" here is very broad in order to include civil and ethnic affiliations. This allows for all citizens of the former Yugoslavia from the territory of occupied Serbia and ethnic Serbs who lived outside Serbia to be perceived as Serbs.

The previous presentation makes it clear that Serbs were to be found in almost every forced labour situation. However, little was known about their fate until now. This publication aims to at least partially close this gap. Essays on individual kinds of forced labour in Serbia and the forced labour of Serbs outside Serbia are included in this edition. Milovan Pisarri focuses on the Holocaust and forced labour, and Zoran Janjetović takes a detailed look at forced labour in Banat. This region differs from the rest of Serbia due to the fact that numerous Volksdeutsche (the ethnic Germans who lived there) won autonomy from the collaborationist government of Serbia. Milan Koljanin considers the issue of the camp at Sajmište from the perspective of forced labour; and lastly Sabine Rutar compares the conditions of life in the mines in Slovenia and the Bor copper mine in Serbia, focusing on the food and labour supply regimes. Outside of Serbia, Sanela Schmid examines in the example of Nuremberg the conditions of life and work of Serbian civilian workers in Germany, while Tomislav Dulic monitors the fate of Serbian prisoners deported as forced labour to the camps of the "Todt" organization in northern Norway. Finally, Thomas Porena shows the policy of repatriation of the Yugoslav government after 1945.

In the selection of topics for this collection, the editors have attempted to follow the main currents on forced labour in, or related to Serbia, aware that because of the lack of attention given to the subject in South-Slavic and post-Yugoslav historiography, every paper in the publication should be approached with care. Priority was given to authors who have already had the opportunity to deal with the issue; at the same time, the pioneering studies - as in the case of the repatriation to Yugoslavia after the war - open up the possibility for new research and new discussions not only in historiographical circles, but also among cultural actors dealing with memorialization or secondary school teachers who are willing to specifically give time to these subjects in the classroom.

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13 According to Sundhaussen, of the 153,000 people recruited as "foreign workers" from the Independent State of Croatia, 62 percent were ethnic Serbs. Holm Sundhaussen, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte Kroatiens im nationalsozialistischen Großraum 1941-1945. Das Scheitern einer Ausbeutungsstrategie* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1983), 183. In addition, 35,000 Serb prisoners of war from the Independent State of Croatia were deported to forced labor and finally from July 1943 onwards also members of the resistance. The army of the NDH additionally provided Serbian conscripts for labor deployment. Barbara Wiesinger, „Wenn dir die Freiheit genommen ist, ist dir alles genommen“. Erfahrungen und Erinnerungen serbischer Zwangsarbeiter“, in *Hitlers Sklaven. Lebensgeschichtliche Analysen zur Zwangsarbeit im internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh, and Christoph Thonfeld (Wien: Böhlau, 2008), 151-152.

The fact that the authors live and work in various European cities and have very different research backgrounds is a great asset to this publication. The reader will have a rich selection of historical sources, literature, newspaper articles and testimonies that illustrate the correlation between all the themes of the collection.

In the study of the issue of forced labour in Serbia itself, the collections of the Historical Archives of Belgrade (the fonds of the municipality of Belgrade, as well as the fonds of the districts of Belgrade Municipality, Gestapo - BdS, Memoirs) were used in the works whose contents in some way gravitate towards the capital of Serbia: in forced labour in Banat, administered by the local German community and the Holocaust. Thanks to the sources from the Archives of Yugoslavia (primarily the fonds 110 - the Land Commission for the Determination of the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators, the Emigrant Government), it has been possible to monitor the sending of workers to the Third Reich or Germany, as well as to the Bor mine. With the help of local, regional and state archives (Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, Federal Archives of Germany, Nuremberg City Archives, State Archives of Hessen, State Archives of Bavaria, Carinthian Archives), important aspects of their stay in these countries could be clarified. The fonds of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from the Archives of Yugoslavia as well as material from a series of fonds of the Archives of Yugoslavia, the Croatian State Archive and the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia showed how very important the issue of repatriating workers to Yugoslavia still is for understanding the post-war context in the entire territory of the former Yugoslavia.

Literature in several languages - in Serbian, or better still, in Serbo-Croatian, English, German, French - showcases the scientific work published as monographs or articles in scientific journals, both recently and in the period of socialist Yugoslavia, when for example, the first coherent work on the Bor mine<sup>14</sup> was published. The decision to include a bibliography at the end of each paper was made so that the reader can immediately advance towards further reading if he/she takes an interest in the subject.

Photographs also form an integral part of the publication, and the goal of publishing them is not simply as an embellishment of the scientific papers, but the desire to bring the reader as close as possible to these themes. That is the reason they are grouped into several sections for easier study, as a historical source of particular value. Finally, the decision to publish the collection in three languages - Serbian, German and English - and, in addition to a printed edition (in Serbian and in German), to make it available as an e-book in English in a digital format, is the result of a common search for the best way to spread new knowledge and experiences, thus becoming the source of new exchanges and research for the wider audience.

In addition to the authors who participated in this paper, archivists, librarians, special thanks should go to all of those who have engaged in the project "Producers, Consumers and Consequences of Forced Labour. Serbia 1941-1944", as well as the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future, which has enabled this important step in the study and understanding of this, no longer, neglected topic.

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14 Tomislav Pajić, *Teror okupatora u logorima u Boru 1942-1944* (Bor: ŠRIF-SO Bor, 1982).

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Milovan Pisarri

## **“I Saw Jews CARRYING Dead BODIES On STRETCHERS”: FORCED LABOUR AND THE HOLOCAUST IN OCCUPIED SERBIA**

Center for Applied History, Belgrade

### **ABSTRACT**

One of the first policies enforced by the occupying forces in Serbia was the introduction of forced labour for Jews. As early as May 1941, the system of total exploitation of the Jewish male population was already operating efficiently. The German forces acted as the principal force and the collaborationist forces - primarily the local municipalities and gendarmerie - as organisers and contractors. Every day, male Jews, regardless of their profession and family status, had to report to their superiors (Serbian gendarmes) who assigned them tasks based on German orders. Male members of the Jewish community from Belgrade, which was by far the largest community in occupied Serbia, had to work mainly on clearing the city of the damage caused by German bombing in early April 1941; they also worked on unloading goods at the port, repairing the sewerage network or were directly used by the German officers themselves for private slave labour. Even after the internment of the Jewish male population from Banat and Belgrade in the Topovske šupe camp (August-October 1941), the system of forced labour would remain in effect: the Jews, now prisoners, were being taken to work during the day and returned to the camp in the evening. Forced labour was used since the beginning of the extermination of Jews as a cover-up for the shooting of prisoners: groups were taken to execution sites convinced that they were being taken to work, just like any other day. A similar fate befell the male Roma population in Belgrade. The women imprisoned in the Sajmište camp (since December 1941) were also taken to work outside the camp. A group of Hungarian Jews, who were sent to forced labour in the Bor mine in 1943 and 1944, deserve special attention; in September 1944, before the arrival of the partisan troops and the Red Army, they were taken away from Bor and killed during a death march to Hungary or deported to Auschwitz and killed there.

### **Keywords**

*Jews, forced labour, the Holocaust, Topovske šupe, Bor, death march*

## INTRODUCTION

There are comprehensive studies about the Holocaust in Serbia that have taken into account many aspects of this phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, a number of seminars, scientific conferences, exhibitions, projects, textbooks for teachers and other activities<sup>2</sup> have considerably helped the issue of the suffering of Jews during World War II emerge from the sea of forgotten or neglected historiographical topics and find its place on the agenda of cultural workers, researchers, teachers, artists and activists. Moreover, the fact that this issue has reached beyond the limited framework of historiographical circles not only implies raising awareness and critical thinking about the plight of the Jews, but also about the sensitive issue of anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the other category of people who were killed for racial reasons, the Roma, whose plight is surrounded by numerous controversies; primarily of whether it is necessary to include them in the category called the Holocaust or if it is better to perceive their suffering as a unique phenomenon, preserving in this way the uniqueness of the suffering of Jewish people.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, insufficient attention is paid to the period preceding the last phase of the Holocaust - the internment and killing of Jews (and Roma). Without any major analyses, the period between 1938 and the end of 1941 mostly serves as an introductory chronology ending with the extermination of people for racial reasons. In other words, the lack of critical thinking is noticeable on the key issues that are necessary for understanding the Holocaust as well as the Nazi policies and the changes that happened in Europe and globally at the time.

The aspects that require further research about the Holocaust in Serbia include the issue of labour exploitation or forced, slave labour (herein referred to as forced labour), of the Jewish (and Roma) population. Although it is often mentioned in many publications as part of the policy of extermination of Jews in Serbia, the real significance of the phenomenon has not been appropriately analysed - that is, how many people were really

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1 Among the most important publications, see: Milan Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom sajmištu*, (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1992); Milan Ristović, *U potrazi za utočištem. Jugoslovenski Jevreji u bekstvu od holokausta 1941-1945* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 1998); Valter Manošek, *Holokaust u Srbiji: vojna okupaciona politika i uništavanje Jevreja 1941-1942. godine*, translated by Eremija Agnes et al. (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 2007); Branislav Božović, *Stradanje Jevreja u okupiranom Beogradu 1941-1944* (Beograd: Srpska školska knjiga, 2004); Stijn Vervaet, *Holocaust, War and Transnational Memory. Testimony from Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav literature* (London: Routledge, 2018).

2 See: Nevena Daković, ed., *Representations of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media. Conference Proceedings* (Belgrade: Faculty of Dramatic Arts - Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, 2014); Milan Fogel, Nenad Fogel, eds., *Jevrejski logor Zemun: holokaust i kolaboracija u Srbiji* (Beograd: Jevrejska opština Zemun, 2012); Milovan Pisarri, Nikola Radić, eds., *Oktobar 1941: 31 dan zločina Holokausta, genocida i terora nacističke i kolaboracionističke vlasti u Srbiji* (Beograd: Istorijski arhiv Beograda, 2016); Vesna Lučić, et al. eds., *Priručnik za učenje o Holokaustu* (Beograd: Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije, 2012).

3 On the suffering of Roma in Serbia, see: Milovan Pisarri, *Stradanje Roma u Srbiji za vreme Holokausta* (Beograd: Forum za primenjenu istoriju, 2014).

engaged, how much it impacted the consumers of that labour (municipalities for example, because Jews were often used for repairing streets, buildings, sewerage networks, etc.), and how much it impacted the already affected Jewish community. Other under-researched issues remain: the role of the collaborationists in the exploitation, what the reactions (if any) of other citizens were, and what would be the material heritage of this traumatic experience which was a prologue to mass extermination. The purpose of this article is to answer these questions at least in part and to try and look at the suffering of Jews (and Roma) from a different perspective, with the sole ambition of opening up new areas of research and contributing to the understanding of the Holocaust and forced labour in occupied Serbia between 1941 and 1944. Due to the large number of archive sources and publications dedicated to the Belgrade Jewish community, the focus will be on the events that occurred in the capital of occupied Serbia, with a note that the situation was the same or very similar in other towns in the country.

### **LEGISLATION CONCERNING THE JEWS: THE INITIAL PERIOD OF FORCED LABOUR**

When the Axis forces entered the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a little over 16,000 Jews lived on the territory that would later become the German occupation zone in Serbia (plus the region of Banat governed by the Volksdeutsche), including a number of Jewish refugees from central Europe who were stranded there at the time of the invasion.<sup>4</sup> The majority - almost 12,000 of them - were concentrated in the capital, Belgrade, while the communities in other towns were quite small.<sup>5</sup>

Three days after the majority of the armed forces arrived, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1941, the newly established and still provisional German authority in Belgrade ordered all Jews to report to the city police on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April for registration, otherwise they would be shot. Although the collaborationist administration was not yet formed, most of the employees of the municipality and the City Administration of Belgrade, fire-fighters, members of the police force and other administrative structures were at work, so the registration was carried out very quickly and efficiently.

After the registration, during which the Jews were given yellow armbands with the “Jude” inscription and the seal of the City of Belgrade stamped on them, Jews of both sexes between 14 and 60 years of age were designated for forced labour. As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> of April the Gestapo sent the first letter to the Fire Department with instructions on how to organise forced labour for Jews. One of the passages reads as follows:

- › All Jewish males 16 to 40 years of age, shall be divided into groups of 40 for forced labour; (...)
- › These groups will be designated for the following duties: cleaning streets,

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4 On Jewish refugees in Serbia and their fate especially, see: Milica Mihailović, ed., *Kladovo transport: zbornik radova sa okruglog stola* (Beograd: Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije, 2002).

5 Koljanin, *Nemački logor*, 20.

cleaning destroyed buildings, works on the sewerage network, the waterworks, on the telephone and telegraph lines, etc.

- › Working hours shall be from 8 to 12 in the morning and from 2 to 5 in the afternoon (...)
- › All Jews should be warned that any form of sabotage, trouble making, disobedience or escape shall be punishable by shooting on the spot.
- › For this purpose, and in order to maintain the discipline, an armed German guard will be allocated to each group.

According to the same document, the Belgrade municipality Fire Department and Technical Directorate had to determine which places were priorities in terms of the demand for work.<sup>6</sup> The following day, the Jews were divided by professions (civil engineers, mechanical engineers, electricians, chemists, etc.),<sup>7</sup> so, already on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, many of them reported for work. In addition to the Fire Department and the Technical Directorate, other intermediaries which were at the same time the ultimate consumers of this unpaid labour responded very efficiently: the Waterworks Department, for example, chose nine engineers and suggested that the others be transferred for work at the Tram Department.<sup>8</sup> In early May, the Technical Directorate was tasked with verifying how many Jews, as well as prisoners of war, were at the disposal of each district. According to preliminary data, the first district had 131, the second district 95, the third district 132, the fourth 60, the fifth 55, the seventh 100, the eighth 40, the ninth 44, the tenth 51, the eleventh 52, the twelfth 71, the thirteenth 102, and the fourteenth 56.<sup>9</sup>

Through the Fire Department, the Gestapo distributed the regulations for the treatment of Jewish forced labourers. The district chiefs had to send a report to the Fire Department at 9:30 every morning on a designated form; before starting work they had to assemble and roll-call all the Jews, and, note if someone had failed to report for work; they had to keep the "strictest" possible record of their assigned Jews.<sup>10</sup>

In mid-May, the German authorities set up a new means of communication and organisation of forced labour for Jews. The Department for Jews and Gypsies, initially known as the Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs or the Police for Jews, was set up within the Special Police Department of Belgrade (Sector VII of the Special Police); The

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6 Istorijski arhiv Beograda (hereinafter: IAB - The Belgrade City Historical Archives), Opština grada Beograda (OGB), Tehnička direkcija (TD), inv. No. 1534, the „Jevreji” file, correspondence 19<sup>th</sup> April - 6<sup>th</sup> August 1941, Voluntary Fire Department unit to the mayor of Belgrade, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1941.

7 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. no. 1534, Voluntary Fire Department to the Technical Directorate of the Municipality of Belgrade, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1941.

8 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. no. 1534, Waterworks management to the Technical Directorate of the Municipality of Belgrade, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1941.

9 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. no. 1534, Technical Directorate to all districts, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1941.

10 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. no. 1534, Technical Directorate to all districts, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1941.

Sector VII operation was closely associated with the operations of the Gestapo or the Jewish Department of the Belgrade Gestapo, headed by the SS Lt. Fritz Stracke.

The chief of Sector VII was Commissioner Jovan - Joca Nikolić. In addition to the agents of the Special Police, a few Jews had to work in the sector, mainly on organising the files and on other administrative tasks. The German authorities appointed one of their commissioners as Sector VII operations supervisor. The first commissioner was Gestapo member Otto Winzet, who was replaced as early as May by an Austrian - Egon Sabukoschek. This position was later occupied by Gestapo member Karrasch and SS Sturmführer Ken.<sup>11</sup> Since its establishment, Sector VII assumed the duty of registering all Jews and Jewish shops and kept a daily record of the Jews designated for forced labour and their division into groups. Commissioner Jovan Nikolić sent detailed biweekly Sector VII performance reports to the Gestapo. On June 7<sup>th</sup>, a week after issuing the legislation which equated Jews and Roma, Sector VII started registering Roma.<sup>12</sup>

With the establishment of Sector VII, the Jews were divided into seven districts, headed by a chief who was in charge of the field work under his authority. Records of the labour force available were kept daily. On separate lists, which were sometimes handwritten, a “plus” sign was drawn next to each name if that person was present that day or a “minus” sign if not, and in that case a reason was listed.<sup>13</sup>

Groups of forced labourers usually consisted of 25-35 people, while the main tasks they were assigned were clearing the rubble left after the April bombing, digging up the corpses of victims of the bombing, repairing streets and sewerage, digging and maintaining public toilets, loading and unloading barges at the dock. Alt Kalman, who, at the end of 1941, managed to escape from Serbia with false documents, commented on that period:

“Forced labour for us Jews began around the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 1941. I worked with my group on clearing the rubble and removing the bodies in district no. 8. The work was not only difficult but also dangerous because the buildings had been damaged by the bombing and could collapse at any moment and did collapse, so we were in constant mortal danger. The German guards themselves never wanted to enter the buildings, but kept guard outside and cursed and pushed us with gun stocks to go inside. We had to carry the bodies with our bare hands and shovels wherever the Germans ordered.”<sup>14</sup>

11 (Ken is the Serbian transliteration, the correct German name (Kehn, Kühn?) could not be determined.) On the Special Police, see: Branislav Božović, *Specijalna policija u Beogradu 1941-1944* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2014).

12 Rena Rädle, Milovan Pisarri, *Mesta stradanja i antifašističke borbe u Beogradu 1941-1944. Priručnik za čitanje grada* (Beograd: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2013), 86-88.

13 See: group of documents in IAB, OGB, TD, inv. no. 1534, „dosije Jevreji”, lists of Jews designated for forced labour on territories I-IX (II) of the district of the technical service OGB, 17<sup>th</sup> April - 24<sup>th</sup> May 1941.

14 Arhiv Jugoslavije (hereinafter: AJ), 110-385-601, statement by Alt Kalman.

The administrative apparatus of the municipality of Belgrade, probably wishing to prove themselves efficient and loyal to the German forces, or maybe just because of their own "work ethic" or responsibility for accomplishing their given tasks, carefully kept records of the available labour force, knowing how important and how readily available it was. In a way that could be defined as defending the obtained privileges, complaints were filed when this unpaid labour became, for some reason, no longer available. This was evident, for example, on June the 5<sup>th</sup> 1941, when more than 2,000 people were killed in a huge explosion of ammunition at the train station in Smederevo. A large group of Jews (about 600 working the shift) was sent from Belgrade to clear the rubble.<sup>15</sup> The chief of the fourth district complained to the Technical Directorate, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, because, pursuant to its orders, he first had to discharge all the volunteers who had signed up to work on clearing the rubble (6<sup>th</sup> of June), and later had to hand over the entire "Jewish labour force" at his disposal (14<sup>th</sup> of June), which comprised 139 Jews. As he himself noted, "the district has no more Jews left now." He was promised prisoners of war instead, but they did not show up, so asserting sadly that he had already had "a bad working experience with them", he would have to use the Belgrade City Administration prisoners.<sup>16</sup> In another city quarter, after a sewerage repair (carried out by the forced labourers), there was a street with potholes that urgently needed to be filled and the street paved, but "because the Jews were gone" there wasn't any labour force left to do the job.<sup>17</sup>

Although still not sufficiently documented, archive traces tell us that the Jews were also privately exploited,<sup>18</sup> outside of the organised labour system of German and collaborationist authorities. On May 17<sup>th</sup>, for example, Isak Jakov and Isak Isak went to work i.e. to report to the chief of their district to be assigned work. They were stopped on their way by a young man who took them against their will and without any written order to work in the Belgrade Volksdeutsche Group (Volksdeutsche Gruppe) Supply Directorate.<sup>19</sup> The district chiefs also arbitrarily used or exchanged groups of Jews to the point that, during the reorganisation of the City of Belgrade administrative division (the number of districts was reduced from eighteen to seven), the Technical Directorate explicitly forbade any exchange of labour force (Jews) between certain districts without reporting to the Commissariat for Jews and the department itself. On this occasion, the chiefs were informed about the new working hours for forced labourers: from 7.30 AM to 1PM and from

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15 Lazar Ivanović, „Teror nad Jevrejima u okupiranom Beogradu 1941-1942”, *Godišnjak grada Beograda*, no. XIII (1966): 295-297.

16 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. 1534, chief of district IV to the Technical Directorate of the Municipality of Belgrade, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1941.

17 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. 1534, Technical Directorate to the sewerage sector, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1941.

18 Zdenko Löwenthal, *The crimes of the Fascist occupants and their collaborators against Jews in Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Federation of the Jewish Communities of the FPRY, 1957), 5.

19 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. 1534, chief of district IV to the Technical Directorate of the Municipality of Belgrade, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1941.

3 to 6 PM every day, except on Sundays when labour was mandatory only in the morning, from 8 to 12.<sup>20</sup>

With the legislation “which referred to the Jews and Gypsies” of the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1941, the position of Jews and Roma in Serbia was definitely legally regulated. In addition to the provisions prohibiting them from visiting public places, the obligation of wearing the yellow armband and others, forced labour definitely became compulsory for both sexes:

- (...) §. 6 For the purposes of repairing war-induced damage, Jews of both genders aged 14 to 60 shall be sent to forced labour. The number of Jewish participants in this type of work shall be decided by County command headquarters in charge or those departments appointed by the Supreme Military Commander for Serbia.
- (...) §. 18 Gypsies are made equal to Jews. Suitable provisions of the present Regulation apply to them.
- (...) §. 22 Whoever objects to the orders stipulated in this Regulation shall be punished by prison and monetary fine, or one of the two punishments. In severe cases, they shall be punished by hard labour or death.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, information on forced labour for women is very scarce. Rare archive traces indicate that there were cases when German soldiers used Jewish women as sex slaves.<sup>22</sup>

### **In the Topovske šupe and Sajmište camps**

In the first half of May 1941, the Jews of the fifteenth district were sent at the request of German authorities to clear Topovske šupe; part of the former *Prince Andrej* barracks which the German authorities themselves had occupied and intended to use for their own purposes. The entire Jewish labour force of that district was engaged in cleaning this large space, which meant that the chief was no longer able to continue with his assigned tasks. In an appeal that he wrote to the Technical Directorate, he states that, according to the German commander's estimate, these Jews would be at work in Topovske šupe for a month and a half to two months (and therefore requests that he be assigned a group of Jews from another district).<sup>23</sup>

What no-one knew at that moment, especially the forced labourers, is that, within three months, this particular location would become one of the first camps for Jews in Europe. In fact, in mid-August that year, the Volksdeutsche authorities from Banat, in

20 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. no. 1534, Technical Directorate of the Municipality of Belgrade to all chiefs of districts, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1941.

21 „Naredba koja se odnosi na Jevreje i cigane“, *Novo vreme*, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1941, 2.

22 AJ, 110-908-504, statement by Lazar Konfino.

23 IAB, OGB, TD, inv. no. 1534, the Fifteenth District Chief to the Technical Directorate of the Municipality of Belgrade, 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1941.

agreement with the German occupation authorities in Belgrade banished the entire Jewish population, having first stripped them of all their movable possessions and money and having confiscated their property.<sup>24</sup>

Around 3,700 of the Banat Jews were placed in private homes of Belgrade Jews or in some buildings which belonged to the Jewish community such as, for example, the Ashkenazi synagogue or the Oneg Shabbat building. Shortly after that, probably because of the likelihood that the hygienic conditions would deteriorate, or that some of these forced newcomers would join the partisan groups that were very active in Belgrade at that time, German authorities ordered the internment of all Jewish adult males from Banat in the newly formed Topovske šupe camp. The place was probably chosen because the location was cost-effective, that is, because it contained buildings that could quickly be converted to fit the new purposes.<sup>25</sup>

The buildings were separated by barbed wire from the others which held, among others, the Serbs; refugees from the Independent State of Croatia. The German authorities probably had no intention of hiding the camp from the eyes of the Belgrade population. In fact, it was located in a densely populated area of the city: to its south and southeast were the neighbourhoods Marinkova bara and Jatagan mala, while to its north there was an important traffic route where trams operated regularly. The camp was visible by ordinary people commuting to the city centre and back simply to work, going shopping or taking a stroll. The camp was located near a primary school, a stadium where fans watched their favourite teams play every week, taverns, as well as other places of social encounter.

Jews were taken from the camp for forced labour. They were still clearing the rubble, working on unloading goods at the port, repairing the sewerage and waterworks and the like. In this way, the Topovske šupe camp became ostensibly a place of forced group residence, perhaps even a labour camp, but it was not yet clear that it, in fact, aimed at the complete extermination of the Jewish male population. The shooting of Jewish men in retaliation for partisan attacks began back in July, but from September, after the introduction of the ratio of shooting 100 hostages for each killed German soldier and 50 for each one wounded, as well as orders to use primarily Jews and communists (and later on Roma) as hostages, the scale of the German reprisals took on a new and terrifying dimension.

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24 On Jews in Banat, see: Božidar Ivković, „Uništenje Jevreja i pljačka njihove imovine u Banatu: 1941-1944”, *Tokovi revolucije*, no. 1 (1967): 373-403.

25 On the history of this camp there are only fragments of information. See: Rena Rädle, Milovan Pisarri, Mesta stradanja, 160-163; Nenad Žarković, „Prolazni logor Topovske šupe”, *Nasleđe* no. 10 (2009): 103-112; Dragan Cvetković, „Logori Topovske šupe i Sajmište kao centralna mesta holokausta u okupiranoj Srbiji - numeričko određenje i kvantitativna analiza”, *Istorija 20. veka*, no. 1 (2018): 69-92. On the cost-effectiveness principle: the German forces in occupied Serbia almost never built camps from the ground up, but used the already existing buildings and locations that they considered to be suitable for that purpose: for the camps in Banjica and Topovske šupe in Belgrade, as well as the camp in Niš, they used military buildings of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; in Pančevo, they used a silk factory, and in Sajmište they used the Belgrade Fairground campus which had been built a few years earlier; etc.

Thousands of Jews were killed in several mass shootings in early October.<sup>26</sup> According to the mathematical calculations of the occupied forces, it was urgent to find more hostages and have many of them available at once. Therefore, the first group of Jewish men from Belgrade, which consisted of those unfit for work, was taken to Topovske šupe camp on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October.<sup>27</sup> All the rest would soon also be interned.

On average, the camp held up to 1,500 prisoners, and, at the moment of the aforementioned final arrests of the Belgrade Jews, there were more than 3,000 people there. Living conditions were very harsh, the Jewish community had to supply the camp with food, and any escape attempt was punishable by death.

The few survivors that gave testimonies before the Yugoslav authorities after the war, also mentioned, when describing the living conditions, the question of forced labour:

“(…) I was working for a while outside the camp during the daytime, while at night I would return to the camp to sleep. In early October, there were roughly 1,000 to 1,500 people at the camp. That number was on a steady increase until the 19<sup>th</sup> of October when all the men from Belgrade were rounded up and, when I ran away, there were at least 3,000 to 4,000 people at the camp. We lived in the barracks and in three to four stables. The rooms were so overcrowded that you could hardly lie down at night. People were lying down in hallways and on paths left for passing through. Germans didn’t give us any bed linen. All we got from them was an insufficient amount of straw.”<sup>28</sup>

“(…) I often worked with my group, as most other groups of Jews did, on unloading wagons and barges. We had to haul heavy bags of 100 kilograms on our backs, we carried logs, heavy furniture that was looted from various buildings, while being beaten, insulted and humiliated in every possible way. There were many elderly people among us - even the 60-year olds had to work. All these people were doing the same hard work together with us. Since they were weak, they often fainted from exhaustion and fell together with the burden they were carrying, so the German guards beat them with gun stocks and stamped on them until they stood up again and continued working with the help of us who were younger.”<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the real significance of forced labour, that is, in addition to the organised use

26 On mass shootings, see: Milovan Pisarri, „Fragmenti Holokausta u Beogradu”, *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja*, no. 10 (2015): 183-214.

27 AJ, 110-593-161, statement by Alfred Kazes.

28 AJ, 110-385-601, statement by Alt Kalman.

29 AJ, 110-385-601, statement by Alt Kalman.

of a slave workforce, it was exactly during that period, in the autumn of 1941, that the world witnessed what could be defined as the use of forced labour as a mask to ensure a passive atmosphere in the process of mass killing of Jewish (and later Roma) detainees.

In the initial period of operation of the Topovske šupe camp, women and children were allowed to come to the entrance of the camp and give their loved ones food, until, one day, they were told that their husband, son, father or cousin had been sent for work in Germany.<sup>30</sup> It was a lie, just as they had lied by telling the prisoners that they were going to work; as they gave them tools and loaded them into empty trucks to take them to the execution sites. In addition to the eyewitnesses, the German officers themselves mentioned it in their reports, sometimes complaining that this part of the "action" was not sufficiently effectively implemented: "They were driven by civilians, thus the secrecy was not guaranteed," wrote Hans-Dieter Walther, a German army lieutenant who commanded the shooting of the Jews in late October and early November 1941.<sup>31</sup>

While some groups were taken to be shot, other prisoners were still used for work in the city. Rare testimonies show that work took place also in the immediate vicinity of the camp. In early November 1941, three prisoners took advantage of the opportunity to escape while they were transporting construction material in the vicinity of the camp. Their escape did not last long: a few kilometres from Belgrade they were stopped by the collaborationist border guards and handed over to the special police who handed them over to the German authorities.<sup>32</sup>

At that period there was a clear line of communication between the occupying forces and their collaborators with a view to efficient use of the remaining workforce; which kept diminishing from day to day. Sector VII of the Special Police, which kept files on the Jews designated for forced labour and organised the work in various neighbourhoods, must have been aware of how much labour force it had at its disposal. It also must have been aware over how many Jews it had to exert control. Therefore, after each transfer of Jews from the Topovske šupe camp, the Sector received from the German forces (most likely from the Gestapo) a report on the number of those taken away with lists of names and last names. On the back of each card there was an inscription LS, a Serbian acronym of "camp, shot", to mark that they were no longer available in purely labour and economic terms.<sup>33</sup>

In the same period, forced labour was also used as a mask for the internment of the Roma male population of Belgrade. When they barged into their houses, at the end of October 1941, arresting about 1,500 male Roma and taking them to the Topovske šupe camp (and taking them to be shot a few days later), agents and gendarmes woke the family members and asked that the men come out and come with them. To avoid creating panic,

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30 AJ, 110-385-601, statement by Alt Kalman.

31 Quoted according to Manošek, *Holokaust u Srbiji*, 107.

32 IAB, Belgrade City Administration, Special police (SP), IV-43/8 k. 279/28.

33 AJ, 110-593-160, statement by Salomon Altarac; i 110-593-154, statement by Moša Simonović.

they often used false promises or explanations: one very commonly used was that they were collecting men to cut down forests in Ada or elsewhere and that it would not last long.<sup>34</sup> This lie was credible and effective, since it was precisely in this period that the municipality of Belgrade started cutting wood at various locations in the suburbs due to the high demand among the population, refugees and the municipal administration.<sup>35</sup> It was, therefore, not overly surprising for Roma since they were accustomed to being taken for work.

Finally, in the very places designated by the German authorities for their shooting, Jews and Roma had to dig graves in which their bodies were to be dumped and buried. Special groups of Roma, who were sometimes engaged also by the local authorities, later had the task of covering the graves with earth.

For example, in early October 1941, the chief of the local police in Deliblato (in Banat, about seventy kilometres from Belgrade), called the Roma Ivan Sukulesku and Đuro Novakov to the municipality and ordered them to go to a place called “Čardak” to bury dead animals. Once there, however, they found many dead people and the already prepared graves. The policemen who escorted them ordered them to bury the bodies. At the end of the day, Novakov and Sukulesku managed to bury only about a hundred of them, which is why the police authorities appointed two more Roma (Jovan Nedeljko and a man called Miško) to join them in completing the task. When everything was finished, the chief of the local police ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen and done, otherwise they would be shot.<sup>36</sup> A similar thing happened in Jabuka:

“During the maize harvest in 1941, one day, I cannot remember the exact date, we were invited to the city police with orders to go and dig graves. That day, they took us 36 Gypsies to Jabuka and threatened us that we should not say anything to anyone, otherwise we would be shot. They ordered us to dig a pit, which was about 15 to 20 steps long, 3-4 steps wide and 1 metre deep (...). We would be digging only one pit every day, the size they ordered us given the number of victims that they had to execute.”<sup>37</sup>

Forced labour was also present in the other camp, where Jews (and Roma) were detained, the Sajmište camp, in response to a “genuine” need, or as a way to exhaust the prisoners through unnecessary activities within the camp. The camp, which was in operation from December 1941 to May 1942 as a camp for Jewish women and children (and also for Roma, although most of them were released),<sup>38</sup> exemplified what would later be the

34 AJ, 110-273-31, 43, 147, 434, 470 etc.

35 IAB, UGB, k. 214, no. 19743 Belgrade City Administration to the citizens of Belgrade, 25 October 1941.

36 AJ, 110-908-773, 774, 777.

37 AJ, 110-691-106.

38 On the Sajmište camp, see: Koljanin, *Nemački logor*; Jovan Bajford, *Staro Sajmište. Mesto sećanja*,

characteristic of many death camps in the Third Reich, that is the exploitation of the labour force until death due to exhaustion or until the killing of the prisoners in gas chambers.

A group of around 300 Jewish men from the Topovske šupe camp were used to work on the refurbishment of the Belgrade Fair buildings, damaged during the German bombing in April. This was the last group of living people from that camp, which would later be transferred to the Sajmište camp after it started its operation. During its operation, and just before their mass murder using a gas van, the women prisoners were working on overhauling the nearby civilian airport which would be reopened in 1942.<sup>39</sup> They also had to carry the corpses of dead prisoners across the frozen Sava: "I saw the Jews, I recognised them by the armbands. They were carrying dead bodies, wrapped in white sheets, on stretchers, over the frozen Sava", testified one eyewitness.<sup>40</sup> Roma were also victims of forced labour, as is evident from their memories: "In the camp they beat me and forced me to work, they made me drink water with sand. Water was running under our beds, so we were freezing with cold. As for food, we received only one meal a day."<sup>41</sup>

### **The Bor mine: from forced labour to death march**

"The entire Jewish population of the occupied Serbia, except for those who managed to hide, flee abroad or join the partisan resistance movement, was killed by May 1942, which resolved the Jewish and Gypsy question in the eyes of the criminals."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, a large number of Jews from Hungary would be used during 1943 and 1944 for forced labour in the Bor mine, which was at that time considered to be one of the most important sources of copper for the needs of the German Reich. Various categories of forced labourers worked in the camp, composed of 33 sub-camps: Jews, prisoners of war, members of the partisan resistance movement and political prisoners, but also conscripts of the National Labour Service, the compulsory labour force which the collaborationist authorities introduced for the entire adult male population.<sup>43</sup>

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*zaborava i sporenja* (Beograd: Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, 2011); and websites [www.semlin.info](http://www.semlin.info) and [www.starosajmiste.info](http://www.starosajmiste.info).

39 Koljanin, *Nemački logor*, 52 and 62.

40 AJ, 110-385-600, statement by Radisav Pavlović.

41 AJ, 110-273-179, statement by Jelena Simić.

42 That is what Harald Turner reported to General Löhner, Commander-in-Chief South East, in his report of the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1942: The Jewish question, as well as the Gypsy question has been completely liquidated. Serbia is the only country in which the Jewish and the Gypsy question have been resolved". Quoted according to Manošek, *Holokaust u Srbiji*, 197.

43 On the Bor camp, see: Tomislav Pajić, *Teror okupatora u logorima u Boru 1942-1944*, (Bor: ŠRIF-SO Bor, 1982); Sabine Rutar, „Rad i preživljavanje u Srbiji: Borski rudnik bakra u Drugom svetskom ratu“, translated by Jelena Radovanović, special edition of the *Beležnica* Journal No. 3 (2017); for the overview of bibliography units on different aspects of the Bor mine in World War II, and on the memories of the survivors with special focus on the Jews, see: Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945* (Washington: USHMM, 2018), 320-321.

In German designs for 1941, the complex of the mines and plants in Bor was to be linked to the large thermal power plant in Kostolac, on the Danube. The two towns were to be connected by rail for easier and faster transportation of ore. The connection was also meant to serve the strengthening of the electric capacity of the Bor complex which would have made mining operations more efficient.<sup>44</sup>

Deploying Hungarian Jews to work in Bor was the result of German demand for labour. According to Todt organization estimates, in 1943, the Bor mine had a shortage of about 10,000 workers. Their inability to recruit workers through other channels led the representatives of this organisation to demand, through their superiors, that the Hungarian government provide the adequate number of workers.<sup>45</sup> The fact that Jews from Hungary had already been used in forced labour, especially on the Eastern Front, made things easier, because the "labour units" had already been organised.<sup>46</sup>

The first transport was sent to Bor on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1943 and it comprised about 1,200 persons. This was followed by other transports, especially in the spring of the following year. In total, some 6,200 Jews worked in the Bore mine, about 600 of whom were from Bačka, the part of Vojvodina annexed by Hungary. In Bor, they were divided into several units and assigned various jobs, from working in the mine itself, in the stuffy conditions, to working on the construction of the new Bor river bed, the construction of the Bor-Žagubica railway and on repairing the streets: they worked between ten and twelve hours a day.<sup>47</sup>

They were placed in several sub-camps, separated from everyone else, in very bad conditions. The largest was named Berlin, which was also the camp used for triage of the newly arrived Jews. Other sub-camps also carried the names of the German Reich cities or territories: Brünn (Brno), Bregenz, Westfalen (Westphalia), Heidenau, Wien (Vienna), etc. On average, each of these sub-camps contained a "labour unit" of about 300-500 Jews, except for the Berlin camp where there were about 2,500 prisoners.<sup>48</sup> Here is what an eyewitness stated about the conditions in this camp:

(...) At first these Jews worked in the Bor mine pit and later also in other departments. I know that these Jews were constantly terrorised by the Germans. Once I watched from the working site as the Germans shot two

44 Nikola Živković, *Eksplotacija Borskog rudnika od 1941. do 1944. godine*, u *Bor i okolina. Prošlost i tradicionalna kultura*, ed. Tomislav Pajić (Bor: Skupština opštine Bor i Muzejr udarstva i metalurgije u Boru, 1973), 213-214.

45 Rutar, „Rad ipreživljavanje u Srbiji...”, 35-36.

46 On Hungarian Jews in forced labour, see: Randolph L. Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry*, 2 volumes (New York: Pro Arte for the World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1963).

47 Löwenthal, *The Crimes*, 179-180.

48 Tolnai Gabor, *Zadnja deonica „strme staze”. Poslednje razdoblje Radnotijevog života* (Bor: Radna organizacija „Štampa, radio i film“ Bor, 1984), 10-11 i 15.

Jews in the camp itself, allegedly for trying escape. After the liberation of Bor in 1944, I went to the aforementioned camp, and saw, there in the camp, one concrete pool, full of viscous mud. Jews were being thrown into this pool and that is where their lives ended. There, next to the camp, there was also a cemetery where they buried the Jews who had died from exhaustion and those whom the Germans had shot.<sup>49</sup>

The working prisoners were directly supervised by the German authorities while the commanders and guards at the camp were members of the Hungarian Army. The surviving prisoners repeatedly described the terror they had suffered at the hands of the Hungarian commanders, especially in terms of punishment and daily harassment.<sup>50</sup> In some cases, as in the Heidenau camp, the situation was more bearable so, for example, the prisoners managed to organise some cultural activities.<sup>51</sup>

Around the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, the Hungarian and German authorities returned the detainees' clothes they had taken away at the time of their arrival in the camps, and they assembled all Jews in the central Berlin and Brünn sub-camps under the pretext of taking them back home. Two weeks later, half of them started the journey: those who remained had to continue working. People performed completely unnecessary work for obvious reasons - they had to be kept busy in those chaotic days before the arrival of the Red Army and the Yugoslav partisan units. In late September, they too made their way towards Hungary. The two groups were to have very different fates: while the Jews from the second group were released by partisans on the way (whereupon many of them joined the fight against Nazism or tried to return to their homes) those who started earlier were mostly killed in the death march or ended up in Flossenbürg, Buchenwald and other labour camps.<sup>52</sup>

According to the recollections of survivors, they had a very difficult time on their way. They received food mostly by having it thrown to them by civilians. The civilians threw bread, maize, or whatever they could spare, thus risking their own lives, in the countryside as well as in towns. Only in Belgrade, specifically in the damaged buildings of the Belgrade Fair (at the site of the former camp for Jews), they received some food from the Hungarian guards.<sup>53</sup> They were transferred by ferry to the left bank of the Danube, (Banat), where they were joined by SS units formed by the local German population. The shootings then began: they first killed those who lagged behind from exhaustion, but all the others would

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49 AJ, 110-908-388, statement by Bogosav Mijatović.

50 Löwenthal, *The Crimes*, 180.

51 Gabor, *Zadnja deonica*, 27.

52 Gabor, *Zadnja deonica*, 31, 36-37 and 39.

53 Gabor, *Zadnja deonica*, 43.

become targets soon.<sup>54</sup> Not far from the killing site in Jabuka, where the Jews and Roma from the Topovske šupe camp were shot in 1941, a group of 146 people was killed.<sup>55</sup> The group continued and entered the Hungarian territory over the Titel bridge, again escorted exclusively by Hungarian soldiers. The situation improved, but this was short-lived: in the village of Crvenka, where they arrived on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, the units of the infamous “Prinz Eugen” SS Division, made up of Volksdeutsche appeared and divided, of their own accord, the large group into three smaller groups: the first was sent on towards Mohacs, the second to Baja, and the third, comprising over 500 Jews, was shot on the spot, despite the attempts of Hungarian officers to prevent the bloodbath.<sup>56</sup> The massacres were carried out on others as well: in late October, when the group met again near the Hungarian town of Veszprem, about 1,500 Jews were still alive, that is, half of those who had set out from Bor. Almost all of them were in a terrible state due to hunger and exhaustion. The following day, those who could not go on were killed, among them the famous poet Miklós Radnóti.<sup>57</sup> It was precisely during those days that he wrote his last verse:

I fell next to him, my body rolled over,  
 already stiff like a frozen string.  
 A bullet in the back of the head. - This awaits you too, -  
 Lie down, to myself I keep whispering.  
 The suffering blooms into death that kills. -  
 Der springt noch auf - I heard above,  
 As bloody mud my ear fills.

*Sentkiraljsabadja*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1944.<sup>58</sup>

The others, now about 1,200 people, arrived on November the 13<sup>th</sup> in Oranienburg and then were moved on to other camps.

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54 Gabor, *Zadnja deonica*, 44.

55 Löwenthal, *The Crimes*, 183.

56 Gabor, *Zadnja deonica*, 47.

57 Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944) wrote his notes about the period of detention in Bor as well as during the death march in verse. His notepad was found during the exhumation of his corpse from the mass grave in the village of Abdi in Hungary, where he was killed. It was published in several languages. See: Miklós Radnóti, *Borska beležnica*, translated by Danilo Kiš (Bor: Narodna biblioteka Bor, 1979).

58 Radnóti, *Borska beležnica*, 48-49 (original in Hungarian and translated in Serbian).

## **Conclusion**

Considering the entire male Jewish population who lived in occupied Serbia, including a number of refugees from the Third Reich who fled there in 1941 and who shared the fate of the Serbian Jews, one can approximate with certainty that in the period between April and December 1941 at least 5,000 people were engaged on carrying out various works. Their work was very important for the occupying and collaborationist government because it was the time when the capital had to be cleared of the rubble, but also the time when the key changes that would significantly improve the urban appearance of the city began. Using the Jews as unpaid workers came to be highly appreciated by the very collaborationist structures that carried out the German orders very diligently and efficiently.

Two years later, around 6,200 Hungarian Jews were sent to work in the Bor mine and were used to perform the heaviest tasks. Their contribution to the operation of this important site for the production of raw materials for the German war industry was also very important in the plans of the occupying forces.

In both cases, wherever the Jews were used in forced labour, their labour force was the only thing that interested their executioners: their life in this sense was subject to total exploitation which continued until death. On the one hand, the people in the Bor mine died of exhaustion; on the other hand, in Belgrade in 1941, or during the death march from Bor in 1944, work was compulsory until the mass shootings.

The situation was not much different from the way in which many Jews were treated in other parts of Europe under Nazi rule: in this regard, the swift adjustment of the local bureaucracy in the process of exploiting the unpaid compulsory workforce in Serbia was similar to that elsewhere.

In addition to dehumanisation, total exclusion from social life and the plunder of property, the forced labour of Jews represented the last step prior to their annihilation. To shift the focus precisely to this last issue, which was the intention of the author of this paper, means to open a different perspective not only in the research on the Holocaust in Serbia, but also regarding the importance of Jewish forced labour in the general context of forced labour in this part of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia; many aspects of which during World War II have been insufficiently or very superficially explored.

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## Zoran Janjetović

# FORCED LABOUR IN BANAT UNDER OCCUPATION 1941-1944<sup>1</sup>

Institute for Recent History of Serbia

### ABSTRACT

The work discusses various forms of forced labour in Banat under German occupation between 1941 and 1944 based on primary sources and literature. Special focus is given to so-called “compulsory labour” as the prevalent form of forced labour in the province.

### Key words

*Banat, Serbia, forced labour, “compulsory labour”, Volksdeutsche, camps*

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the Yugoslav Banat became part of occupied Serbia in order to avoid conflict between German allies Hungary and Romania concerning this province. It was to be an interim solution until the end of the war. Meanwhile, the rule was handed over to local Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) who, supported by the occupiers, managed to obtain a special autonomous status in relation to the Serbian collaborationist government. They ruled on behalf of the German occupying forces and in their own interest.<sup>2</sup> This will leave a special mark also on various forms of forced labour in the occupied province.

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1 This paper comes as a result of the project No. 47027: Srbi i Srbija u jugoslovenskom i međunarodnom kontekstu: unutrašnji razvitak i položaj u evropskoj/svetskoj zajednici (The Serbs and Serbia in the Yugoslav and International Context: Internal Development and Position in the European/global community), financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

2 On Banat during the Second World War and its occupation system, see: Sandor Vegh, “Le systeme du pouvoir d’occupation allemand dans le Banat yougoslave 1941-1944,” in *Les systemes d’occupation en Yougoslavie 1941-1945* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1963); Akiko Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003); Predrag Bajčić, *Organizacija i karakter okupacionog sistema u Banatu 1941-1944* (Novi Sad: MA thesis in manuscript, 2007); Ekkehard Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944. Die deutsche, die ungarische und andere Volksgruppen* (München: R. Trofenik, 1991); Zoran Janjetović, „Jugoslovenski Banat 1941. godine”, in *Srbi i rat u Jugoslaviji 1941* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju, 2014), 291-318.

The first group targeted by the Volksdeutsche, as early as the April War and immediately after it, were the Jews. There were around 4,100 of them in Banat. Like in Serbia, they were concentrated in cities and larger towns (Petrovgrad, Vršac, Velika Kikinda, Debeljača, Novi Bečej and Bela Crkva).<sup>3</sup> Since the Volksdeutsche leadership embraced the Nazi ideology and general ethnic German population shared the anti-Semitic prejudices,<sup>4</sup> the Jewish population fell victim to humiliation and harassment of the German soldiers and some Volksdeutsche from the first days of the occupation and was compelled to forced labour. Discriminatory practices introduced by the occupying forces in Serbia were also “legalised” in Banat through the order of the military commander to Serbia of 31 May 1941, which sets out the position of Jews and Gypsies under the “new order”.<sup>5</sup>

In Serbia, due to extensive destruction, the Jews were immediately forced to engage in clearing the rubble.<sup>6</sup> In Banat, during the April war there was no serious damage, so there was no need for that kind of work. Therefore, the tasks to which the Jews were compelled there were smaller-scale and physically easier, but due to the anti-Semitic mood of a good deal of the local Volksdeutsche population they were performed under particularly humiliating conditions. Some of the tasks that the Jews had to do were pointless, that is, devised only as a means of humiliating people. Thus, for example, in Pančevo, a local rabbi was arrested and forced to sing Hebrew songs while washing cars. He was also beaten while doing that work. Also in Pančevo, Jewish intellectuals were forced to clean toilets and contaminated premises with their bare hands, to clean windows, corridors and premises with their clothes, even beards. They were harnessed to pull a carriage instead of a horse and forced to transport wood and other objects for Germans and German institutions, or in the prison yard. They were forced to cut wood using blunt saws and then beaten for alleged “laziness”.<sup>7</sup>

These examples clearly show that the main aim of forced labour here was not to carry out some useful work but primarily to expose the victims to humiliation and abuse.<sup>8</sup>

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3 Teodor Kovač, „Banatski Nemci i Jevreji”, Zbornik [Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja], 9 (2009): 41.

4 Zoran Janjetović, „O nacifikaciji vojvođanskih Švaba”, *Tokovi istorije*, 1-4 (1999): 243-244.

5 Kovač, „Banatski Nemci”, 55; Petar Kačavenda, *Nemci u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941* (Beograd, Institut za savremenu istoriju: 1991), 37; Vegh, “Le systeme”, 512; Branislav Popov Miša, *Nemački zatvori i koncentracioni logori u Banatu 1941-1944* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1992), 40; Valter Manošek, *Holokaust u Srbiji. Vojna okupaciona politika i uništavanje Jevreja 1941-1942* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 2007), 43; Venceslav Glišić, *Teror i zločini nacističke Nemačke u Srbiji 1941-1944* (Beograd: Rad, 1970), 102; Božidar Ivković, „Uništenje Jevreja i pljačka njihove imovine u Banatu 1941-1944”, *Tokovi revolucije*, 1 (1967): 381.

6 Zoran Janjetović, „U skladu sa nastalom potrebom...” *Prinudni rad u okupiranoj Srbiji 1941-1944* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2012), 70-77.

7 Kovač, „Banatski Nemci”, 58, 61-63; Ivković, „Uništenje”, 378.

8 Serbs in Banatski Karlovac were also subjected to forced labour due to national hatred during the first days of the occupation, and similar phenomena were recorded also in Vršac and in Bela Crkva (Kačavenda, *Nemci*, 30).

The Banat Jews, however, did not endure this inhumane treatment for long, because the next, much more fatal phase of their suffering followed very soon: they were caught in mid-August 1941, and, by the middle of the following month, dispatched to Belgrade where they were soon to be killed.<sup>9</sup> The Roma, already on the social margins, were used to carry out the “dirty” tasks during the occupation, such as removal of corpses after executions. They were also forced to carry out various other manual tasks, not only in Banat.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to “kuluk” (hard labour) which was inherited from the legal system of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as civic duty (but which was enforced using national discrimination during the occupation), the principal form of forced labour during the occupation of Banat was called “compulsory labour”. It had its specific characteristics in Banat compared to other parts of occupied Serbia, because the occupation regime in Banat had its own specific characteristics. However, in its main features, it did not, overall, substantially differ from the general form of forced labour in occupied Serbia and was connected to it: forced labourers from Banat were sent to work in Serbia, just as the forced labourers from Serbia were occasionally sent to work in Banat.<sup>11</sup> It came as a logical consequence of the fact that the occupying power in Banat, despite its own local characteristics and parish rule of the Volksdeutsche, formed part of the German occupation system in Serbia which was directly run by representatives of the German military administration from Belgrade.

Compulsory labour service in Banat was introduced earlier than in Serbia. The Decree on it was issued by vice-ban Sepp Lapp,<sup>12</sup> who had already introduced policies on the deployment of the workforce. He issued a decree on “compulsory labour” in October 1941, at a time when the collaborationist government in Belgrade was still discussing its introduction.<sup>13</sup> Lapp’s decree included the complete male population between 18 and 45

9 Ženi Lebl, *Do „Konačnog rešenja”. Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2001), 308; Kačavenda, *Nemci*, 37-38.

10 Dragoljub Acković, *Romi u Beogradu* (Beograd: Rominterpres, 2009), 248.

11 Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 426.

12 Until the end of 1941, the *Viceban* was, *de facto* the highest government representative in Banat. He was only formally subordinated to the *Ban* of the Danube Banate, i.e. he was the embodiment of the autonomy of the Banat administrative apparatus headed by the Volksdeutsche. Starting with the reorganization of Serbia’s administrative division in December 1941, Banat became a separate district and Sepp Lapp the district chief. In this way, the territory of Banat was formally separated from the rest of Serbia, that is, it only formally remained under the authority of the collaborationist government.

13 In mid-May 1941, *Vice-Ban* Lapp took steps to provide labour force for the war economy. The heads of local administration were ordered to prepare workers for agriculture and for the needs of the German army. The work was mandatory and boys aged from 19 to 20 years and people over 40 years were being sent to perform it. In July, a decree on public works was published to counter “unemployment” and under it roads were being built, public buildings renovated, drinking water provided for individual settlements, etc. (Ljubica Šijački, „Teror i pljačka okupatora u Banatu 1941-1944. godine”, *Istraživanja*, 7 (1979): 287.

years of age. The conscripts would work on building roads, bridges, digging drainage and irrigation channels, etc. This labour service could take up to six months.<sup>14</sup> In this way, the Volksdeutsche authorities in Banat anticipated a policy that was being prepared for the whole territory of Serbia. From the available documents it is not possible to conclude whether this policy was inspired by what was being prepared in Belgrade, but it is very likely. It is certain that it could not have been introduced without the approval of the competent German authorities in Belgrade. All the more so, since the German authorities were behind the introduction of compulsory labour in the whole of occupied Serbia. Judging by the form of works it provided, in the Banat decree, however, they rather resembled those that provided “kuluk” (hard labour)<sup>15</sup> than those that included the “compulsory labour” in the rest of Serbia.

“Compulsory labour” in the real sense of the word was introduced in Banat at about the same time as in the rest of Serbia, i.e. in the spring of 1942<sup>16</sup>, although the reasons were not exactly the same. Since Serbia was expected to primarily supply the Reich with ore, central Serbia was primarily supposed to provide the miners for Bor, Kostolac and other mines as well as workers for construction sites around them. Banat, which had no mines, on the other hand, was expected to be an exporter of agricultural products to Germany and partly to feed Belgrade. That is why it had to provide the labour force for agriculture. The intention was that “compulsory labour” conscripts would replace the Volksdeutsche who were recruited into the *Prinz Eugen* Division of Waffen SS which was established in early 1942.<sup>17</sup> The households of ethnic Germans could get as many workers as they gave soldiers. Since the agricultural production had high priority, the non-German agricultural households that had lost their own labour force to war captivity, death or disappearance in combat were also able to get compulsory workers. They were, however, entitled to

14 Božidar Ivković, „Neki metodi ekonomske politike i privredne pljačke okupatora u Banatu 1941-1944”, in *Vojvodina 1941* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1967), 192; Šijački, „Teror i pljačka”, 287; Bajić, *Organizacija*, 128; *Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*, Augsburg: Weltblick Verlag, 1995, 56E.

15 “Kuluk” was a particular civic duty in Serbia before the First World War. Although the first Yugoslav constitution prohibited it, it was practiced during the interwar period. It referred to the male rural population who had to put in their personal efforts to repair or build roads and bridges, cut and supply wood for various jurisdictions, etc. Soldiers, state officials, priests, students and women were excluded from this duty. The city population would pay a certain amount of money instead of performing “kuluk”. Unfortunately, this obligation has not been dealt with in more detail in our historiography. For elementary data, see: Vladan Jovanović, *Jugoslovenska država i Južna Srbija 1918-1929* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002), 203-204.

16 Arhiv Jugoslavije (A), 110, 672/723, The Fourth group of mass crimes in Banat: deportations and forced labour [II. VII 1946].

17 The principal collaborationist newspaper, *Novo vreme* (*The New Times*), depicted it as friendly assistance of the Serbs to the Germans at war. (V.S. „Prijateljska saradnja Nemaca i Srba u Banatu”, *Novo vreme*, July 17. 1942, 3) For more on the establishment of the unit, see: Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division „Prinz Eugen”. Die Banter Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt, New York: Campus Verlag, 2003), 187-197, 212-227; Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 225-238.

only one worker regardless of the number of absent members of household.<sup>18</sup> In addition to farming, the compulsory workers also performed tasks that were indirectly linked to agricultural production, such as road building and repair, canal digging and cleaning, etc.<sup>19</sup> Some were also sent to work in Serbia.<sup>20</sup> The compulsory workers were entitled to wages. During the occupation, the Banat authorities issued about 40 decrees, orders and regulations on “compulsory labour”, and all of these acts were based on the Decree of the Serbian government on compulsory labour and restriction of the freedom of employment of 14<sup>th</sup> December 1941.<sup>21</sup> Based on it, in June 1942, the Banat District Chief ordered the conscription of certain workers to perform compulsory service and the use of conscripted workers to make up for labour shortages in industries essential for the war effort and in agriculture. Like in the rest of Serbia, the National Service for the Reconstruction of Serbia was also established in Banat as a specific prelude to the “compulsory labour”.<sup>22</sup>

In accordance with the needs of occupying forces, most of the workforce was first sent to work in agriculture. The service was regulated by means of the Decree of 10<sup>th</sup> May 1942 on the Agricultural Labour Service. No option was provided of finding a paid replacement, which had been the case with “kuluk” (hard labour) before the war. It was envisaged that the work would be performed in groups, for between 45 and 60 days. Work done in one year was counted as work for the National Service for the Reconstruction of Serbia. It was provided that the workers would be paid wages, or be punished for violating the order by paying a fine or serving between 5 to 60 days of forced labour. The conscripts were used by mayors, notaries and county mayors, and employers would sign formal contracts with workers. Penalties were imposed not only on negligent conscripts, but also on employers who mistreated them.<sup>23</sup> The introduction of compulsory labour for non-Germans was justified by the fact that they, unlike the Volksdeutsche, did not

18 Mirna Zakić, *Ethnic Germans and National Socialism in Yugoslavia in WWII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 132.

19 AJ, 110, 672/723, The fourth group of mass crimes in Banat: deportations and forced labour [11. VII 1946].

20 Enikő A. Sajti, *Hungarians in the Vojvodina 1918-1947* (Boulder, Col.: East European Monographs, 2003), 334.

21 AJ, 110, 672/723, record, dr Rihard Faninger, Petrovgrad, March 24, 1945.; Vegh, “Le systeme”, 536; Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 422-423.

22 Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 419-420, 426; Völkl, *Der Westbanat*, 43. The National Service for the Reconstruction of Serbia primarily targeted young people and had labour as well as educational goals. Collaborationist advocates considered that the „corrupted“ youth should be taught a lesson and brought back to „national“ ideals. For this reason, almost half the time spent in the NSRS was dedicated to ideological lectures and other forms of indoctrination (Janjetović, „U skladi“, 187-208).

23 Zakić, *Ethnic Germans*, 132; MAJ, „Mobilizacija radne službe u Banatu“, *Novo vreme*, July 4, 1942, 3; Šijački, „Teror i pljačka“, 288.

serve in the military units.<sup>24</sup> It was in line with the official German propaganda which claimed that the Germans “defended Europe from communism,” and that nations which did not participate in it with weapons in hand, should contribute to the “common cause” by means of their work. In Banat, as in the rest of Serbia, “compulsory labour” was formally time restricted, but the term of service grew longer with time: it was 45 to 60 days in 1942, between 138 to 190 days in 1943, and up to 210 days in 1944.<sup>25</sup> This depended on the amount of work and on conscripts not reporting for work regularly. The number of weeks and working hours differed from municipality to municipality. A conscript was not allowed to leave the workplace before their replacement arrived, which often happened with delays. The Volksdeutsche families who were assigned compulsory labourers were obliged to treat them fairly. The employers were obliged to feed the workers, wash their clothes, provide them with accommodation and contribute up to 200 dinars for their medical treatment. The local district administration covered the latter cost starting from May 1943. Violation of these provisions by employers entailed likely fines or loss of workforce. Still, many landlords did not treat the workers assigned to them fairly, which was one of the reasons for the mass escape of conscripts which could not have been prevented neither by being sentenced to forced labour after completing their “compulsory labour” service, which was introduced in March 1943, nor by corporal punishment.<sup>26</sup>

13,500 non-Germans worked in the Volksdeutsche estates in 1942.<sup>27</sup> In March of the following year, district chief Lapp re-issued the order on referral for “compulsory labour” of all men and women between 16 and 60 years, whose labour force had not been fully exploited in their farms or companies. They were supposed to be employed in other people’s farms or companies. This order replaced the standard employment contract and wages were supposed to be standard or equal to those paid at the work place. The labour force was to be assigned to the vital industries which had labour shortages. The notorious alcoholics, slackers, asocial types, convicts and Roma were to be organised into special work brigades for public works. It was planned that workers would be paid according to their ability (whatever that meant), except for persons in forced labour. Mostly young men aged between 17 and 25 were taken into account, while the clerks, students who regularly attended school, annual farm servants and sole providers were spared. Conscripts were entitled to a reduced rent, food, clothing, free laundry service and medical care. Workers

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24 Johann Wuescht, *Jugoslawien und das Dritte Reich. Eine dokumentierte Geschichte der deutsch-jugoslawischen Beziehungen von 1933 bis 1945* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1969), 266.

25 Vegh, “Le systeme”, 536; Nikola Živković, *Ratna šteta koju je Nemačka učinila Jugoslaviji u Drugom svetskom ratu* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1975), 183-184; Vökl, *Der Westbanat*, 43; Bajić, *Organizacija*, 129; Šijački, „Teror i pljačka”, 289; Zakić, *Ethnic Germans*, 132.

26 AJ, 110, 672/723, Police prefecture of the Banat, the police Prefect of Veliki Bečkerek to the command of the state guard of the Banat, the public security command Veliki Bečkerek, March 22, 1943; Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 426-429, 431-432; Živković, *Ratna šteta*, 183-184.

27 Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 428.

who worked in their own clothes, were later financially compensated for it. Conscripts were given the right to free transport to the place of work and back, and it was to be financed from the District Authority Fund for the planned economy. Contempt of this order was punished by fine or labour of up to 20 days.<sup>28</sup> On 31 January 1944, a similar order was issued for the year 1944.<sup>29</sup> In Banat, like in Serbia, escape from “compulsory labour” was common, but due to lack of police personnel, it was mostly impossible to catch the runaways. In order to counter the fleeing, in January 1944, the District Chief Lapp introduced a two years’ forced labour punishment, a fine, or both.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, in March 1944, hundreds of conscripts failed to show up for their compulsory service, so the district prefecture demanded that they be detained by the police.<sup>31</sup>

The Reich’s war-economy policies were introduced in Serbia on 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1943, but only as late as September of that year in Banat.<sup>32</sup> The first decree on implementing these policies concerned the Germans from the Reich and Volksdeutsche, and introduced compulsory service for the German men aged 16-65 years and women aged 17-45. People fully employed in agriculture, public officials, clergy, students and prisoners unfit for work, pregnant women, mothers of preschool children and mothers with at least two children under 14 years were exempt from it.<sup>33</sup> District Chief Sepp Lapp stipulated that only county mayors, their deputies, borough mayors, deputy mayors or German mayors could order compulsory service for the Volksdeutsche.<sup>34</sup> The intention here was to point out that the Volksdeutsche were independent from the Serbian administration in Belgrade and the Serbian civil servant section in Banat. At the same time, they sought to demonstrate that Germans were not formally exempt from “compulsory labour”, that is, that belonging to the German nation was not a privilege, but that it also involved obligations. The Hungarians, although more privileged than the Serbs, were also required to perform labour service. In August 1942, the leader of the Hungarian minority in Banat, Baron Tibor Tallián, agreed with the German authorities that Banat Hungarians would no longer be sent to work in

28 AJ, 110, 672/723, Circular letter “Order for Banat on Referring for Compulsory Service”, *Novo vreme* March 21, 1943, 4.

29 AJ, 110, 672/723, Decision, January 31, 1944; MAJ, “Regulating the Compulsory Service in Banat”, *Novo vreme*, February 27, 1944, 2.

30 AJ, 110, 672/723, Order by Sepp Lapp, Grossbetschkerek, October 4, 1943.

31 AJ, 110, 672/723, District prefecture for Banat, General Department, section for compulsory labour service of the Police Prefecture for Banat, March 1944.; AJ, 110, 672/723, District prefecture for Banat, General section, Department for the Compulsory Labour Service to the police prefecture.

32 Ordinance on the Introduction of War Economy Policies of the Reich, *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, September 10, 1943. Šijački wrongly lists October 1943. Šijački, „Teror i pljačka, 289.

33 The First Decree on Implementing the Ordinance on the Introduction of War Economy Policies of the Reich, *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, March 26, 1943, 311.

34 AJ, 110, 672/723, Order by Sepp Lapp, Grossbetschkerek, October 4, 1943.

Serbia, but the German authorities did not keep the promise.<sup>35</sup>

Already in the summer of 1941, a 6-month youth labour service duty was organised for German youth. During that year, dozens of German boys and girls helped with the harvest, working for about a month and a half. The following year, there were over 800 young Germans working, and the girls were more in demand than the boys - certainly due to the conscription of young people in the Waffen-SS. That year, youth labour in agriculture became mandatory, but many did not want to respond - in part because their fathers were in military service, so there was no one available to do the work on their own farms. In order to boost the enthusiasm for the labour service, young people were given propaganda lectures in preparatory camps - resembling the political indoctrination of Serbian youth in the National Service for the Reconstruction of Serbia. Soon after the introduction of the Reich's war-economy policies, three generations of youth were recruited for labour service in two months.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the compulsory farming on the estates of local Germans and works on roads and canals, from mid-1943, the inhabitants of Banat were forced to provide labour also for the airfields that the German Air Force intended to build in Banat because they were being pushed from the East and Southeast. It was planned to build or expand airfields in Ečka, Pančevo, Kovin, Alibunar, Bela Crkva, Vršac and Botoš. 4,000 unskilled and 600 skilled workers were required only for the airfield in Ečka. By September of that year, 1,200 regular and 250 professional workers were sent. In order to provide the necessary labour force, an obligation was imposed on the municipal authorities in Bečkerek and Kikinda and the district prefectures in Modoš, Novi Bečej, Kovačica and Novi Kneževac.<sup>37</sup> Local governments were supposed to ensure the deployment of an adequate number of workers and their replacements after three or six months. The workers were to be provided preferably from the ranks of the urban population not engaged in agriculture, which was not only the province's principal industry, but also the most important industry for the occupying authorities because it was expected to produce surplus food. The Volksdeutsche were also sent for as compulsory labour, at least as a qualified labour force. They, too, could not return to their homes before the arrival of the appropriate replacement.<sup>38</sup> Works on the construction of the airfield were carried out by a series of mainly German companies.<sup>39</sup> They worked a 10-12 hour working day, with the pay ranging from 20 to 50 dinars. The wage later rose to as much as 100 dinars, but the wages on the free market at the time ranged

35 Sajti, *Hungarians*, 334.

36 Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 437-439.

37 AJ, 110, 672/723, The Fourth Group of Mass Crimes in Banat: Deportations and Forced Labour, [July 11, 1946] Šijački, „Teror i pljačka”, 289-290.

38 AJ, 110, 672/723, Čestereg municipality to the district prefecture, Čestereg, September 19, 1943.

39 AJ, 110, 672/723, Banat District Prefecture, General Section, Department of Compulsory Labour Service, Veliki Bečkerek, September 1943; AJ, 110, 672/723, The Fourth Group of Mass Crimes in Banat: Deportations and Forced Labour, [July 11, 1946].

between 400 and 500 dinars. There were many complaints about cutting down the already low salaries. In addition, the workers did not receive the entire agreed salaries because a certain amount reserved for food, various fees and taxes was deducted from it.<sup>40</sup>

The main construction site was the airfield in Ečka. According to the assessment of the State Commission for the Investigation of the Crimes of Occupiers and their Accomplices, during 1943 and 1944, 20,750 of all kinds of forced labourers passed through it. Among them were about 2,000 Italian internees.<sup>41</sup> While a very small number of women, mostly cooks and maids, worked in Bor and other sites in Serbia,<sup>42</sup> in Banat there were relatively many women working in heavy construction jobs or employed in agriculture around the airfield. However, some of these women were sent for this type of work as punishment, i.e. they were not “compulsory” but forced labourers,<sup>43</sup> which clearly indicates the shortage in labour force. Others were also being sent to work on airfield construction, but to carry out “female” jobs - as cleaners, laundresses etc.<sup>44</sup> Part of the male labour force who worked on airfields was sent there as punishment.<sup>45</sup> Workers were treated harshly, the repertoire of harassment ranged from curses and threats to beating.<sup>46</sup> The work itself was strenuous and lasted between 9 and 12 hours a day, sometimes longer. The workers from the surrounding villages would sleep in their homes. They were in a better position also because they usually worked less weeks than workers brought in from more remote places. They, in turn, were placed in various sheds, barracks or peasants’ homes, usually in rooms without windows. Due to poor sanitation, many soon contracted lice and due to hard work, poor food and lack of hygiene, many workers got sick, but doctors usually refused to grant them exemption from work, accusing them of being “malingerers”.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, from as early as September 1943, many conscripts failed to report for work, but the district

40 AJ, 110, 672/723, Record Radovan Tanuševac, August 25, 1945; AJ, 110, 672/723, The Fourth Group of Mass Crimes in Banat: Deportations and Forced Labour [July 11, 1946]; Živković, *Ratna šteta*, 184.

41 AJ, 110, 672/723, The Fourth Group of Mass Crimes in Banat: Deportations and Forced Labour [July 11, 1946]. After Italy had capitulated, the German troops disarmed parts of Italian units and interned them. Italian soldiers did not have a true prisoner-of-war status, but were treated as “military internees”.

42 Pajić, *Organizacija*, 314–315. Many of them contracted sexually transmitted diseases, because they “were intensely used for sexual intercourse” as the only women in the camps.

43 AJ, 110, 672/723, Record Dejan Sudarski, August 25, 1945; Record Ljubica Kokotović, May 30, 1945; AJ, 110, 672/723, The Fourth Group of Mass Crimes in Banat: Deportations and Forced Labour [July 11, 1946].

44 AJ, 110, 673/724, Report Jovanka Tomić, Pančevo, November 13, 1944.

45 That is how a group of Croats from Starčevo was driven away to forced labour in Ečka because they refused to join Hipo in May 1943. AJ, 110, 672/723, Record Franjo Jambek, December 28, 1944.

46 AJ, 110, 672/723, Record Milorad Putić, May 17, 1945.

47 AJ, 110, 672/723, Record Radovan Tanuševac, August 25, 1945; Record Dejan Sudarski, August 25, 1945; AJ, 110, 672/723, The Fourth Group of Mass Crimes in Banat: Deportations and Forced Labour [July 11, 1946].

commander, Captain Amelung from Bečkerek, sought the enforcement of strict measures such as fines, imprisonment, hard labour and even the death penalty, as it was provided in Articles 30 and 31 of the Order of the Military Commander in Serbia of July 28<sup>th</sup> that year.<sup>48</sup>

From 1943, works in Bela Crkva were undertaken on the expansion of the small airfield of the Royal Yugoslav Army. They used the Serbian population from the town itself and the neighbouring villages for the works. Unskilled workers worked for free and those skilled received very low wages. If someone failed to report for work, they would be arrested by the police.<sup>49</sup> We were unable to find data on other airfield construction sites, but the situation in those was probably similar. There is also a lack of sources which would allow us to determine the total number of “compulsory” and forced labourers in the Yugoslav part of Banat during World War II. After the liberation of the province, the Inquiry Committee for Banat came up with the figure of 2,880 workers,<sup>50</sup> which was certainly too few - even if we assume that the estimated number for the Ečka airfield construction site alone of 20,750 is too high.<sup>51</sup> The forms of forced labour in Banat were varied and the coverage was quite large. It partly included also the Volksdeutsche population - which the Investigative Committee certainly did not record - so the figure of 2880 plaintiffs was most likely too small.

The system of “compulsory labour” in Banat had its counterpart in Serbia, but there was a difference between them. The most massive form of “compulsory labour” in Serbia was work in the mines in Bor, Kostolac or on construction sites around them. They worked in large groups and mainly for German companies. Therefore, the workers were accommodated in large barracks in the camps themselves. By contrast, in Banat, due to the characteristics of the local economy the main branch of which was agriculture, the predominant type of work was performed on Volksdeutsche estates. They could get a handful of conscripts at most, depending on how many family members were absent due to military service. The work on the construction sites for the needs of the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe started as late as 1943. They were secondary in the context of forced labour, though they engaged larger groups of workers. This was the main difference: most of the “compulsory workers” in Banat “replaced” the absent Volksdeutsche labour force in agriculture, while in the rest of occupied Serbia the conscripts filled in the positions for which no labour force could be found on the labour market. That is why it was suspended

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48 AJ, 110, 672/723, District Commander Amelung to the Banat District Prefect, Bečkerek, September 10, 1943.

49 AJ, 110, F. br. 959, The State Commission for Vojvodina. Decision on the crimes of the occupiers and their accomplices; AJ, 110, 672/723, The Fourth Group of Mass Crimes in Banat: Deportations and Forced Labour [July 11, 1946].

50 AJ, 110, 673/724 The statement on the number of plaintiffs and the total damage according to the types of crimes based on reports from the local commissioners' offices and the Banat Inquiry Commission record, December 24, 1945.

51 AJ, 110, 672/723, The Fourth Group of Mass Crimes in Banat: Deportations and Forced Labour [July 11, 1946].

as such and replaced by coercion, while some conscripts were being sent in also from Banat. It is very likely that the work performed on the estates of the Banat peasants, even with bad masters, was more bearable than that in the mines and on construction sites in Serbia. Conscripts in Banat performed tasks they were used to doing at home,<sup>52</sup> which could never be as difficult as work in mines or in construction sites under armed guard. Most probably the accommodation, food and general living conditions in peasant farms were, in most cases, better than in the camps in Serbia. This issue is, however, yet to be explored. The fact remains that with the use of agricultural machinery, better quality seeds and fertilizers, as well as thanks to the conscripts' "compulsory labour", the volume of agricultural production in Banat during the occupation increased, despite the fact that as many as 17% of the Volksdeutsche were called to arms.<sup>53</sup>

Although the work in agriculture and the airfield construction prevailed, it was not, however, the only form of compulsory labour in Banat. Work was also done on transporting goods (using so-called "kuluk" carts), loading and unloading (e.g. railway tracks and sleepers, parts for bridge construction, etc.) in Pionirski Park in Pančevo, as well as unloading grain at the Pančevo grain mill.<sup>54</sup> Similar tasks were certainly performed elsewhere.

In addition to the "compulsory labour" which was interpreted as a civic duty, forced labour was enforced, like elsewhere in Serbia, as a punishment for politically and socially unwelcomed elements. Thus, in Ostrovačka Ada on the Danube near Dubovac a camp for forced labourers who worked on cutting wood was organised in 1942. Convicts were divided into three groups. The first was made up of black marketers who received the mildest treatment. The second group consisted of political prisoners in the Bečkerek concentration camp and the third consisted of the so called "Bosnians". They were called so because the largest number of them originated from Bosnia. They included captured resistance fighters, but also innocent civilians, partly from Kozara. The so-called "Bosnians' camp" was opened on August 20<sup>th</sup> 1942, when 800 detainees were brought in from the notorious Sajmište camp in Belgrade. Due to exhaustion, hard work and cruel treatment by the Volksdeutsche guards, after only a month of work, only about 200 people from this group remained alive. This camp was abolished in November of that year, and the 89 surviving prisoners were taken back to the Sajmište camp. Political prisoners lived and worked under almost equally difficult conditions.<sup>55</sup>

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52 We should not forget that a good deal of the urban population in Vojvodina engaged in agriculture as their principal or additional occupation.

53 Karl-Heinz Schlarp, *Wirtschaft und Besatzung in Serbien 1941-1944. Ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Wirtschaftspolitik in Südosteuropa* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986), 354; Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division*, 178.

54 Šijački, „Teror i pljačka“, 290-291.

55 AJ, 110, inv. br. 12634, State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators, Decision on the investigation of the crimes committed by the occupiers

Due to the insatiable need for labour in Bor, some of the Banat convicts served the forced labour sentence in Serbia. On the other hand, the prisoners from the nearby Sajmište and Banjica camps in Belgrade were brought to work in Banat. In Banat itself, the prisoners/political convicts were mostly working in agriculture and gardening. That is how they used to work on the Schulhoff estate, and also in Čoka, on the former Lederer estate.<sup>56</sup> In the Petrovgrad camp, prisoners, have worked in the camp workshops and gardens,<sup>57</sup> cutting wood or reed. They were sometimes rented as cheap slave labour to work in factories. In some cases, detainees were taken out of the camp to work on loading and unloading.<sup>58</sup> It is recorded that in Pančevo in 1941 the female prisoners of the Svilara camp spun yarn.<sup>59</sup>

Forced labour in Banat had the same major subcategories as in the rest of Serbia, although its enforcement had local peculiarities. Its main form was “compulsory labour” in agriculture as the result of the economic needs of the occupiers. Another important aspect - airfield construction - was caused by the military needs of the occupying forces, while the forced labour by the camp prisoners was an integral part of the repressive system. It was integrated into the system of terror at the Serbian, even European level. These aspects, as well as the number of people affected by various forms of forced labour are yet to be further explored. Also, we should pay more attention to the study of the phenomenon of “compulsory labour” at the local level, as well as the living conditions of the conscripts in various places.

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and their collaborators, dr. Turner Harald; *Otpor u žicama. Sećanja zatočenika*, II, (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1969), 65-74; Božidar Ivković, „Zatvori, koncentracioni i radni logori u Banatu 1941-1944”, *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke*, 39 (1964): 115, 122-129; Branislav Popov Miša, *Nemački zatvori i koncentracioni logori u Banatu 1941-1944* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1992), 194, 197-201; Šijački, „Teror i pljačka”, 291; Aleksić, „Prinudni rad”, 144-145.

56 By historic irony, the Schulhoff estate was acquired by the company which had managed the Bor mines. They brought in concentration camp prisoners from the Petrovgrad camp (Kovač, „Banatski Nemci”, 81; Ivković, „Uništenje”, 397; idem, „Zatvori”, 123). A labour camp was set up in July 1942, in Miloradović wasteland near Banatski Brestovac, with concentration camp prisoners brought in from Sajmište and Banjica, and, later, from Croatia. Due to very difficult conditions, a group of about 100 exhausted prisoners brought in from the Petrovgrad camp had to be returned there in mid-1943 (Ivković, „Zatvori”, 124-125; Aleksić, „Prinudni rad”, 145).

57 Miša, *Nemački zatvori*, 194; Šijački, „Teror i pljačka”, 241; Ivković, „Zatvori”, 122.

58 Idem.

59 Ivković, „Zatvori”, 115; Aleksić, „Prinudni rad”, 145.

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## NEWSPAPERS

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Milan Koljanin

## The camps as a Source of Forced Labour in Serbia 1941-1944

Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade

### ABSTRACT

Forced labour of Serbian citizens was exploited since the beginning of the German occupation of Serbia. Compulsory service was immediately introduced for Jews, which also included interned Jewish men. In November 1941, the Germans began using the workforce of Serbian labour camp prisoners for work in coal mines. The construction of a large concentration camp was also planned then, but was later abandoned. The deportation of prisoners from camps in Serbia to concentration or labour camps in Germany or occupied countries began in late April 1942. Prisoners from Serbia were collected in two Belgrade camps, in Banjica and Sajmište (The Belgrade Fair). Sajmište became the central German camp in Southeastern Europe for sending forced labourers to other camps, including those in Serbia. The first groups of forced labourers were sent to coal mines in Serbia in November 1941, from the camp in Šabac. The systematic transfer of prisoners from the Sajmište camp to forced labour in Serbia, primarily in camps near large mines began in late August 1942. They were set up around the mines in Trepča and Bor, as well as on farms in Banat. The Sajmište camp became the main source of forced labourers for the mine in Trepča, and a smaller number of workers were sent to the mines in Bor. Forced labour of prisoners from the camp in Banjica was used a lot less. However, the majority of prisoners from the camps in Serbia were sent to forced labour in concentration and labour camps in the Third Reich, and somewhat less to other occupied countries which was the main function of these camps.

### Keywords

*Serbia, The Second World War, Germany, occupation, concentration camps, forced labour, Sajmište, Banjica, Bor, Trepča*

Forced labour was used from the beginning of the German occupation of Serbia. As soon as the occupying troops entered Belgrade, which the German air force was brutally bombing since April 6<sup>th</sup> 1941, the civilian population, prisoners of war and Jews were ordered to clear the ruins, remove the corpses and repair the infrastructure of the city.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Muharem Kreso, *Njemačka okupaciona uprava u Beogradu 1941-1944. (Sa osvrtom na centralne okupacione komande i ustanove za Srbiju, Jugoslaviju i Balkan)* (Beograd: Istorijski arhiv Beograda, 1979), 49-50, 57.

labour service for the Jews was regulated by means of the fundamental legal act for Jews and Roma, which the German military commander of Serbia passed in late May 1941. Although compulsory service was reserved for adult Jewish men, Jewish women were also often forced to perform various tasks, primarily for the sake of humiliation.<sup>2</sup> After internment in camps, Jews were also used as forced labourers. During the time of mass executions of Serbian civilians in retribution for the German losses infighting with the rebels, from September to the end of November 1941, “going to work” was the pretext under which groups of Jews (and Roma) from the camp would be selected and taken away for execution.

In Šabac, a camp for Jews was set up on 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1941 in the Yugoslav army facilities (the engineering units’ barracks), near the Stari Grad (the Old Town) quarter on the river Sava. Most were Jewish refugees from Central Europe (the so-called Kladovo Transport) who had been caught in Šabac during the war. They were soon joined by the Jews from Šabac. Jewish men from the camp were used for labour in the city until the beginning of mass shootings upon the arrival of the German “punitive expedition”, when a total of 750 Jews and 84 Roma were killed. The remaining Jews, women and children were deported to the Jewish camp in Zemun (Judenlager Semlin) at Sajmište (the Belgrade Fair) in late January 1941.<sup>3</sup> The largest camp for Jewish men in Serbia was set up on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1941 in Belgrade in Topovske Šupe at Autokomanda. The first to be interned there were the Jews deported from the Banat region in August and September 1941, followed by those from Belgrade. At first, the camp was primarily a labour camp from which Jews were taken to work at various locations in Belgrade.

The massive uprising in Serbia in the summer and autumn of 1941 was a threat to German interests and prestige at the time of their greatest success in the war against the Soviet Union. Hitler, therefore, decided that the uprising should be crushed in the harshest possible way. The order of the Supreme High Command of the Wehrmacht of the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1941 stipulated that for each killed German soldier or member of the German national minority 100 “communists” be executed, and 50 for each one wounded. General Franz Böhme was made the German plenipotentiary commanding general in Serbia.<sup>4</sup> During the brutal suppression of the uprising in autumn 1941, the interned Jews and other prisoners of the network of camps that had been meanwhile set up in Serbia, were a suitable “pool” of hostages for mass shootings for all major German losses in fighting the rebels. By

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2 Regulations by the Military Commander in Serbia, 8 (31 May 1941), *Novo vreme*, 19 (3 May 1941); *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and their Collaborators against Jews in Yugoslavia*, ed. Zdenko Löwenthal (Belgrade: Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, 1957), 1-2.

3 Stanoje Filipović, *Logori u Šapcu*, (Novi Sad, SUBNOR, 1967), 12, 33, 35, 125-129, 137-145; Milan Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom sajmištu 1941-1944* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1992), 38-39; idem, „Poslednje putovanje Kladovskog transporta”, in *Kladovski transport, Zbornik radova sa okruglog stola* Beograd, Oktobar, 2002 = *The Kladovo Transport: Roundtable Transcripts*, Belgrade, October, 2002, ed. Andrej Mitrović et al. (Beograd: Jevrejski istorijski Muzej, 2006), 79-82.

4 Walter Manoschek, *‘Serbien is judenfrei’. Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1993), 56.

the end of November 1941, virtually the entire Jewish male population had been killed in mass executions, and by the end of 1941, about 20,000 people were killed.<sup>5</sup>

The policies used for suppressing the uprising in Serbia also included a plan for the mass internment of the population from insurgent areas and its use in forced labour. On the order of General Böhme, shortly before the attack on the rebels in the area between the Sava and the Drina rivers on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 1941, the entire male population aged 15-60 was planned to be imprisoned and transported to the prisoner assembly points (“Gefangenensammelstellen”) which were supposed to be prepared by the army. “It will later be used by the labour departments, especially for corn cutting in the fields along the roads, as well as for collecting the crops. The whole female population is to be used, from day one, for the same work or forced to do other work. According to the special order, prisoners will be sent to certain concentration camps north of the river Sava which will be regulated by the order of the Military Commander of Serbia “.<sup>6</sup> The new order of General Böhme from the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1941 reiterated that the entire male population aged 15-60 be collected at the prisoner assembly points and that the entire remaining population be pushed to the south and to Cer mountain. General Böhme reiterated that the Military Commander of Serbia should arrange a concentration camp north of the river Sava where all the prisoners would be sent.<sup>7</sup> Thousands of arrested citizens of Šabac and other neighbouring villages were taken, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1941, in a forced “bloody march”, to a makeshift camp in the village of Jarak in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) only to be returned four days later to Šabac, to the camp which had been, meanwhile set up in the military barracks at Senjak (“Durchgangslager Šabac”, The Šabac transit camp).<sup>8</sup>

Like the camps in Belgrade (in Banjica and Topovske šupe) and Niš (in the Crveni krst quarter), the Šabac camp was a pool of hostages for mass shootings that continued throughout the autumn of 1941. All these camps were under the administration of the German Police (Gestapo), but the mass shootings were committed by members of the German army (Wehrmacht). Some of the prisoners from the Šabac camp were gradually liberated, but some were sent to forced labour. This was the first camp from which the prisoners were sent in an organized way to forced labour as needed by the occupying administration. Until then, only interned Jews were used for forced labour. According to the ten-day report by General Böhme of the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1941, the first group of prisoners was sent from the Šabac camp to the coal mine in Kostolac, principally run by the General Plenipotentiary for Economy in Serbia, Franz Neuhausen. Due to the Belgrade power station’s increased demand for coal, Neuhausen “offered 300 men from the Šabac

5 Venceslav Glišić, *Teror i zločini nacističke Nemačke u Srbiji 1941-1944* (Beograd: IP Rad, 1970), 79.

6 Manoschek, ‘Serbien is judenfrei’, 58; *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* (hereinafter: *The NOR Collection*), Volume 1, Borbe u Srbiji, 1941 (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institut), 1949, 450-451.

7 *The NOR Collection*, I, I, 461-462.

8 Filipović, *Logori u Šapcu*, 63-82.

concentration camp to the mine as assistant workers“.<sup>9</sup> It turned out that the demand for additional labour force existed not only in the Kostolac coal mine, but also in other coal mines. According to a report by General Böhme of the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1941 “300 men from the Šabac concentration camp arrived at the open-cast mine in Senjski rudnik, and 300 men to the coal mines in Kostolac and Klenovik (north of Požarevac)”.<sup>10</sup>

The camps in Serbia had a pacifying role, but also served as a source of forced labour, as is evident from the orders of General Böhme and the practice of sending prisoners to coal mines. However, the German police command in Berlin was of the opinion that the uprising in Serbia should be crushed by radical eradication of the insurgent regions and mass internment of the entire population. According to the report by the Chief of Security Police and Security Service of the Reich (Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD) of the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1941, it was planned that the Todt Organisation should construct a large concentration camp made in “the style of German concentration camps.” The capacity would be for 50,000 people and later as much as 500,000 people, and the camp would be managed by the Task Force of the Security Police and Security Service (Einsatzgruppe der Sipo und des SD). The construction of the camp began near the village of Zasavica on the bank of the Sava, but the location was abandoned due to flooding. Therefore, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1941, General Böhme ordered that the pavilions of Belgrade Fair be used for the planned large camp. However, after the suppression of the uprising in late November and early December 1941, the German command cancelled the plan of mass internment of residents from insurgent areas and the newly established camp was used for the “final solution of the Jewish question”. The camp at the Belgrade Fair became the Zemun Jewish Camp (Judenlager Semlin) where all the remaining Jews from Serbia were interned. The camp was located in the city of Zemun, in the Independent State of Croatia, with whose approval it was organized, but it was part of the German repressive system in occupied Serbia. Since a decision was made in Berlin, in mid-March 1942, that the prisoners at Sajmište would not be deported to some of the death camps in Poland but killed in Serbia, the Jewish prisoners were killed, from late March to the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1942, in gas vans on the way to the execution site in Jajinci where they were buried.<sup>11</sup>

The collapse of the German “Blitzkrieg” on the Eastern front against the Soviet Union in late 1941 indicated that it was going to be a long war. The constant demands of the German war industry for forced labour increased even more in the Greater German Reich as well as in the occupied countries. The number of workers in forced or “voluntary” labour in the Greater German Reich grew steadily, so that in August 1944 it reached 7,615,970 people, of whom 5,721,883 were civilians and 1,980,087 prisoners of war. Foreign workers made

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9 *The NOR Collection*, I, 1, 591-592.

10 *Idem*, 605-606.

11 Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom sajmištu*, 128-133.

up 21% of the total German workforce.<sup>12</sup> The need for a workforce led to some changes in treatment of the captured rebels in Yugoslavia. Based on the decision of the Southeast Command, at the end of March 1942, it was decided that only the rebels captured in battle should be killed, and the rest sent to forced labour in Norway (“Arbeitseinsatz Wiking”, The Viking Labour Assignment).<sup>13</sup> This was preceded by an agreement between the Reich Commissioner for Norway Josef Terboven and the senior leader of the SS and police in Serbia, General August Meyszner, who had served in Norway before coming to Serbia.

However, the number of prisoners from the camps in Serbia (camps in Belgrade - Banjica, Niš and Šabac) was insufficient for Norway’s demands. Therefore, an agreement was made between August Meyszner and the chief of police of the ISC Eugen Kvaternik, in the second half of April 1942, on taking prisoners from the Ustasha<sup>14</sup> camps in Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška for that task. They were supposed to be deported to the camp at the Belgrade Fair from where they would be transported to Norway. Meanwhile, in late April and early May 1942, the Sajmište camp was given a new purpose and a new name: the Zemun Reception Camp (Semlin Anhaltelager). As the last groups of Jews were being put to death, from the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1942, a mass of new prisoners started arriving in the camp at Semlin from the camps in Serbia and, most of them, from the Ustasha state and its camps in Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška. The camp at the Belgrade Fair soon became the central German camp in the Southeast of Europe for collection and further deportation of forced labour to concentration and labour camps in Germany and the occupied countries, including Serbia. Another Belgrade camp, the one in Banjica (Anhaltelager Dedinje - Reception camp Dedinje), had a similar role, and it often happened that transports to camps outside the country consisted of prisoners from both Belgrade camps. The first group sent to Norway, on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1942, was from the Banjica camp followed by groups from the Sajmište camp: on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of May and 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of May 1942.<sup>15</sup>

The influx of new prisoners was extremely high in July and August 1942 with the arrival of thousands of prisoners from the German and Croatian forces’ extensive joint operation on Mount Kozara and Prosara. Because of the unresolved issues between German authorities in Serbia and the Ustasha state on the feeding of the prisoners, famine broke out in the camp and the prisoners died from exhaustion, disease and torture. As there was a need for housing thousands of prisoners, as well as separating the sick and those in better health,

12 Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerbeschäftigung in Deutschland 1880-1980. Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter* (Berlin-Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz, 1986), 144-145.

13 Vojni arhiv, Belgrade (hereinafter: VA) the German archive fonds (Ga), k.27, f.I,d-27, Commander of armed forces in the Southeast to the Commanding General and Military Commander in Serbia, March 31, 1942.

14 Croatian fascist and terrorist organization, which came to power in the newly established Independent State of Croatia in April 1941 with the help of Germany and Italy.

15 Ljubo Mladenović, *Pod šifrom Wiking. Život, borba i stradanja jugoslovenskih interniraca u logorima u Norveškoj 1942-1945* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1991), 24.

the construction of a new camp began at the very confluence of the Sava and Danube which was under the administration of the Todt military - economic organisation. It should be noted that both camps in Norway to which prisoners from the two Belgrade camps were being sent were under the administration of this organisation. Already the first groups of prisoners in the Zemun Reception Camp at the Belgrade Fair were used for forced labour in the construction of camps of the Todt organisation. This place had been already previously used for housing a large number of people. A camp for German migrants from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina was built there in September 1940, but after the war started in April 1941, its facilities were dismantled and removed.

Already at the end of August 1942 a new Todt Organisation camp (Organisation Todt Sammellager) was completed at Ušće. Two large groups of about 2,500 healthier prisoners from the Sajmište camp were transferred to the new camp at Ušće on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1942. The camp of the Todt Organisation then partially assumed the role of the Sajmište camp and became a distribution centre for referral to other camps in Germany and in the occupied countries, including Serbia. From the Todt Organisation camp two groups were sent to Norway, on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1942 and the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1943. In the second half of January 1943, the camp of the Todt Organisation at Ušće was disbanded and given a new purpose.

The transfer of the first groups of prisoners in the second half of August 1942 to forced labour in Serbia, suggested that the camp at the Belgrade Fair would become the main and practically the only camp in Serbia, from which forced labour was systematically and continuously sent to Serbia itself. This was certainly the result of the fact that the lack of labour force<sup>16</sup> was felt in occupied Serbia itself, therefore, this demand was fulfilled from this source. It was common practice that the prisoners who were unfit for work be sent back to the Sajmište camp, where most of them died or were killed.

The transfer of prisoners from the Sajmište camp to work in Serbia began on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 1942. A group of 801 prisoners, mainly Serbs deported from the concentration camp in Jasenovac, was then sent to the labour camp on the Dubovačka ada (or Ostrovačka ada, named after the nearby village Ostrovo) near Kostolac.<sup>17</sup> They were extremely weak and exhausted and had only the most basic tools and were assigned with a very difficult job of felling trees. To increase productivity, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, a group of 215 prisoners from the camp in Petrovgrad (Veliki Bečkerek, today Zrenjanin) was sent to Ostrovačka ada, where they were placed in a separate camp. They were in much better physical condition and the majority of them had survived hard labour and imprisonment. Only 89 prisoners from the group sent from the Sajmište camp were returned there in mid-October due to

16 Karl-Heinz Schlarp, *Wirtschaft und Besatzung in Serbien 1941 - 1944*. (Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986), 204-220; Zoran Janjetović, „U skladu sa nastalom potrebom...” *Prinudni rad u okupiranoj Srbiji 1941-1944* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2012); Dragan Aleksic, *Privreda Srbije u Drugom svetskom ratu* (Beograd, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002), 325-329.

17 Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom sajmištu*, 300-304; Miloš Đonić, Radivoje Ječenac, Od Bezdana do timoka. *Nautičko-turistički vodič* (Beograd: Pronalazač, 1991), 66-68.

the terrible living and working conditions. Most of them were seriously ill and exhausted, and were killed immediately after returning to the camp. The rest were transferred to the camp in Banjica at the beginning of 1943, where they were deported to a German camp near Thessaloniki.

Soon after the first group from the Sajmište camp was transferred, the recruitment of prisoners to forced labour continued. The demand for labour force in mines in Serbia grew higher, so the camps for forced and “voluntary” workers were set up in their vicinity. It should be noted that the mines in Serbia were extraordinarily important for the German war production. The copper from Bor provided nearly 50% of the German demand in early 1943 and the production in Trepča provided 13% of the German war industry demand.<sup>18</sup> In August 1942, a camp (several wire-fenced barracks) was set up in Trepča near the first mine tunnel, where 120 prisoners, chosen by the German manager of the Trepča mines Dr. Kraus and camp doctor Cvetković, were sent from the Sajmište camp on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1942. Two months later, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, 300 new prisoners from the Sajmište camp were selected to work in the Trepča mine. This group included 15 prisoners, who had been brought from Šabac six days earlier.<sup>19</sup> The additional prisoner transportation in the following year showed that the camp at the Belgrade Fair had become the main supplier of forced labour to the Trepča mine.

In addition to the mines, the prisoners from the Sajmište or Ušće camps were sent to labour camps set up on farms. The Todt Organisation itself had its own farms (Organisation Todt Gut or Organisation Todt Landgut) in Serbia, i.e. Banat. The German Police (Gestapo) estimated that these prisoners could be handed over to the Todt Organisation for “voluntary labour”. On 17<sup>th</sup> November 1942, 30 prisoners were sent to the Banatski Brestovac to “OT-Gut” (the Miloradović wasteland). In the first half of January 1943, 40 prisoners were sent to a farm in Vlajkovac, owned by the Todt Organisation.<sup>20</sup> At the time, the Todt Organisation’s camp in Ušće was disbanded.

The Banjica camp also served as a source of forced labour for German demands in Serbia, but to a much lesser extent than the camp at the Belgrade Fair. Work groups which would go to work in the morning and return to the camp in the evening were formed. During 1942 and 1943, groups from the camp in Banjica were digging channels in Makiš. In late April 1943, the first group of prisoners from Banjica was sent to a farm in Banatski Brestovac. New groups followed soon after. Prisoners from Banjica were also used for labour to meet the needs of German officers in various locations in Belgrade. The Anglo-American bombing of Belgrade, which started in mid-April 1944, produced numerous casualties and brought about tremendous destruction of property. Several groups of

18 Živko Avramovski, *Treći rajh i Borski rudnik* (Bor: Muzej rudarstva i metalurgije, 1975), 22; Koljanin, *Nemački logor*, 284.

19 Istorijski arhiv Beograda (hereinafter: IAB), *Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes* (BdS), B-584.

20 IAB, BdS, B-630; B-652.

prisoners from Banjica worked on clearing the ruins, and also risked their lives by defusing bombs. Prisoners from Banjica also built German bunkers in the streets of Belgrade and barracks near the Vojlovica monastery during 1944. Some of the German command officers moved there from Belgrade, which was imperilled by the Allied bombing.<sup>21</sup>

The transfer of prisoners from the Sajmište and Banjica camps to forced labour (Zwangsarbeitseinsatz) in German concentration camps began in the second half of October 1942, primarily to Mauthausen, and later to Auschwitz and other concentration camps. Some of the prisoners were sent to “voluntary labour” (Freier Arbeitseinsatz) in Germany. Some of the prisoners were brought to work in Germany mostly in the armament factories in the major industrial centers. They were sent by the Reich’s Ministry of Labour’s representative to Croatia (Der Beauftragte des Reichsarbeitsministers für Kroatien), usually through the Recruitment Outpost in Osijek (Werbestelle Osijek/Esseg). A camp in Tenja near Osijek was set up for this category of prisoners.<sup>22</sup> At the request of the Commander for the South East, in mid-January 1943, a large group of 500 prisoners from the Sajmište and Banjica camps was sent to forced labour in the Harmankioi (Χαρμάνκιοϊ) camp near Thessaloniki. In early June 1943, a group of 1,350 prisoners from Herzegovina and Montenegro was deported through the Sajmište camp to another German camp near Thessaloniki (“Serben Lager”) in the “Pavlos Melas” barracks.<sup>23</sup>

During 1943, the assignment of prisoners from the Sajmište camp to forced labour in Serbia, primarily in the mines, continued. From 1943, forced labourers were also sent to the mine in Bor. The copper mines in Bor and the surrounding area were being gradually adjusted to accommodate the growing production and this caused an increased need for labour force. More camps were built around the mine for workers of different status. It turned out that the demands for labour force could not be met in Serbia itself, because, according to Germany’s assessment, “the Serbs are putting up passive resistance, leaving building sites and joining the partisans.”<sup>24</sup> The Todt Organisation, therefore, proposed to the Reich’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to employ 10,000 Jews from Hungary in Bor. From July 1943, after signing a contract with the Hungarian government, a total of about 6,000 Jews from Hungary, and the Hungarian occupied territories, Bačka among them, were sent to Bor.<sup>25</sup>

The first and only transport of forced labourers from the Sajmište camps was sent to the Bor on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1943. They were mainly prisoners from the ISC camp

21 Sima Begović, *Logor Banjica* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1989), 217-223.

22 IAB, BdS, C-376.

23 Slavko Pešić, *Jugosloveni u nemačkim logorima u Grčkoj 1941-1944*. (Beograd, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1989), 67-100, 236-265.

24 Tomislav Pajić, *Prinudni rad i otpor u logorima Borskog rudnika 1941-1944* (Beograd, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1989), 184-187, 321-322.

25 Idem.

originating from Bosanska Krajina and Banija, among whom there were also some minors. The transport of 500 prisoners, who were mainly from Bosanska Krajina, with some from Kordun and Banija, was sent from the Sajmište camp to Bor on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1943. They were mostly men, but also older boys captured during the extensive German Operation Weiss in western Bosnia. They were imprisoned in Bor in the Brünn camp; one of the many camps around the Bor mine. Since a large number of prisoners from the Sajmište camp were young and unfit for work, two groups of prisoners from this transport were sent back from Bor to Sajmište.<sup>26</sup> During 1943, deportation of prisoners from Sajmište to the camp near the first tunnel in Trepča continued: 70 were sent on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, an unknown number on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June and the 11<sup>th</sup> of July and 50 prisoners on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September. Some of those unfit for work from this transport were also sent back to the Sajmište camp. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June and the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, two groups of prisoners were sent from the Sajmište camp to the labour camp in Banatski Brestovac, and one group of 40 prisoners was sent to the farm in Vlajkovac.<sup>27</sup>

Groups of prisoners from the Sajmište camp were taken to work in the vicinity of the camp, to which they would return at night. One such group worked at a tar factory in Zemun. Together with prisoners from the Banjica camp, prisoners from the Sajmište camp were used in the Sonderkommando 1005 labour campaign where they worked on removing the traces of mass murder at the Jajinci execution site from the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1943 until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1944. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1943, 38 Albanians and 58 Jews, who had been deported from Split, were sent from Sajmište to Jajinci. A total of about 100 prisoners from the Sajmište and Banjica camps worked on disinterring corpses from mass graves and burning them on makeshift stakes. All, but two prisoners from Banjica who managed to escape, were killed immediately upon finishing the burning of corpses.<sup>28</sup>

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26 IAB, BdS, B-1047; B-1040; D-746; A-411; B-1150; B-1160; A.413; A-410; A-492; Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom sajmištu*, 430.

27 VA, fonds ISC, k-317, f-2, d-26, statement by engineer Radomir Đurić; IAB, BdS, A-432; B-596; B-1040; G-551.

28 IAB, BdS, files; S. Begović, *Logor Banjica*, vol. II, 242-251.

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## **NEWSPAPERS**

Novo Vreme

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Fonds Chief of Security Police and Security Service (BdS)

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Fonds German Archive

Fonds Independent State of Croatia



Belgrade Jews forced to clear rubble, Belgrade 1941  
CK SKJ fond, sig. neg. A-208/45, inv br 6975  
photo: [www.znaci.net](http://www.znaci.net)



Left: Aftermath of the  
explosion in Smederevo,  
on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

photo: Author unknown,  
public domain.

						Fortsetzungen Nastavci			
						Zahl d. Arb. Broj radnika			
orm. — pre podne		nachm. — posle podne		nachts — noćni rad		Stundenlohn Nadnica		ledig - než. verh. - ož.	
von ... bis ... od ... do ...		von ... bis ... od ... do ...		von ... bis ... od ... do ...		Din. ....		Din. ....	

Anmerkung  
Primedba

Name und Vorname Ime i ime		Wohnung Stan		Ehestand Bračno stanje		Arb. stand. Radni časovi		Anmerkungen Primedbe	
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*Handwritten letter in Cyrillic script:*

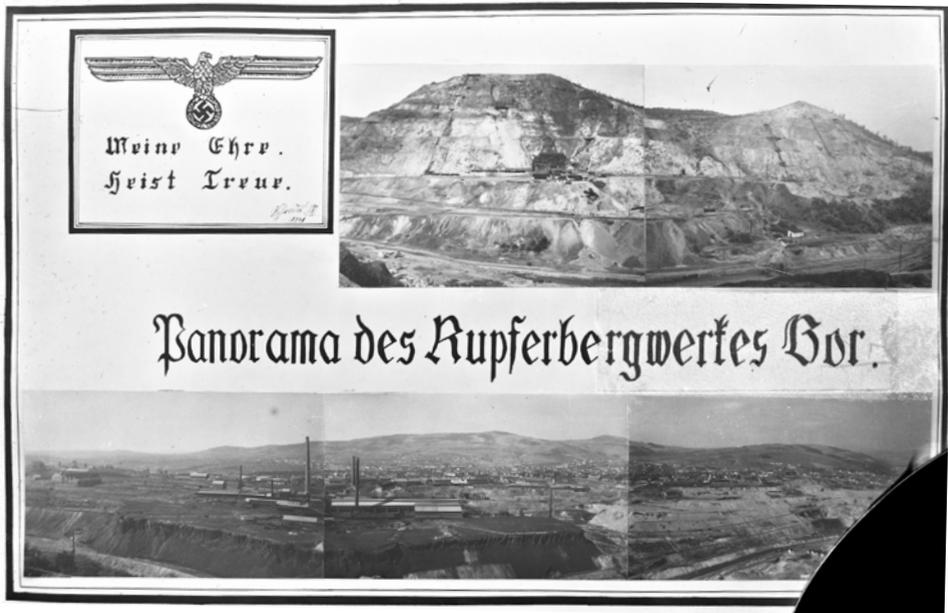
Stigli smo jučer po podne a  
 danas nam se javio brat da idemo  
 pošto pa ti se na letim putovanju  
 Svesetli smo se u jednu veliku zgradu  
 na III spratu (Monaste Monopela) i dobili smo  
 plan pa je sveo u jedno Kuvanje  
 i ostavio strane po ne sanim u jednu ali se  
 dradom da se i to leti malo videlo.  
 Pošto imademo odovadmo stola pa ne mogu  
 iprocent reći da da poje po to zavri est  
 letine Rajner vidimo. Radujemo se  
 mi odjednom. Uostajare u to a spavaju to.  
 kao u vrtu. Ovo smo pricu apot po vijenac  
 zedeci nos plan na Jozim Kuterom no kodere.  
 Duzina je sanim pleles i da se pada kiša mogla  
 li se podest. Ima kupalet. mogu se manje  
 stati preko Jarmajdava - bolija za penje.  
 Ja radim u slavi gupri sa nju izgahnin jedite  
 Melim te tridati mi kupac gajice a i za  
 Jov ih imat izgleda da čemo se kupati  
 moći bolje kadu.  
 Kako si mi ti mala mija? Ili mi  
 preko i pošli pricu Stravica preko  
 Jarmajdava kaus se i rasplojaj  
 dali se moze i kadu doći.

*Handwritten notes in blue ink:*

Antonija  
 Jarmajdava

**ACHTUNG:** 1. Die Arbeiter sind von den jeweiligen Dienststellen zu entlohnen 2. **Mindestlohn:** für normale Arbeitszeit von 8 Stunden pro Tag: für verheiratete D. 6.—, für ledige D. 4.— pro Stunde. 3. Den Lohn bezahlt die Dienststelle an den beauftragten Gruppenführer auf Grund der vom Lohnbüro aufgestellten Lohnliste.  
**PAŽNJA:** 1. Poslodavac ima da plati radnike. 2. **Minimalna** nadnica iznosi za normalno radno vreme od 8 časova dnevno: za oženjene Din. 6.— po času, za neoženjene Din. 4.— po času 3. Nadnicu plaća poslodavac određenom vodi grupe na osnovu platnog spiska, koji izdaje odeljenje za nadnice.

Working list and letter from Ladislav Rajner to his wife, from the forced labour detail clearing the rubble after the explosion of ammunition in Smederevo, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1941.



Panorama of Bor mines, year 194?

National library Bor,  
FDDB negatives collection.

Following page, detail views.





This page and following:

Interior of the smelting hall  
in Bor during an unknown  
ceremony. 1947

National library Bor,  
FDBR negatives collection.





This page and following:

A group of exhausted prisoners  
in front of the barracks of the  
Sajmište camp, Belgrade.

AJ-RZ-11-537





Sabine Rutar

## **PHYSICAL LABOUR AND SURVIVAL. SUPPLYING MINERS IN YUGOSLAVIA**

Leibniz-Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg

### **ABSTRACT**

Focusing on the issue of food and labour supply regimes in the exploitation of the Bor copper mine in Serbia as well as in mining industries in Slovenia, the author demonstrates how, in the supply regimes' scheme, the hard-working miners held a position equal or even superior to the army. However, while experiences of violence, hunger, and (forced) labour prevailed everywhere, in the Yugoslav story the copper mine in Bor was different from the mining industries in Slovenia. Bor was by far the most important facility in Yugoslavia for the German war economy and the efforts invested there were as elaborate as they were relentless. Food and labour supply regimes clearly coincided, but were also heavily interfered with by racism and violence: on the one hand, policies to provide the war economy with a labour force were in a futile battle against the ever increasing scarcity of labour and against the increasing scarcity of food and, on the other hand, a cynical continuation of maltreatment of certain groups of labourers that worked completely against the goal of a functioning war economy.

### **Keywords**

*supplying food, supplying manpower, Bor mines, (forced) labour, Serbia, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, German occupation, war economy*

As historians have never paid much attention to the economic history of the Second World War in Yugoslavia, those who wish to research food and labour supply regimes can merely refer to parts of the larger patchwork that the country resembled during the war.<sup>1</sup> The lack of a more comprehensive economic history of the war also means that, while there have been several studies on German economic exploitation and the German idea of Southeastern Europe as an economic “supplementary area” (Ergänzungsraum), the actual question of food supplies, both of the army and of civilians, was rarely given much attention. Rather, scholars have given a structural bird’s eye views of economic exploitation, and more recently of the exploitation of the labour force.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter thus engages in a twofold exercise of shifting scales. My aim is to identify the narrative layers involved in the issue of food and labour supply regimes in Yugoslavia. I shall do so, on the one hand, by focusing on the local dimension, hitherto little considered. However, while I focus on the copper mine in Bor in eastern Serbia, I wish to pay attention to the Yugoslav framework, too, as I am firmly convinced that many relevant interpretive as well as empirical frames of the world war remained out of sight through the nationalisation of post-Yugoslav historiographies. The comparative perspective here are the mining industries in Slovenia.

A local approach does not only take the occupied society as its point of departure (rather than the occupying forces),<sup>3</sup> it also illustrates how the contingent local situation conditioned experiences of violence, hunger, labour, of survival and death. In the Yugoslav story, the copper mine in Bor in eastern Serbia was different from the mining industries in Slovenia. And still, shortage, deprivation, and hunger prevailed everywhere. Within the supply regimes, the miners are a metaphor for a situation in-between: they were privileged in terms of food rations, as was the army; and, in the course of the war, the skilled workers among them (and not only them) were conscripted to work in the mine rather than conscripted to serve in the army (whether they wanted this or not), and thus themselves became the subject of supply; specifically of labour supply. In the food rationing schemes, the physical labour of soldiers and civilians - miners, in this case - competed.

During the interwar period, Yugoslavia’s economic dependence was huge not only with regard to Germany, but also with regard to France and Great Britain. Germany did not need the attack on Yugoslavia to get hold of the Yugoslav industrial plants. In some economy sectors, the share of foreign capital reached almost 100%, and the copper industry

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1 Cf. Zoran Janjetović’s chapter in this volume.

2 Cf. Carl Freytag, *Deutschlands “Drang nach Südosten”. Der Mitteleuropäische Wirtschaftstag und der „Ergänzungsraum Südosteuropa“ 1931-1945* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2012); Milan Ristović, *Nemački „novi poredak“ i jugoistočna Evropa 1940/41 - 1945. Planovi o budućnosti i praksa* (Beograd: Službeni Glasnik, 2005, 2nd ed.); and Zoran Janjetović, *„U skladu sa nastalom potrebom...“ Prinudni rad u okupiranoj Srbiji 1941-1944* (Beograd: INIS, 2012).

3 Cf. Tatjana Tönsmeier, „Besatzungsgesellschaften, Begriffliche und konzeptionelle Überlegungen zur Erfahrungsgeschichte des Alltags unter deutscher Besatzung im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Version: 1.0,“ *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, December 18, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.663.v1>. ↗

was among them. For example, with regard to Bor, in 1940, the record export quantity in copper ore was reached (43,646 t). The capital of the French company “Mines de Bor” rose from an initial 5,5 million (1905) to 15 million (1933), and three years later to 60 million francs. In 1939, it amounted to 120 million francs.<sup>4</sup> In 1940, Germany occupied France and quickly took over also the French assets of Europe’s biggest copper mine.<sup>5</sup> At that moment, in 1940, the German rhetoric emphasised friendship with Yugoslavia:

“With respect to the fact that the headquarters of “Mines de Bor” in Paris is now part of the German-administered territories, the German authorities have introduced the appropriate measures to guarantee the continuing smooth operation of the mine, in line with the Yugoslav preferences.”<sup>6</sup>

When Germany attacked Yugoslavia in April 1941, it added to its “administered territories” also those mines that had been controlled by British capital and technological know-how, like the lead-and-zinc mines in Mežica in northern Slovenia and in Trepča in northern Kosovo. The Yugoslav mining industries as well as the granary at Banat were important for the German war economy. With the British sea blockade of 1939, they no longer had any access to copper and other ores from overseas. Serbian copper became ever more important, as did the exploitation of other mines in the German-controlled areas.<sup>7</sup>

Histories of supply, food, shortages and hunger tend to focus on the distribution of agricultural goods and on Nazi agricultural policies, the most horrific of which was the so-called “hunger plan” that killed millions of prisoners of war and civilians in the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup> This is also the case with so many other research tropes concerning the

4 Cf. Sergije Dimitrijević, *Das ausländische Kapital in Jugoslawien vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1963), 52-54, 180, 198; Dragan Aleksić, „Medjunarodni privredni položaj Jugoslavije pred drugi svetski rat“, in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima XX. veka*, eds. Latinka Perović et al. (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1994), 123-132, 126f., 131. Cf. from a French perspective Bernard Michel, „La Compagnie française des mines de Bor. Une entreprise étrangère en Serbie (1905-1940)“, in *Les entreprises et leurs réseaux. Hommes, capitaux, techniques et pouvoirs XIXe - XXe siècles*, eds. Michèle Merger and Dominique Barjot (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1998), 487-499, esp. 488, 493.

5 Tomislav Pajić, *Prinudni rad i otpor u logorima Borskog rudnika 1941-1944* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1989), 21-26; Michel, „La Compagnie française des mines de Bor,“ 497.

6 “Taking into account that the office of Mines de Bor in Paris is now located in the German administrative territory, the German authorities have taken appropriate precautions to ensure that the mining continues smoothly in accordance with Yugoslavian wishes.” „Widerstand gegen die Politik der französischen und britischen Bergwerksgesellschaften in Jugoslawien“, *Montanistische Rundschau* 32, no. 16 (1940): 274.

7 Cf. the elaborate treaty on the British blockade by William N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), including a detailed description on the role of the Balkans in the British economic and provision schemes at the outbreak of war.

8 Christoph Dieckmann, „Das Scheitern des Hungerplans und die Praxis der selektiven Hungerpolitik im deutschen Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion,“ in *Kriegführung und Hunger 1939-1945. Zum Verhältnis*

war; Southeastern Europe has been left much on the margins also with regard to the issue of food supplies. The most horrific of the Balkan hunger disasters, the one in Greece, was analysed in detail by Violetta Hionidou in her pioneering “Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941-1944” in 2006.<sup>9</sup> When Lizzie Collingham published “The Taste of War. World War II and the Battle for Food” in 2011, she still had little more than Hionidou’s book to turn to when looking at Southeastern Europe.<sup>10</sup> Her book has a global perspective, in which the Balkans beyond Greece remain a blank spot. In the text below, I shall fill up but a small part of this blank spot. I shall first give a more general idea about the role of physical labourers, and miners in particular, in the nutrition schemes conditioned by the war. Then I shall give an overview of how Yugoslavia reacted to the outbreak of war with food supply regulations. And finally, I shall combine the issue of food supplies with that of labour supply regimes after April 1941, i.e. after Yugoslavia was occupied and dismembered, with a specific focus on mining industries in Serbia and Slovenia.

### NUTRITION SCHEMES CONDITIONED BY THE WAR

Lizzie Collingham notes how physical activity generally increased dramatically as a consequence of the war because of the breakdown of infrastructures (like public transport), which made it necessary to walk much more, and because of all sorts of other shortages. She points out that farmers were recruited into the army, leaving their fields unattended, or rather, leaving all the work to their families on the home front. Thus generally the need for food actually increased for almost everybody.<sup>11</sup> The mining industries recruited men, and the tension between recruitment in the army and the mines persisted throughout the war. The shortage of skilled workers particularly increased during the course of the war.<sup>12</sup>

Workers in heavy industry lost their productivity when they were under-nourished, especially when malnutrition was a feature of an unskilled and overworked workforce.

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*von militärischen, wirtschaftlichen und politischen Interessen*, eds. Christoph Dieckmann and Babette Quinkert (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 88-122; Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord. Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998); Gustavo Corni and Horst Gies, *Brot - Butter - Kanonen. Die Ernährungswirtschaft in Deutschland unter der Diktatur Hitlers* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997).

9 Violetta Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941-1944* (Glad i smrt u okupiranoj Grčkoj 1941-1944) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006).

10 Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War. World War Two and the Battle for Food* (London et al.: Allen Lane, 2011).

11 Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 8f.

12 Cf. on the complex entanglements between labour in the mines, conscription into the army, and food schemes in the Ruhr Valley, Hans-Christoph Seidel, *Der Ruhrbergbau im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zechen - Bergarbeiter - Zwangsarbeiter* (Essen: Klartext, 2010); on the British variant of conscripting coal miners into the mines Cf. the website “The Wartime Memories Project - Bevin Boys”, <http://www.wartimememories.co.uk/bevinboys.html>. ↗

For example, because of the war-induced food shortages, Ruhr valley miners lost up to six kilos of their body-weight during the winter of 1941/42, resulting in a loss of productivity between 15 and 43%. It was such observations that prompted the Nazi leadership to look towards the occupied territories for food stocks - without regard for the consequences for the local populations.<sup>13</sup>

While it was broadly accepted that the military should receive food as a first priority, the issue of how to allot extra rations to those engaged in heavy physical labour such as miners, steel workers and arms industry workers was addressed differently by different governments, depending on local conditions. To give but two examples that reflect the two extremes: while in Britain equal rations were distributed across the adult population, in the Soviet Union the government struggled to provide its army, let alone its industrial workforce, with enough to eat. Britain in fact is an interesting comparison. The equal ration policy demonstrably disadvantaged miners and other physical labourers, who were soon significantly less well-nourished than the middle class. The government reacted by setting up canteens; in 1943 it became compulsory for all firms employing more than 250 people to set up canteens where men could buy cheap extra meals.<sup>14</sup>

In Germany, the Wehrmacht was the best supplied authority and workers began to demand the same rations. While the German rationing system acknowledged the need of physical labourers for larger quantities of food, the reality of food provisioning remained too low for the physically demanding war industries. Having recognised that the high-calorie needs of the miners, on whom so much of the war effort depended, were not being met, Göring issued a decree which stipulated that miners working overtime should be provided with a hot meal. However, the meal was, more often than not, simply an extra slice of bread. What is more, when it came to feeding foreign workers, the idea of using food resources efficiently was obscured by a mass of ideological principles. While west European forced labourers received only marginally less food than the German workers, east European workers received completely inadequate rations.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to the millions of people who died of hunger in the Soviet Union as a result of Nazi policies and actions, a mix of anti-Slavic racist ideology, military strategy and economic exploitation has been identified. Adam Tooze emphasises that the existing documents concerning the “hunger plan” reveal a language that is more explicit, cold, and more directly referring to mass murder than the documents referring to the destruction of the Jewry.<sup>16</sup> Generally, scholars who have researched the ‘hunger plan’ have come

13 Collingham, *Taste of War*, 9.

14 Collingham, *Taste of War*, 320-339, 363-367.

15 Dietrich Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1939-1945*, vol. 1: 1939-1941 (München: Saur, 2003), 216-217.

16 Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction. The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London et al.: Penguin, 2006), 476f. See also Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*; and Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder. Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet*

to agree that the national socialist economic policy in the East was a deliberate tool of mass extermination, directed against Slavic or Soviet peoples, as well as Jews and other “unwanted” groups.<sup>17</sup> Even though nothing similar to the “hunger plan” existed with regard to Southeastern Europe, its envisaged role as a “supplementary space” (Ergänzungsraum) for German needs had consequences that were essentially made up of the same economic, racist, and ideological mix.

### YUGOSLAV PROVISION SCHEMES

Still remembering their experiences from the First World War and fearing German politics and, indeed, a potential German military invasion, in the late 1930s, many European countries started organised preparations for maintaining a viable supply regime. From 1939, imports and exports were severely reduced and many traffic connections interrupted. This resulted in decreased production rates and subsequent price increases. Speculative trading increased, and the situation was further aggravated by masses of anxious consumers who emptied the stores and masses of worried savers who were knocking on the doors of the banks. These problems did not bypass Yugoslavia, which was economically weak and dependent on other European countries, especially Germany.<sup>18</sup>

Soon after the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, scarcity and profiteering started to be felt. Protests against price rises and against the support of the axis powers became more common. To be sure, the self-provisional garden had always been a core necessity for many before the war and the world economic crisis had worsened the situation considerably. In Yugoslavia, the numbers of those unemployed hovered between 360,000 and 500,000. The huge surplus of workers permitted wages to be kept low. Between 1930 and 1937, the average earnings of a Yugoslav miner was about 38% of the subsistence level of a family of four.<sup>19</sup> This corresponded to one sixth of what a miner earned in the Ruhr Valley, while the latter's productivity was three times as high as that of the average Yugoslav miner.<sup>20</sup> This number has been obtained from a statistic for the

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*Union, 1940-1941* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006). It is only with works such as these that the centrality of food - and the centrality of agrarian ideology - as an engine of World War II has become apparent (as opposed to racial and ideological motivations).

17 Beyond Tooze I mention here Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*; Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder*; as well as Jörg Ganzenmüller, *Das belagerte Leningrad 1941-1944. Die Stadt in den Strategien von Angreifern und Verteidigern* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007, 2nd ed.), 41-53; and Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944* (München: Oldenbourg, 2008), 65f.

18 Klaus Olshausen, *Zwischenspiel auf dem Balkan. Die deutsche Politik gegenüber Jugoslawien und Griechenland von März bis Juli 1941* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1973), was among the first to study the interdependencies of economy and politics with regard to Yugoslavia and Greece.

19 Sergije Dimitrijević, *Karakteristike industrije i rudarstva bivše Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Biblioteka Društva Ekonomista Srbije, 1949), 43.

20 Ferdinand Friedensburg, „Kohle, Eisen und Bauxit in Jugoslawien“, *Glückauf. Berg - und Hütten-*

Croatia - Slavonia region and represents the then Yugoslav average. In Serbia, where the social group of industrial workers consisted of only 110,000 to 150,000 people, wages were below average. In September 1940, German sources mention them to be as low as 25% of the subsistence level.<sup>21</sup> Wages of miners were not only lower than during the crisis years of 1932/33, they were even lower than in 1913/14; prior to the outbreak of World War I. While the monopoly the copper mine held certainly helped manoeuvring it relatively successfully through the economic crisis,<sup>22</sup> the French mining company's measures in order to succeed in this manoeuvre did include the lowering of the miners' wages to a critical minimum.<sup>23</sup>

In the spring of 1940, everyday life in Yugoslavia was marked by the first war-induced food supply shortages, and in the autumn of the same year a "regulated economy" was introduced. Decrees were issued that aimed at controlling prices, and, in May 1940, a decree provided the reduction in meat consumption by dictating two days of the week, Tuesday and Friday, to be meatless days. On Tuesdays and Fridays, butchers were not allowed to sell meat and restaurants were not allowed to prepare or serve dishes that contained it. Still, the supply situation continued to worsen. The regulatory provisions started to broaden the control over the distribution of the goods, and over the general practices of rationing foodstuffs. Price movements were monitored, as was the work of salespeople, in an attempt to prevent the black market from growing.<sup>24</sup>

1940 brought a poor harvest - there were 100,000 railway cars of grain less than in 1939. Yugoslavia was forced to import wheat from Germany and deliver ore and other raw materials as payment. In the above mentioned lead-and-zinc mine in Mežica on the border with Austria, this was the moment when the Yugoslav state commissioner provided for the de facto expropriation of the British management. A few months later, in April 1941, British protests against such policies by the Yugoslav state would be made futile through the disintegration and occupation of the country.<sup>25</sup>

In order to distribute evenly what was available, an attempt was made to regulate the wheat and maize traffic both in terms of price and in terms of its use in the production of bread. The amount of wheat flour in bread dough was first limited to 70%, only to be reduced to 40% in the first days of 1941. The rest had to be made up of corn flour, turning

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*männische Zeitschrift* 75, no. 46 (November 18, 1939): 897-903 and 913-919, 897.

21 Cf. Milan Ristiović, „General M. Nedić. Diktatur, Kollaboration und die patriarchalische Gesellschaft Serbiens 1941-1944,“ in *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919-44*, ed. Erwin Oberländer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), 633-687, 662.

22 Roland Schönfeld, „Deutsche Rohstoffsicherungspolitik in Jugoslawien 1934-1944,“ *Vierteljahresheft für Zeitgeschichte* 24, no. 3 (1976): 215-258, 252.

23 Pajić, *Prinudni rad*, 18f.

24 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, 247. Medlicott quotes a collaborator of the British Ministry of Food who maintained that the Yugoslavs were cutting down meat supplies for its population as a reaction to German pressure, rather than because of actual scarcity of supplies.

25 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, 261-265, 595-596.

the bread into some sort of a polenta with a crust. Still, this left only enough wheat to last for two months. The next step were bread ration cards, and it was here that for the first time a distinction was made: while adults received four kilos of wheat flour per month and children two or three kilograms, depending on their age, workers who performed heavy manual labour were entitled to one additional kilo of flour per month.<sup>26</sup>

A couple of weeks later, all of Yugoslavia would be suffer the German-Italian-Hungarian-Bulgarian attack, the quick surrender of the Yugoslav army, the dismemberment of the country, and its fragmentation into so many occupied zones. From then on, the plight of the population grew exponentially everywhere, and yet things continued to evolve in contingent ways, according to context.

### **The Regional Perspective I: Miners in Slovenia**

In annexed Austria, of which the German-occupied Yugoslav regions of Southern Styria and Southern Carinthia had become a de facto part, since 1938, the Germans had established a framework that was to steer the economy and the production of raw materials. The workforce was screened according to racial and national composition, and Jewish enterprises were quickly largely closed or expropriated. A similar screening procedure was carried through in the Drava Banat in the spring of 1941, only there the question at stake were not so much the Jews - hardly any lived here - but whether a given Slovene was deemed fit to be Germanised or rather qualified for quick deportation. In the first stage, Slovenia was economically added on to Austria in the sense of enlarging Austrian structures “back” to the former imperial Kronländer Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola. The general vision of the occupier was that this was a re-unification of century-old imperial lands that had been “artificially” cut off from each other by the provisions of the 1918 Versailles treaty.<sup>27</sup> Because of the war events, however, the Germans kept postponing the de iure annexation of the Yugoslav regions of Southern Styria, Carniola and Carinthia to the German Reich - the partisan movement prevented this.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the first policies applied to the mines were those of appeasement: only days after the lead-and-zinc mine of Mežica, for example, was re-annexed to its former Austrian “mother enterprise”, the new Austrian management successfully obtained a Reichsmark 200,000 credit from the Gau administration of Carinthia and could thus pay the workers

26 Mojca Šorn, “Life in Occupied Slovenia during World War II,” in *Between the House of Habsburg and Tito. A Look at the Slovenian Past 1861-1980*, eds. Jurij Perovšek and Bojan Godeša (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2016), <http://www.sistory.si/cdn/publikacije/36001-37000/36293/cho9.html>. ↗

27 Cf. Sabine Rutar, „Zwischen Volkstumspolitik und Volksbefreiungskampf. Braunkohlenabbau im deutsch besetzten Slowenien,“ in *Zwangsarbeit im Bergwerk. Der Arbeitseinsatz im Kohlenbergbau des Deutschen Reiches und der besetzten Gebiete im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, eds. Klaus Tenfelde and Hans-Christoph Seidel (Essen: Klartext, 2005), 537-569.

28 Cf. Tone Ferenc, *Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Entnationalisierungspolitik in Slowenien 1941-1945 / Viri o nacistični raznarodovalni politiki v Sloveniji 1941-1945* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1980), document no. 194: Letter from the Reich Chancellery concerning the suspension of the integration of the occupied Slovene territories into the German Reich, January 22, 1942.

who had not received any salary for two months. A couple of weeks later, the salaries of the miners were raised to equal those in the Austrian mines. Himmler himself issued a decree that exempted the miners from the mass deportations that began within weeks after Yugoslavia's surrender. He calculated that the mining regions could be regarded as massive concentration camps, which needed "a certain surveillance".<sup>29</sup>

The German attempt at leaving the impression that their arrival would mean a turn for the better was proven a deceptive one very soon. Not only did the Germans soon make it clear that their "Heim-ins-Reich" policy was to include only those whom they saw fit to be Germanised, within weeks, violence became the main feature of the occupation. As described, the food supply regime had already been stretched to its limits. When Slovenia was occupied, the shops and depots only held enough comestibles to meet about a fifteen-day demand. The situation was further exacerbated by the poor exchange rate of the Yugoslav dinar against the currencies used by the three occupying forces, i.e. German marks, Italian lira and Hungarian pengő. The system of rationed food supply established before the occupation remained in place and was updated several times between the summer of 1941 and the spring of 1945: an increasing number of foodstuffs and other necessities could only be purchased with ration cards and gradually declined in quality and available quantity. This concerned not just flour, bread and pasta, but also meat, potatoes, rice, milk, salt, sugar, oils and lard, as well as fuel, soap, clothes, footwear and tobacco. People were encouraged to self-supply. City residents were advised to rent gardens, fields and meadows, and some municipalities fostered the development of "war gardens". The biggest such garden was Tivoli park in Ljubljana which was turned into 8,000 square metres of cultivated area planted with potatoes and oats. An effort was made to encourage or introduce people to keep small animals, like rabbits, poultry, sheep and goats, so as to allow as many people as possible to at least partly take care of their own food supply and improve it without having to resort to the black market.<sup>30</sup>

The situation of the miners in this scheme was ambivalent. A typical Slovenian miner at that time was a full-time worker residing in the vicinity of the mine with a wage below average, who more often than not had a garden to provide for himself and his family. So, in terms of sketching a social "type", he was an industrial worker with some backyard agriculture. Given his privileges in terms of food rationing, the likelihood of his being exempt from deportation even if seen "unfit" for Germanisation and given the house-with-a-garden pattern, his starting position in a deteriorating situation was among

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29 Ferenc, *Quellen*, document no. 23: Guidelines and instructions of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (Volkstum) on the resettlement of Slovenes and the settlement of Germans in Lower Styria, April 18, 1941. The expression was used by the chief administrator of Graz, Otto Müller-Haccius, in a briefing on April 30, 1941, cf. Tone Ferenc, *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika v Sloveniji v letih 1941-1945* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1968), 257-289, 322-327, who mentions 214 miners' families from Trbovelje, all together 976 individuals, who were exempt from deportation.

30 Marjan Žnidarič, *Do pekla in nazaj. Nacistična okupacija in narodnoosvobodilni boj v Mariboru 1941-1945* (Maribor: Muzej narodne osvoboditve, 1997), 146; Mojca Šorn, „Life in Occupied Slovenia.”

the better ones.<sup>31</sup> Yet, with the more general decline of foodstuffs, physical labourers in fact lost this advantage exactly because of the type of work they were doing. It wore them down quicker.

Towards the end of the war, Slovenia severe heavy shortages. Its ideological role of being a “bulwark against the Southeast”, i.e. the imagined Germanised border region of the Reich, had prevented any introduction of a genuine forced labour system.<sup>32</sup> For example, no Ostarbeiter, or other groups like prisoners of war, had been brought to the mines, so as not to strengthen any Slavic, or potentially subversive component of the population.<sup>33</sup> After failing to recruit labourers from allied Croatia, in October 1943, 185 ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) from Bosnia were brought to the coal mines in Trbovlje. They were supposed not only to work in the mines, however, but also to act as guards.<sup>34</sup> The lack of qualified personnel was glaring,<sup>35</sup> and, in September 1944, the mining director in Trbovlje wrote to the management of the Austrian mining enterprise that “next to destructive acts directed at the operating equipment [...] the removal of qualified workers is the simplest method [of the partisans] to shut down the coal mine”.<sup>36</sup>

Most affected by the lack of foodstuffs were the locations that were cut off from their hinterland or the countryside due to transport interruptions or due to the control of the railway by the Germans, who used it to supply their army and other occupational institutions, as well as those industrial objects that were important for the war economy; the mines included. Overall, from late 1944 at the latest, until the liberation in May 1945, the Slovenes suffered hunger. The black market which had flowed, for example between Ljubljana and Upper Carniola, and which had been quite dynamic throughout the war,

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31 Cf. the description of the miners' social situation in Arhiv Republike Slovenije (ARS), Energieversorgung Südsteiermark (EV Süd), folder 4, Beschreibung des Kohlenwerkes Trifail, April 20, 1941; Friedensburg, „Kohle,“ 897.

32 Cf., for example, Rupert Schumacher, “Der Südostraum in der Konzeption Mitteleuropas I,” *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* 11, no. 3 (1934): 156-176, 157: „The Southeast German, who for centuries has defended and interpreted the idea of the Reich, as a cornerstone of the occidental empire [...]”

33 For Trbovlje cf. ARS, EV Süd, folder 67, Niederschrift über die Monatsbesprechung am 2.7.1942 in Cilli; for the lead-and-zinc mine in Mežica cf. the 1943 annual report, Kärntner Landesarchiv (KLA), AT KLA 813 - Bleiberger Bergwerks-Union (BBU), box 319, Jahresbericht CEM 1943, I u. 54. See Thomas Zeloth, *Zwischen Staat und Markt. Geschichte der Bleiberger Bergwerks-Union und ihrer Vorläuferbetriebe* (Klagenfurt: Kärntner Landesarchiv 2004), 444-446, on the deployment of foreign civil labourers and prisoners of war in Bleiberg in Austria, at only a few kilometres distance from Mežica. Towards the end of the war they constituted more than half of the labour force there.

34 ARS, EV Süd, folder 67, Transcript of the monthly meeting on August 26, 1943 in Cilli; Transcript of the meeting of the Directors on October 27, 1943 in Cilli, Hotel Europa, November 4, 1943; Transcript to the Directors' Conference on April 21, 1944 in Cilli.

35 ARS, EV Süd, folder 67, Transcript of the meeting of the Directors on October 27, 1943 in Cilli, Hotel Europa, November 4, 1943; Transcript to the Directors' Conference on April 21, 1944 in Cilli.

36 ARS, EV Süd, folder 67, Mine Director Trifail to the Board of E.V. South. Subject: Maintenance of the operation of the steam power plant Trifail, 23 September 1944.

dried up completely in 1945. The impact of insufficient nutrition was reflected in the weak physical condition and poor health of the people who started showing typical effects of shortages - weight loss, anaemia, nervous exhaustion, tiring easily after any kind of work, weak hearts, skin disorders, an increase in tuberculosis morbidity and mortality. In the Province of Ljubljana, for example, the daily food ration in early 1945 amounted to no more than 675 calories.<sup>37</sup> The situation was on the brink of further escalating into a disaster when the war ended. The miners lived through the war on the better side of things, at least as far as food provisioning and chances of survival were concerned.

### **The Regional Perspective II: Miners in Serbia**

In Serbia, too, it was the German occupation regime that ruined a previously viable, though certainly not rich part of Yugoslavia. There is hardly any research on the local contexts that would contribute to a more comprehensive picture, such as ownership relations in Serbian companies, or in non-Yugoslav companies that were active in Serbia. It was the whole international economic system that crashed, which after all, consisted of traits of colonial power relations, or of an “informal empire”.<sup>38</sup>

The copper mine in Bor, the largest in Europe, was the central object of German economic exploitation in Yugoslavia. Here too, in order to understand both the continuities of scarcity and the radicalisation brought about by the war, the pre-war history needs to be considered. Since 1905, the mine had been managed by the aforementioned French enterprise “Mines de Bor“. In the interwar period, the engineers and skilled workers were an international and all-Yugoslav crowd from literally all Yugoslav regions, as well as from France, Italy, Romania, Germany and Czechoslovakia. The mine absorbed the redundant workers in rural eastern Serbia, with the peasants living in its vicinity forming the majority of the unskilled workforce. The social “type” of the miner here was different from the one in Slovenia. The peasants went to seek additional employment in the mine; they worked there when there was little to do in the fields, or when they could find no work at all in agriculture.<sup>39</sup>

However, the mine also played a major role in ruining the agriculture of the region with its emissions and water pollution. Already in 1907 the peasants had protested violently against the pollution the new mining industry had brought.<sup>40</sup> Thirty years later, in 1936, a

37 Mojca Šorn, *Življenje Ljubljčanov med drugo svetovno vojno* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2007), 192.

38 Cf. Stephen G. Gross, *Export Empire. German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Paul N. Hehn, “*The Search for Raw Materials. Nazi Germany’s Imperialist Plans for the Exploitation of Southeastern Europe in the Inter-War Period*,” in Paul N. Hehn, *A Low Dishonest Decade. The Great Powers, Eastern Europe, and the Economic Origins of World War II, 1931-1941* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 99-117; Michel, “*La Compagnie française des mines de Bor*.”

39 Michel, „*La Compagnie française des mines de Bor*,” 489.

40 Michel, „*La Compagnie française des mines de Bor*,” 490f.

revolt of 4,000 peasants against the French mining company broke out. However, not even then did such protests evolve into a social movement of industrial labourers in a quest for better working conditions. Once more, these were “des manifestations paysannes contre l’industrie, au caractère nettement archaïque”.<sup>41</sup> The company paid a small compensation to the peasants and continued its work of copper extraction.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, indeed, while the Slovenian mines were on the brink of industrialisation, eastern Serbia rather resembled a setting of colonial exploitation. Bor was (and is to this day) a mono-industrial location in a rural setting. At the beginning of the 20th century, when the French enterprise initiated its work, they set up “une entreprise moderne dans une région agricole”.<sup>43</sup> By 1939, the Bor mine employed 5,836 people and had reached a high technological level as well as a solid financial situation.<sup>44</sup> Still, Bor would have to wait until 1947 before it would be granted the status of a town, having reached 11,000 inhabitants.<sup>45</sup>

When the Germans took over Bor in April 1941, they transformed the mine into an elaborate system of obligatory and forced labour. Obligatory labour was made mandatory in Serbia at the end of 1941. The labour supply regime privileged the mines over agriculture - the operation of the mines was more important than providing a maximum agricultural harvest.<sup>46</sup> Workers were to be sent to the mines or other war industry as a top priority, both in the Reich and in the occupied Serbia. Between 1941 and October 1942, the number of workers and prisoners of war from Serbia in the German Reich rose from approximately 75,000 to 150,000. Thousands of Serbs were deployed in the mines in Serbia, most of them in Bor, as a consequence of which “there is a lack of workers for cultivating the fields”.<sup>47</sup>

This was the case in spite of the exceptionally abundant harvest of 1941. Between August 1941 and July 1942, about 100,000 t of wheat and 70,000 t of maize were exported to

41 Michel, „La Compagnie française des mines de Bor,” 497.

42 Pajić, *Prinudni rad*, 16f.

43 Michel, „La Compagnie française des mines de Bor,” 487.

44 Michel, „La Compagnie française des mines de Bor,” 497.

45 Cf. the Wikipedia entry „Бор Град“, [https://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Бор\\_\(град\)](https://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Бор_(град)) ↗, which is based on data retrieved from the Serbian State Statistical Office. 1948 was the first census carried out by the state socialist regime.

46 This mirrors the dispositions issued by decree no. 10 of August the 22nd, 1942, on the deployment of workers in the occupied territories, as published in *Handbuch für die Dienststellen des Generalbevollmächtigten für den Arbeitseinsatz und die interessierten Reichsstellen im Großdeutschen Reich und in den besetzten Gebieten*, ed. Friedrich Didier (Berlin: Der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz, 1944), 97-98, 97: “In the occupied territories they [the available labourers] are to be deployed in the following priority ranking: a) for necessary tasks of the troops, the offices of the occupiers, and the civil administration; b) for German armament tasks; c) for tasks in the food and agricultural economy.”

47 *Die Okkupationspolitik des deutschen Faschismus in Jugoslawien, Griechenland, Albanien, Italien und Ungarn (1941-45)*, ed. Bundesarchiv Koblenz (Berlin: Hüthig, 1992), 213, document no. 104: From a note by Felix Benzler of 19 October 1942 about a meeting with Milan Nedić, Prime Minister of the collaboration government, on exploitation and terror in Serbia. Cf. Ristović, „General M. Nedić,” 663.

Germany. However, the German occupation regime requested that grain be exported only from Banat to Germany because of the confusion following the occupation, and because of inefficient recording and distribution of foodstuffs in Serbia had led to a lack of supplies. As a consequence, the grain from Banat had to provide for both the army and the general population in Serbia. Priority provisions here were those for workers in the war economy; which included the miners.<sup>48</sup>

Bor held an absolutely privileged position in the assignment of workers.<sup>49</sup> In the aforementioned competition between the army and the mine, Bor “won”: In March 1942, the Serbian Minister of the Interior decreed compulsory labour for all miners, including those who had already been conscripted into the army. In August 1942, all deportations of Serbian workers were stopped in order to supply Bor with more workers.<sup>50</sup>

In the meantime, the situation with food supplies deteriorated. In the winter of 1942/43, only a fraction of the planned rations could be distributed. The regular price of eight dinars for a kilo of flour became a myth as there were really hardly any goods on sale anymore. Only 37% of the required flour was available, as well as 56% of meat, and 0.05% of fat. The Belgrade black market had the following prices: 500 dinars for a kilo of wheat flour and 350 dinars for a kilo of maize; between 1,800 and 2,500 dinars for a kilo of lard, butter or kajmak; a kilo of sugar cost 1,000 dinars; potatoes 100 dinars, coffee 12,000 dinars, and so on. Between 8,000 to 12,000 dinars had to be paid for a ton of hard coal, 4,000 to 6,000 dinars for a ton of lignite and between 18,000 and 20,000 dinars for a pair of shoes.<sup>51</sup>

It is difficult to put these numbers into perspective with the wages workers received, at least those who continued to or took up work in the mine on compulsory service (rather than as forced labourers). A report from late 1941 on the situation of labour deployment in former Yugoslavia mentions that the post-occupation confusion and the ensuing lack of workers saw wages rise - a minimum of 100 dinars per day is mentioned, which amounts to five times the pre-war average. Qualified personnel received double or triple this average.<sup>52</sup>

48 Olshausen, *Zwischenspiel*, 291.

49 Cf. the extensive material collected by the State Commission for Investigating the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Supporters in the Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača (DK), box 598, folder 648 Report of the Commission of Inquiry on the forced labour in the Bor mines from April 6th 1941, until October 3rd 1944. More details in Sabine Rutar, „Arbeit und Überleben in Serbien. Das Kupfererzbergwerk Bor im Zweiten Weltkrieg,“ *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 31, no. 1 (2005): 101-134. The privileged position of the copper mine accounts also for the fact that it is among the best researched locations in Serbia. I mention only the pioneering detailed study by Živko Avramovski, *Treći Rajh i Borski rudnik* (Bor: Muzej Rudarstva i Metalurgije “Bor”, 1975).

50 „Die Arbeitskräfte für den Bergbau Serbiens,“ *Montanistische Rundschau* 34, no. 8 (1942): 129. Cf. Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945. Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford/ Ca.: Stanford, University Press, 2001), 655.

51 AJ, EV, box 5, folder 54, Le travail, without date, but before December 1941; AJ, EV, box 5, folder 56, August 19, 1943.

52 AJ, EV, box. 5, folder 54, Le travail; „Der Arbeitslohn im ehemaligen Jugoslawien,“ in *Jahrbuch 1940/41*, vol 2, ed. Arbeitswissenschaftliches Institut der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 850-859, confirms this, while

Towards the end of occupation, in April 1944, the sources mention 120 to 250 dinars for unskilled workers, and between 500 and 600 dinars for skilled workers.<sup>53</sup> The purchasing power had fallen substantially, however, compared to pre-war levels. A report from April or May 1944 on labour deployment in the Bor region mentions low wages as one of the main reasons for leaving the workplace.<sup>54</sup>

The precariousness of the situation is reflected in a decree of the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1943, which prioritised food hunting over partisan hunting: the German army, with the support of the Serbian police had to give priority to collecting food even if this meant weakening their fight against the partisans. For example, in the district of Užice at the end of April 1944, all sorts of foodstuffs were stolen in order to provide for the German troops. The consequence of these food raids was an increase in hunger among the civilian population.<sup>55</sup>

By February 1943, it had become obvious that it was impossible to satisfy the need for workers merely by means of recruitment practices in Serbia. The fact that workers increasingly left their workplace in order to escape from the unbearable working and living conditions led to several measures on the part of the occupiers. One was the deployment of approximately 6,000 Hungarian compulsory labourers, most of them Jews. These labourers were put at the disposal of the Germans in the framework of the Hungarian version of compulsory labour. This labour service system was organised in a military manner and became the fate for all those who were deemed unreliable or unfit for military service - in the late 1930s these had been, for example, Hungary's ethnic minorities, like Romanians, Serbs, and Slovaks. Later the service largely involved the Jewish population.<sup>56</sup> In addition

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analysing the growing gap between nominal and real wages in relation to growing cost of living.

53 AJ, EV, box 161, folder 583, April 18, 1944.

54 AJ, DK, box 598, folder 648, work assignment in the Zajecar county, without date (but end of April or beginning of May 1944).

55 "Report of the District Committee of CPY (Communist Party of Yugoslavia) for Zaječar, (undated, probably from end of January 1943.) to the Regional Committee of CPY for Serbia on the conditions in the Bor mines," in *Istočna Srbija u ratu i revoluciji. Zbornik nemačkih dokumenata* (Ekonomska eksploatacija), ed. Živko Avramovski (Zaječar: Istorijski arhiv „Timočka krajina“, 1989), 193-196, 195; Žarko Jovanović, "Poljoprivreda Srbije u ratu 1941-1945," in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima XX veka*, ed. Latinka Perović et al. (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju, 1994): 143-150, 148.

56 Cf. Randolph L. Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry. A Documentary Account* (New York: Pro Arte for the World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1963), 104f., document no. 58: Note by Fränk of the Organisation Todt Regarding the Need for Hungarian Jews to Work in the Copper Mines of Bor; 110-112, document no. 62: Letter from Jagow to the Foreign Office Transmitting the Text of the Agreement Signed by Neyer and Ruszkiczay-Rüdiger Concerning the Transfer of Hungarian Jews to Bor, July 6, 1943. See also Randolph L. Braham, *The Hungarian Labor Service System 1939-45* (Boulder/Co.: Columbia University Press, 1977), and Randolph L. Braham, ed, *The Wartime System of Labor Service in Hungary. Varieties of Experiences* (Boulder/Co.: Columbia University Press, 1995), which features the reminiscences of a forced labourer who worked at the construction site of the railway line Bor-Žagubica. In particular Hungarian scholars have shed light on the history of these labourers, cf. recently Tamás Csapody, *Bortólszombathelyig. Tanulmányok a borimunkaszolgáltatásról*

to this large group, Bor saw the arrival of Russian and Polish prisoners of war, Serbs and Greeks who had left “Greater Albania“, and, after the Italian capitulation of September 1943, about 3,000 Italian military internees. In July 1944, there was an estimated workforce of 80,000 workers in Bor, whose condition is described as poor by the sources: four workers were required to load a railway car where two had once been enough.<sup>57</sup>

The labour deployment practices thus turned Bor into a place with a massive number of various groups of workers. Their diet consisted of a breakfast of coffee without sugar, a slice of straw and corn flour bread, often already mouldy; a lunch and a dinner of cabbage or bean soup, sometimes potatoes, often already rotten. The bread ration consisted of 500 to 700 grams made of millet and wheat flour mixed with straw, often two weeks old or mouldy. Those who did not have money of their own to buy food on the black market suffered hunger. The differences in food supply in a dozen labour camps that had been set up around the mine were caused by the racial or political hierarchies set up by the Germans. Forced labourers, as opposed to compulsory labourers, received even less food, and its distribution was accompanied by all sorts of harassments. Forced labourers had to walk twenty minutes to the place where they would receive their insubstantial lunch, and they were often exposed to the beating of the guards if they were to reach for a piece of bread.<sup>58</sup>

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*a borimunkaszolgálattalok részlegesnévlistája* (Budapest : Zrínyi, 2014).

57 AJ, DK, box 598, folder 648, Demand of a Wehrmacht unit for workers' recruitment in Zajecar County, April 29, 1944; work assignment in the Zajecar county, without date. Cf. also Bundesarchiv Koblenz, ed, Okkupationspolitik, 344f., document. 294: From the status report of Major General Erwin Braumüller, Chief of the Wehrwirtschaftsstab Southeast, for July 1944 on the economic exploitation of Serbia; as well as AJ, EV, box 161, folder 583, April 18, 1944.

58 AJ, DK, box 599, fasc. 649, June 6, 1945. Testimonies of Rastislav Ognjanović, Milan Bučan, Milan Tatalović, and Milan Šarenac.

## Conclusion

Local perspectives on supply regimes in Yugoslavia reveal how the dismembered country was subjected to contingencies that were dictated by the specificities - both systemic and arbitrary - of the German occupational policies, their war economic pursuits, and their racial-ideological world views and practice. Food supply regimes and labour supply regimes clearly coincided, but were also heavily interfered by racist dispositions and by the accompanying violence. At the same time, the occupied local societies were characterised by differing path dependencies - the Yugoslav state acted and was perceived differently in Slovenia and Serbia; also, it had existed for too short a time to have had the possibility to thoroughly “set in”. The two decades between the foundation and the breakup of Yugoslavia made it easy for older, imperial, or national threads to be easily re-activated in 1941.

In the course of the war, the precariousness that had started to be felt before the occupation and had already seen the first food policies by the Yugoslav state became the main feature of the occupied populations in both Slovenia and Serbia. There was a shortage in foodstuffs; they were often already in a state of decay when they were distributed, and anyway available only in tiny quantities. In Serbia, with its heavy compulsory and forced labour regime, the even worse provisioning among the groups who ranked lowest in the labour force hierarchy was a consequence of harassment in order to deliberately increase their plight. Food deprivation was used as punishment for any sort of “misbehaviour”, or simply “as a matter of principle”.

At the same time, the cross-cutting issues of, first, how to supply the mines with labourers, and second, how to feed them and keep them in working condition haunted the occupiers throughout the war. The contradiction is obvious: on the one hand, the policies to provide the war economy with a greater and greater labour force in a futile battle against the ever increasing scarcity of labour and the increasing scarcity of food; on the other hand, a cynical continuation of abuse of certain groups of labourers that worked completely contrary to the goal of a functioning war economy.

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Sanela Schmid

## Serbian Civilian Workers in Nuremberg 1941 - 1945

Humboldt University of Berlin

### ABSTRACT

The article presents a quantitative and qualitative study of the working and living conditions of Serbian workers in Germany on the example of the city of Nuremberg. The analysis was carried out based on the sources from the Nuremberg City Archive, and especially the foreign workers' registration forms. In the end, the author is trying to position the Serbian labour force in the National Socialist hierarchy of foreign workers.

### KEYWORDS

*forced labour, civilian labourers, Serbia, Germany, Nuremberg*

### INTRODUCTION

National Socialist Germany forced more than 20 million people to work on its territory. Over 13 million people were employed in the German Reich, 2.5 million of whom died.<sup>1</sup> The forms of coercion were different: people from the Soviet Union were mostly brought against their will and subjected to extremely humiliating and strict rules and living conditions as so-called "eastern workers".<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, many foreign workers from western, but also eastern Europe were engaged in their own countries; they first came voluntarily but were later turned into forced labourers.<sup>3</sup> At least 65 thousand Serbs were among these workers. To this day, not much is known about their experiences in

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1 Statistics according to Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Dritten Reich und im besetzten Europa 1939-1945* (Stuttgart, Munich: DVA, 2001), 223 and Jens Binner, "Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus," *Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte* 13, no. 1 (2012): 38.

2 Order on the employment of the workers from the East, 30 June 1942, in: *Reichsgesetzblatt* (hereinafter: RGBl.) I (1942), 419; Hans Küppers and Rudolf Bannier, *Einsatzbedingungen der Ostarbeiter, sowie der sowjetrussischen Kriegsgefangenen, Stand vom 1 January 1943* (Berlin: Geschäftsstelle des Reichsarbeitsblattes, 1943). There are numerous studies and personal testimonies about eastern workers.

3 On the categorization of forced labourers compare with the study by Jochen Fleischhacker and Mark Spoerer, "Forced Labourers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers, and Survivors", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (2002): 169-204.

Germany. Therefore, their status in the Nazi hierarchy of foreign workers is particularly unclear. Unlike the Slovaks or Croatians, they weren't allies of Nazi Germany, and in comparison with the French or Dutch population, they were still Slavs. In addition, they were disproportionately fewer in number than the Poles or the workers from the East.<sup>4</sup> Like all other forced labourers, they were deployed throughout the Reich, which is why there were very few Serbs in some cities, municipalities, factories or camps compared to others. This fact further complicates research on their position in the Reich. These are just some of the reasons why the fates of Serbian forced labourers are neglected in large studies, and why they are not mentioned in smaller, regional studies.<sup>5</sup>

When consulting local data for the study, we took into account the uneven distribution of forced labourers and thus the validity of the sources; therefore the focus was only on one city: Nuremberg. Their engagement spanned from construction work on large-scale projects on the sites of the National Socialist Party rallies, through arms factories and other companies situated in Nuremberg, to workshops and private households. A small number of these workers were from Serbia. Between 1941 and 1945, 160 of them were registered in Nuremberg's police documents. These documents serve as a research source on the lives of Serbian forced labourers in Nuremberg, because they not only provide an insight into how many people were employed in the city, but also, for example, what their housing looked like, where they worked and even whether they were able to return to their home country after completing their contract, or whether they decided to escape due to the terrible living conditions.<sup>6</sup>

### **SERBIAN WORKERS IN THE REICH - THE STORY IN FIGURES**

After the attack against Yugoslavia in April 1941 and the occupation of Serbia that followed, the German offices began collecting the labour force as early as July.<sup>7</sup> By July 1944, when the last groups of workers left Serbia for Germany, a total of around 64,500 to 80,000 people were sent to the German Reich.<sup>8</sup> The magazine *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Deutschen Reich*

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4 Already in September 1941, over a million Poles were employed in Germany and the number of Polish civilian workers reached 1.7 million in September 1944. The statistics according to Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des „Ausländer-Einsatzes“ in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Bonn: Dietz, 1999), 114, 316.

5 In an article from 2002, Mark Spoerer noted that the studies on Serbian and Croatian civilian workers, as well as on Serbian military prisoners, were missing. Fleischhacker and Spoerer, "Forced Laborers", 174. An example of a regional study: Herbert May, ed., *Zwangsarbeit im ländlichen Franken 1939-1945* (Bad Windsheim: Fränkisches Freilandmuseum, 2008).

6 Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, (hereinafter: StadtAN - the Nuremberg City Archives), Police Files C 31/III, Ausländerpolizei (AP - Police for Foreigners), no. 27-32.

7 Extensively on collecting labour force in Serbia, Zoran Janjetović, „Arbeiterrekrutierung unter deutscher Militärverwaltung in Serbien 1941-1944,“ in *Arbeitskräfte als Kriegsbeute. Der Fall Ost- und Südosteuropa 1939-1945*, ed. Karsten Linne and Florian Dierl (Berlin: Metropol, 2011), 210-240.

8 In the third report by the Chief Plenipotentiary for Economy in Serbia at the beginning of 1944, 63,000

(*Labour Force Engagement in the German Reich*) which was periodically issued by the Chief Plenipotentiary for Labour Force Engagement, described the current quantitative status of foreign workers. Given that some of the workers kept returning to Serbia, we can start from the fact that, during the first two years, there were around 35 to 55 thousand workers in the Reich in total. According to German data, the highest number recorded was on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1942.<sup>9</sup>

According to data on foreign labour force in the German Reich from April 1941, which in the case of Yugoslavia referred to seasonal workers recruited before the war, there were 47,330 Yugoslavs (of whom 12,549 or 26.5% were women).<sup>10</sup> They represented only 3.1% of the labour force, and their share was lower than that of workers from Slovakia or Belgium, but higher than that of workers from other countries of south-eastern Europe such as Bulgaria or Greece. In total, 62% of workers were employed in the industry and only 26% in agriculture. However, these statistics are quite different when we look at only the female labour force, of which 37.5% was employed in agriculture, 27.9% in industry, 27.8% in households and 6.7% as shop assistants. Therefore, there were considerably more men employed in industry, a total of 75.1%.<sup>11</sup> The statistics on Serbian “voluntary” labour in the Reich until July 1942, paints a somewhat different picture in favour of the industry. Thus, out of 33,471 men and 10,435 women from Serbia, 26,268 men (6,107 women) worked in the industry and almost 17,638 (4,318 women) in agriculture. The largest number of workers in

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workers were recorded, who had been sent to Germany but that does not include the last transports. See: Zoran Janjetović, „Arbeitskräfterekrutierung und Zwangsarbeit im Militärverwaltungsgebiet Serbien 1941-1944,“ in *Pflicht, Zwang und Gewalt: Arbeitsverwaltungen und Arbeitskräftepolitik im deutsch besetzten Polen und Serbien 1939 - 1944*, Florian Dierl, Zoran Janjetović und Karsten Linne (Essen: Klartext, 2013), 370; Dragan Aleksić, *Privreda Srbije u Drugom svetskom ratu* (Beograd: INIS, 2002), 316-320; Milan D. Ristović, *Nemački „Novi poredak” i Jugoistočna Evropa 1940/41-1945. Planovi o budućnosti i praksa* (Beograd: Službeni Glasnik, 1991), 262-263. The Reich’s figures were slightly higher, but it cannot be accurately determined to whom the clause “Yugoslavia without Croatia” referred, or who was registered as a Serb.

9 See table 1. Kar-Heinz Schlarp and Dragan Aleksić found data which show that around 30 to 45 thousand workers were from Serbia, relying on the statements of Hans Zeck, the Military Headquarters for Economy in the Southeast, as well as on the reports of the Plenipotentiary General for the Economy in Serbia. But they did not have access to the publication “Labour Force Engagement in the German Reich”, which quotes larger figures. Karl-Heinz Schlarp, „Ausbeutung der Kleinen: Serbien in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1941-1944,“ in *Das Europa des „Dritten Reichs“*. Recht, Wirtschaft, Besatzung, eds. Johannes Bähr and Ralf Banken (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2005), 212; Hans Zeck, *Erfahrungen mit dem Einsatz südosteuropäischer Arbeiter unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Verhältnisse im Landesarbeitsamtsbezirk Wien-Niederdonau* (Wien: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1943); Aleksić, *Privreda*, 320.

10 On Yugoslav workers in the Third Reich before the war, see: Mira Kolar Dimitrijević, „Radnici bivše Jugoslavije na radu u Trećem rajhu”, *Acta historico - oeconomica iugoslaviae III* (1976): 131-156.

11 *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Deutschen Reich*, no. 11, (5 June 1941). As well as Marc Buggeln, *Die Zwangsarbeit im Deutschen Reich 1929-1945 und die Entschädigung vormaliger Zwangsarbeiter nach dem Kriegsende: Eine weitgehend statistische Übersicht* (Working paper no. 4 of the Independent Commission of Historians Investigating the History of the Reich Ministry of Labour (Reichsarbeitsministerium) in the National Socialist Period), 5-7.

the industry was employed as unskilled assistance.<sup>12</sup>

The last official German census was carried out on September 30<sup>th</sup> 1944 and registered 37,607 Serbian workers, 81.3% of whom were employed in the industry. After disaggregating the labour force by gender there were no noticeable differences over the years, while the share of female workers of 22.4% was slightly lower than before.<sup>13</sup>

Table 1: Serbian workers in the German Reich from 1941 to 1944<sup>1</sup>

Date	Total	Men	Women
31/01/1941	43835	32795	11040
25/04/1941	47330	34781	12549
25/09/1941	108798	82799	25992
20/01/1942	78108	58238	19869
10/07/1942	60222	44204	16018
20/08/1942	57629	42619	15010
10/10/1942	56923	41922	15001
20/11/1942	53725	39170	14555
31/12/1942	50686	37529	13157
15/02/1943	48530	36371	12159
31/03/1943	46430	34395	12035
30/06/1943	50647	38302	12345
09/30/1943	45690	34363	11327
02/15/1944	42608	32075	10533
30/09/1944	37607	29 192	8415

1. The statistics were collected according to *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Deutschen Reich* no. 6, 11, 21, (1941), no. 5, 18, 20, (1942), no. 5, 7, 10/11 (1943) and no. 4/5, Nr. 11/12 (1944). Data from 1941 refer to the total number of workers from "Yugoslavia", from 1942, they are disaggregated into "Croatia" and "Former Yugoslavia (without Croatia)". Further information about the publication in Mark Spoerer, "NS-Zwangsarbeiter im Deutschen Reich. Eine Statistik vom 30. September 1944 nach Arbeitsamtsbezirken," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 49, no. 4 (Oktober 2001): 667.

The magazine *Labour Force Engagement in the German Reich* shows that the percentage of Serbian workers decreased over the years. According to the last extensive census of September 30<sup>th</sup> 1944, workers from former Yugoslavia (without Croatia) - but

12 Bundesarchiv (hereinafter: BArch - the (German) Federal Archive ), R 26, V1/692, The second general report of the General Plenipotentiary for Economy in Serbia, in July 1942, 51.

13 Table 1. See also: Fleischhacker and Spoerer, "Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany", 187.

mostly from Serbia - represented only 0.6% of all foreign workers.<sup>14</sup> Even if Croatian labour force, which made up one percent, were to be taken into account, the total share of Yugoslav workers would still be half of what it had been in 1941. This does not mean that the actual number of Yugoslav workers decreased - on the contrary, it doubled compared to 1941.<sup>15</sup> The change in the percentage reflects the high number of foreign, mainly Soviet and Polish workers in Germany in 1944, in comparison with 1941, or before the war.

Table 2: Foreign civilian workers<sup>2</sup> in the German Reich in 1941 and 1944<sup>3</sup>

Country	25/04/1941		30/09/1944	
Former Yugoslavia	47,330 <sup>4</sup>	3.1%	37,607	0.6%
Croatia	N/A	N/A	60,153	1.0%
France	24,884	1%	646,421	10.8%
Netherlands	90,253	6%	254,544	4.3
Slovakia	68,753	4.6	37,550	0.6
Belgium	86,349	5.7%	199,437	3.4%
Bulgaria	7,622	0.6%	16,257	0.3%
Greece	486	0.04%	15,658	0.3
Poland <sup>5</sup>	872,672	58%	1,701,412	28.5%
"Soviet Russia"	10,163	1.2%	2,174,644	36.4%
...	...	...	...	...
Total	1,508,362	100%	5,976,673	100%

2. This refers only to the voluntary workers, not the forced labourers in concentration camps and prisoners of war.
3. *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Großdeutschen Reich*, no. 11 (1941) and 11/12 (1944).
4. Statistics including Croatia.
5. Data on Polish workers are presented as follows: for 1941, we took the "ex-Poland" data; for 1944, data on the General Governorate and Białystok (1,053,027 or 17.6%) were added as well as those on the "labour force of Polish origin" "under the patronage of the Reich" (648,385; 10.9%).

<sup>14</sup> *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Großdeutschen Reich*, no. 11/12 (1944), printed in: Buggeln, „Zwangsarbeit“, 27.

<sup>15</sup> The total number of workers from "Croatia" and "Former Yugoslavia" in the Reich was 97,760.

### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR SERBIAN AND OTHER FOREIGN WORKERS

Serbian workers were, like all the others, bound by a work contract, which was regulated by civil law.<sup>16</sup> This didn't change, not even after October 1942 when they could be forcibly conscripted to prevent them from returning to their homelands after their contracts expired. In this way, former voluntary workers became forced labourers. Labour departments could prevent their return if the workers did not come from allied or friendly countries. This fact confirms the inferior position of workers from Poland, Serbia, Greece, France, the Netherlands and Belgium compared to those from Bulgaria, Denmark, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Hungary and, till September 1943, Italy.<sup>17</sup>

Numerous regulations such as the "Order for the Poles" („Polenerlasse“) or provisions on the "workers from the East" regulated orders and prohibitions for individual groups of forced labourers.<sup>18</sup> Mark Spoerer established six groups of forced labourers. Labourers from collaborating or neutral countries were, in legal terms, in the most favourable position. They received, at least on paper, the same quantity of food staples as the Germans, and the same legal framework that regulates labour applied to them. According to Spoerer, they were almost equal to the workers from western, northern, or south-eastern occupied countries among whom were the Serbs. Therefore, they were all in a better position than the Poles and the workers from the East, who were not only publicly stigmatized, but were also paid less and had clearly limited rights. At the very bottom were the Jews and the "Gypsies" who did not have any rights.<sup>19</sup> Carina Baganz sees the position of western workers somewhat differently in comparison with those from south-east European countries (Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Greece, Serbia and Croatia) which were still in a better position compared to the Poles and the citizens of the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> Thus, for example, forced abortion applied to all female forced labourers, but was almost exclusively carried out on Polish and Soviet female workers. Only towards the end of the war were their rights officially made equal to the rights of the workers from Western Europe. This of course had almost no impact on the actual state of affairs.<sup>21</sup> Finally, we

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16 This did not apply to the "eastern workers", Jews and "Gypsies" who were bound by a specific work contract; Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*, 145.

17 Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*, 97.

18 Binner, "Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus," 34.

19 Mark Spoerer, „Die soziale Differenzierung der ausländischen Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangenen und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich,“ in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, tom 9: *Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945, Halbbd. 2: Ausbeutung, Deutungen, Ausgrenzung*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp (München: Dt. Verl.-Anst., 2005), 496.

20 Carina Baganz, „Lager für ausländische zivile Zwangsarbeiter,“ in *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*. Vol. 9: *Arbeitserziehungslager, Ghettos, Jugendschutzlager, Polizeihäftlager, Sonderlager, Zigeunerlager, Zwangsarbeiterlager*, eds. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (München: Beck, 2009), 260.

21 Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*, 97-98; Baganz, „Lager,“ 265-266.

must take into account that gender also played a part in determining the position of the individual, alongside “race” and national identity. Female foreign workers not only earned less than their male counterparts, but were also neglected: everyday life in the camp was tailored to men. If any activities were offered during free time, they were offered to men only. Moreover, women were often victims of sexual violence.<sup>22</sup>

Working conditions for foreign workers were not primarily founded on economic coercion, they were rather a compromise between it and the ideological premises of the National Socialists. Therefore, forced labourers were grouped according to their racial origin, not according to their actual performance. The best example of such practices is the document by Hans Zeck on “The experience of employing eastern European workers” in the Reich from 1943. In it, Zeck estimates the performance of the engaged workers, primarily on the basis of their nationality or race, and this analysis is hidden behind a seemingly scientific discourse.<sup>23</sup>

It goes without saying that the civilian workers were aware of the German categorization of foreign workers. There is one notable story from the surroundings of Nuremberg from 1941. Two Croatian farmers who were not satisfied with their salary of 20 or 25 marks stressed that they had come to Germany voluntarily, and that they “were not in fact Poles.”<sup>24</sup>

The National Socialist racial regulations affected the workers’ diet, as well as all other aspects of life. Serbian workers belonged to the group of foreign workers who received the largest rations. For the people in the camp, this meant, at least officially, 3,888 calories for ordinary workers and 4,744 for those performing physically more strenuous work, divided between fat, meat and bread. Of course, this was difficult to control in the camps and we can assume that the workers received smaller rations due to corruption or shortage of food, especially insufficient amounts of fat and meat. Workers that were individually housed, some of whom were Serbs, were given somewhat less meat and fat. Civilian workers located in cities generally received smaller portions or worse food than the workers employed in agriculture. In collective camps, if the conditions allowed it, the workers were required to grow their own vegetables.<sup>25</sup>

In late 1941, the Ministry of Food decided, among other things, that none of the workers placed in the camps were allowed to eat in the canteens of the companies for

22 Katharina Hoffmann, *Ausländische ZwangsarbeiterInnen in Oldenburg während des Zweiten Weltkrieges: eine Rekonstruktion der Lebensverhältnisse und Analyse von Erinnerungen deutscher und polnischer ZeitzeugInnen* (Oldenburg: Univ. Diss, 1999), 187-188.

23 Zeck, *Erfahrungen*. Also see: Ristović, *Nemački „Novi poredak”*, 255-259.

24 In the end, the two men were moved to another workplace. StAN, Schwabach, submitted in 1984, no. 943-1, Letters by the chief of police Spalt to the county chief in Schwabach, and answers 23/9-20/10 1941.

25 Data on calories according to Spoerer, „Die soziale Differenzierung”, 522-527. „Anordnung Nr. 9 über die Überprüfung der Unterkünfte, der Ernährung, der Heizung und Instandhaltung der Lager durch Lagerhandwerker,” *Mitteilungen des Beauftragten für den Vierjahresplan - Der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz* 2, (7 May 1942): 27-28.

which they worked. The mayor of Nuremberg repeated this in his decree of January 7<sup>th</sup> 1942. The Headquarters for the Construction of the Congress Hall objected and reported to the department "B" of the food department the following message, which concerned their employees which included Serbian civilian<sup>26</sup> workers: "Because it seemed desirable and necessary from the very beginning that these workers receive a cooked meal, they can buy a meal in the canteen (soup, vegetables). Changes may not be proposed now, especially during the cold months."<sup>27</sup> Although the workers only had to pay for soup and vegetables, this measure was useful especially during winter, so as to improve the insufficient portions and so that the workers would eat at least some cooked food during the day. Was this something that could be found in other companies in Nuremberg, or was it rather an exception? Unfortunately, it cannot be determined on the basis of the surviving sources.

Foreign workers had to bring their own clothes and shoes with them, since they could not get any in the Reich. Given the fact that some workers came in old clothes which they eventually completely wore out, the manufacture of coarse clothes began in late 1941 - originally for the eastern workers, and later for all other workers. Primarily manufactured were wooden shoes, which were so uncomfortable that many workers decided to walk barefoot.<sup>28</sup>

Serbian workers had health insurance at their workplace. In the decree to the labour force hired from abroad of May 4<sup>th</sup> 1942, which was distributed to workers in their mother tongue already in their homeland, it was explained that "health insurance, taxes, etc." had to be subtracted from their salary. While the workers from allied countries had insurance both for themselves and their family members at home, the legal status concerning the insurance of Serbian and Spanish workers was still unresolved at that time. Therefore, only the first sentence, which concerned health insurance, had to be translated: "Foreign workers employed in Germany may claim the health insurance benefits from the Reich, just as the German workers." Although health care was thus legally guaranteed to them, this did not happen in practice.<sup>29</sup> Sick workers could be sent to hospital only "in the most urgent cases" and the foreign women were also ordered to give birth "at home". Police

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26 This concerned jobs on construction sites where, according to existing data, women were not employed.

27 StadtAN, C 32/71, Instruction for approval of additional and top-up cards for civilian workers, who received food in joint camps, mayor of Nuremberg, the Food Department, section B, 7 January 1942; Letter from the Congress Hall Interest Company to the Food Department, section B, 22 January 1942.

28 „Anordnung Nr. 4 des Generalbevollmächtigten für den Arbeitseinsatz über die Anwerbung, Betreuung, Unterbringung, Ernährung und Behandlung ausländischer Arbeiter und Arbeiterinnen," *Mitteilungen des Beauftragten für den Vierjahresplan - Der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz* 2 (7 May 1942), 23; Spoerer: "Die soziale Differenzierung", 527-528.

29 „Merkblatt für ausländische gewerbliche Arbeitskräfte vom 4. Mai 1942," *Amtliche Mitteilungen des Treuhänders der Arbeit für Sachsen*, vol. 7-9 (1940-1942), 169-170.

buildings provided free “birth bags”<sup>30</sup> to Nuremberg factories.

If the foreign workers fell ill, the foreign women were generally left to the decision of insurance companies which were very restrictive. Thus, sick workers whose recovery lasted longer than three weeks were denied treatment and they were sent home instead.<sup>31</sup> This practice was very evident in relation to the Serbian workers in Nuremberg. A total of 19 cases (10 men and 9 women) were sent home because “they were not medically fit” due to illness or pregnancy and therefore “could not be engaged in the Reich.” In three cases women were dismissed because of pregnancy or maternity, since this type of health care did not exist for foreign workers.<sup>32</sup> The three cases occurred in the fall of 1943 or 1944, that is, after the order of the Chief Plenipotentiary for Labour Force Engagement which interrupted the return of pregnant workers home for the duration of the war.<sup>33</sup> Here it is again clear that the Serbian workers enjoyed a better status than the Polish, or Soviet ones, or workers who were forced to have an abortion or whose children were sent to the so-called homes for the children of foreigners from 1943 on. There, the children were systematically murdered through neglect, insufficient hygiene and under-nourishment.<sup>34</sup>

The use of annual holidays for foreign civilian workers was regulated in August 1941: unmarried workers were entitled to a two week’s holiday after a year, while married workers were entitled to it after six months. This was the only possibility for them to legally leave Germany before the expiration of the employment contract. Due to poor working conditions, as well as air strikes, many workers used the holiday not to return to Germany. That is why, from mid-October 1943, new restrictions were in effect in respect of annual holiday,<sup>35</sup> and, as of 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1943, collective guarantee for each nation entered into force. This meant that in the production plants each nation formed groups and they were

30 “Birth bags” were the equipment that was provided by the city of Nuremberg since 1933. They contained medical supplies for the aseptic conditions for childbirth and for the postpartum period. They could be given to a midwife, or to the person in charge, at the police station. They were sterilized after use and ready to be used again. *Bayerische Ärztezeitung* 36, no. 18 (8 May 1933), 201.

31 Spoerer, „Die soziale Differenzierung”, 530; StadtAN, C32 Zweckverband Reichsparteitag Nürnberg 1935-1955 (Z/RPT), 1196 Russenwiese, Instructions for the managers of Nuremberg companies on preventing the spreading of dangerous diseases by foreign workers.

32 StadtAN, C 31/III AP, no. 26 (file no. 599), 29 (files no. 685 and 691).

33 Reichsarbeitsblatt (RABl.) (1/1941), 143, Erlaß des Reichsarbeitsministeriums (RAM) vom 4.3.1941 betr. vorübergehende oder endgültige Rückkehr ausländischer Arbeitskräfte in ihre Heimat (Va5760/103); Bernhild Vögel, „Säuglingslager - ein Massenexperiment allergrößten Stiles?“, in *Medizin und Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus. Einsatz und Behandlung von „Ausländern“ im Gesundheitswesen*, ed. Andreas Frewer und Guenther Siedbuerger (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus, 2004), 10.

34 The decree by the Chief Plenipotentiary for Labour Force Engagement od 15.12.1942; Raimond Reiter, *Tötungsstätten für ausländische Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zum Spannungsverhältnis von kriegswirtschaftlichem Arbeitseinsatz und nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik in Niedersachsen* (= Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Niedersachsen und Bremen 39 = Niedersachsen 1933-1945, 3) (Hannover: Hahn, 1993).

35 Spoerer, „Die soziale Differenzierung”, 549-550.

allowed to take turns in using their annual holiday. If persons from one group failed to come back, the same number of people from the next group would have to remain in Germany. In factories, where there were a small number of people of one nation, everyone had to find their own guarantor, who could only take the holiday after the person for whom he/she had guaranteed had returned from holiday. These instructions were not applicable for workers from allied and neutral countries (Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Spain, Romania, Bulgaria), nor for those from Poland or workers from the East.<sup>36</sup> They were binding only for labour force from the occupied countries of western and south-eastern Europe, which included Serbia. But this order was not in force for long, because a general prohibition on taking a holiday for workers from conquered or neutral countries was issued in March 1944 that lasted until the end of the war.<sup>37</sup>

The status of Serbian civilian forced labourers, somewhere in between those from the West and those from the East is demonstrated by the following facts. On the one hand, their family members were not covered by health insurance, like the families of workers from Bulgaria or Greece or those who lived in the occupied territories in the east.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, workers from Serbia, as well as foreign workers from allied countries were allowed to possess a bank account and a savings book or to buy a particular currency without limitation when travelling home or going on holiday.<sup>39</sup> When it came to “mixing blood” or sexual relations with the Germans, the sanctions for the Serbs were equally drastic to those for workers from Poland, the Soviet Union and the Czech Republic. Death sentence was in place for men, while women could be sent to a concentration camp or a brothel. The range of possible punishments for the German men was very broad: while many could be acquitted easily, others could, at worst, end up in a camp.<sup>40</sup> The marriage was almost impossible and entailed “racial investigation”. Still, one Serbian woman, who came to Nuremberg in 1942 at the age of seventeen, married a German in March 1944, the father of her child, born on 9<sup>th</sup> of January that year.<sup>41</sup>

### **SERBIAN LABOUR FORCE IN THE REICH: THE CASE OF THE CITY OF NUREMBERG**

After the workers signed contracts in Serbia, the units in charge of hiring labour force organised their transport to the Reich, usually group transport in special trains.

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36 „Anordnung Nr. 12 des GBA über Familien- und Urlaubsheimfahrten ausländischer Arbeitskräfte,“ in *Mitteilungen des Beauftragten für den Vierjahresplan - Der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz* 6 (15. Februar 1944): 99-100.

37 Spoerer, „Die soziale Differenzierung“, 549-550.

38 Spoerer, „Die soziale Differenzierung“, 538.

39 Oliver Rathkolb, „Zwangsarbeit in der Industrie,“ in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 9: *Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945, Halbbd. 2 : Ausbeutung, Deutungen, Ausgrenzung*, 697.

40 Spoerer, „Die soziale Differenzierung“, 563.

41 StadtAN, C 31/III AP, no. 26 (file no. 593).

Upon their arrival in the Reich, the German Labour Front (Deutschen Arbeitsfront) or the Food Headquarters (Reichnährstand) were in charge of them. They were first placed in reception or temporary camps of the Labour Force Directorate. There they were subjected to medical examination, cleaned of lice and, if infectious diseases were to be suspected, they were placed in quarantine. In Nuremberg, workers from eastern and south-eastern Europe were subjected to additional medical examinations, which took place in specially appointed field premises at the Nazi party rally grounds (Reichsparteitagsgelände) near the Märzfeld railway station.<sup>42</sup>

From June 1942, the temporary camp for entire Franconia, including Nuremberg, was located in Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz.<sup>43</sup> The Labour Force Directorate then distributed the workers in working districts. All those who were interested in the labour force, for example, farmers, civil service, public or private companies, had to express their needs by means of an application to the labour department and get workers, depending on the urgency or qualifications. Then they need to collect them at the temporary camps.<sup>44</sup>

After arriving to the place to which they were assigned, foreign workers had to apply to the police in order for the police to collect their data. Here, among other things, there was the issue of travel documents. Since Yugoslavia had ceased to exist and Serbia was one of the occupation zones, the responsible departments were not able to issue a valid passport. Serbian workers usually travelled to Germany using a temporary document issued by the Serbian Security Service. The police chief in Fürth and Nuremberg extended the period of validity of the documents which had expired on the spot.<sup>45</sup> Every foreign worker received from the labour service “a work card for foreigners”. It contained not only the place and duration of employment, but the Plenipotentiary for Labour Force Engagement allowed entering additional data on that person’s accomplishments and behaviour. This document was never to be destroyed or taken outside the borders of the Reich. Workers had to hand it over to the person in charge of the labour service before leaving the German Reich.<sup>46</sup> Among the police documents there are work cards of Serbian workers. The bosses

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42 StadtAN, C32 Z/RPT, 1196 Russenwiese, Instructions for managers of Nuremberg companies on prevention of transmission of dangerous diseases by foreign workers.

43 Annette Schäfer, „Durchgangs- und Krankensammellager im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Schnittstellen zwischen ‚Arbeit‘ und ‚Vernichtung‘ beim Zwangsarbeitereinsatz,“ in *Medizin und Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus. Einsatz und Behandlung von ‚Ausländern‘ im Gesundheitswesen*, 207; Franz Puntigam, „Die Durchgangslager der Arbeitseinsatzverwaltung als Einrichtungen der Gesundheitsvorsorge,“ *Der Gesundheits-Ingenieur* 67 (1944): 47-56.

44 Friedrich Didier, ed., *Handbuch für die Dienststellen des Generalbevollmächtigten für den Arbeitseinsatz und die interessierten Reichsstellen im Großdeutschen Reich und in den besetzten Gebieten*, 1 (Berlin: Meyer, 1944), 174-175; Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*, 96.

45 StadtAN, C31 III AP, no. 27 (file no. 616).

46 StAN, Weißenburg, submitted in 1955, no. 993, „Verordnung über das Arbeitsbuch für ausländische Arbeitskräfte vom 1. Mai 1943,“ *Mitteilungen des Beauftragten für den Vierjahresplan - Der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz*, 5, (1 September 1943), 82-83.

were supposed to enter the amount of savings in the card, but all the cards were blank. It remains an open question whether this means that Serbian workers really could not make any savings from their wages, or that they sent all their savings to their families. This was possible through Deutsche Bank while they had valid contracts and had submitted the data on the employer to the bank.<sup>47</sup>

According to police application sheets of the city of Nuremberg it is not easy to identify the persons who came from Serbia in the period between 1941 and 1945. First, there is a group of 152 people<sup>48</sup>, for whom Serbia is listed as the country of origin. They were all further marked as the Serbs. Among these people who came from Serbia, at least four could be identified as not only being born on the territory of the NDH, but to have lived there before the war, so they were probably Serbian refugees or people expelled from the ISC. In Serbia they were recruited to work in the Reich. In addition, there are 8 people wrongly registered as Croats. They came from Belgrade and with the same travel documents as the persons from the document entitled "Serbia".<sup>49</sup> The number of "Serbs" thus increased to 160. Six more women, who actually came from the ISC, were Orthodox and declared themselves as Serbian.<sup>50</sup>

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, such designation was unclear and, as can be seen from the presented facts, for many German officers it was difficult to clearly distinguish who these people were, so that data should be treated with some caution, and only as an approximate value. As a rule, the people who came by train from Serbia were registered as Serbs. The data on the nationality were entered in forms very imprecisely and there were fields for former or second nationality. While "Croatia" was entered for Croats, the officers recorded "Yugoslavia" for Serbs in this field, while in the field of "former nationality", they entered "Yugoslav" or rarely "Serbian workers". At the end of the form the workers were able to declare their nationality, so in the case of Serbs, this meant "I am a Serb by

47 Vule Jovanović, "Da li svako može slati novac svojim za Srbiju?" ("Can everyone send their money to their relatives in Serbia?"), *Srpski rad. List srpskog radništva u Nemačkoj*, no. 34 (27.8.1944), 4.

48 One person was listed twice.

49 As they ended up in the "Croatia" file by mistake, they were entered in the statistics.

50 StadtAN. C 31 / III AP, no. 32 (Croatia). These women were not included in the evaluation because they were subject to the provisions for "Croats". All six women arrived in Nuremberg on the same day, on 22 February 1943. Since two of them were from Northwestern Bosnia, they must have been the persons arrested during the "Kozara" military operation in 1942. Furthermore, they received their documents in Sisak where there was a reception camp for these people. According to Wehrmacht's data, some of these people "volunteered" to work in Germany. These women were actually separated from their husbands and children and sent on to work in the Reich, while children were placed in children's camps where many of them died due to harsh conditions, hunger, cold and disease. See: Christian Schölzel, *Zwangsarbeit und der „Unabhängige Staat Kroatien“*, in *Zwangsarbeit und der „Unabhängige Staat Kroatien“: 1941 - 1945*, 54-55; Narcisa Lengel-Krizman, *Akcija spašavanja kozarske i druge djece iz ustaških logora*, in *Kozara u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi i socijalističkoj revoluciji (1941-1945)*, eds. Zdravko Antonić and Joco Marjanović (Prijevor: Nacionalni Park Kozara, 1980), 285-290; Nataša Mataušić, *Žene u logorima Nezavisne države Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Republike Hrvatske, 2013).

origin and mother tongue.” These people were registered under the “Serbia” file. When the classification was especially difficult, for example when it came to people who were granted Yugoslav citizenship, but sometimes without a clear reason, German officers qualified them as Yugoslavs.<sup>51</sup> They knew this category very well, because the Yugoslavs back in the thirties often worked in Germany as seasonal workers. The case of Nikola M. clearly shows how the boundaries between the groups were vague and variable. In Nuremberg, on 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1941, he was registered as a Serb as he had come from Serbia, but on 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1944, the ISC Embassy issued him a passport in Munich. In other German documents he was always referred to as a Yugoslav.<sup>52</sup>

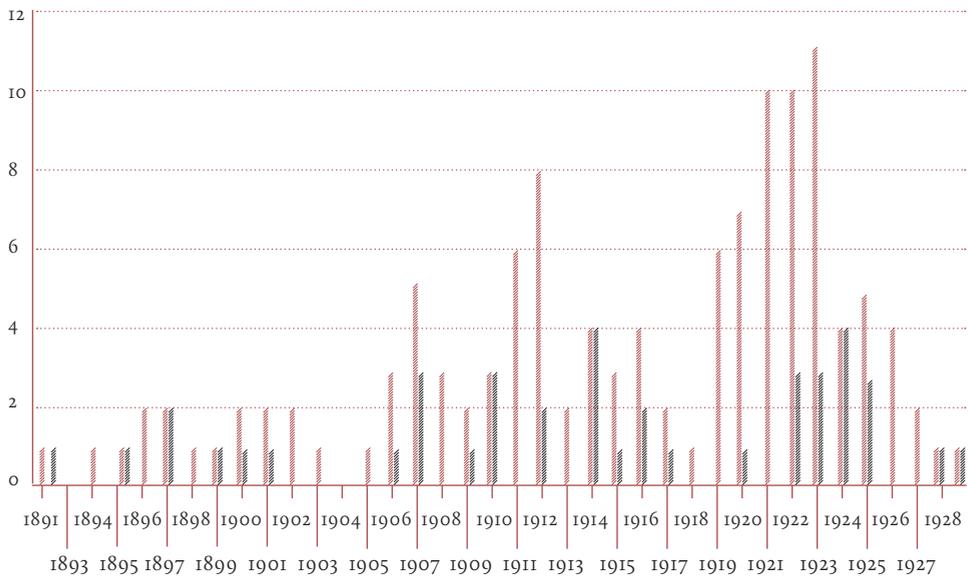


Figure 1: Years of birth of Serbian workers in Germany men  women 

Out of 160 Serbian workers, there were 121 men and 39 women. Most were Orthodox, one was a Protestant, five were Catholics and two were Muslims. Out of the male civilian workers, 64 were single, 51 married, three divorced, one was separated, one was a widower and for two of them there is no data. Among women, 16 were single, 21 married and two were widows. The oldest was born in 1891, that is, she was 50 when she came to Germany and the youngest was a girl of five, who came with her mother to Nuremberg in 1943 where they both worked as auxiliary workers in Siemens - Schuckertwerke (SSW)

51 16 Yugoslav citizens were registered as “Yugoslavs” and they were of diverse origins: Slovenia (1), The Czech Republic (3), Slovakia (4) and Russia (8). StadtAN, C 31/III AP no. 27-31, 33-34.

52 StadtAN, C 31/III AP, no. 29 (File no. 679).

company.<sup>53</sup> No wonder, therefore, that young, unmarried men, born between 1919 and 1926, made up half of all the male workers. Married men were mostly born before 1916. In women, however, it is not possible to make such a clear distinction. Three or four of them were minors when they arrived in Nuremberg.<sup>54</sup> It is not possible to determine the relationship between a person's age and their engagement as skilled or unskilled labour.

The majority of Serbian workers came from Belgrade, a total of 68 people (16 of whom were women). In addition, small groups can be observed, from Kragujevac (5), Leskovac (7), Mladenovac, Niš and Šabac (6). This is not surprising because the offices for collecting workers were opened in these towns. Leskovac is located some 50 kilometres from Niš and Mladenovac is at the same distance from Belgrade. For most of them Nuremberg (and its surroundings) was their first contact with Germany, only 22 people had previously already been in one of the German cities. At least 21 people returned to Nuremberg after a short or long stay in Serbia.<sup>55</sup> Figures from Nuremberg coincide with the general trend of engagement of Serbian workers: in the first two years, 48 people came to Nuremberg, while in 1943 this number increased to 60 people. In 1944, only three new workers came from Serbia and in 1945 there were no new arrivals.

In the opinion of German companies and the Reich, good workers were those who worked hard and fulfilled their work duties, that is, remained for six or even 12 months and preferably returned with a new labour contract. According to statistics, more than half of the Serbian workers fulfilled these conditions: at least 40 people remained in Germany between 6 months and one year, 38 between one and two years, while 12 worked for more than two years.<sup>56</sup> Some of them even concluded new labour contracts. The remaining 50 persons terminated their contract before it expired, as many as half of them already in the first month. Some fled their workplace, while others returned to Serbia after they could not be hired in the Reich<sup>57</sup> and received their orange return tickets which indicated the reason for the return. The course of their travel back was also established: workers were able to get a ticket to the border (usually to Maribor) and with it were allowed to use a normal train or to return to Serbia in a group transport.<sup>58</sup>

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53 StadtAN, C31 III/ AP, no. 28 (files no. 647 and 648).

54 Diagram 1.

55 This number could be higher if a person returned to another town, was registered there and no longer appeared in the documents of the city of Nuremberg.

56 Excluding 20 more persons for whom there are no data, 64% of the workers fulfilled their working duties.

57 StadtAN, C31 III/AP, no. 26-32.

58 StAN, LRA (Scheinfeld), submitted in 1977, the passport treatment of the foreign workers (here: collective transport of workers on holiday by the German Labour Front), 10.12.1941; StadtAN, C 31/ III, AP, no. 31 (file no. 724). 25. 6. 1943. A special train to Croatia was organised. StadtAN, C 31/III, AP, no. 109, (file no. 241).

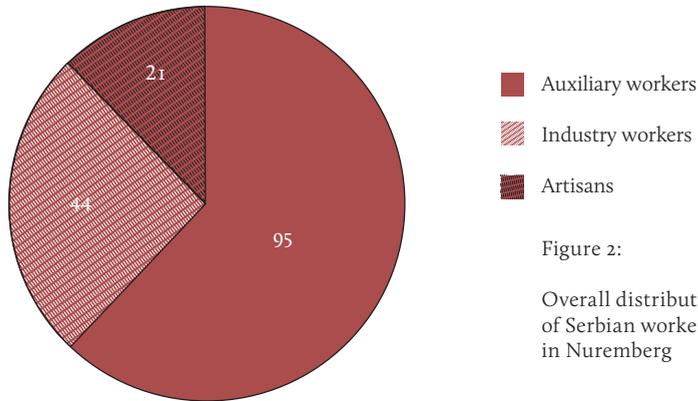


Figure 2:

Overall distribution of Serbian workers in Nuremberg

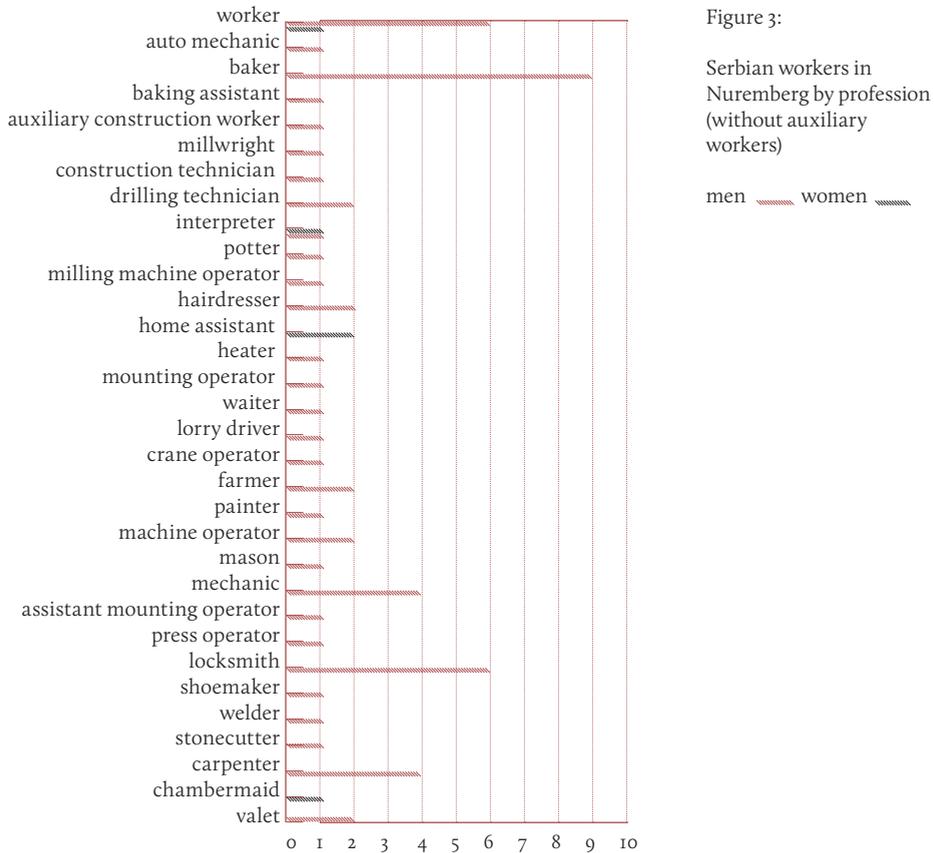
The majority of the labour force was employed in the industry. The major employers for Serbian workers were Siemens - Schuckert which employed 29 workers (19 auxiliary workers and 10 skilled workers) and 21 women auxiliary workers and one skilled working woman, as well as the Augsburg - Nürnberg machine factory (MAN) which employed 25 workers (out of whom 17 auxiliary workers) and only three women workers. The rest were distributed to the artisan or small and medium-sized companies, among which only the „Congress Hall Working Company“ stood out, employing 17 workers. It was a case of a merger of three large construction companies: Siemens, Philipp Holzmann and Hochtief that won a project to build the basic construction for a conference hall. It published targeted ads in the Serbian daily newspaper *Novo vreme* in which they looked for skilled workforce. The Ministry of Labour considered these ads very useful, and indeed, 17 Serbs were employed by the Congress Hall Working Company, 5 of whom were skilled workers.<sup>59</sup>

All foreign workers were expected to perform auxiliary works, just like all Serbian workers who were positioned quite low in the National Socialists' racial hierarchy. It is not surprising that the majority of Serbian forced labourers - a total of 95 people of whom 34 women - were employed as auxiliary workers, no matter what work they had performed in Serbia. In Siemens, for example, 29 of the 19 workers were employed as assistants workers, while all women workers had to work as auxiliary workers. However, many Serbs were employed as artisans, such as locksmiths, potters, painters, welders, carpenters and the like.<sup>60</sup>

Among the relatively large number of artisans, a group of 10 bakers who worked in bakeries in the city stands out. This fact brought them a couple of advantages: not only were

59 Eckart Dietzfelbinger and Gerhard Liedtke, *Nürnberg - Ort der Massen: das Reichsparteitagsgelände: Vorgeschichte und schwieriges Erbe*, (Berlin: Linksverlag, 2004), 52; Janjetović, *Arbeitskräfteerkrutierung*, 367; StadtAN, C 31/III, AP, no. 26-32.

60 See figures 2 and 3.



they able to continue their work in the bakery, they lived with the families who managed the bakery and thus avoided being placed in a civilian labour camp.<sup>61</sup> Two hairdressers, one waiter and one farmer, as well as two housekeepers and one cleaning lady were in a similar situation as they lived with their bosses. Still, it seems that bakers did not do quite so well, because four of them escaped, while one returned to Serbia after five months. There are no data about the other three, so it is possible that more of them escaped. Only one has returned to work as a baker in Nuremberg. After his contract expired, he had spent two months in Serbia, but after that, he had returned to Nuremberg and was employed at another bakery. He left this job after a short while with an official document, because he

61 StadtAN, C 31/III, AP, no. 27-32. The baker example was not an exception in Nuremberg. Several Serbs worked as bakers and shoemakers in Göttingen as well. Cordula Tollmien, „In Göttingen befinden sich etwa 6000 ausländische Arbeiter' - NS-Zwangsarbeiter in der Stadt Göttingen,“ in *„Leiden verwehrt Vergessen“. Zwangsarbeiter in Göttingen und ihre medizinische Versorgung in den Universitätskliniken*, ed. Volker Zimmermann (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 91.

was to be conscripted in Serbia.<sup>62</sup>

Serbian workers were sometimes visited by a representative of the Serbian government, who checked their living and working conditions. During one such visit to the MAN company in Nuremberg, the management complained that one in five workers did not meet the required standards in the business. This is not surprising as they were farmers who could not get used to factory work, or the daily lives of factory workers. Nevertheless, from the appeal of the MAN company one can conclude that, on the other hand, four out of five workers - although not accustomed to factory work - delivered satisfactory performance. At the same time, Serbian workers protested because of the abuse, which the representative allegedly resolved successfully.<sup>63</sup>

German companies also complained about the lack of discipline and poor hygiene as well as the urge to gamble.<sup>64</sup> However, the documentation in Nuremberg reveals only one worker who was actually sentenced to a fine of 60 marks or 12 days in prison for “participating in games of chance.” But this did not conclude his stay in prison, because he was sentenced again to three months for “petty theft”. In November 1943, he was again detained for a year, for theft and fraud, and served his sentence in the penitentiary in Landsberg am Lech. After his release, he reported to work in Nuremberg on 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1944.<sup>65</sup>

Three more Serbs had problems with the national socialist justice. One of them was sentenced to two months in prison for “fraud and inflating prices” in July 1944.<sup>66</sup> In other words, he tried to sell the goods on the black market. One of the bakers earned a three-month prison sentence in 1943.<sup>67</sup> The third was sentenced to 60 marks or 12 days in jail on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1944, because he traded food coupons. It is impossible to learn whether he thus tried to provide additional food for his pregnant wife, who also worked in Nuremberg, but it is quite logical. The assumption is that everyone was trying to improve their living conditions, and provide food for themselves and their families. If during these attempts they got caught, prison often ensued.

In addition to prison sentences, workers were constantly exposed to the threat that, if they tried to escape, if they were caught stealing or engaging in similar “work indiscipline”, they would automatically be transferred to a labour-educational or concentration camp.

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62 StadtAN, C 3I/III, AP, no. 26 (file no. 596).

63 Vojni arhiv Republike Srbije (VA - Republic of Serbia Military Archive), Beograd, the Nedić fonds, k. 34, Reg. no. 46/3-6. See also Janjetović, „Arbeitskräfterekrutierung”, 373, 375.

64 VA, Nedić fonds, k. 34, Reg. no. 46/3-6. In October 1944, in the newspapers for Serbian civilian workers, an article was published reminding the female workers to take care about their appearance and hygiene. *Srpski rad*, no. 40 (8 October 1944), 8.

65 StadtAN, C 3I/III, AP, no. 27 (file no. 614).

66 StadtAN, C 3I/III, AP, no. 29, (file no. 679).

67 StadtAN, C 3I/III, AP, no. 29, (file no. 684).

This is evidenced by the story of Marko I. from Kragujevac who originally came to Germany as a civilian worker, employed as a locksmith. The SS economy unit transferred him to the Flossenbürg concentration camp, where he worked as a turner.<sup>68</sup> Among 586 detainees of Serbian nationality found in the data of the Flossenbürg Memorial Centre, there were 58 people who were sent to a concentration camp as civilian workers for some reason or under some pretext, usually political.

The largest number of Serbian workers lived in labour camps for foreign workers set up by the companies for which they worked or by the SS. There, the workers got separated by nationality, if possible, on the order of the Plenipotentiary for Labour Force. Very little material remained in the city of Nuremberg about individual camps, so there is no data on how many of them exactly existed. Only by analysing the documentation on Serbian forced labourers one can list 27 camps, while another 11 facilities were adapted for the accommodation of foreign workers.<sup>69</sup> Most of the camps consisted of wooden barracks. From April 1942, there were two types of barracks, for men and for women. Barracks for men were equipped for 18 civilian workers and had 9 double beds, 9 double wardrobes, 2 tables, 18 chairs and a bowl dish, a plate, a cup, a cutlery set, a sack of straw, a pillow case, two blankets and two towels per person. Barracks for women were planned to accommodate 12 women, and were equipped with 6 double beds and double wardrobes, a table, twelve chairs, as well as the same bedding as provided for men, with the only difference that women received additional bed sheets. However, these were only official provisions that were reduced from August 1942. Those who used the workers were responsible for their housing. They were controlled by the labour services which often turned a blind eye when it came to accommodating foreign workers.<sup>70</sup>

How difficult the situation may have been, is demonstrated by the example of the SS camp Fischbach, which the SS units mostly let to the MAN company from Nuremberg as a camp for foreign workers. The barracks they took were warmed only partly, which was why the SS units had not previously used them for accommodation. The company was in charge of heating, as well as of fuel. The guards, on the other hand, were in charge of strictly supervising the camp, where about 1600 workers lived, not allowing access to the part of the camp still remaining in the hands of the SS which included sanitary and supply barracks as well as the Reichsführer-SS rooms. In doing so, they were allowed "to use weapons" if

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68 Flossenbürg Memorial Centre, the file on the prisoners of the SS Economic and Administrative Service (WVHA) - File no. 22,756.

69 The term camp is used for accommodation which looked like a typical camp for civilian workers, therefore, consisting of barracks and a shared kitchen, and not individual accommodations. As the army of workers got settled, those in charge wanted to create a "colony for foreigners in each direction", separated by nations, but they never brought this idea to fruition. StadtAN, C 32 Z/RPT, 1196 Russenwiese, The setting up of the barracks for housing of foreign workers and prisoners of war, 13 April 1942.

70 Spoerer, „Die soziale Differenzierung“, 518.

necessary.<sup>71</sup> In order to provide for the need for more accommodation, the MAN company built additional barracks on this site. But when the cold weather arrived, the workers were not provided with enough fuel for heating or bathing and they had only limited time allowed to heat the barracks. They received hot water for bathing only on Sundays. This was not enough, given that some worked on Sundays as well so they could not take a bath during the day and the water supply for the others was insufficient. There was no common canteen, the workers received food stamps with which they purchased food themselves. The camp, however, had no conditions for preparing food. Because of this the workers had to use bricks to kindle the fire outside and to cook there. Since the company supplied them only coal that was not fit for this purpose, they had to collect firewood, which they found for example at the barracks that had been destroyed in the bombing or they resorted to breaking the wooden toilets. After several complaints from the police who was in charge of surveillance, as well as the encouragement of workers and the company security, the MAN company finally provided the space for a shared kitchen in the fall of 1943.<sup>72</sup>

The exception was the DAF camp at Alte Regensburgerstr. 44, which was established in 1939 for the (German) workers, who worked at the near by construction site at the Nazi party rally grounds. This building, which had 1,136 beds, was later used to accommodate foreign workers and a total of 22 persons from Serbia. In addition to all the Serbian workers employed by the Congress Hall Working Company, primarily skilled workers apparently lived there.<sup>73</sup> In 1942, the Wehrmacht set up a camp hospital in a separate part of the camp. Also in 1942, the DAF Management Board intended to form a brothel. This was, for racial reasons, practice in many German cities in order to prevent liaising between the workers and the German women.<sup>74</sup>

71 StadtAN, C 32 Z/RPT, no. 1193, Allocating the SS camp to the MAN company between 1943-44, the SS company for surveillance, the order no. 6 to the company, Nuremberg, of 28 1 1943.

72 In 1944, approximately 3,000 foreign civilian workers from 25 countries worked for the MAN company. Johannes Bähr, Ralf Banken and Thomas Flemming, *Die MAN: Eine deutsche Industriegeschichte* (München: Beck, 2009), 333, 335. „Anordnung Nr. 9 über die Überprüfung der Unterkünfte, der Ernährung, der Heizung und Instandhaltung der Lager durch Lagerhandwerker,“ *Mitteilungen des Beauftragten für den Vierjahresplan - Der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz* 2, (7 May 1942), 27-28; AgN, C 32 Z/RPT, no. 1193, The correspondence between the MAN and interest group RPT about the SS camp Fischbach, October/November 1943; VA, Nedić Archive, k. 34, Reg. no. 46 / 3-6.

73 StadtAN, C 31/III, AP, no. 26-31. This premise should be checked in a special survey about the DAF camp.

74 StadtAN, C 32 Z/RPT, no. 1193, Letter from interest group RPT (signed by the mayor of Nuremberg) to the Franconian district administration of 23 July 1943. In researched documents no data could be found on whether this idea was implemented. Robert Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell: sexuelle Zwangsarbeit in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern* (Paderborn, München [u.a.]: Schöningh, 2009), 38. Zu Bordellen für Zwangsarbeiter see: Christa Paul, *Zwangsprostitution: staatlich errichtete Bordelle im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Ed. Hentrich, 1994), 117-130; Claudia Thoben, *Prostitution in Nürnberg: Wahrnehmung und Maßregelung zwischen 1871 und 1945* (Nürnberg: Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, 2007), 650-652. Toben revealed that the setting up of brothels for foreign workers was considered as early as 1941, but she was not able to prove whether this happened or not.

Very rarely and under special circumstances, the Serbian workers were allowed to live in private accommodation. This again shows vague and contradictory position of Serbian workers, because housing in private accommodation was a privilege.<sup>75</sup> There were 28 persons of Serb origin who worked as artisans, cooks or maids, accommodated with their employers from the start. Eight more people were eventually allowed to leave the camp and thus drastically improve their living conditions. This was the case with couple Dragomir and Nadežda C, who arrived in Nuremberg in 1943 and worked in a factory for the production of margarine (Vereinigte Margarinewerke), which had been confiscated from its Jewish owners in 1939. For Dragomir, a locksmith by trade, this was already the second employment in Germany. Nadežda became pregnant in Germany and gave birth to a child in July 1944. Immediately afterwards, the couple received permission to live together, but two weeks later they checked out of Nuremberg. Because she had no one to babysit her child, she was not able to work and was granted permission to return home. Dragomir was allowed to take her home, but he never returned to Germany.<sup>76</sup>

In that short free time that workers had at their disposal, the Serbian government tried to use propaganda to exert its spiritual and ideological influence on them. From August 1943, the weekly newspaper of Serbian civilian workers was published in the Reich. In addition to open Nazi and nationalistic Serbian propaganda, which was built around the cult of the personality of Milan Nedić, the content was directed mainly against Communists and Jews. On the other hand, it also disseminated useful information for workers, for example, about sending money to Serbia, it reported on Serbian workers and their life in German cities, the sports activities and so on.<sup>77</sup> In addition, workers were visited by various Serbian theatre companies whose performances were also used for national education.<sup>78</sup> After the Serbian workers' branch was established in Nuremberg in 1944, followed by the opening of the "Serbian Home", which the workers were able to visit on Saturdays and Sundays, even the establishment of the Serbian football team and theatre company, which often organised the "entertainment afternoons".<sup>79</sup>

In August 1942, night air raids started in Nuremberg. The city was an attractive target because of its symbolic value, and it also represented an important industrial centre

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75 Even the Danish workers mostly lived in shared accommodation, although they ranked highly in the National Socialist racial hierarchy of workers. From mid-1941, private accommodation became an exception even for them. Therkel Stræde, „Deutschlandarbeiter. Dänen in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft, 1940-1945,“ in *Europa und der ‚Reichseinsatz‘. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und KZ-Häftlinge in Deutschland 1938-1945*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (Essen: Klartext-Verl., 1991), 155.

76 StadtAN, C 31/III, AP, no. 29 (file no. 598 f.) Similarly, another couple received permission to live together after childbirth. StadtAN, C 31/III, AP, no. 29 (file no. 690-691).

77 *Srpski rad. List srpskog radništva u Nemačkoj*, was published from August 1943. Issues no. 33-52 (20 August 1944 - 31 December 1944) are kept in German National Library in Leipzig.

78 *Srpski rad*, no. 34, (27 August 1944); 4.

79 *Srpski rad*, no. 34, (27 August 1944), 5; no. 37 (17.9.1944), 5; no. 39 (10.1.1944), 4; no. 45 (12 November 1944), 4.

and transport hub of southern Germany. This had far-reaching consequences for foreign civilian workers in Nuremberg right from the start. The field of the MAN company was damaged already in the first attack.<sup>80</sup> A year later the sirens and bombings became a daily occurrence for the Nuremberg population. Ágnes Rózsa, a Jew of Hungarian origin, camp survivor and forced labourer at SSW, testified in her diary notes that they heard alarms every night, which was why they could not sleep.<sup>81</sup> Since the camps with foreign workers were situated near the strategically important enterprises, they were constantly exposed to the bombing.<sup>82</sup> The city was slowly turning into a pile of rubble and ash.

Given the deteriorating situation in the city, but primarily because of the ill-treatment of civilian and forced labourers, many of them decided to leave their workplace. That is how fleeing the workplace became a mass phenomenon among forced labourers. At the end of 1943, the Gestapo reported about 45,000 cases a month.<sup>83</sup> In Nuremberg, some used the chaos after the bombing to escape, so in April 1944 the police ordered that certain (larger) camps (such as the above-mentioned MAN or Siemens Camp) be better supervised when the siren sounds. The guards had to ensure that no workers left the camp during the attack. It also meant that, unlike ordinary people, workers were not allowed to seek shelter from the bombs. In addition, 17 reception camps were set up for “foreign workers who fled unjustifiably” in two circles around Nuremberg. The first circle covered the distance of 12 to 26 kilometres from the city centre and the second the distance of 24-45 kilometres. In places located on one of the two circles, road blocks were set up in the streets and at stations. The workers who were caught were taken to reception camps where representatives of labour offices made sure to bring them back to their workplaces or to find them new ones. Police Chief of Fürth and Nuremberg, moreover, asked the neighbouring cities of Ansbach and Regensburg to reinforce police and guard patrols after major attacks on Nuremberg. They were also responsible for the capture of escaped workers from Nuremberg and Fürth.<sup>84</sup>

A total of 39 Serbian workers, among whom there were no women, managed to

80 Michael Diefenbacher, Gerhard Jochem, Hendrik Bebbler and Helmut Beer, ed., *Der Luftkrieg gegen Nürnberg: Der Angriff am 2. Januar 1945 und die zerstörte Stadt* (Nürnberg: Stadt Nürnberg, 2nd ed. 2005).

81 Michael Diefenbacher und Gerhard Jochem, ed., *Solange ich lebe, hoffe ich* (Nürnberg: Testimon, 2006). On pages 127-128, it says: “We cannot sleep here. Almost all night we keep hearing the air raid siren or people running back and forth ... Even half asleep, I listen intently for the sounds of the siren.”

82 StadtAN, C32 Z/RPT, 1193, Allocating the SS camp to the MAN company between 1943-44, MAN to ZRPT, reason: accommodation in the SS camp Fischbach, Nuremberg, 13 October 1943. Among the Nuremberg victims of the air strikes, there were a total of 705 men, 119 women and one child from abroad. See Gerhard Jochem, “Der Einsatz der ausländischen Arbeitskräfte während des Zweiten Weltkriegs am Beispiel der Stadtverwaltung Nürnberg,” in *Die Steinerte Rose: Erinnerungen einer polnischen Fremdarbeiterin in Deutschland, 1942-1943*, ed. Barbara Ostyn and Wolfgang Benz (Berlin: Metropol, 2004), 78.

83 Binner, *Zwangsarbeit*, 37-38.

84 StadtAN, 31 C/I (2) Criminal Police / orders for defence from the bombing, no. 34, order no. 78 and cause 4.

escape, and their documents were concluded by the statement “checked out, unknown location,” which was a code for “fled”. Most of them (21 persons) fled in 1943, 10 during 1942 and 8 during 1944. There is an additionally interesting fact about the length of stay in Germany before the escape. In 1942, the fugitives had remained in companies between one and 12 months. After a year, half the men who escaped in 1943, had spent one month at most in the workplace, and eight others had been employed for no longer than 5 months. This can possibly be explained by the poor position of Germany in the war and the worsening general living conditions caused by the air strikes in early 1943. The shock caused by the circumstances in which they worked prompted many workers to escape in a relatively short period. In 1944, on the other hand, six of the eight men who decided to escape, had already spent 12 months in Nuremberg, and the other two 9 and 6 months. This comes as no surprise since in 1944 the labour force no longer arrived to Germany and the catastrophic living and working conditions compelled even the most diligent workers to escape.<sup>85</sup>

### Conclusion

In order to answer the question from the beginning of the paper as to where the foreign workers were positioned in the National Socialist hierarchy, one must consider several things. Despite the fact that the Serbs were Slavs who were ranked at the bottom of the Nazi racist categorization, and Hitler himself, like many of his countrymen, harboured exceptional animosity towards the Serbs,<sup>86</sup> they were in a better position in relation to the workers from the east and Poles. In their case there was no propaganda like the one that presented the citizens of Soviet Union or Poland as a “lower race”. Furthermore, in this hierarchy they were officially ranked immediately below the German allies or neutral countries. They were coming like the citizens of France, the Netherlands and Belgium from the occupied territories and observed similar rules. It is necessary also to make a distinction between workers of Germanic origin, such as the Dutch, the Danes, the Flemish and Norwegians, and other “foreign nationals.” In short, there were too many laws not all of which could be equally enforced in real life.<sup>87</sup> When one considers all the facts, from regulations and general conditions to the living conditions of Serbian workers in Nuremberg, they are not much different from the conditions in which other workers from the western, southern and south-eastern Europe lived and worked. Their employers, accommodation, duties, possibilities to return home, as well as the method of hiring, did not, roughly speaking, differ from those of the others. Some Serbs were even allowed to live outside the collective accommodation, a Serb woman married a German - another act

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85 StadtAN, C 31/III, AP, No. 27-32.

86 On the role of the Austrians during the occupation of Serbia and the attitude towards the Serbs see: Walter Manoschek, *'Serbien ist Judenfrei.' Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42*, (München: Oldenbourg), 55-61; Ben Shepherd, *Terror in the Balkans. German Armies and Partisan Warfare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

87 Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*, 100.

banned to foreigners by the National Socialists.<sup>88</sup>

The Nazi state did not consistently place the Serbs into one category. There could be several reasons for it: the first is that Serbs accounted for a relatively small group of workers. Equally important is the fact that, in its attack on Yugoslavia, Nazi Germany did not have the vision and the plan of how it would fit the shattered country in the new order. Before the war, there was only the idea of the South-eastern economic region. There was room in it for a Yugoslavia that would be subordinated to the Nazis' plans.

In April 1941, Croatia became an independent country and an ally, while the rest of Yugoslavia was an undefined mass, which was not definitely shaped during the war. In particular, it was unclear what the fate of Serbia would look like. During the war, the occupiers took good care to suffocate any attempt at statehood. The use of the national coat of arms, for example, was almost never allowed. Hitler was not prepared to make concessions until the very end.<sup>89</sup> The idea that Serbia, with its own national characteristics, be included in the German statistics was very remote. The principal documents issued by the Plenipotentiary for Labour Force Engagement from 1942 make a distinction between "Croats" and "others", the name "Yugoslavia excluding Croatia" was used, although it could be replaced by "Serbia". Given the fact that Croatia was marked as "Independent State of Croatia" and that it covered areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and workers also arrived from there, the rest of the workers from Yugoslavia came from Serbia.<sup>90</sup> The very registration of workers showed how hard it was to consistently put the political ideas into practice.

Reflections on the political future of "Serbia" certainly did not have negative consequences for Serbian workers as was the case of Poland. Even the spiral of violence that rapidly accelerated in Serbia from 1941 and the behaviour of the occupiers there which increasingly resembled the one they displayed in Soviet Union, did not have an impact on the events in Germany. The ubiquitous stereotypes of primitive, less productive or southeast Europeans in general, with certain differences between individual nations, were

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88 Spoerer, *Arbeitseinsatz*, 204.

89 See for example document no. 107, in which the Plenipotentiary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Military Commander in Belgrade sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 September 1941, in *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933-1945*, Volume 14: *Besetztes Südosteuropa Und Italien*, ed. Susanne Heim, Ulrich Herbert, Michael Hollmann et al (München: DeGruyter 2017), 369-370; Klaus Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Mittler, 2002), 42-45; Hermann Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost. 1940-1945. Bericht eines fliegenden Diplomaten* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1956).

90 Around 45,000 Slovenian "immigrants" were in the Reich, and they were mostly used as labour force. But they got temporary German citizenship or were placed in the "under the protection of the German Reich" category. On the legal status of Slovenians see: Dieter Blumenwitz, *Okkupation und Revolution in Slowenien (1941-1946): Eine völkerrechtliche Untersuchung* (Wien: Böhlau, 2005), 57-58. On Slovenes in the Reich see: Gerhard Jochem und Georg Seiderer, ed., *Entrechtung, Vertreibung, Mord: NS-Unrecht in Slowenien und seine Spuren in Bayern 1941-1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 2005); Tone Ferenc, „Slowenen zwischen „Eindeutschung“ und Ausländereinsatz,“ in *Europa und der „Reichseinsatz“*, 200-209.

not overcome.<sup>91</sup> All these reasons together contributed to the fact that Serbian workers had a “variable” status, somewhere between that of workers from the west and workers from the collaborating countries.

To conclude, the question of what happened to Serbian workers after the German capitulation on 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 still remains open. Yugoslav authorities demanded that the (now again) Yugoslavs return home. On 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1945, a law was passed according to which all prisoners of war, prisoners, as well as those who had fought on the side of the enemy and had left the country would lose Yugoslav citizenship, unless by 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1945 they expressed to Yugoslav representatives their intention to return to their homeland. Then they were to be transported home in a group transport.<sup>92</sup> This decision was to be communicated to Yugoslav citizens by the mayors of the municipalities in which Yugoslavs lived.<sup>93</sup> A minority of them decided to stay in Germany, like, for example, one former prisoner of war who worked as a farmer in Dieburg.<sup>94</sup> Most, however, returned home to new Yugoslavia, and many never spoke about what they survived in Germany.

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91 Zeck, *Erfahrungen*.

92 StadtAN, Schwabach Administration District, submitted in 1984, no. 943 Letters of the Military Government Headquarters, Schwabach District, to the Schwabach District Governor, 19 November 1945.

93 StadtAN, Schwabach Administration District, submitted in 1984, no. 943, no. MG 344 T/Swabach, Yugoslav nationals, 07/12/1945.

94 Hessen Municipal Archives, 14 H (District Courts), Dieburg, no. Z 192, in the period from 1950 to 1953. G.N. from Dieburg, represented by the Dieburg Youth Directorate, versus D.I., a former prisoner of war from Yugoslavia, Serbian nationality, now farmer in Dieburg, for the establishment of paternity and child alimony.

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Srpski rad. List srpskog radništva u Nemačkoj

## **ARCHIVAL MATERIAL**

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LRA Schwabach

BA Weißenburg

LRA Scheinfeld

### **Stadtarchiv Nürnberg (StadtAN):**

C 31/III

C 32

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Nedić's archives



This page and following:

Column of captives from  
Kozara being brought to  
the Semlin Anhaltelager  
in the summer of 1942.

Photo: [www.semlin.info](http://www.semlin.info)





Medical examination of the exhausted prisoners at Sajmište camp.  
Examination is conducted by Dr Selenić, a military doctor.  
AJ-RZ-II-535

*Wlants. list 31. I*

15006

SRBIJ

PRIVREMENI PUTNI LIST  
VORLÄUFIGER PERSONAL AUSWEIS

Za:  
Für:

Ime i prezime *Nikolić Kostja*

Vredj za putovanje *u Nemačku*

Name und Vorname

Gültig zur Reise nach *Deutschland*

Zanimanje *radnik*

Vredj do *24. II. 1943*

Beruf *firšler*

Gültig bis

Veroispovest *pravoslavac*

Religion *Pravosl.*

Rodno mesto *Bijelj*

Geburtsort

Srez *Beograd*

Bezik

Mesto stanovanja *Beograd*

Wohnort

Bezik *u. g. B.*

Banovina *SRBIN*

Banschaft *SERBE*

*Narodnost*  
*Volkszugehörigkeit*  
**LIČNI OPIS:**  
**PERSONALBESCHREIBUNG:**

Roden (dan, mesec i godina) *11-11-1923*

Geburstag

Oženjen (udata) *ne*

Verheiratet

Stas *srednji*

Gestalt

Lica *ovalna*

Gesicht

Kosa *smeđa*

Haare

Oči *smeđe*

Augen

Nos *pravilan*

Nase

Osobeni znaci *neima*

Besondere Kennzeichen

Mesto izdavanja putnog lista i datum:  
Ort und Datum der Ausstellung:

*Beljgrad* 24. II. 1942



*Kostja Nikolić*  
*Nikolić Kostja*

Svojeručni potpis:  
Eigenhändige Unterschrift:



Potpis i pečat vlasti:  
Unterschrift und Stempel der ausstellenden Behörde:

*M. J. J. J.*  
*J. J. J.*

Front side of a laissez-passer for travel to work in Germany.

# Der Polizeipräsident

der Städte Nürnberg und Fürth

Ausländeramt

Wohnung:

Nbg.

von der Tannstr. Nr. 120 b. Alt

*Konradkarte wurde am 4.9.44 ausget. Sekt.*

## Aufenthaltsanzeige eines Ausländers

1. Familienname und Vornamen:

(Rufname unterstreichen, bei Frauen auch  
Geburtsname und gegebenenfalls Name  
aus der letzten früheren Ehe)

S e k u l i c geb. Manojlovic

Dragica

2. Tag und Ort der Geburt:

(Bezirk, Staat)

28. 2. 1915 zu Otok Bez.

Ogulin

Heimatzuständig nach:

3. Staatsangehörigkeit:

J u g o s l a v i e n

a) frühere Staatsangehörigkeit:

jugoslawische Arbeiterin

b) weitere fremde St. Angeh.:

---

4. Religion:

orth.

5. Muttersprache:

serbisch

6. Jüdische Rassezugehörigkeit:

nein

7. Familienstand:

ledig - verheiratet - verw. - gesch.  
(Zutreffendes unterstreichen)

8. Familienangehörige:

a) Ehegatte:

Familien- und Rufname  
bei Frauen auch wie zu 1)

Sekulic Ilija

Aktenz.

Eheschließung am:

14. 11. 1943 zu Belgrad

Tag und Ort der Geburt:

(Bezirk, Staat)

5. 6. 1911 zu Objajac

Wohnort:

(falls die Ehegatten getrennt leben)

Nürnberg

(Anschrift, Bezirk, Staat)

b) Kinder:

1.            2.            3.            4.

Rufname:

Tag und Ort der Geburt:

(Bezirk, Staat)

Wohnort:

(falls nicht in häuslicher Gemeinschaft mit den  
Eltern oder mit einem Elternteil lebend)

This page and following:

Registration of residence of  
the worker Dragica Sekulic.  
Stadtarchiv Nürnberg,  
C31-III-31-3.

Aktenz.:

13. Zuzug in Nürnberg am:  
von:  
Wegzug nach:  
14. Wird ständiger Wohnort im Aus-  
lande beibehalten:  
Wo?

15. Beruf:  
(Genaue Bezeichnung der Berufstätigkeit und  
Angabe, ob selbständig oder Angestellter,  
Arbeiter usw.)  
16. Angabe, aus welchen Einkünften  
der Unterhalt bestritten wird:

17. Beschäftigt bei:  
(Firma, Sitz, Ort, Straße Nr.)  
18. Ist gültiger Befreiungsschein-  
Arbeitserlaubnis vorhanden?  
(Behörde, Geltungsdauer, Nr.)  
19. Voraussichtliche Dauer und  
Zweck des Aufenthalts?

20. Über die Volkszugehörigkeit  
befragt, erklärt:

7. 12. 1943

Belgrad

Nürnberg

(Ort, Kreis, Straße, Hausnummer)

Belgrad, Cetnicka "r. 16

Serbien

(Ort, Straße, Hausnummer, Bezirk, Staat)

Hilfsarbeiterin

von Verdienst

Philipp Holzmann

Nbg., Aktiengesellschaft

wird beantragt

unbestimmt

Durch Abstammung u. Muttersprache  
bin ich serbischen Volkstums.



Ich versichere, daß ich die vorstehenden  
Angaben nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen  
gemacht habe. Mir ist bekannt, daß un-  
richtige Angaben ausländerpolizeiliche  
Maßnahmen zur Folge haben.

Nürnberg, den 9. 12. 43 194

*Le kulic: I. Dragicev*  
(Unterschrift des Ausländers, Ruf- und Familienname)

# СВЕ ЗА СРБИЈУ!

Свако ко је мало боље пратио развој прилика код нас после нашег слома, морао је да дође до закључка, да би Србија још дуго храмала, да није било помоћи, коју је Немачка свесрдно пружила побеђеној земљи.

Немачка то чини и данас помоћу Организације Тот, која, нарочито у последње време, развија живу делатност на побољшању привредних прилика у Србији – на изградњи мостова, путева, железница, постројења и др.

О. Т. није капиталистичка установа, која ради за свој профит. То је установа која ради за добро свих народа, чија су пренимућстава мегли да осете сви они, који су већ једном радили у њој, како у погледу рада тако и у погледу исхране њ становања.

О. Т. је установа, која узима удела свуда, где је потребна људска помоћ. Она подиже и гради истовремено по целој Европи. По њој се рад попео до свог највишег изражаја и постао тековина целог човечанства.

О. Т. је установа светскога гласа и значаја, у којој узимају учешћа сви народи Европе чије су земље услед ратног вихора пролазно настрадале.

Српски народ може ова настојања, која О. Т. спроводи у нашој земљи само да поздрави. Јер, ће тековине овога рада остати ипак у Србији као светао пример духа заједничке сарадње и као доказ широкогрудости Немачке према српскоме народу, из кога ће тек каснија поколења моћи право да схвате сву величину идејних прегнућа и жртава које Немачка доприноси за општу ствар.

**Зато, сваки прави и честити радник и Србин**



**ради на изградњи Нове Србије.**

**САМО РАДОМ СРБИЈА МОЖЕ ОПЕТ ДА СЕ ОБНОВИ И ПОВРАТИ СВОЈЕ ИЗГУБЉЕНО МЕСТО У ЕВРОПСКОЈ ЗАЈЕДНИЦИ.**

Време ће једном да избрише трагове рата, али трагове цивилизаторског рада ове установе на обнови Србије – никада неће.

§  
SIEMENS

SIEMENS-SCHUCKERTWERKE AKTIENGESELLSCHAFT

NÜRNBERGER WERK

Eing. 15. APR. 1944

Abt. II

..... Beilagen

An das  
Polizeipräsidium Nürnberg-Fürth  
Abt. Ausländerangelegenheiten

13 a Nürnberg  
Ludwigstr. 36

Ihre Zeichen

Ihre Nachricht vom

Unsere Zeichen

NÜRNBERG

Landgrabenstraße 100

Schließfach 129

Betrifft : Flüchtligmeldung. AP/Zi.

den 11. April 1944

Der Serbe Atanas Stojanovic, geb. 5.5.09  
zu Jasna, Heimatanschrift: Leskores, Rupe  
42, Eintritt: 26.8.1942, beschäftigt als  
Gussputzer, ist an seinem Arbeitsplatz bei  
uns seit 14.2.1944 abgängig.  
Nachdem er laut Mitteilung seiner Meistere  
ein frecher und fauler Bursche war, legen  
wir keinen Wert auf Rückführung.

Heil Hitler!

Report on the escaped worker Atanas  
Stojanović, from „Siemens-Schuck-  
ertwerke“, Nürnberg.

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, C31-III-31-7.

Abt. 26/31810

Fernsprecher  
Ortsverkehr 411 81 u. 421 81  
Fernverkehr 405 81

Fernschreiber  
06 216

Drahtanschrift  
Dynamowerk Nürnberg

Reichsbank-Girokonto Nürnberg 64/84

Postscheckkonto Nürnberg 1558

SIEMENS-SCHUCKERTWERKE  
Aktiengesellschaft

*Handwritten signature*



Tomislav Dulić  
**Among the Hyperboreans:  
YUGOSLAV PRISONERS IN NORWAY 1942-1945\***

Hugo Valentin Centre, Uppsala University

**ABSTRACT**

This article provides new insights into the violence suffered by more than four thousand Yugoslavs who were deported to Norway by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Placed in labour camps throughout the country, they were made to work under extremely harsh conditions on projects such as road construction and military installations. Particular attention is paid to their interaction with prison guards and to the political conflicts that emerged within the prisoner group. The findings of sociologist Nils Christie on the camp guards are juxtaposed against new sources from Belgrade, which became fully available to scholars in the early 2000s. These new sources show how the camp administrations exploited the terrible hygienic conditions, malnutrition and negative stereotypes about a violence-prone “Balkan culture” to create emotional distance between prisoners and guards. The prisoners complained that they were not given enough food or sufficient opportunity to maintain their hygiene, which they attributed to a conscious policy on the part of the camp administration. Lice infestations, outbreaks of typhus and malaria, combined with extrajudicial executions, not least of prisoners who fell ill, resulted in a death toll of over sixty percent for the Yugoslavs. The Yugoslavs thus suffered among the highest death tolls of any national or ethnic community relocated to Scandinavia during the war. The analysis further deals with prisoner escapes to Sweden, which were often made possible by help from Norwegian civilians. Such experiences contributed to the very positive image of Norway and Norwegians in the witness statements taken by the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm. These statements also show that the prisoners had a very positive view of how they were treated by the authorities upon arrival in Sweden.

**Key words**

*camps, prisoners, guards, Yugoslavs, Norway, World War Two*

\* Another version of the text has been published: Dulić, Tomislav. “De plågade oss som om de ville att vi skulle dö: Jugoslaviska krigsfångar i Norge under andra världskriget i ljuset av nytt källmaterial”. *Historisk tidskrift* 131:4 (2011): 746-771.

A concentration camp is one of the most important symbols of mass murder of millions of Europeans during World War II. Interest in these institutions began to develop after the war, when Eugen Kogon and others wrote about life in the camps from a personal perspective. The scientific community during the 60's expressed interest in this subject, thanks, among other things, to the work of political scientist Raul Hilberg, who identifies the camps as an integral part and basis of Nazi terror in his masterpiece *The Destruction of the European Jews*. However, the research interest in the camps peaked as late as the fall of the Berlin Wall, when easier access to the original material in the archives of Eastern Europe enabled a more detailed analysis of the camp system, including the "extermination camps" (*Vernichtungslager*), which include Auschwitz, Belzec, Sobibor, Chelmno, Treblinka and Majdanek. During this period, Ulrich Herbert and Karin Orth, for example, made the connection between the camp system and the German war economy,<sup>1</sup> which aimed at providing cheap labour to various institutions and companies, while also undertaking the systematic extermination of a countless number of men, women and children.<sup>2</sup> While historians had primarily been interested in concentration camps as a system, sociologist Wolfgang Sofsky in this period partly shifted the focus to the social and psychological perspective through detailed analysis of the relationship between structural factors and violence in the camps.<sup>3</sup> Sofsky's analysis in this respect largely builds upon the idea of Zygmunt Bauman about the Holocaust as an expression of modern society, which includes ideas of racism, nationalism, modern bureaucracy and communication.

Norway also had its own camp system, although Norwegian camps cannot be compared with German extermination camps. Unlike the German camps the aim of which was to directly and systematically exterminate incoming prisoners, Norwegian camps had the purpose of supplying the German economy with a labour force. The camps in Norway were under the German administrative apparatus, and those with Yugoslav prisoners, in which about 4,300 people were kept, had the highest mortality rate. Prisoners from Yugoslavia were primarily placed in northern Norway; on the border with Finland (in the Karasjok camp), where they spent several years exposed to severe physical work on the construction of roads and other infrastructure, and on strengthening the various military installations of Adolf Hitler's so called "Atlantic Wall". Most of the prisoners died of hunger and disease or were killed by German and Norwegian guards, but their fate

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1 Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann, *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998); Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des "Auslander-Einsatzes" in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches*, 2. Aufl. ed. (Berlin: J. H. W. Dietz, 1986); *Hitler's foreign workers: Enforced foreign labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Europa und der "Reichseinsatz": Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und KZ-Haftlinge in Deutschland 1938-1945*, 1. Aufl. ed. (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1991).

2 Karin Orth, *Das System der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Eine politische Organisationsgeschichte*, 1. Aufl. ed. (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999).

3 Wolfgang Sofsky, *Die Ordnung des Terrors das Konzentrationslager* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993).

had great significance for the establishment of very good diplomatic relations between Norway and Yugoslavia after World War II. However, there is not much scientific research on them. Birgit Koch, for instance, only marginally mentions Yugoslavs in her master's thesis from 1988, bearing in mind that she was primarily interested in Soviet prisoners who were accorded the status of prisoners of war.<sup>4</sup> The Soviet focus also dominates the works of Mariane Soleil and Einar Kr. Stefenak.<sup>5</sup> Russian historians have studied in detail the fate of Soviet prisoners, refuting the widespread belief in the West that the prisoners were more or less systematically killed or punished upon their return to the Soviet Union. In this context, it is worth mentioning the formally voluntary Polish workers of the so-called "Organiaation Todt", whose fate was described by the Polish historian Emilia Denkwicz-Szczepaniak.<sup>6</sup>

While the focus of Norwegian historians was almost exclusively on the Soviet prisoners, in the studies from former Yugoslavia we are confronted with other problems. The literature is dominated by the memoirs of former prisoners, while only the frequently quoted studies by Ljuba Mladenović and Milorad Ašković represent something that could be called historical work.<sup>7</sup> However, their works have a specific character in that they are based on the recollections of former prisoners or personal reflection, mixed with archive sources. This kind of literature, which represents a combination of popular history and journalism, was common in the Yugoslav society, and is pervaded by many serious shortcomings. Although the data in them may not of course be wrong, the lack of quoted sources means that it is often very difficult or almost impossible to distinguish between the facts and quotes or personal reflections.<sup>8</sup>

In general, we can conclude that the book *Fangevoktene in konsentrasjonsleire* (Prison Guards in Concentration Camps) by the famous Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie, remains for now the only monograph on Yugoslav prisoners in Norway, which completely meets the criteria required of a scientific paper. Christie, however, focuses solely on the guards, with the primary goal being to explore the social and psychological

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4 Birgit Koch, *De sovjetiske, polske og jugoslaviske krigsfangerityskfangenskap i Norge 1941-1945* (Oslo: Hovedoppgave, 1988).

5 Marianne Neerland Soleim, *Sovjetiske krigsfangeri Norge 1941-1945: antall, organisering og repatriering* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2009); Einar Kristian Steffenak, *Russerfangene: sovjetiske krigsfangeri Norge og deres skjebne* (Oslo: Humanist forl., 2008).

6 Emilia Denkwicz-Szczepaniak, "Polske OT-tvangsarbeidere og krigsfanger i Norge under annen verdenskrig", *Historisk tidsskrift*, no. 2 (1997). There were also a few hundred Yugoslav "Todt workers" in Norway, primarily from Slovenia and ISC.

7 Milorad Ašković, *U logorima u severnoj Norveškoj* (Kikinda: Komuna, 1979); Ljuba Mladenović, *Pod šifrom viking: život, borba i stradanja jugoslovenskih interniraca u logorima u Norveškoj 1942-1945* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1991).

8 Mladenović's 700-page work, for example, has only 192 footnotes, many of which refer to statements that were in his possession but not referenced. Unfortunately, while working on this project, we were not able to obtain these interviews or other data.

aspects, and to determine whether the abuse of the prisoners may be explained by various pathologies of the guards, or by the socio-psychological processes of group dynamics in the context of what Sofsky would call “the order of terror”. After a detailed analysis of a guard’s socio-economic status, Christie places them either in the “extreme group”, which includes those guards who committed murder and other serious crimes, or in the “contrast group”, which includes guards who, according to the available data, had not committed crimes and, in some cases, even helped prisoners. By using detailed analysis and interviews with about fifty guards, Christie concluded that there was in fact nothing in the social, professional or psychological character of the most brutal guards “which would differentiate them from the other guards and which would in some way explain the differences in their behaviour.” What he found is that the guards in the “extreme group” were more frustrated with their situation than the guards in the “contrast group”, chiefly because the majority had wanted to join the Norwegian volunteer Waffen-SS units such as the “Viking” and the “Nordland” to fight on the Eastern front,<sup>9</sup> but had been rejected. Christie also found that the “extremes” had less physical contact with the Yugoslavs, and were, on average, younger than the rest.<sup>10</sup> Christie’s conclusion is, therefore, that individual-psychological or ideological aspects did not have a decisive influence, but that most of the violence can be explained by socio-psychological elements of group dynamics (loyalty to the group, real or presumed expectations about behaviour, the psychological distance between the guards and prisoners, etc.). This means that Christie’s original study (the book is based on a 1952 master’s thesis) preceded the research of prominent psychologists such as Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo, whose research from the 1960s and 1970s on obedience of authority and group dynamics mostly confirms what Christie established based on his research on the Yugoslav camps in Norway.<sup>11</sup> However, we must also bear in mind that Christie’s guard is not an average representative of the Norwegian population. About forty percent of them were convicted of minor offenses before they joined the “Norway” guard battalion (Vaktbataljon “Norge”), and the data also show that they were, on average, more prejudiced and xenophobic than the average Norwegian. It is possible that these facts explain the

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9 Some of the Norwegians who were admitted in Nordland ended up on the battlefield in Yugoslavia in 1943 or in Kordun and Banija, where they participated in anti-partisan operations after the capitulation of Italy until November 1943. Several Norwegians died in the Balkans, while the Danish “Nordland” units suffered the greatest losses during the attack of the units of the 7<sup>th</sup> Banija division with support from the 8<sup>th</sup> Kordun division on Glina and the village Hrastovica in November; see Tomislav Dulić, “Danish Waffen-SS units in Yugoslavia: The fighting at Hrastovica and Glina, Autumn 1943”, *Fra Krig og Fred* (2016): 63-96..

10 Nils Christie, *Fangevoktene i konsentrasjonsleire: en sosiologisk undersøkelse av norske fangevoktere i “serberleire” i Nord-Norge i 1942-43* (Oslo: Pax, 1972), 102.

11 Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Philip Zimbardo, “Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison”, *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* (1974); See also, Henri Zukier, “The Twisted Road to Genocide: On the Psychological Development of Evil During the Holocaust”, *Social Research* 61, no. 2 (1994); Philip G. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2008).

widespread belief among the prisoners that “all the guards were bums who sold themselves to serve the Germans.”

Christie also concludes that most of the guards from the “extreme group” were ideologically motivated, which “should have a significant impact on the differences in the desire to fulfil the Germans’ objectives - in the sense of anticipating and carrying out the assigned tasks - in the camps.”<sup>12</sup> Christie’s conclusions have been met with support in recent studies of violence in other regions and periods, which point to the fact that violence against prisoners is *primarily* explained by group dynamics, although “the intensity of participation” correlates with ideological conviction. This means that most of the perpetrators do not commit crimes primarily for ideological reasons, though the most prolific criminals are also those most ideologically motivated.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that the fate of the Yugoslavs did not attract much attention of the Norwegian and other foreign historians is clear and can be at least partially explained by the linguistic barrier.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, examining the fate of Yugoslav prisoners seems to be particularly important precisely because the death rate among them far exceeded that of the other categories of prisoners.<sup>15</sup> In addition, we should bear in mind that although Christie laid a solid and important foundation for further research, his research was done solely from the perspective of the guards, while the voice of the prisoners was only sporadically shown through memoirs and other unscientific, though interesting, studies done by people who had also had personal experiences of tragic events. However, the new documents that became available only in the first decade of this century enable us to revisit these questions and seek answers based on primary sources which meet the basic criteria of accuracy between the events themselves and documented description better than memoirs and similar materials.

The aim of this work is to complete the picture of life in the camps through the eyes of the victims on the basis of new materials, with particular focus on the relationship between prisoners and guards, the conflicts within the prison community, the view of the Norwegian public and the escape and life in Swedish shelters. Yugoslav sources will also be linked to previous surveys and memoirs if necessary, with special emphasis on Christie’s study.

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12 Christie, *Fangevoktere*, 89.

13 Michael Mann, “Were the Perpetrators of Genocide ‘Ordinary Men’ or ‘Real Nazis’? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14, no. 3 (2000): 151; Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY and Bristol: Cornell University Press, 2006).

14 This is the aspect that Abraham noticed in the case of research on Russian prisoners; Ole-Jacob Abraham, “Russarfangane - mytar, fakta og nyansar”, *Historisk tidsskrift*, no. 02 (2009): 296.

15 Trond Risto Nilssen, “Jugoslaviske fanger i Norge under andre verdenskrig”, in *Sotavangit ja internoidut*, ed. Lars Westerlund (Helsinki: Kansallisarkisto, 2008).

## Sources

The material that forms the basis for this analysis comes from the Archives of Yugoslavia (hereinafter: AJ), primarily the Archives of the government in exile in London (fonds 103), and the fonds of the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm organised in the early 2000's (fonds 382). The extent of the analysed material exceeds six hundred pages of text (including copies of correspondence between the government in exile and the embassy in Stockholm), and some material that can also be found in the Swedish and Norwegian state archives, which encompasses a lot of extensive material that gives us a fairly complete picture of the communication between the Swedish authorities, institutions and embassy. This material, fonds 382 in particular, was not freely available in the socialist period, although some researchers had access to the material from fonds 103 and even issued collections of archives. The reason is probably that it was quite problematic for the former regime, especially in the first decades after the war, to allow free access to the material, as this might have allowed certain unpleasant details about how the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) had climbed to power to reach the general public (as a reminder, the government in exile in London was recognised as the *de jure* representative of the Yugoslav state at an international level in the eyes of western allies until the end of the war( and they wanted to create some kind of *modus vivendi* through the Tito-Šubašić agreement which was, of course, doomed to failure). The fonds also provide information about the divisions within the government in exile, and even about certain "ethnic conflicts". For example the disagreements over how to treat the Yugoslav communists after the outbreak of the conflict between them and the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland, or the Serbian-nationalist Chetnik movement of Draža Mihailović, whose organisation was accepted as the official military branch of the government in exile on the territory of Yugoslavia since autumn 1941.

The archive of the Stockholm embassy was catalogued only at the beginning of this century and has almost never been used for research purposes. The collection is particularly interesting, because the sources illustrate, among other things, the situation and living conditions of refugees in Sweden. About ninety Yugoslavs were recorded by the embassy in Stockholm and their statements give quite an interesting picture of their fate, from their capture in Yugoslavia to transport through Germany, to life in Norway. The embassy staff were particularly interested in the issue of war crimes, which we must connect with the instructions that had been received after the decision of the Allies in the autumn of 1943 to begin gathering evidence in order to establish a military tribunal after the war (later established in Nuremberg). This material is particularly useful because it gives us a very good insight into life in the camps from the perspective of the prisoners, although we must be aware that the prisoners did not always speak freely but answered the questions of embassy officials. In such situations, there is always a risk of a witness or a victim tuning their statement to the questions so that some aspects seem unconnected, or to emphasise some aspects according to their assumptions about what the officials want to hear. One very important aspect is, for example, that the communist-oriented prisoners

could mitigate ideological aspects considering potential conflicts (which did occur later) between their views on the socialist revolution and the pro-royalist views of the embassy. However, the material does not provide the basis for the claim that self-censorship had a decisive impact on communication. The reason for this is probably the fact that during the second half of the war, and especially after the Tito-Šubašić agreement and King Peter the Second's rejection of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (YAF), some kind of a *modus vivendi* was established between the government in London and the National Liberation Movement of Yugoslavia (NLM), which then had the initiative in the fight against the Axis powers. A good part of the basic data can certainly be checked against the statements of former Norwegian guards, which the embassy acquired through the Norwegian ambassador Jens Bull.

### **SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE PRISONER GROUP**

There were two main reasons why the German authorities decided to transport over four thousand Yugoslavs to Norway and use them as workforce there. The first reason is that, already in April 1941 and until the end of the war, the German military force refused to recognise the partisan units and the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NLAY), or the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović, as legitimate military forces in Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup> Yugoslavs were therefore considered to be common criminals and were not protected as prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention, although even the German commanders in Norway were uncertain about whether the Yugoslavs were actually prisoners of war or not.<sup>17</sup> The reason why they were sent to Norway of all places can be explained by the interesting personal relations between the German Reichskommissar for the occupied Norwegian areas, Jozef Terboven, and the German personnel in the Balkans. The decision

16 This fact made it significantly more complicated for the Stockholm embassy to send packages to prisoners. For example, on 30 March, in answer to his question to the Norwegian Red Cross if they could get in touch with the Yugoslav "prisoners of war", Ambassador Alexander Avakumović was told that this was not possible, because there were actually no Yugoslav prisoners of war in Norway. The government in London therefore instructed Avakumović to ask "whether there were any of our citizens who had fought as guerrillas and who had been, as such, sent to internment camps in Norway"; The telegram from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Yugoslav government in London to the Royal Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm of 30 March 1943; AJ 103-108-462. In his response to the government in exile, Avakumović writes that there really are prisoners of war in Norway, but that the Germans "maybe wanted to say that there were no prisoners of war referred to in the resolution of 18 April 1941, only those caught after that date"; Letter from the Royal Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Political Department) of the government in exile in London, 5 May 1943, AJ 103-108-503. This correspondence is evidence of the fact that the Germans did not want to recognise the Yugoslav prisoners as prisoners of war, if they were caught after the capitulation of Yugoslavia on 17 April in 1941.

17 Nilsen has shown in his research about the payment of reparation at the end of the last century that even German officers often didn't clearly understand the status of a "prisoner of war", since they often used terminology which suggested that they considered them prisoners of war, although they formally did not have that status; Trond Risto Nilssen. „Krigsfanger, politiske fanger eller opprørere? Om de jugoslaviske fangenes skjebne i Norge under andre verdenskrig og erstatningsoppjøret i ettertid,“ in *Forskning i Trøndelag*, ed. Morten Stene (Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forl., 2010).

was made at the initiative of August Meyszner, who was appointed police commander in Norway in August 1940, and in January 1941 he was transferred to Belgrade where he received the new title of the Higher SS and Police Leader in Serbia.<sup>18</sup> His first initiative to use the captured partisans as forced labourers, however, met with disapproval of the German military leadership of the Southeast who believed that the practice of executions by firing squad should be continued. A treaty was concluded, however, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, according to which the partisans who were caught outside of battle were supposed to be sent to concentration camps, while the rest should be shot. The treaty was later extended to include the partisans in the Independent State of Croatia, primarily from the territories of Lika, Kordun, Banija, and Bosanska Krajina.<sup>19</sup>

The prisoners were transported to Norway on four occasions, from June 1942 to September 1943. Most were communists and partisans, or their sympathisers. However, among them were also a large number of civilians “purged” from the Independent State of Croatia, a small number of Chetniks, other political enemies of the regime, and a number of common criminals.<sup>20</sup> The available data indicates that Serbs constituted the vast majority of the prisoners, which also explains why the camps are routinely viewed as “Serbian concentration camps” (serberleire) by the Norwegian public.<sup>21</sup> There were several reasons why Serbs were the dominant group, starting from the fact that around half the contingent was brought from Serbia under German occupation (a territory in which there weren’t a lot of minorities) or from the region of ISC where a large percentage of the population was Serbian. Another reason is that Serbs, especially in the first years of the war, accounted for the majority of the opposition against the Axis powers in the ISC.<sup>22</sup> Many prisoners were captured during the “anti-bandit operations” in Serbia, which started in autumn 1941, when the NLM managed to free a large part of southern Serbia (the so-called “Užice Republic”).

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18 Ruth Bettina Birn, *Die Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer* (Düsseldorf: DrosteVerlag, 1986), 96.

19 *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda: Dokumenti nemačkog rajha*, vol. XII, book 2, Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institut Jugoslovenske armije, 1976, 265.

20 Mladenović mentions that among the prisoners there were about 150 criminals and 1,783 individuals taken hostage during the German anti-partisan operations; Mladenović, *Pod šifrom Viking*, 34.

21 Mladenović states that there were 3,841 Serbian prisoners from various parts of Yugoslavia, 179 Muslims (Bosnians) and 165 Croats; *ibid.*, 71-72.

22 Dragan Cvetković, „Stradali pripadnici Narodnooslobodilačke vojske Jugoslavije iz Hrvatske prema popisu *Žrtve rata 1941-1945*. iz 1964. godine: Analiza trenutnog stanja prema do sada izvršenoj reviziji”, in *Dijalog povjesničara-istoričara*, ed. Hans-Georg Fleck and Igor Graovac (Zagreb: Zaklada Friedrich Naumann, 2002); *Idem*, „Bosna i Hercegovina - numeričko određivanje ljudskih gubitaka u Drugom svetskom ratu”, in *Prilozi istraživanju zločina genocida i ratnih zločina*, ed. Jovan Mirković (Beograd: Muzej žrtava genocida, 2009); Ivo Goldstein and Slavko Goldstein, „Srbi i Hrvati u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi u Hrvatskoj”, in *Dijalog povjesničara-istoričara*, ed. Hans-Georg Fleck and Igor Graovac (Zagreb: Friedrich Naumann-Stiftung, 2003).

The structure of the prisoner group according to the Yugoslav States

State	Number of prisoners
Serbia	2239
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1055
Croatia	926
Other states	48
Total	4,268

Source: Mladenović, Pod šifrom viking, 25.

Another large group of prisoners was deported after the Battle of Kozara in the summer of 1942. The operation was a great success for the Wehrmacht, which managed to besiege and destroy the majority of the partisan units, which had retreated with a large number of civilians to Kozara mountain near the strategically important Prijedor. The civilians issue was a subject of discussion with the authorities of the ISC as a result of the German plan to deport the Serbs from the territory close to the main roads and to bring in a “more loyal population” to live there.<sup>23</sup> During the deportation, tens of thousands of civilians were sent to forced labour or simply executed during the marches or in the Jasenovac concentration camp.<sup>24</sup>

Yugoslav prisoner Petar Stojanović presented some details in a statement to the Swedish authorities about his journey from home to Norway, which is quite typical and gives a general picture of similar journeys. Upon the outbreak of war, Stojanović was conscripted and served for several days in an air defence battery in Niš. German forces captured him on April 9<sup>th</sup>, but he managed to escape from captivity to Pirot and he returned home. However, the quiet life that he had hoped for was not possible because of the “terror” spread by the German forces and Yugoslav “traitors” against the civilian population.<sup>25</sup> Stojanović joined the Nišava NLM detachment, the partisan unit which consisted of about 2,500 fighters. The main tasks of the unit were “sabotage, attacks on transport troops and obstruction of important communication on the Belgrade-Athens road.” The changes in the treatment of captured partisans meant that Stojanović was not shot after surrendering on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1942, but went on a journey that would take him to northern Norway, thousands of kilometres away from Niš. He departed on 21<sup>st</sup> of March, when he was taken from the prison camp to the Gestapo headquarters in Niš, where he underwent tests which resulted in him losing

23 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, Record Group T-501, roll 265, images 1389 -90.

24 See Tomislav Dulić, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-42*, *Studia Historica Upsaliensia*, 218 (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2005), diss., 242-81; Dragoje Lukić, *Rat i djeca Kozare* (Beograd: Književne novine, 1990).

25 AJ, 103-108-99. Transcript of the interview with Peter Stojanović in the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 8 December 1943.

most of his teeth. Then he was sent to the Sajmište camp (Anhaltelager Semlin), from where he was transferred on a barge to Stalag XVII B near Krems in Austria in October 1942:

We were there for three months. From there, in fifteen days we went for two months to Stargard in Germany, and then to Stettin. We were severely tortured, abused and starved in those camps. We were transferred from Stettin to Norway, where we landed in Trondheim. We stayed in Melhus in Trondheim for about a month and went from there to the Botn camp in Rognan. There were various forms of torture, the likes of which only Germans could imagine. I was there on 8 September, when I escaped. I ran away during labour right next to where the guards were. Norwegians helped me along the way and took me across the border to Sweden. In Sweden, I was surprised by the reception of the Swedes. I was in Arjeplog for 25 days. From there I went to Stockholm and retained the rest of my teeth. I came from the hospital to Enköping on 10 November.<sup>26</sup>

### **The guards**

Most of the Yugoslav prisoners arrived in camps while the SS and the Organisation Todt were still in charge of the camps. The guards were divided into two main groups: on the one hand, the SS and the German police (Ordnungspolizei), and on the other members of the so-called “Norway” guard battalion (Vaktbataljon “Norge”), who had been arriving from June to November 1942 and were active in the camps until March 1942. The “perimeter guards” were primarily Norwegian and oversaw the work at the construction sites and this meant that they in fact did not have much contact with the Yugoslavs within the actual camps. In April 1943, Wehrmacht took over the administration of the camp system, when the Norwegian guards were disbanded as well. Almost all of the prisoners’ statements point out that this change led to a significant improvement in the living conditions in the camps.<sup>27</sup>

As for the guards’ view of the prisoners, Christie states that the members of the “extreme group” had a more negative view of the Yugoslavs than others, and the reason was usually that they thought that the prisoners didn’t maintain personal hygiene and that they were lazy. Christie’s reasoning for this is that hygienic conditions in the camps were so bad that lice, scabies, dysentery and the uncontrollable outbreaks of typhoid were in fact the result of poor living conditions in the camp and the apathy that arose afterwards, which led to the deterioration of physical and mental health of the prisoners. Even some of the guards understood this very well. A John Doe from the town of Røros, for example, gave the following statement at a shelter in Kjesäter in Sweden, which the Norwegian ambassador Jens Bull addressed to the Yugoslav embassy in April 1944:

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26 AJ, 103-186-424, Royal Yugoslav Ministry of Internal Affairs, Petar Stojanović’s letter, 22 November 1943.

27 Koch, “De sovjetiske”, 99.

The treatment of Serbs was simply inhuman and it is a big mystery why the German guards mistreated and tortured them so much -the Germans themselves had to understand that they would sooner or later answer for such utterly senseless atrocities which we witnessed daily.

You could hardly call that food human food. It consisted almost exclusively of kohlrabi - or potato soup, which almost entirely consisted of water. Prisoners were served two bowls of such soup daily, when they returned from work at 6 p.m. [...]

The health condition of prisoners could not have been worse. Everyone showed clear signs of starvation and those who were just starved and did not have any disease were still in a much better situation than those who suffered a variety of illnesses. After all, most did suffer from serious illnesses, usually scabies, tuberculosis and gonorrhoea. Those suffering from scabies were the most difficult to look at: most of them had open wounds all over their body.

The hospital was an ordinary barrack. They crammed as many people as they could there and it was always packed. There were often 60-70 people in one room. And when new patients would arrive to the already crowded barrack, some of them would just be taken out and shot.<sup>28</sup>

Yugoslav sources are evidence of the fact that some prisoners came to the same conclusion as the historian Soleim - that causing death was in fact the goal of the camp system in Norway. Croatian prisoner Ivan Šuman, for example, stated that every week in Mosjøen they were forced to bathe for half an hour in water as cold as 4-5°C and, therefore, many prisoners fell ill. However, there was no medical aid, which led to the following conclusion - "they tortured us as if they just wanted to decimate us."<sup>29</sup> In addition, doctor Jovan Krstić said that it was life-threatening to check in at the infirmary. When he arrived in Korgen, he discovered that bayonets were used to perform amputations and open abscesses. After the situation became acute in late 1942, Commander Fritz Kiefer decided to "radically solve" the issue by ordering the shooting a total of 150 of prisoners on three occasions.<sup>30</sup>

As for the "laziness", some of the guards interviewed by Christie believed that prisoners generally worked well,<sup>31</sup> while others claimed that "working was the worst of their abilities."<sup>32</sup> Yugoslavs, however, pointed out that malnutrition and poor hygienic conditions ruined their physical and mental strength to the point where they would "faint from hunger

28 AJ, 382-8-581, Statement by a Norwegian refugee at the Kjesäter shelter, 15 April 1942.

29 AJ, 382-1-502, Statement by Ivan Šuman for the Royal Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 3 August 1943.

30 AJ, 103-382-8-611, Letter by Jovan A. Krstić to the Royal Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 28 July 1944.

31 Christie, *Fangevoktere*, 114.

32 Ibid., 156.

and exhaustion,” and then “the SS and Quisling’s Hird members beat them to make them work harder”.<sup>33</sup> Krstić also recounted one event, which can serve as an illustration of the prisoners’ very positive impression of the Norwegian civilians:

In the winter of 1942-43, when we had to stop work on the roads because of the cold, we had to clean the airport in Rognan. Norwegian civilians were infuriated and upset when before dusk they saw people barefoot in ragged clothes moving about in the snow at minus 20-30 degrees. If someone would fall from fatigue and cold, he would be left in the snow until their departure for the camp.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, it is not surprising that violence against prisoners was more common in the camps controlled by the SS than in those under the control of the Wehrmacht, bearing in mind that the former organisation functioned under entirely different conditions than the latter, and it had to do with the survival of the prisoners. It is much more interesting to try to establish the consequences of alienation between prisoners and guards, which sometimes resulted in guards viewing the prisoners “as animals. Animals in human form”.<sup>35</sup> One of the guards, for instance, said that the prisoners “beat and thrashed each other all day”, while another said that “after we saw how they behaved towards their own, we had no choice but to despise them.”<sup>36</sup> The fact that cultural differences were used as an explanation for seemingly irrational behaviour is illustrated in one guard’s statement - “when I attended school we learned that the Balkans were an unstable region of Europe with revolutions and assassinations.”<sup>37</sup> Cultural differences sometimes turned into pure racism, for example, according to one guard - “only Slavs can do such a thing, or a people with significant Slavic influence”,<sup>38</sup> or in the statement of another “Serbs” were unable to feel remorse.<sup>39</sup> Christie believes that the so-called “kapos” (prisoners who were responsible for maintaining order and discipline in the barracks), were especially brutal, and that ethnic tensions in the camps were frequent.<sup>40</sup>

The prisoners themselves confirm that the kapos were responsible for a large part of the violence, stressing that “often ‘our people’ inflicted more pain than the fascists

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33 AJ, 382-I-497, Letter by Vladislav P. Milić to the Royal Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 3 August 1942.

34 AJ, 103-382-8-6II, Letter by Jovan A. Krstić to the Royal Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 28 July 1944.

35 Christie, *Fangevoktere*, 138.

36 *Ibid.*, 123.

37 *Ibid.*, 133.

38 *Ibid.*, 122.

39 *Ibid.*, 121.

40 *Ibid.*, 155.

themselves”.<sup>41</sup> However, the source material does not support the notion that violence between prisoners was motivated by ethnic divisions. The sources actually barely differentiate between various prisoners on ethnic grounds, so it seems that this aspect had a relatively limited role in the conflict. Although today it is easy to look at the past through the ethnicity lens, this circumstance can only be understood if the violence is analysed as a result of *the political* conflict between the left and the right in the camps. Mladenović, for example, points out that the German camp authorities did everything they could to sow discord in the ranks of the prisoners, and it was often achieved by mixing the communists with the anti-communists and common criminals (who made up a disproportionately large part of the “kapos”), and they also mixed Yugoslavs from different parts of the country. However, Mladenović says that there were more than 1,600 CPY members and candidates in the camps, including about a thousand members of the Communist Youth League. In the conflicts that broke out, it was very important to be a member of one of the organised groups in the camp, as the membership more or less provided minimum protection against arbitrary violence.<sup>42</sup> However, the most important thing was that the communist-oriented Yugoslavs were led by an ideology that boiled down national and ethnic identity to only a transitional phase of a historical process, the main aim of which was to prevent the unification of the working class, in order to preserve the capitalist form of production. The communists have, therefore, often regarded the “reactionaries” and the criminals as their main enemies, regardless of their nationality and ethnicity. The fact that ethnic groups in the camp were in fairly good relations is also confirmed in an article in the Swedish newspaper *Morgon-tidningen social-demokraten* (leftist paper) issue of 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1944. The report of the meeting of Yugoslav refugees in the town of Viggbyholm, for example, emphasises the amity between the refugees:

An MT (*Morgon-Tidningen*) associate met, in the halls of a Viggbyholm school, with a crowd of black-haired young men whose faces were all lined due to their cruel fate. It was a nice mix of different nationalities and religions: here, as in Yugoslavia, were Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Montenegrins and Macedonians, all practicing different faiths, whether Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant or Muslim. ... The previous evening, they showed that they were not in fact chauvinists. Representatives of [sic] other refugee groups also came to the meeting and the Yugoslavs warmly welcomed the German democratic party delegates and expressed that they were capable of distinguishing between a nation and its Nazis. The Germans who had joined Tito’s partisan army were greeted with boundless joy. Italians and Yugoslav partisans are now fighting side by side.<sup>43</sup>

41 AJ, 103-114-765, Letter by Derviš Imamović to the Royal Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 23 November 1943.

42 Mladenović, *Pod šifrom Viking*, 213.

43 AJ, 103-186-438, Translation of the article „Titovi partizani pripovedaju o svojim sudbinama”,

Based on the statements and these, albeit somewhat romantic, external observations, we can conclude that the violence was not primarily committed by a “Croat” against a “Serb” or vice versa, but it was most likely the result of political disagreements and/or conflicts with the criminals. Norwegian guards, who incited ethnic conflict, simply did not know the circumstances and the relations between the Yugoslavs, and therefore interpreted events through the lens of their own world-view in which ethnic and racial divisions were of central importance.

The murder of Štefan Telišman, a Croatian kapo in Beisfjord, who boasted about having personally strangled “dozens” of prisoners in the infirmary, is a good example of the fate that could befall prisoner-criminals, and also serves as an example of the symbiosis that sometimes occurred between prisoners and guards. According to Mladenović, after Telišman had been transferred to the Korgen camp in late 1942, the communists tried among other things to poison him. After a failed attempt, they went on to “draw in” the Norwegian head of the labour department and the Norwegian guards who were informed about Telišman’s crimes in Beisfjord. The conflict ended with a guard throwing a cigarette stub into the area the prisoners were not allowed to walk in, and told Telišman to go and get it. When Telišman stepped into the restricted area, the guard shot him with a rifle. The guard later claimed that the other prisoners were grateful for what he did, which Mladenović confirms in his study.<sup>44</sup> However, nothing indicates that Telišman’s ethnicity had anything to do with the incident.

### **Escape attempts and reprisals**

Another interesting conclusion that can be drawn from Christie’s material is that a small number of guards feared the Yugoslavs, which implies that the administration of the camp was successful in its efforts to create and maintain psychological and emotional distance between the prisoners and guards. Christie nevertheless points out that the guards only cite one case where “one German was killed in a brutal way.”<sup>45</sup> The incident occurred during an escape attempt at the Korgen camp in July 1942. According to the detailed account by prisoner Vladislav Milić, the German guard was killed during a fight with Radovan Dimović:

On 17<sup>th</sup> July, when we were carrying coffee to the Norwegian Hirds, who guarded us at work, an SS man was following us. Dimović and I attacked him in the forest through which we had to pass. When Dimović grabbed him by the throat I took his bayonet, but at that moment he kicked me in the

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*Morgon-tidningen social-demokraten*, 8 January 1944.

44 Christie, *Fangevoktere*, 139; Mladenović, *Pod šifrom Viking*, 321-24. We can conclude from the memoirs of Cveja Jovanović that this was not the only time when the guards threw cigarette stubs into the restricted areas and then ordered the prisoners to go get them in order to have an excuse to kill them; Cveja Jovanović, *Blodveien til nordpartisanavdelingen* (Beograd: [C. Jovanovic], 1988), 129.

45 Christie, *Fangevoktere*, 124.

stomach, so I fell over a trench and the bayonet fell out of my hand onto the grass. When I saw that the SS officer had almost defeated Dimović, I started running through the forest. After a short while, Dimović managed to get away from the SS man and was also running 20 steps behind me. He was shouting to me that we were ruined, and that we'd be shot. I then yelled back at him to run the other way and not with me. While I was running, I heard several gunshots and the SS man calling for help. I got lost in the forest and did not see any more of what happened between the SS officer and Dimović. Only when Dimović and I met again in Sweden, in Tärnaby, did he tell me that the SS officer wounded him three times while chasing him and that later a bullet got stuck in the barrel. When Dimović saw that the SS officer stopped firing and started calling for help, Dimović, as he told me himself, went back, overcame him cut his throat.<sup>46</sup>

Dimović later claimed that he and Milović had agreed to hit the guard in the head with a stone so he would pass out, and that Milović (or Miler, a Jew born in Budapest) escaped with a bayonet in his hand (the stone is not mentioned at all in the embassy's material). After firing, the German caught up with Dimović, who, according to this statement did not come back to kill him. What's more important for our analysis is certainly the fact that what the guards later described as a "brutal murder" occurred in the context of an escape attempt: after moving to Sweden, Dimović was sent to the hospital in Falun, where they found that he had two grains of bullets in his body. The murder, however, also caused diplomatic complications, because it was feared that Dimović would be handed over to the Germans. The Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm repeatedly sent letters about the Dimović case to the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Dimović was interned, by the Swedish authorities, in the Långmora shelter, where he spent his days under great stress and pressure.<sup>47</sup> His communication with the Yugoslav embassy is evidence of the fear that the Swedish authorities would deliver him to the Germans, although that never happened.<sup>48</sup>

However, the murder of the SS officer led to severe reprisals in Korgen. The prisoners were taken back to the camp at 1 p.m, where they were forced to lie on the ground. The ones that stirred were immediately killed. The reprisals continued on 17<sup>th</sup> of July, when they were brought by the Germans "in front of the camp and kept standing at attention until 4 pm, when 50 men were taken out of the lines and shot before the eyes of all the

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46 AJ, 382-1-495, Letter by Vladislav P. Milić to the Yugoslav embassy of 1942, without a date.

47 AJ, 382-1-508, An excerpt from the record at (Socialstyrelsen), 25 August 1942 (transcript).

48 The Institute for Social Welfare issued a decree for the internment of Dimović on 25 August 1942. The Yugoslav embassy, among other things, sought help from the British embassy, so that they might manage to influence the Swedish authorities not to deliver Dimović; AJ, 382-1-508, Letter by Cecil Parrott to the Yugoslav embassy, 25 August 1942.

prisoners.”<sup>49</sup> It must have been extremely difficult for Života Pirić to witness this event, since he was forced to watch the murder of his own brother.<sup>50</sup>

### A view of themselves and others

As we have already seen, Norwegian guards often understated their own actions in the camp, which they compared with that of the Germans and “a few Norwegian guards [who] also showed sadistic tendencies - and this is especially true of the NS members”.<sup>51</sup> In such a context, it was important for one guard who escaped to Sweden to emphasise that the Norwegian guards were not allowed to enter the camp in Korgen itself.<sup>52</sup> Another said that “his comrades were only responsible for guarding the premises, while the camp was completely under German surveillance and command.”<sup>53</sup> A third claimed that he and most of the other guards treated the prisoners well and helped them with food and cigarettes as much as possible. This, however, had to be done in secret, because the Germans did not allow any amity towards the inmates, and several guards were given disciplinary punishment because they had been distributing things to prisoners.<sup>54</sup>

The fact that the Norwegians were primarily responsible for the external security of the camp to some extent confirms the claim that the SS did not fully trust them.<sup>55</sup> However, we must bear in mind that it was in the interest of the guards to minimise their own offences. During the court proceedings for treason after World War II, it was confirmed that a lot of the guards participated in crimes. Some of the collected materials were later sent to the State Commission for Investigation of the Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators in the country, which operated in Yugoslavia from 1943-47. The proceedings were not conducted against the Norwegians in Yugoslavia, but we can conclude from the materials that they really did commit serious crimes. In one of its “statements”, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1945, the Commission describes the murder committed by John Doe from the town of Halden, during the period when he served in Beisfjord and later in the Botn camp. According to the Commission, on one occasion when he was on

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49 AJ, 382-1-505, A telegram from the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm to the government in London, 27 August 1942.

50 AJ, 103-114-716, Statement by Života Pirić for the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm (transcript), 21 December 1943.

51 AJ, 382-8-550, Statement by a former Norwegian guard on the treatment of Yugoslav civilian internees in Norway (transcript), 17 January 1944.

52 Ibid.

53 AJ, 382-8-571, Report by a Norwegian refugee from the Kjesäter shelter on the Yugoslav prisoners of war from the Botn camp near Rognan in Saltdal (transcript), 15 April 1944.

54 AJ, 382-8-597, Transcript of the report from Kjesäter, 18 October 1944.

55 Dirk A. Riedel, “SS-Inspektion z.b.V in Norwegen. Nationalsozialistische Täter in den Gefangenenlagern für jugoslawische Partisanen”, in *Krieg und Verbrechen. Situation und Intention: Fallbeispiele*, ed. Timm C. Richter (München: Martin Meidenbauer Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2006), 116-17.

guard duty outside the camp, a prisoner asked him if he could bring some wood to warm up. John Doe allowed him to go, but killed him from behind with a rifle when he moved a dozen meters away from the fire. When the prisoners asked him why he had done it, he replied, “I wanted to kill a prisoner.” This clearly shows us how little human life was worth in the camps.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps we expected the Yugoslav sources to provide more detail about the precise atrocities committed by the Norwegian guards. This however is not the case, because prisoners often didn’t make a clear distinction between the German and Norwegian guards. However, one report from the government in exile in London of 30 November 1942, describes a situation that occurred near Rognan, where Yugoslavs worked on the construction of a tunnel near Saksenvik and Saltnes. The report states that “a few Hird members and a small group of Germans are guarding the prisoners. The Hird members are just as ruthless as the Germans. The worst is called John Doe and lives in Rognan “.<sup>57</sup>

Another aspect that we have to bear in mind is that the Yugoslavs often made a very clear distinction between ordinary Norwegians and those members of the Hird who tortured them in the camps. A large number of testimonies confirm the fact that the Norwegians helped the Yugoslavs in the camp. The aforementioned Pirić (who had learned Norwegian in the camp), for example, said that he had received a “warm welcome” from Norwegian civilians on trying to escape,<sup>58</sup> while the embassy’s documentation proves that “during their flight the Norwegians helped them [sic] everywhere and in every way”.<sup>59</sup> Although there are cases of Norwegians handing prisoners over to the German authorities, the statement of the previously mentioned Šuman from Zagreb on the escape from Korgen can serve as a display of the generally very positive view of Norwegians:

I travelled eight days to the Swedish border. I didn’t hurry. Norwegians helped me [sic] all the way. They gave me some food, clothed me and gave me shoes, instructed me how to get to the Swedish border. Norwegians are really good people. I will never forget their kindness.<sup>60</sup>

Additionally, the material testifies to the fact that the Swedish authorities also treated the prisoners well. Pirić, for example, stated that “we were positively welcomed by

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56 Miodrag Zečević and Jovan P. Popović, eds., *Dokumenti iz istorije Jugoslavije*, vol. III, Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1999, 325.

57 AJ, 103-108-435, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government in London to the Yugoslav embassy in Bern, 30 February 1942.

58 AJ, 103-114-717, Letter by Života Pirić to the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, no date.

59 AJ, 382-1-485, Letter from the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm to the government in exile in London, 5 August 1942.

60 AJ, 382-1-503, Statement by Ivan Šuman for the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 3 August 1942.

the Swedes, especially by the soldiers”,<sup>61</sup> and Šuman said that after spending a day at the police station, “which was like a hotel,” they were free to go and report to the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm.<sup>62</sup> Another example is Milorad Mitrović, who stated that “we were so surprised when we came to Sweden. We were so kindly welcomed by the Swedish people that I’ve not experienced such a thing since then [sic]. Everything was served on time and in abundance, which I am very grateful for. “

### IMPRESSIONS FROM SWEDEN

The conflicts that had settled down during Norwegian captivity broke out again after the transfer of prisoners to Sweden. They were due, among other things, to the fact that a dispute arose between the communists and the Stockholm embassy, which must be considered in the light of their long-term goal to take power in Yugoslavia after the war. One group from Uppsala and the town Enköping were especially active so they established *The Free Yugoslavia*, a republican and revolutionary organisation that campaigned against the government in exile in London. This fact is confirmed by the organisation’s internal documents and also the letter from the activist Radovan Đuričić from the town of Torshälla of May 4<sup>th</sup> 1944. After concluding that “at most” 60 of the 80 refugees in Sweden accepted to work for the goals of the association, he noted the following:

Reading the book I received from you, “The History of the Communist Party,” I see that a tough fight awaits us and that there’s still a long way to go to get to freedom. Freedom is not so easily acquired, because these capitalist thieves will fight against national freedom now and always, to their last breath-until death. They, those capitalist crooks, long for the benefits that they enjoyed in our former homeland and which they enjoyed at the expense of our tortured and tormented people [sic].<sup>63</sup>

The majority of Swedish companies and organisations refused to support the organisation. The main trade union in Sweden (Lands organisationen, LO), for example, reported that it could not provide financial assistance to *the Free Yugoslavia*, since “your

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61 AJ, 103-114-717, Letter by Života Pirić to the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, no date.

62 AJ, 382-1-503, Statement by Ivan Šuman for the Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 3 August 1942.

63 AJ, 382-15-495, Letter from Radovan Đuričić to comrades during the conference in Uppsala, 4 May 1944. Djuričić also sent a letter to the embassy, claiming that the government in exile in London was made up of traitors, and that he was therefore severing all relations with the government in exile; AJ, 382-15-103, Letter from Radovan Đuričić to the Royal embassy in Stockholm, 13 March 1944. Political disagreements within the refugee groups led several refugees in Enköping to decide to send letters to the embassy, complaining that there were, “as the Royal embassy already knows”, some groups within the refugee group who were not loyal to King Peter II. This group therefore wanted to show that they were loyal, and that they wanted help obtain UK visas; AJ, 382-15-103, a letter from a group of Yugoslav refugees in Enköping to the Royal Yugoslav embassy in Stockholm, 21 January 1944.

activities do not have a trade-union character”. Ragnar Wählin from the famous Swedish rolling bearings manufacturer SKF- who was, in the interwar period, the head of operations in Yugoslavia and left the country in 1943 - states that “I helped provide the financial resources for the purchase of medicines and the like, primarily intended for people who lost their place of residence because of the bombing,” but gave up financial assistance. Swedish revolutionary organisations, however, were more willing help out *the Free Yugoslavia*, so *the Revolutionary Workers of Norrköping (Norrköpingsrevolutionärarbetare)* organisation gave 25 crowns to the organisation for its work on “establishing a free and democratic Yugoslavia.”

The activities of *the Free Yugoslavia* also caused diplomatic problems for Ambassador Alexander Avakumović, who repeatedly complained to the government in exile about various problems. In one letter, for example, he explains that the refugees “express opinions that are not particularly pleasant to local authorities” and that “some of these people could, perhaps for ideological reasons, be drawn into espionage or sabotage.” Avakumović further considered that “possible preventive internment” would undermine the reputation of Yugoslavia and that it would therefore be wise to transfer refugees to the UK. The Ambassador also asked the Swedish Institute for Social Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) “not to give our refugees the right to stay in cities where there are universities, such as Stockholm, Uppsala and Lund, given the fact that they showed tendencies for campaigning with Swedes for their own goals”.

## Discussion

It goes without saying that it is not possible to give a comprehensive picture of life in Norwegian camps as part of an article and there is a lot of work ahead in order to reach deeper understanding of the situation from the one we have shown here. However, the source material from the Archives of Yugoslavia allows us to conclude that the prisoners gave almost exclusively positive recounts of the help they had received during their attempts to escape from the camp. There is of course another aspect that we need to consider, which is that the support of the Norwegian population may be explained by the fact that Norway and Yugoslavia were both under occupation; that both countries were under the control of various fascist and collaborationist regimes (the regimes of Ante Pavelić and Milan Nedić in the ISC and Serbia; the rule of Vidkun Quisling in Norway, who also became a symbol of the collaboration and treachery during World War II); and that the legitimate governments of both regimes operated from London. This means that the Norwegians shared certain experiences with the Yugoslavs, who, like the Norwegians with their organisation *Hjemmefronten*, fought against the occupying and collaborationist forces. It is possible that these factors affected the Yugoslavs, combined with the apparently positive experiences that some of them had with Norwegian civilians. Such a view of the situation can be added to Christie’s conclusion that interaction leads to a lower level of stereotyping and psychological distance. In the eyes of Yugoslavs, extreme guards simply became Norwegian exceptions, just as those guards who were in contact with the inmates made distinctions between the “kapos” and Yugoslavs in general.

Archive material also confirms the notion that there were conflicts within the camps' communities which later spilled over to Sweden, although it is not quite clear to what extent. However, the fact that the division produced violence among inmates led to the conclusion among some guards that Yugoslavs had no sense of loyalty to each other, that they behaved in accordance with their "southern" temperament and were in some cases something between humans and animals. It is also clear that the living conditions slowly but surely brought prisoners to a situation where moral values could no longer come to the fore. In such a situation, the prisoners were left with very little alternatives. One was to somehow try to endure captivity, disease and hunger. This often led to the situation where the prisoners had a more or less conscious tendency to believe in "personal immortality" and the hope that they would somehow survive. Others, however, did not have the ability to face violence, hunger and disease in ways other than falling into deep apathy. An additional means of survival was making oneself "useful" to the perpetrators of the crimes, for example by taking on various roles in the camp, such as an interpreter or even a "kapo". This often confronted the prisoners with a dilemma between exploiting their new positions in order to survive, on the one hand, and the ability to help their comrades on the other. Attempting to escape was the fourth alternative. However, those who did try to escape often had a difficult choice, because escape attempts and especially murder of guards led to severe reprisals against the prisoners who remained in the camp. Nevertheless, the documents clearly show that the prisoners who fled were greatly aided by the Norwegian population. Most probably, without this assistance, a lot more of them would have perished in the Scandinavian wilderness.

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Thomas Porena

## **THE REPATRIATION POLICY FOR YUGOSLAV DEPORTEES FROM GERMANY IN YUGOSLAV STATE ENTITIES BETWEEN 1944-1947 (WITH FOCUS ON SERBIA)**

Humboldt University of Berlin

### **ABSTRACT**

The paper deals with the repatriation of former Yugoslav prisoners of war, deportees and forced labourers at the end of World War Two, with special focus on the repatriation and social reintegration of forced labourers on the Serbian territory. Three distinct phases of repatriation are presented in the paper, corresponding to the different governments and state entities which were successively in power in Yugoslavia. In the first phase, the Yugoslav government in exile in London and the partisan National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia (NKOJ) worked together seeking to gain international legitimacy. The NKOJ, having the advantage of control over the territory, started to reflect about a policy of social integration of the repatriated people. It was with this aim that the guidelines for the repatriation policy of the Tito-Šubašić interim government were established. The establishment of the State Repatriation Commission in April 1945, was followed by a big repatriation wave which peaked in the summer. While, on the one hand, the new Government had some success in the organization of mass repatriation (350,000 Yugoslavs were repatriated by fall 1945), on the other the fear of the enemy's infiltration often led to harsh treatment of the repatriates at the Yugoslav check-points, particularly in Subotica. After the foundation of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the humanitarian repatriation gave play to the political supervision of the special services of the Ministry for People's Defence. The social reintegration of the repatriated people was no longer a priority of the new state.

### **Keywords**

*POWs, deportees, forced labourers, repatriation, Yugoslavia, 1945*

In the three years following the end of World War II, the borders of Yugoslavia were the backdrop for a very different kind of people movement: transit, forced transfer, forced repatriation, voluntary repatriation, escape, expulsion, emigration, immigration. The aim of this paper is to focus specifically on the repatriation of three groups of people: the POWs of the Yugoslav Royal Army imprisoned after April 1941 in the German Stalags and Oflags; the people deported on ethnic and political grounds (the Jews who survived the Holocaust, the Slovenes, the partisans and the victims of the counterinsurgency operations) and the forced labourers. Today, the term forced labourers includes both the people deported to Nazi Germany in order to work for the German war economy and the people whom the circumstances constrained to move to Nazi Germany in order to improve their situation (draft evasion, or to look for the possibility to earn some money for the family). Both groups had to face the same discrimination introduced by the racist Nazi-German policies as they suffered from hunger and diseases, fell victim to arbitrary heavy punishments by the police and surveillance at work, and, according to Mark Spoerer, neither group had barely any possibility to have any influence on their work conditions.<sup>1</sup> Making repatriation as a social phenomenon the object of the research, the paper has the aim of switching between two perspectives: that of the repatriates themselves on the one hand, and that of the repatriation policy of the Yugoslav State entities from 1944 to 1947 on the other.

Considering the lack of interest in this topic that the Yugoslav and international historiography demonstrated in the Cold War era, as well as after the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, the generic desiderata are still waiting for an answer.<sup>2</sup> The repatriation to Yugoslavia will be presented here in three phases. Firstly, the early stage of the repatriation policy, approximately from the fall of 1944 to April 1945. The second phase lasted from April 1945 until Tito's victory in the November 1945 elections and the third phase started after the establishment of the socialist regime. In the first and the second phase, the focus will be on the transformation of the repatriation policy, basically on how the humanitarian principle of assistance and social reintegration was transformed into a political filtration practice applied to the repatriates. In the third phase, with the Sovietisation of the land, the repatriation policy of the new government completely abandoned any assistance features.

The sources analysed in this research are both private and state ones. When it comes to the private sources, like the published memoirs and oral history interviews about

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1 For the definition of the term - forced labour see: Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Dritten Reich und im besetzten Europa 1939-1945* (Stuttgart, DVA, 2001), 15f. His definition of a forced labourer matches the reality of the everyday life of foreign labourers in Germany, not considering the voluntariness of people who went to Germany as a discriminatory factor.

2 The text by Anna-Maria Grünfelder about the Yugoslav displaced persons and the Yugoslav repatriation, quite interesting for the abundance of information the author has collected, but ignoring the fundamental sources from the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade failed in the attempt to trace the history of the repatriation phenomenon. Cf. Anna Maria Grünfelder, „Displaced Persons“ aus Jugoslawien. Repatriierung und Reintegration seit 1945 in: *Südost-Forschungen* 74, no.1 (summer 2015), 73-110, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sofo-2015-0107> ↗

the repatriation, we noticed in particular that forced labourers are very underrepresented, probably because they have long been considered an unimportant victim group both in Yugoslavia and Europe in general. Regarding the state sources, the fonds of the Yugoslav government in exile section on repatriation policy, the fonds of the Repatriation Commission of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia at the Ministry of Social Policy<sup>3</sup>, the Presidency of Yugoslavia and the Repatriation Commission of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have all been useful in this research. In the national Archives of Croatia it was possible to collect materials on the inmates of Buchenwald, in the National Library of Serbia it was possible to consult materials on the POWs and the newspapers and periodicals of that period.

### **THE FIRST REPATRIATION POLICY: THE CONCURRENCE BETWEEN LONDON AND BELGRADE**

On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1944, the Yugoslav government in exile issued the Regulation on the Repatriation Commissariat (Uredba o komesarijatu za repatriranje) outlining the guidelines of the repatriation policy: coordinate the care of the Yugoslav citizens with the UNRRA and the international and Yugoslav Red Cross and support their possible wish to help the allies in the war against Germany.<sup>4</sup> The commissariat had to be represented at the Allies' headquarters by accredited former POWs of the Royal Yugoslav Army, who had the task to coordinate the work with the international organizations. Prior to the publication of the Regulation in October 1944, Tito, who had been informed in September, had already sent his men abroad to liaise with the UNRRA and the Allied Forces.<sup>5</sup> On Yugoslav territory, the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia (Nacionalni komitet oslobođenja Jugoslavije abbr. NKOJ) decided, in October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1944, to organize the first collection centres with kitchens and beds. In December 1944, a department for repatriation and assistance to unemployed workers was set up within the Commission for Social Policy.<sup>6</sup> So since its beginning, the repatriation of the Yugoslav people was caught in the rivalry between the NKOJ on the one hand and the Yugoslav government in exile on the other. The first wave of repatriation from the Nazi-Germany regions liberated by the Red Army started after the creation of the Tito-Šubašić provisional government in March 1945. The first group arrived on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1945. The *Politika* newspaper described the triumphal welcoming ceremony organized on the occasion of the return of the deported people liberated by the

3 At the time when the fonds was consulted in the Archive of Yugoslavia (hereinafter referred to as AJ), it was not inventoried, so the signatures could not match the current ones.

4 AJ, 103-1-19, the Regulation on the Repatriation Commissariat (Uredba o komesarijatu za repatriranje).

5 AJ, 642-1-1, and AJ, 642-10-32, documents without title. Among others, General Ljubo Ilić, a former Spanish civil war fighter, General of the French Resistance and chief of the Yugoslav military mission in Paris led the UNRRA policy and was the person accredited at the SHAEF for Yugoslavia.

6 AJ, 642-10, document without signature. The Regulation on the Organization of the Committee for the Protection of Refugees and the Exiled of December 8, 1944.

Soviets.<sup>7</sup> The aim of this event was to put together the victorious liberation struggle of the People's Army and the resistance of the POWs during their German captivity underscoring the inclusive and democratic character of the new state.

### **The second repatriation policy: between defence and reception**

After the first groups of returnees came in April 1945, the Yugoslav government established that the coordination of tasks was required in order to face a repatriation of a yet unknown but huge number of people: the State Repatriation Commission was created at the Ministry for Social Policy<sup>8</sup>. Although it was decided that the presidency of the commission had to be in the hands of Anton Kržišnik, Minister of Social Policy, the commission was formed comprising one member from each federal territory and one member each from the Ministry of People's Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Trade. The central executive headquarters of the commission in Belgrade was set up comprising five officers and two delegates each from the Ministry of Social Policy, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Social Policy of Serbia, the Secretary of the Red Cross of Yugoslavia and the -Association of Unions of Workers and Employees. The headquarters of Novi Sad, Zagreb and Ljubljana were affiliated to the central executive headquarters. The executive headquarters had the task to organize the checkpoints at the Yugoslav border assuring the medical care of the returnees but also the defence of the Yugoslav state. So the officer of the security service, the Department for People's Protection known as OZNA (Odeljenje za Zaštitu Naroda) started to work alongside the medical staff in the new repatriation offices. With the exodus of 200,000 Yugoslavs alongside the German troops at the end of the war, the State Repatriation Commission found it necessary to redefine which groups were welcome in the land.<sup>9</sup> On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1945, the Commission decided that the entire German minority (except for some individual cases of people who could demonstrate to have been active members of the liberation struggle) were to lose the Yugoslav citizenship, whereas the Hungarian minority had to be filtered individually in order to establish who had acted as an enemy of Yugoslavia during the war.

In the report of May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945, written to the Presidency of the Council of Ministries, the Antifascist Section of former POWs in Germany suggested that a fast repatriation of the POWs would be necessary not only for the huge number of antifascist prisoners who had been waiting to come back to their liberated country, but for the entire Yugoslav society as well. Among them would be many renowned experts and a substantial labour force who would aid the cultural and economic recovery of the land. It would be

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7 *Politika* Newspaper of March 23, 1945; March 24, 1945; April 1, 1945; April 5, 1945.

8 AJ. KMJ-2-9-d/3, fond KMJ Cabinet of the Marshall of Yugoslavia. Regulation on the Organization of the Service for Repatriation of the POWs, Forcibly Deported Workers, Internees, Convicts and Others, whom the Occupier Had Deported from Yugoslavia of April 28, 1945.

9 AJ, 50-35-717, no. 35, Document without title.

important that every single former prisoner should be repatriated, not only the anti-fascists, but also all the people who did not express a positive opinion about the People's Liberation struggle. Yugoslavia would need every available pair of hands. And it was also important that the elements who had been against the People's Liberation struggle be repatriated as soon as possible, in order to prevent them from spreading anti repatriation propaganda.<sup>10</sup> Especially among the POWs of the Royal Yugoslav Army in German captivity since 1941 and in particular for the privates imprisoned in the Stalags and then employed mostly in agriculture, the distinction between Tito and Mihailović was not always clear. This was not the case with the officers and generals imprisoned in the Oflag. Since their deportation in Germany after the Yugoslav capitulation, they split into two major groups: the group which continued to identify themselves as Yugoslavs and the group which accepted the German policy of dismembering Yugoslavia into ethnic components. By signing the Nürnberg declaration of 1942, the generals and officers of the Yugoslav Army declared their support to the Nedić government in Serbia, hoping to be liberated from the German captivity. The group of generals and officers who did not sign the declaration were first separated in the Oflag of Nürnberg and then transferred with the Jewish officers accused of promoting the March upheaval and the outbreak of war, to the Oflag VI C of Osnabrück. The antifascist POWs claimed that it had been a mistake to sign the declaration, because they had lost the POW status that was under the care of the International Red Cross. This group was engaged in crossing the barriers of the Oflag VI C of Osnabrück and spreading the antifascist ideas around different Stalags and Oflag.<sup>11</sup> After the defeat of Germany, the antifascist POWs engaged in propaganda for the repatriation, travelling around Germany looking for Yugoslavs - primarily privates, former POWs and forced labourers, who had not received any notice of the political changes in their homeland.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, among the displaced persons in the American and British zones, groups of former POWs of monarchist orientation, supported by Yugoslav people who had left the country at the end of the war and were registered as DPs (displaced persons), spread strong propaganda against Tito and communism trying to convince former forced labourers to avoid repatriation in order to delegitimize the new Yugoslav State. The DP camps began to be a theatre of heavy battles between pro repatriation oriented committees and anti-communist committees which would continue for the next two years. The former POWs were not the only group engaged in the repatriation. In a similar way, pro-Liberation Army-oriented groups were formed from imprisoned communists and partisans in the German concentration camps. In the camps of Dachau,

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10 AJ, 50-35-708, the report was signed by Milan Bartoš and Albert Vajs.

11 On the resistance of the Yugoslav POWs Cf. Stanislav Vinaver, *Godine poniženja i borbe. Godine u nemačkim oflazima* (Beograd: Međunarodna knjižarnica Milinković i Mihailović, 1945), 41 ff.; Oto Bihalji-Merin, *Do vidjenja u oktobru* (Beograd 1947), Milan Bartoš in *Politika*, April 22, 1945, 5.

12 The newspaper „*Glas oslobođenih jugoslovenskih zarobljenika*” was published in the Stalag of Borghorst from June to July 1945.

Buchenwald and Ravensbrück, the inmates formed illegal organizations of mutual assistance which spread news they had heard on the radio about the victorious efforts of the Liberation Army in Yugoslavia.<sup>13</sup> After the capitulation of Germany, the former inmates who were members of the illegal organizations became active members of the international committees who administered the liberated camps with the logistic help of the Allies. In particular the group of Buchenwald, which had already had a very strong structure during the SS administration of the camp because of the massive presence of communists, was able to organize a huge propaganda network sending emissaries in several displaced camps in central Germany. The Buchenwald men distributed self-edited newspapers and fliers and organized cultural events in order to convince the displaced persons, primarily forced labourers, to accept communism and Tito and ultimately return to Yugoslavia.<sup>14</sup> They organized collection centres in which the Yugoslavs had to register themselves. The Buchenwald men filled the lists with the names of the Yugoslavs, recording everyone's political affiliation (in Serbian: Karakteristike) and sent them to Yugoslavia.<sup>15</sup> The decision to record the political affiliation of every returning Yugoslav was a directive of the new Yugoslav repatriation policy, made by Tito's entourage after the exodus of several thousand collaborationists of the German occupation forces and anti-communist minded people. Fearing a huge number of dissidents abroad and the possibility that enemies of the State (the Germans and their collaborators) could infiltrate the country, it was necessary that the returnees be already profiled before the repatriation. People were obliged to stay in the repatriation reception centres for a long time in order to proceed with their political identification. The new regulation of the Repatriation Service, published on June 5, 1945, defined which groups had to be repatriated: the POWs, the deported workers, the internees, political prisoners, the entire population the occupying force had deported from the annexed territories, the people who had worked for the Germans with a contract signed under coercion.<sup>16</sup> In order to step up the procedures at the repatriation reception centres (prihvatišta in Serbian) the regulation established that it was necessary to have the health of the repatriates examined by military-medical staff (and to have them quarantined, if necessary) to analyse if they were physically able to work, or if they were able to be sent for military service if they hadn't served it before. After the medical examination, the repatriation staff had to establish the identity of the

13 Slobodna Jugoslavija (*The Free Yugoslavia*) was broadcast from the Soviet Union from 1944 to 1945 AJ, n. 790 *Free Yugoslavia Broadcast* and fonds no. 79014-1 Radio broadcast from Kuybeshew.

14 The newspaper of the Buchenwald Committee „*Naš glas*” was distributed throughout central Germany. (HDA - the Croatian State Archive, private archive of Rudi Supek box 29) The newspapers “*Jez za žico*” “*Razvit*” and “*Dachavski poročevalec*” were distributed in Dachau. Slovenian Archive (SI AS 1769, T.E. 10/P.E. 150-153).

15 HDA, fonds of Rudi Supek, box 30, document without signature.

16 Regulation on the enforcement of the ordinance on the organisation of the service for the repatriation of the POWs, forced labourers, internees, etc. In *Službeni list DFJ*, SL 38/45.

repatriate. All the repatriates who were fit for military service and voluntary work at the repatriation reception centres were sent home for one month for rehabilitation. Thereafter, they had to enlist in the local military offices. People unfit for service were sent home. After a month they had to register with the closest people's committee (narodni odbor) in order to get a Karakteristika of their position towards the liberation struggle during the time spent abroad.

The regulation established furthermore that delegations of former POWs had to be sent abroad in order to spread the propaganda for the repatriation and against the anti-communist and nationalist minded groups for the new government.<sup>17</sup> The repatriation missions were sent to the major cities of central and northern Europe, of Italy and France and tried to get the accreditation among the Allies.

Until July 1945, the only possibility to enter Yugoslavia from central Europe was through the province of Vojvodina.<sup>18</sup> Through the accords of July 5, 1945 between two English and two American representatives of General Eisenhower and Major General Ljubo Ilić, chief of the Yugoslav military mission at the SHAEF, the Allies and the Yugoslav government decided to repatriate all the 200,000 Yugoslav people from the British and American zone, 6,000 a day, via Jesenice in Slovenia and, possibly, 4,000 a day via Hungary to Vojvodina, if the Soviet Union would accept the proposal.<sup>19</sup> In order to prevent Germans and enemies of the State from entering the country through the planned mass repatriation, on July 11, 1945, the Yugoslav Army Headquarters decided that the Department for Repatriation of the Ministry of People's Defence had to assume all the tasks of the repatriation headquarters.<sup>20</sup> By late August, only 60,000 of the 330,000 repatriates passed through Slovenia. By late November, 357,412 people were repatriated, 124,083 former POWs, 88,129 former internees, 71,238 workers and 73,962 others (principally Slovenian families deported by the Germans from the annexed territories).

During the so called second repatriation policy, the Trieste question and the international denunciation of the Bleiburg massacre cracked the international reputation of Tito's policy. Looking to restore its political legitimacy, the Yugoslav government became a strong promoter of international law. The extreme activity of the military missions abroad and the Yugoslav vigilantism in matters of persecution of former war criminals

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17 AJ, 22-3-20, In a letter to the Minister for Slovenia Edvard Kocbek of April 11, 1945, the Minister of Social Policy Anton Kržišnik underscored the importance of the political propaganda toward the repatriates. During their stay in the repatriation reception centres, the repatriates had to learn the history of the People's Liberation struggle and the history of their region. Kržišnik asked Kocbek to send the propaganda material in Slovene.

18 The repatriation reception centres were located in Novi Sad, Petrovgrad, Kikinda, Pančevo, Ruma, Sremska Mitrovica, Indija, Stara Pazova, Nova Pazova, Sremski Karlovci, Vršac, Bela Crkva, Mramorak, Kovin. A special centre for former POWs was established in Belgrade (Dušanova, 23).

19 AJ, 50-35-720, Document without title.

20 AJ, KMJ-11-9-d/7, Letter of the People's Defence Headquarters to the Chief of Cabinet of the Ministry of People's Defence about the organization of the repatriation.

developed in combination with the propaganda that Yugoslavia was a democratic country and that every displaced person was welcome in the new state. But after Bleiburg it was clear that not everybody was welcome in the new state, above all the German minority was forced to abandon the country at the end of the conflict. In this framework, the role of the OZNA became more and more important. If the propaganda shared through the welcome ceremonies had the task of convincing the people abroad to go back home, the repatriates, on the other hand, had to demonstrate that they had been on the right side during the war, that they were anti-fascists. But who was antifascist? Who decided who had been antifascist during the war? What did it mean to be antifascist if not the participation in the People's Liberation struggle? In order to better understand the ambivalence between a welcome propaganda and the everyday discrimination, the practical functioning of the Subotica repatriation base in the paragraph below will offer a fitting example.

### **The Subotica repatriation reception centre**

From the beginning of the repatriation process, Subotica was the major arrival station for all the people who, liberated by the Red Army in Central and Eastern Europe, arrived to Yugoslavia travelling mostly by train via Bratislava and Budapest. Until the regulation of the State Repatriation Commission of April 28<sup>th</sup> 1945, the people collected by the Soviets were left to the arbitrariness of their liberators. The cases of rape, violence and arbitrary arrest were not infrequent. After the capitulation of Germany, several self-organized groups of liberated POWs and the concentration camp inmates of Buchenwald organized the first collection station in Prague using the rooms of the former Yugoslav Boarding School „Aleksandar“.<sup>21</sup> They sent a delegation to Belgrade in order to make the repatriation through the territories liberated by the Red Army as safe as possible. The checkpoint of Subotica with its 68 employees was the largest repatriation reception centre in the country. In the report of the State Commission of May 30<sup>th</sup> it was indicated that a thousand people arrived in Subotica every day. Although the accommodation facilities were in good condition, the repatriates claimed that they had been kept in the repatriation centre for too long. It took up to 10 days to perform the sanitary and political control.<sup>22</sup> Many cases of Slovene and Jewish returnees who had been imprisoned for longer because their names sounded German were registered in Subotica. Thus, for example, Vladislav Švarc, a Jewish doctor who had survived Sajmište, Bor and Mauthausen was arrested as an enemy by the Hungarian speaking inspectors at the Subotica checkpoint.<sup>23</sup> The problem

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21 AJ, 50-4-156. In the letter to Kardelj of April 27, 1945, Erna Musera, a deported Slovene listed 500 forced labourers in the collecting centre of Neubrandenburg, who came into contact with the unofficial Yugoslav delegation in Prague with the aid of some former POWs. On the repatriations from Neubrandenburg and Ravensbrück cf. Silvija Kavčič, *Überleben und Erinnern, Slowenische Häftlinge im Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück* (Berlin, Metropol, 2007).

22 AJ, 642-II-246.

23 Istorijiski arhiv Beograda (IAB), Memorarska građa (MG) - 859, 4749. Vladislav Švarc deposited his memories in mid-80 in the Historical Archive of the city of Belgrade.

of the Hungarian supervisors was reported by many returnees, so the Commission for Repatriation reacted by saying that it was necessary to replace the Hungarian supervision by a Serbo-Croatian speaking one: It was of primary importance for the people who entered the land to feel welcome and not to meet the members of a nation who had been their enemy during the war.<sup>24</sup> With the new regulation of June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the State Repatriation Commission sent delegations to Vienna, Budapest, Bratislava and Prague in order to check the transports before they entered the country. The principal task of the delegations was to check the trains with the aim of preventing the Yugoslav German minority from entering the land. Not always supported in this by the Soviet Army, the Yugoslav officers made lists of the people inside the trains before letting them continue south. Until the end of July, 110,000 repatriated people passed through Vojvodina: 32,000 former forced labourers, 28,000 former internees, 32,000 former POWs, 17,000 women and children.

As returnee Mila Repič wrote on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the conditions in the repatriation reception centre of Subotica were not friendly at all. In her report to the Ministry of Social Policy, the Slovene woman denounced several dysfunctions in the repatriation reception centre. Firstly, the majority of the supervisory personnel was of Hungarian origin and could not speak Serbo-Croat. They treated the repatriates harshly. Secondly, they seized everything the returnees had brought with them: coats, personal belongings, new shoes, bicycles. The food provided by the state was very poor. Just bread and some soup once a day. The women had to take showers all together, naked in front of the supervisors (men only). They had to sleep on the floors for a week, because the registration proceeded very slowly. The reception centre's hospital was overcrowded. On August 8<sup>th</sup>, Petar Kleut, Commander of the repatriation headquarters reacted to the report and, accompanied by an officer of the OZNA, carried out an inspection of the Subotica reception centre. The result of the inspection report is mentioned in the answer of the Ministry for Slovenia of August 18<sup>th</sup> to the Repatriation Headquarters in Belgrade about the "Repič case".<sup>25</sup> The Repatriation Headquarters argued that Mila Repič was a superficial and an uncritical person, de facto de-legitimizing her statement. The answer of the Ministry for Slovenia to the Headquarters repudiated the criticism against the woman and ended by saying that Mila Repič's not only was her testimony accurate but also useful to improve the operation of the centre itself.<sup>26</sup>

In August 1945, the presidency wrote to the Ministry of the Interior in order to stop the requisition of the items the repatriates had brought with them from Germany because it would have a negative political effect on the returnees.<sup>27</sup> The answer of the Ministry of the Interior was that the repatriates and particularly the former forced

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24 AJ, 642-II-215.

25 AJ, 642-10-34.

26 AJ, 22-3-301.

27 AJ, 50-35-608, Communication of August 3, 1945 of the Presidency of the Council of Ministries to the Headquarters of the People's Defence Corps.

labourers brought goods from Germany in order to sell on the black market. The black market trade was generally forbidden and was widely considered an anti-communist activity. The propaganda documents which circulated during the war often alleged that it was the profiteers and smugglers who made the pact with the fascists. The attitude towards these people who tried to smuggle goods from abroad was such that they were considered the worst enemy of the revolution. The items seized on the border were actually often used by the boarder guards for private purpose. The personnel at the check-points who were recruited by the local councils (Narodni odbori) were mostly people who had joined the partisan movement last and had to make an extra effort in order to avert any suspicion of collaboration.<sup>28</sup> The partisan ethics of solidarity adopted through the People's Liberation struggle was not embraced by many people who had joined the liberation army in the last months of the war.<sup>29</sup>

Following the adoption of the law on confiscation of the property of the enemy and the temporary nationalization of the propriety of people in their absence it was not infrequent that the returnees had to face big problems in order to get their houses back.<sup>30</sup> Robberies, uncontrolled confiscations, looting and violence were common at the end of the war. Over time, the Yugoslav government had to address the poor administration of the local authorities. Apart from some cosmetic reforms, the political effort to organize welcome rallies for the returnees became more and more difficult to fulfil due to a lack of financial resources and a general disregard toward the repatriated people.

On one hand, the new government had the task of spreading the message that Yugoslavia was a country where everyone was welcome and, on the other, Yugoslavia needed the labour force of the deported people. The new government did not have the financial resources to assist the thousands of returnees who had lost everything during their residence abroad. Already in May 1945, the Ministry of Social Policy notified the trade unions that the repatriates who arrived in Banat did not have the possibility to reach their home and had to be employed in agriculture if they could not serve the Army in order to avoid their applying for aid from the state institutions, underscoring that the land needed this labour force.<sup>31</sup> The central committee of the trade unions notified the Union of

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28 On November 21, 1944, it was decided to give the general amnesty to former Chetniks, Croat and Slovene Domobrans. AJ, 15-12-204, The decision No. 69 on the general amnesty of persons who, while in the Chetnik units of Draža Mihajlović had taken part in, were actively aiding them, or have taken part in the Croat or Slovene "domobran" units.

29 In his personal report of June 9, 1945 sent to the Presidency of the Council of Ministries Ljubomir Zečević, Minister of the Interior denounced the violation of numerous private proprieties by the members of partisan units, AJ 50-33-292.

30 AJ, 15-12-205, November 21, 1944, Decision No. 70 on conversion to state property of the enemy property, of state administration of property of absent persons and sequestering the property which the occupation authorities had seized.

31 AJ, 117-249-800, communication of May 3, 1945 of the Ministry of Social Policy to the United Association of the Trade Unions of Employees and Workers of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia.

Agricultural Workers that it was necessary to employ the labour force of the returnees to prevent them from loitering.<sup>32</sup>

### **The social reintegration of the repatriated Yugoslavs**

As the report of the Antifascist Section of former POWs in Germany already suggested, on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1945, the new state had an urgent need for new labour force. Not only manual workers were needed, but this time also particularly intellectuals. There was a need for professors, teachers, technical experts, doctors, specialists and mid-level officers for the Liberation Army, which had demonstrated to be very strong in matters of guerrilla war, but had a considerable lack of mid-level officers.<sup>33</sup> The priority was to integrate the old officers in order to build a new competitive army. In order to repatriate all the POWs, the Government disseminated the propaganda among the POWs in the DP camps on the one hand, and, on the other, ordered, by means of the law of August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1945 the revocation of citizenship. By means of this law, the government established that all the officers and non-commissioned officers, former POWs who refused to be repatriated would lose their Yugoslav citizenship and their property. The law established a deadline of two-months after the official end of the repatriation.<sup>34</sup> The discussion about the social reintegration of the repatriates started at the conference of September 1<sup>st</sup> 1945, held at the Ministry of Social Policy for Serbia. For a faster reintegration it was necessary to assign the political profile (*Karakteristika*) to every repatriate in order to facilitate his getting a job in a private enterprise or a public office.<sup>35</sup>

In the report of October 10<sup>th</sup> 1945 the Headquarters for the Repatriation of POWs sent to the Ministry for People's Defence, the issue of the *Karakteristike* featured prominently in the reintegration of former POWs.<sup>36</sup> There were many people without any or with one not written by a member of the Ministry of People's Defence. The report described the situation

32 AJ, 117-249-917, communication of May 5, 1945 of the United Association of the Trade Unions of Employees and Workers of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia to the Association of Agricultural Workers and Employees of Yugoslavia.

33 Referring to Yugoslavia's need for more officers, Stalin stated that Yugoslavia had had good officers before the war who were sent to captivity in Germany. From the „Record of I.V. Stalin's Conversation with the Head of the Delegation of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia, A. Hebrang,“ January 9, 1945. History and Public Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, f. O6, po. 7, p.53, d. 872, i. 8-28. Published in Murashko, G.P., et al, *Vostochnaja Evropa*, vol, 1, 118-33. Translated for VWIHP by Svetlana Savranskaya. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118440> ↗ (last access: April 30, 2017).

34 Law on the Revocation of Citizenship for Officers and Non-commissioned officers of the Former Yugoslav army who Refused to Come Back to the Homeland, for Members of the Military Formations who served the Occupiers and who Left the Country in SL n.64/45 and amended in January 18, 1946 in Law on the Revocation of Citizenship for Officers and Graduates of the Former Yugoslav Army Who Refused to Come Back to the Homeland, for Members of the Military Formations who Served the Occupiers and the People Who Left the Country after the Liberation. In *Sluzbeni List*, n. 86 (1946).

35 AJ, 642-10-37.

36 AJ, 50-119-701.

of returnees who didn't get a job neither from the state nor from a private company because they didn't have a valid *Karakteristika*. The Headquarters assumed that the reason was that the company didn't need that person. The report also described the situation of people who could not be admitted to hospital because they did not have a valid profile. The situation was very bad for former POWs who didn't serve in the new Yugoslav Army, for the reservists and for the former internees in general. In order to avoid this problem, the Ministry for People's Defence, in its communication to the Presidency of October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1945, proposed to make the situation less complicated at least for the former POWs who decided to join the new army.<sup>37</sup> While the social reintegration of former POWs and former internees was not easy at all, it was even worse for the forced labourers. Internees and POWs had already liaised with each other since their stay in Germany, and the majority had already received a *Karakteristika* before returning home. To get a *Karakteristika* in Yugoslavia, a person needed other three persons with a positive *Karakteristika* to testify that they had been deported with them, or that they had known them before the deportation as a progressive person. So obtaining a profile in Yugoslavia was just a matter of time. The situation for the forced labourers was quite different. In Germany, the forced labourers weren't organized in committees like the POWs and the concentration camp inmates. The inmates and the prisoners were considered to be the enemies of Germany. This classification strengthened them as a group. Unlike them, the forced labourers were often considered to be racially inferior, probably politically unworthy, but not enemies.

As the example of Subotica shows, there was a general suspicion about the political positioning of forced labourers. They were treated as profiteers, linked with the black market. While on the one hand they were officially considered victims and one of the groups of people which the State Repatriation Commission decided to repatriate, on the other hand the common opinion was that instead of fighting against the enemy they earned money abroad. By way of example we present the communication of the president of the District People's Committee (*Okružni Narodni Odbor*) of the town of Leskovac, Mile Veljkić to the Minister of the Interior of Serbia of June 25<sup>th</sup> 1945:

“Many workers who stayed in Germany as forced or voluntary workers are coming back from Germany with women who they claim to be married to. There are cases in which they bring German wives even if they already have a family at home. Since there are women from Russia, the Netherlands and Germany of whom we don't have any information, we ask the Minister's opinion as to how to proceed. We propose to expel every woman, especially the foreign women whom the voluntary workers are bringing with them from Germany, because they cannot be trusted in general, especially not the persons who are coming to us with someone who is already married.”<sup>38</sup>

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37 AJ, 50-119-700.

38 AJ, 50-33-289, and 50-33-290, the reply of the Ministry of the Interior was that, although foreign marriages

Although the official regulation of June 5<sup>th</sup> 1945 defined the deported forced labourers and the people who worked for the Germans according to a contract signed under duress as a group which had to be repatriated and de facto victim of fascism, the statement of the president of the people's committee of Leskovac cannot be considered to be an exception. This trend became more and more accepted in the state bureaucracy. The repatriation statistics for February 1946 of the State Repatriation Commission list only voluntary workers, not forced labourers.<sup>39</sup>

### **THE THIRD REPATRIATION: A POLITICAL BATTLE**

With the end of the mass repatriation in the fall of 1945, it was established that it was necessary to downsize the State Repatriation Commission.<sup>40</sup> The Novi Sad headquarters was transferred to Belgrade. Subotica became the only repatriation checkpoint for Vojvodina. With Tito's victory in the parliamentary elections of November 11<sup>th</sup> 1945, the new government of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia decided that the Ministry of Social Policy had to disappear, and with it the State Repatriation Commission. The new entity was called the Department for Repatriation of the Committee for Social Welfare of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, which points out at least the centralist purpose of the new repatriation policy. The military personnel of the headquarters and the repatriation reception centres started to depend on the Ministry for People's Defence and the care of the repatriates had to be put under the control of the Committee of Social Welfare.<sup>41</sup> The third phase of the repatriation was characterized by a strong political battle in the DP Camps outside Yugoslavia. The newspapers and periodicals reported violent clashes between the monarchists and nationalists held in the DP camps in Italy, Austria, and Germany and delegates of the repatriation missions who tried to convince the displaced persons to come back to the homeland.<sup>42</sup> In October 1946, the Head of the Committee for Social Welfare noted in his report about the work of the Section for Repatriation that the repatriation would continue until the end of 1947 and proposed to the Presidency to delegate all the repatriation tasks to the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>43</sup>

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were not accepted, it was better to analyse each individual case, except for German women, who had to be expelled.

39 AJ, 33-7-10, fonds no. 33, the Social Welfare Committee.

40 AJ, 642-10-1407.

41 AJ, 50-35-876, Decision of the Presidency of the Council of Ministries of February 12, 1946.

42 Fašistički teror u logorima Jugoslovenskih izbeglica i raseljenih lica u inostranstvu (Fascist terror in the Yugoslav Refugee and DP camps abroad), *Trideset dana*, n. 5/6 (1946): 30-40.

43 AJ, 50-35-924, Committee for Social Welfare to the Presidency of the Government of the FPRY: Subject: The issue of organization of the repatriation service.

As the issue of repatriation of the displaced persons became an international problem brought up at the United Nations level<sup>44</sup>, Branka Savić, the Secretary of the Committee for Social Welfare wrote, on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1947, a comment to the Presidency in which she underscored a huge number of repatriated people who complained about them is the treatment of the authorities they received and generally about poor likelihood of getting a job. The answers they usually got was “get a job where you came from”. Branka Savić proposed that the Government intervene urgently because the repatriates who were in contact with the people abroad could create very bad propaganda for the country. It would be necessary to improve the policy of their social reintegration.<sup>45</sup>

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44 From the second session of the United Nations General Assembly, *Trideset dana*, n. 1/2/3 (1947): 75-96.

45 AJ, 50-35-978.

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## AUTHORS

### Tomislav Dulić

Tomislav Dulić is a historian and the director of the Hugo Valentin Centre at the Uppsala University in Sweden.

### Milovan Pisarri

Milovan Pisarri is a historian and the founder of the Center for Applied History, Belgrade.

### Zoran Janjetović

Zoran Janjetović is a historian and senior research associate of the Institute for Recent History in Belgrade.

### Thomas Porena

Thomas Porena is a historian at the doctoral studies at the Humboldt University, Berlin.

### Milan Koljanin

Milan Koljanin is a historian and research fellow at the Institute for Contemporary History in Belgrade.

### Sabine Rutar

Sabine Rutar is a research fellow at the Leibnitz Institute for East and South-east Europe Studies, as well as the Editor in Chief of the scientific journal *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society*.

### Sanela Schmid

Sanela Schmid is a historian and research fellow at the Humboldt University, Berlin.

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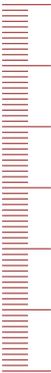
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Center for Holocaust  
Research and Education - CHRE

Luke Vojvodića 35/4,  
11000 Belgrade, Serbia  
+38163247856  
[www.cieh-chre.org](http://www.cieh-chre.org)  
[office@cieh-chre.org](mailto:office@cieh-chre.org)

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