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PACIFICATION AND EXTERMINATION OF POLISH VILLAGES IN THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Rural areas had gone through a serious economic crisis during the interwar period, resulting in the ruination of numerous wealthy landowners and the impoverishment of a large number of small-scale farmers, and thus the rural population greeted the occupation period with anxiety. With World War I still fresh on their minds, the Polish farmers did expect increased exploitation, but reality proved to be much worse. This was because the Germans waged a total war which involved not only exploiting the resources available in the occupied territories, but also stifling all manifestations of Polishness and depopulating the conquered areas. Thus, World War II was a period of turmoil for Polish villages.

This applied in particular to the agricultural industry in the General Government (henceforth GG), seeing as the local farms were supposed to play an important role in supporting the military might of Germany. The agricultural sector was to supply the German market with food and cheap labour. Thus, Polish rural areas became the stage for many economic, social and demographic processes and phenomena. These had varying effects on agriculture, depending on the stage the war was in and the occupier's actions. However, the Polish economy was weak and undeveloped. That was why the Germans pursued a policy aimed at modernising agriculture throughout the entire occupation period (though most intensively in its early stages), targeting primarily large farms and landowners. The modernisation and investments were aimed at increasing productivity and building a colonisation base for future plans (the territory of the GG was to be Germanised after the war). Thus, during the wartime operations of September 1939, wherever possible and motivated by German interests, the Nazis avoided requisitioning or destroying property (this applied primarily to large farms). In practice, however, soldiers of the Wehrmacht looted shops, restaurants and farms, and raped local women.

Modern farming machines and tools were brought in, artificial fertilisers were popularised, as well as new species of plants and farm animals, and changes were introduced into the agricultural structure of the GG (land consolidation, confiscation of property which was then handed over to ethnic Germans, *Liegenschaften* – property managed by the

Wehrmacht, police officials and the SS), as well as the farmlands themselves and how farm work was organised.

In the case of large farms (especially those owned by members of the landed gentry), degressive taxes were imposed, as well as the prohibition of dividing the land (in more extreme cases, such divisions were made void, and the land was consolidated), exploitation privileges (e.g. forcing landless peasants to work for free during busy periods, decreased conscription of workers to perform compulsory labour, exemption from labour contributions) and preferential loans. These actions, and especially the situation on the agricultural market during the war, undoubtedly resulted in the strengthening of the economic situation of large farms. It was not until the final stages of the war that the market took a turn for the worse in the form of 1944's mass transports of produce by Germans to the Reich. In order to ensure that the productivity met the planned quota, the entire agricultural industry was placed under strict supervision – it was one of the most developed German administrative mechanisms in the GG.

With the deterioration of the Reich's military and economic situation, the mandatory crop and financial contributions imposed on Polish farmers were increased even further (making them particularly difficult to bear for small-scale farmers), and the methods of their collection were made even more ruthless. The Germans used a wide array of repressions against those who resisted, i.e. flogging, fines, confiscation of property, burning down buildings, arrests, imprisonment, labour camps, concentration camps and executions. Collective responsibility was frequently enforced. One of the most atrocious tools used by the German occupiers against Polish farmers was pacification, which meant deaths, suffering, destruction and deportation to camps and prisons. Therefore, it is no wonder why pacification operations left their mark on the identity of post-war villages.

With regard to the progress of the extermination and pacification operation, it is possible to divide the occupation period into at least several phases which differ in the scale and nature of the actions taken. The first phase is the so-called September terror phase, the second phase comprises the repressions caused by the actions of Hubal's unit, and the third phase lasted from approx. 1942 until the end of the war. During that period, the Germans carried out pacification operations (and frequently also extermination operations) which were part of the colonisation programme (e.g. in Zamojszczyzna), as well as actions spurred by the increasing resistance of farmers against the intensifying economic exploitation and by the increasing activity of the guerrilla forces. In this context, the Germans treated every part of the agricultural community in a distinct manner. While peasants were usually targets of

pacification operations, members of the landed gentry could expect individual repressions such as imprisonment, confiscation of property or the death penalty.

The first wave of terror employed against the rural population of central Poland (which became the GG) began during the September Campaign and lasted through the initial weeks of German occupation. The terror tactics were preventive in nature, their goal being to stifle any social resistance against the German invaders. However, the main target was the leading elites of the country (Operation Tannenberg), i.e. social and political activists, members of the uniformed services, officials, priests, landed gentry), not peasants. Nevertheless, this does not mean that peasant communities did not fall victim to repression. Units of the Wehrmacht, Selbstschutz, Einsatzgruppen and Volksdeutsche militias, carried out mass executions, often in retaliation for the actions of the Polish Army. Residents of small towns and villages also died in bombings, military operations and spontaneous executions organised for offences committed against Germany, sanctioned for racial reasons. For the elites living in small towns and villages (primarily members of the landed gentry), taking hostages and imprisoning them as a guarantee of social peace was one of the most terrible means of repression. In a time of military administration, the above-mentioned German formations carried out more than 760 singular and mass executions, including approx. 714 carried out by the Wehrmacht, killing approx. 20,000 people in the process. Some of these crimes were committed in the GG. More than 470 Polish villages were burnt to the ground. As many as 30,000 instances of property damage were recorded in 30 counties of the GG, including on farms. Personal property losses incurred by farmers reached nearly 30,000,000 zlotys. The most well-known instances of mass murder in what became the GG include: Dynów – 300, Częstochowa – 227, Zambrów – 200 (POWs), Tarnów – 200, Przemyśl – 600, Uryce – 100 (POWs), Majdan Wielki – 100 (POWs), Ciepielów – 300 (POWs). Hundreds of people were taken hostage and thousands were sent to prisons and the newly-established concentration camps, with most of those people coming from Western Poland (more than 800,000 Poles survived the concentration camps).

Between 1940 and 1942, the German extermination efforts went in different directions. The Polish intelligentsia was the first to be targeted (e.g. Intelligenzaktion Masowien, Sonderaktion Lublin and Krakau, Operation Burgerbraukeller, Ausserordentliche Befriedungsaktion – Operation AB), followed by the rural population in retaliation for its support shown to Hubal's unit (713 victims). During that period, farmers were expropriated for the benefit of a number of German institutions (e.g. the SS, Wehrmacht, police, state treasury). Primarily targeted were large farms, especially those owned by members of the

landed gentry, though farms owned by peasants were not spared either. By 1942, a good percentage of peasant-owned land and approx. one-fifth of gentry farms were taken over by the Germans, their previous owners left to seek other means of subsistence. This stemmed from the attempts to adapt the local agricultural industry to meet the needs of Germany, and also constituted a means of terrorising the Poles – the property policy was applied instrumentally and was supposed to instil obedience into Polish farmers. Forced conscription of cheap labour was also introduced. Workforce limits were imposed on farms, and excess workers were forced to report to perform compulsory labour. The auxiliary agricultural administration (i.e. communal officials, village heads and the Agricultural Production Commissions – priests, landowners and local officials) was made responsible for recruiting villagers who were to be sent to the Reich. In extreme cases, commission members were arrested for failing to meet the mandatory quotas. The system was inefficient, and the required manpower was acquired by way of street roundups (e.g. at train stations, fairs, after religious ceremonies). In total, 1.3 million people were taken from the territories of the GG, compared to the 600-700,000 taken from the annexed territories.

In the GG, the Germans confiscated at least one-third of produce in the form of mandatory contributions. The rural population began to resist the increasing exploitation of Polish agriculture, starting in 1942. Farmers would hide food, delay contribution deliveries, boycott the occupier's ordinances, forge agricultural statistics, trade illegally and support the military underground. This attitude forced the Germans to apply even more brutal measures in dealing with the Polish population. Penal expeditions became the primary tool, which transformed into pacification operations in rural areas. Each such operation was different. Initially, the majority of these actions targeted villagers who had failed to meet their mandatory contribution quotas, and were later (in particular from 1943 onward) combined with anti-guerrilla operations. The efforts made in the Zamojszczyzna region, where the local rural community joined the guerrillas in combating the deportation operation, were a unique occurrence during that time. The Germans deported approx. 110,000 people from 293 villages in Zamojszczyzna, and a number of them were pacified.

In the GG, pacification efforts were primarily the domain of police units, primarily the Ordnungspolizei (the gendarmerie), security police units, the Wehrmacht and units composed of Volksdeutsche and collaborators (formations belonging to the so-called Ostlegionen or Osttruppen). While pacification operations were carried out all over the GG, they were particularly frequent in the District of Radom and Lublin, as well as in the District of Kraków (though slightly less so, with the exception of the north-western part) and Warsaw (north-

eastern territories). The operations carried out in the District of Galicia, however, differed in nature – the Polish population was exterminated by Ukrainian military and paramilitary organisations (both underground and those which collaborated with Germany).

The pacifications were at their most frequent in the autumn of 1943 and the summer of 1944. This was related to the mounting resistance of the farming community, as well as the increasing guerrilla activity in the GG. That is also why the involvement of the Wehrmacht also increased during that time – in late autumn of 1943; its military units carried out more than 100 such operations. It is estimated that approximately 650 operations targeting villages were carried out in the rural areas of the GG (excluding Galicia) between 1942 and 1944, resulting in the deaths of more than 17,000 people and the total or partial destruction of nearly 200 villages. In Eastern Lesser Poland, the Ukrainians carried out ethnic cleansing of the Polish inhabitants of villages and small towns. As a comparison, more than 800 such operations were carried out on the current territory of Poland between 1939 and 1945, and during 84 of those operations, most of the villagers were killed, and the villages themselves were destroyed partially or in their entirety. More than 10,000 villages became targets of German repressions during the occupation, and in 900 of those, the Nazis killed between a small number and several hundred residents. As an example, 370 repression operations were carried out in the District of Kraków, resulting in the deaths of more than 2500 people. In the District of Lublin, approx. 180 villages were terrorised by the Germans. Many of the aforementioned 10,000 villages were located in the GG. In addition to the pacification and terrorist operations, executions (in the District of Lublin, more than 77,000 Poles died in mass executions), imprisonments, deportations to concentration and labour camps and arrests were also frequent. The latter affected both the landed gentry and peasants. Farmers were most frequently arrested for selling food illegally (smuggling), helping Jews, supporting guerrillas and as a preventive measure. Imprisonments of Mandatory Contribution Commissions (made up of members of the landed gentry, priests, village heads, commune heads, teachers, among others) to force villagers to make their mandatory contributions was another form of repression.

The Germans also exterminated the landed gentry, as in the District of Radom, where they murdered 163 people. According to the latest estimates, more than 2.7 million Poles in total died at the hands of the Germans, though some historians indicate that the number of Poles murdered was between 3 to 6 million, based on the demographic data from 1939–1946. Throughout the occupation period, the Nazi terror only increased in intensity, and the number of victims steadily grew, with a high percentage of civilian casualties.

| Years | Number of victims |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1939/1940 | 144,000 |
| 1940/1941 | 352,000 |
| 1941/1942 | 407,000 |
| 1942/1943 | 541,000 |
| 1943/1944 | 681,000 |
| Total | 2.125 million |

The above table illustrates this perfectly – 2.125 million is the number of people killed during pacification operations, in prisons and camps, as well as outside of prisons and camps (e.g. executions), most of them civilians. When the pacification efforts were at their most intensive, i.e. between 1943 and 1944, the number of victims doubled compared to 1940-1941, i.e. during the period of finalising the German plans for the Polish lands and Poles.