

THE EXPELLED



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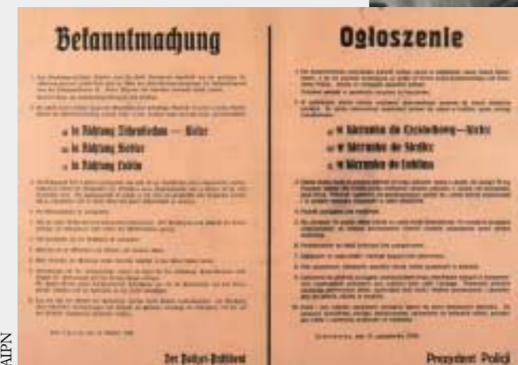


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Fot. J. Vachon



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“L. Illustration”, Paris, 2 IX 1939



The Second World War put an end to the Polish Second Republic, a multinational state in which Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews were most numerous. German aggression against Poland on 1 September 1939 was made possible by the German-Soviet pact (Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact) signed on 23 August 1939, in which East-Central Europe was divided into spheres of control. On 17 September 1939, executing the provisions of the Pact, the Red Army invaded Poland. From the outset both invaders pursued repressive measures against Polish citizens, with forcible resettlement and deportations as their essential component.

The massive resettlement of Poles was planned by Nazi Germany even before the outbreak of the war which after all was aimed, among other things, at gaining “living space” (“*Lebensraum*”). It is therefore unsurprising that the first massive population resettlements occurred as early as September 1939, while military operations were still under way. After the annexation of some Polish territories to the German Reich, the forced resettlements became systematic. In all, over 900,000 Poles were brutally expelled from the incorporated territories and replaced by German settlers.

Simultaneously, the Soviet authorities carried out four huge deportations, removing over 320,000 Polish citizens deep into distant territories within the USSR. Tens of thousands were arrested and sent to Soviet Gulags, and another 138,000 were forcibly resettled away from the border zone. Mortality rates were extremely high among exiles and the gulag inmates were high due to the brutal transport and harsh living conditions.

German plans extended beyond Polish territories incorporated into the Reich. In 1941, after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, all Polish territories came under the German control. It was then the General Plan Ost was developed according to which the majority of Slav nations, including Poles, were to be resettled in Siberia. Although these far-reaching plans were not ultimately implemented fragmentary attempts were made. The



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massive population resettlements from the Zamość region, which commenced in November 1942, have come to symbolize these grand plans. Over 110,000 Poles were deported, and as many as 293 villages depopulated. The Poles were then replaced by 12,000 German settlers. The most tragic aspect of the operation was the removal of nearly 4,500 little children from their parents and subsequently Germanized.

The Holocaust was also preceded by the expulsion of Jews from their homes and forced resettlement in ghettos. Some Jewish people managed to escape to Soviet-controlled territories, however only for the majority to be subsequently deported eastwards.

After the crushing defeat of the Warsaw Rising Germans expelled half a million inhabitants from their capital, while the town itself was razed in a methodical and organized manner.

2,857,000 Polish citizens were deported to the German Reich and other German-controlled countries as forced labourers.

The re-invasion of Poland by the Red Army in 1944 launched a new wave of repressions. 27,000 people, the majority Home Army soldiers and activists of the Polish Underground State, were sent to Soviet gulag in the depths of the USSR. An additional 17,000 Poles from Pomerania and several thousand Poles and Germans from Silesia, were deported to the USSR as forced labourers.

The end of the Second World War did not bring end to forced resettlements. The seizure of nearly half of pre-war Polish territory by the Soviet Union forced successive mass migrations. Over 1.2 million Poles were resettled within Poland’s new borders, 300,000 found themselves within the new



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borders during the war, while 270,000 were permitted to return from the depths of the USSR. In exchange, several thousand Lithuanians and Byelorussians, and nearly half a million Ukrainians were resettled, in the latter case often forcibly, into the USSR from Poland.

In accordance with international agreements, Germans were resettled from territories awarded to Poland at the Potsdam Conference. Earlier almost 4 million fled before the advancing front line. Thru the end of 1947 a further 3.3 million Germans had been removed to British and Soviet-controlled zones. In the spring of 1947 the Polish communist authorities, under



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Operation “Wisla”, forcibly resettled 140,000 Ukrainians from south-eastern Poland, on the grounds of completing the liquidation remaining Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) partisan detachments.

As a result of the communist regime inflicted upon the post-war Poland nearly half a million of its



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citizens who found themselves in Western Europe during the war were forced to remain in exile. Most never saw their homeland again.

The last wave of migration occurred in during the period of de-Stalinisation, 1956–1959, when 250,000 returned from the USSR, many of them newly released from Soviet gulag or permitted to return from exile.

The tragic fate of those forced to resettle has been overshadowed by other, more cruel, war crimes. Millions lost their lives as a result of the Holocaust, hundreds of thousands fell victim to the inhuman Nazi concentration camps or Soviet gulags, or to extermination policies pursued by both invaders targeting Polish elites, symbolized by the Katyń massacre and the German AB Action.

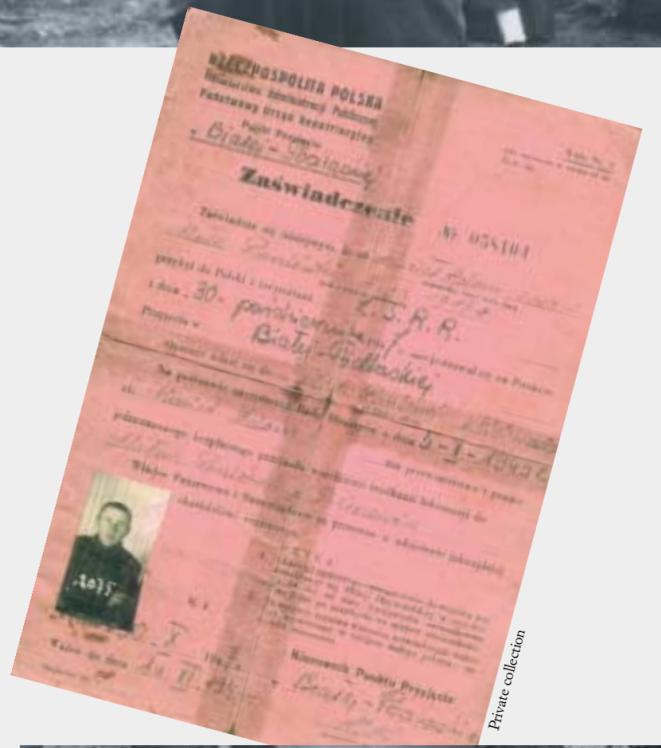
However, we owe homage to all the victims of the Second World War. Memory enables us to understand the difficult fates of Europe in the 20th century. Only on the basis of memory is genuine unity possible.



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For. E. Uchymiak/PAP/CAF



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