

This is the Epilogue which I wrote for my translation of Hermann Bachmann, Through the German Colonies of the Beresan District and Colonist Tales, Forward by Joseph Schnurr, Translated with Commentaries by Roland Wagner, Ph.D., published by the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Libraries, North Dakota State University, 2002.

-- Roland M. Wagner

Epilogue – Bachmann’s Historical Context: the Rising Tide to the Deluge

“Memories of the *Heimat*” strikes a melancholy tone as a conclusion to Bachmann’s humorous tales, yet it is fitting. When he reminisced about these earlier years, they must indeed have seemed like an innocent dream world that was soon swept away. This poem was one of his later works, published in Germany where he could speak his mind freely. It gives us a glimpse of his retrospective views about the Soviet regime, balancing the veneer of Communist propaganda that surfaces at various points in his earlier writings.

As Joseph Schnurr noted in his Forward, Bachmann strove to protect the ethnic identity and folk traditions of the German colonists by emphasizing their compatibility with Communist ideology. The pathos of the concluding paragraph in his travelogue (Part One) is striking when he states that the colonists had adapted well to Communism and had even struck a balance between the old and the new, abandoning the unfettered lust for material possessions while still retaining their old busy-bee diligence. It is anyone’s guess if he seriously believed this optimistic assessment or if it was just another slogan.

Bachmann’s tales depict life in the German colonies during the latter years of Lenin’s so-called New Economic Policy (1921 to 1928), at the cusp of the transition to Stalin’s first Five-Year Plan. The NEP is generally remembered as a time of modest social and economic recovery. The robbery, chaos, and mass murder were behind them and life had returned to a semblance of normalcy. Hints of the devastation of the German colonies during the Civil War years loom like death’s heads in his narratives at various points, as in his passing remarks about the “grave battles” fought by the villagers to protect themselves and the many “grim ruins” that were still visible.

The NEP era was a lull in the storm, a metaphor which Bachmann himself used to describe those times. There were widespread fears of even worse times to come. When the “Colonist Tales” (Part Two) appeared in print the political climate was shifting. One of his tales is titled, “A Deluge in the Autumn of 1928.” Although a “great deluge” didn’t literally happen in 1928 as many people feared which would sweep away their lives, Stalin soon unleashed a worse flood of sorts leading to a wave of repression and executions during the “Great Terror” in the 1930s, culminating in the deportation of entire ethnic groups to Siberia during the war years. Bachmann and his ethnic German compatriots were soon swept away by the tide of these events.

The broader historical context in which Bachmann wrote will be reviewed in this epilogue, tracing the German colonist experience in Russia during the early Soviet era, up through the political

trial and prosecution of Bachmann and his academic colleagues. Some of this story will be told in the words of the colonists themselves, using extracts from letters that appeared in local German language newspapers in North Dakota during the 1920s.

The Nineteenth Century Background

Between 1763 and 1820 the Tsars launched an ambitious plan to economically develop the borderlands of the empire by establishing a series of agricultural colonies along the Volga and in the river valleys flowing into Black Sea. Invitations were issued for foreign colonists, drawing an especially enthusiastic response from ethnic German farmers and craftsmen in Alsace, Rhineland Pfalz, Baden, and other nearby realms. Waves of immigrants trekked eastwards, lured by the generous offers of free land and the guarantees of religious and cultural freedom, as well as exemption from military service. By 1820 the German settlers had founded some 300 agricultural colonies, under the supervision of the tsarist regime. By the end of the century their population had swelled to 1.3 million and their original colonies had branched into numerous daughter colonies.¹

Unfortunately, as they were reaching their apex of prosperity the climate of tolerance in Russia deteriorated. The fate of the German colonists became mired in a rising backlash of “anti-foreigner” bitterness, which eventually came to permeate Russian society at the highest levels. Tsarist Russia had rapidly expanded into a vast, multi-ethnic and polyglot state, but this heritage of conquest and annexation was not without a price. The regime increasingly found that it had to wrestle with the thorny problem of containing and controlling its many ethnic minorities, who comprised the great majority in the border regions. Ukrainians, Poles, Balts, Armenians and other “national minorities” comprised about 40 percent of the population overall and they strove to preserve some degree of autonomy and identity. After the abortive Polish insurrection of 1863, Russia’s military planners grew increasingly concerned with the security of the western periphery of the empire. Their concerns were exacerbated as Russia’s sphere of influence increasingly came into competition with Austria-Hungary and the Ottomans in the Balkans, then later with the newly unified German empire.

Reactionary anti-Germanism began to take root in Russia during the Slavophile movement of the 1840s. At that time Germans were emblematic of the Western influence which predominated in the upper echelons of Russian society.² The Slavophiles initially targeted the wealthy and highly influential Baltic German nobility, many of whom had received key administrative and advisory posts in the tsarist regime. Anti-German rhetoric heated up during the later Pan-Slavism movement, an expansionist form of Russian nationalism with messianic overtones. Russia, it was asserted, was the direct heir of the

¹ The 1897 census figures showed 1,790,489 German-speaking subjects in the Russian empire, 1.3 million of whom lived in agricultural villages. By the onset of the Soviet era the number of ethnic Germans had grown to about 2,000,000, and they had established more than 10,000 villages (Ingeborg Fleischhauer, Ingeborg, “The Germans’ Role in Tsarist Russia: a Reappraisal,” in Ingeborg Fleischhauer and Benjamin Pinkus, The Soviet Germans, Past and Present, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986, p. 13). They were the fourteenth largest among the approximately 125 ethnic groups in the Soviet Union (Gerd Stricker, “Preface,” p. xxv in Samuel Sinner, The Open Wound, the Genocide of German Ethnic Minorities in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1915 – 1949 – and Beyond, Fargo, N.D.: Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University, 2000).

² Terry Martin, “The German Question in Russia, 1848-1896,” Russian History/Histoire Russe, 18, No. 4 (1991).

Byzantine empire and the preordained champion and protector of Russia's "little brethren" Slavic peoples throughout Eastern Europe.³

Russian nationalistic ideology became especially pervasive at the highest levels during the reign of Alexander III (1881-1894). He came to the throne after the assassination of his father, Alexander II, amidst growing "nihilistic" revolutionary violence. The new Tsar quickly reimposed autocratic control and rolled back many of the basic rights and freedoms that had been granted by his predecessor. A network of secret police agents and informers was established and the empire was effectively reduced to a police state.⁴ "Russification" efforts to promote the Russian language, the Orthodox faith, and Russian administrative institutions intensified throughout the empire among all its subject peoples.⁵ Roman Catholics in Poland, Lutherans in the Baltics, and Moslems in the east became subjected to rigorous restrictions. Jews were forbidden to purchase land in rural areas, their Pale of Settlement was reduced in size, and pogroms soon broke out in Kiev, Odessa, and elsewhere.⁶

Despite Bismarck's adroit diplomatic efforts, relationships between Russia and Germany became strained after Russia's ambitions for greater control in the Balkans ended in disappointment at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The turning point came in 1887 when Bulgarian nationalists managed to shake off their dependency on Russia, with tacit support from Germany and Austria-Hungary. The "Three Emperors League" collapsed and Russian foreign policy took a decidedly anti-German turn towards alliance with France.⁷

The German colonists had been resident in the Black Sea region for about three generations by that point, and even longer in the Volga region. As a group, they had become extraordinarily successful in their farming ventures and their acquisition of farmlands from local Russian gentry was skyrocketing.⁸ They had generally been valued as loyal subjects and highly productive citizens, with little effort made to enforce their assimilation into the Russian mainstream. However, their economic success and their ethnic distinctiveness made them high profile targets during the escalating anti-foreigner backlash in Alexander III's reign.

Concerns about growing German land ownership initially centered on the western border provinces of Volhynia, Kiev, and Podolia where Russian officials were alarmed by a massive influx of German settlers since the 1860s.⁹ Although these new settlers didn't have the legal status of the earlier "colonists" in

³ Edward Crankshaw, The Shadow of the Winter Palace, NY: Viking Press, 1976. See chapter 14, "How Great is Russia!"

⁴ Richard Pipes, Russia Under the Old Regime, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974. See chapter 11, "Towards the Police State."

⁵ An excellent discussion of Russification policies is provided by Theodore R. Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1915, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996.

⁶ Richard Charques, The Twilight of Imperial Russia, Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 44.

⁷ Charques, 1972, p. 46.

⁸ The Black Sea colonists owned a large percentage of the arable land, an estimated 11 percent in Bessarabia, 20 percent in Cherson, 38 percent in Taurida (Crimea), and 25 percent in Jekaterinoslav (Karl Stumpp, The German-Russians, Bonn: Edition Atlantic-Forum, 1971, second edition, p. 25).

⁹ Fleischhauer, 1986, p. 343.

the Volga and Black Sea regions, German farmers everywhere had come to be routinely viewed alike by that point.¹⁰ This was an ominous portent. As the rhetoric about protection of the western provinces heated up, it began to color perceptions of ethnic German farmers and craftsmen throughout the empire. Policy debates came to center on their ethnic and linguistic traits, despite the fact that the older colonist populations posed no credible threat to national security.

As Neutatz¹¹ points out, conditions were ripe for turning the German colonists -- now unfortunately associated in Russia's national consciousness with a powerful foreign competitor -- into scapegoats for the unresolved problems of Russia's agrarian policies. Alexander II had emancipated the serfs, but without adequate provision of farmland to meet their needs. The ethnic Germans were increasingly viewed with envy and resentment, now regarded as "privileged foreign intruders" in Russia. In the 1880s anti-German rhetoric reached near hysterical levels in the nationalist Russian press. Articles dwelled on the "problem" of controlling the land acquisitions of the German colonists. Although they had consistently been loyal and staunch supporters of the Tsars, the fact that they had retained their language and customs -- rights to which they had been guaranteed by the Tsars, as did other national minorities -- now made them subject to suspicion and slander. These "foreign subjects of the Tsar," it was charged, were displacing "native Russian people" and taking over lands that had been sanctified by "Russian blood." Even worse, they represented an advance "conquest by foreigners of Russian soil," the "spearhead" of an impending assault by Bismarck's armies.¹²

Legislative efforts soon followed to curtail the growth of land ownership by ethnic Germans, undercutting their ability to provide for their growing families. The colonists were excluded from access to the Peasant Land Bank, established in 1882 to act as the national agency to provide long-term low-interest credit in the transfer of gentry and state lands to the Russian peasantry. The Germans argued -- without success -- that they should be treated equally because their special "colonist" legal status had been taken away from them by Alexander II in 1871 and they had become subject to local **Zemstvo** administration, along with the general Russian peasantry. They hoped that lawmakers would reject the widespread stereotype that all the colonists were wealthy and recognize that many were also suffering from the growing problem of landlessness. German farmers were especially distraught when lands that they had leased and developed were taken over by the Land Bank, then resold to Russian peasants. Germans remained excluded from this financial resource, with very few exceptions, until the end of the tsarist regime. As Long has noted, "[a]lthough they were technically excluded on the grounds of being 'settler proprietors' rather than 'peasants,' the exclusion in truth resulted from the rising xenophobia, particularly the anti-German feeling fueled by the press, the rampant nationalism, and the Russification policies of the government of Alexander III."¹³

¹⁰ Martin, 1991, p. 408.

¹¹ Dietmar Neutatz, *Die "deutsche Frage" im Schwarzmeergebiet und in Wolhynien, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Östlichen Europa, Band 37*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993, p. 436.

¹² Neutatz, 1993, p. 142.

¹³ J. W. Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed, the Volga Germans, 1860 – 1917*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988, p. 126.

In 1887 foreign settlers lacking Russian citizenship were forbidden to acquire land outside urban areas in Volhynia, Kiev, and Podolia. The primary intent of this legislation was to stem the tide of German settlers and to restrict investments by German companies, although diplomatic expediency prevented them from being singled out as an ethnic group.¹⁴ By the end of 1889 the vast majority of applications for citizenship filed by Germans had remained turned down. In 1892 a stricter version of this law was enacted, forbidding persons of foreign ancestry – even if they were Russian citizens – from acquiring land outside urban areas in Volhynia and the other western provinces. Persons of Russian ethnic origin and those who had embraced the Orthodox faith were exempt from these restrictions.¹⁵

Such efforts to stem the growing German presence soon began to backfire when Russian gentry realized that the law imposed restrictions on their own best customers, thereby reducing their property values.¹⁶ It also became evident that investments by German enterprises in the region were economically crucial and that numerous exceptions had to be made.¹⁷ As is always the case, the Russian government ran up against the problem that discrimination is difficult to implement when it affects the business interests of persons other than the targeted minority. This economic reality continued to plague efforts to erect bureaucratic barriers against the German minority over the next quarter century.

On the opposite side of the empire restrictions were also imposed on land acquisitions by the colonists in the Volga region, despite the fact that they posed not even the remotest risk to national security. As their population steadily increased, the Volga colonists also suffered from chronic land shortages. As late as 1905 their petitions to access the Peasant Land Bank continued to be turned down by the Ministry of Finance, which “...lamely justified its decision on the grounds that approval would set a precedent that would encourage petitions from other [German] colonists.” In 1906 the Volga colonists were dealt a crushing setback when they were forbidden to purchase or settle on state lands in Samara, Orenburg, and Ufa provinces, which until that point had been their major means for augmenting the lands available for their tillage.¹⁸

Nicholas II (1894-1918), the ill-fated last Tsar, haphazardly continued some of these policies, although not with the persistency of his predecessor. During the revolutionary outbreaks of 1905 the pent-up resentment of non-Russian minorities erupted. To restore order, Nicholas agreed to convene a Duma and made promises of religious and cultural freedom. The brief period of quasi-parliamentary rule from 1905–1906 brought large blocks of minorities into national political life for the first time. A broad spectrum of parties began to vie for their support. These included the leftist Social Democrats (both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks), the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the centrist “liberal bourgeoisie” parties, the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) and Progressives.¹⁹

¹⁴ Neutatz 1993, p. 75-77.

¹⁵ Neutatz, 1993, p. 120-121.

¹⁶ Neutatz, 1993, p. 92.

¹⁷ Fleischhauer, 1986, p. 349; Neutatz, 1993, p. 125-127.

¹⁸ Long, 1988, pp. 126-128.

¹⁹ N. Riasanovsky, A History of Russia, second edition, London: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 457-58.

Although most German colonists didn't actively participate in the revolution of 1905,²⁰ they were encouraged by the prospect that the Duma would restore and enhance their ethnic rights. For a brief period the nationalistic Right withheld attacks against the Germans in recognition of their loyalty to the crown. However, after 1907 the tsarist government reasserted power against the Duma and renewed the old policies of suppression of the national minorities.²¹ Debate soon resumed about enacting further legislation to restrict land ownership by Germans in the western provinces.²² A "Neo-Slavic" movement sprang up in the newspapers. The Germans were again charged with disloyalty for preserving their ethnic language and folkways, and their Duma representatives were accused of being "against the national Russian people and the interests of the state."²³

In 1910 Stolypin, the Minister of Internal Affairs, attempted to revive the law of 1892 prohibiting citizens of foreign ancestry from owning land in the three western provinces of Volhynia, Podolia, and Kiev.²⁴ The Polish delegate was reassured that the specific intention of the law was not directed against Poles, but rather against the German "*Drang nach Osten*." A group of German Octobrists, headed by Karl Lindemann, managed to defeat the measure in 1911.²⁵ After Stolypin's assassination that year, his successor, Makarov, introduced a reworked version of the law in 1912. The proposed legislation was expanded to include Bessarabia, with exclusions for ethnic Poles, Czechs, and persons of the Orthodox faith. The Black Sea Germans became greatly alarmed when they realized that legislation no longer targeted just Volhynia and the western provinces. Karl Lindemann's "German group" again managed to defeat the initiative when it reached the Duma in 1914, with support from Russian banking interests and others concerned about the economic and political impact of the proposed law.²⁶ At that point the issue became moot when events were overtaken by the First World War.

²⁰ In the Saratov region some Volga Germans participated in the broad-based liberation movement that swept the area (James Long, "The Volga Germans of Saratov Province Between Reform and Revolution, 1861-1905," pp. 139-159 in Rex A. Wage & S. J. Seregny, eds., *Politics and Society in Provincial Russia: Saratov, 1590-1917*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1989).

²¹ H. Seton-Watson, "Russian Nationalism in Historical Perspective," in Robert Conquest (ed.), *The Last Empire, Nationality and the Soviet Future*, Stanford University: Hoover Institute Press, 1986, p. 23.

²² B. Pinkus, & I. Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1987, p. 49.

²³ Neutatz, 1993, p. 155-157.

²⁴ Neutatz, 1993, p. 162.

²⁵ Neutatz, 1993, p. 175; see also David G. Rempel, "The Expropriation of the German Colonists in South Russia During the Great War," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 4, no. 1, March, 1932, p. 51.

²⁶ Rempel (1932) provides a detailed summary of the sequence of events around the proposed legislations of 1910 and 1912. He notes that "[m]anifestly, the conservatives, who controlled both these dumas had opposed these proposals for purely selfish reasons" (p. 530). The primary opposition to the legislation was spearheaded by the Octobrists, who as Sommer (1940, p. 77) notes, opposed it not only because it violated the property rights of Russian citizens of foreign origins (those who had acquired Russian citizenship after 1888), but also because it was an attack on the prestige of their party.

Toward the Debacle: the First World War

Spark was set to this tinder when the First World War broke out in August, 1914. The initial hopes for an easy Russian victory were dashed by early defeats on the battlefield, and the nationalistic Russian press began to make strident demands for action. The “German question” in Russia quickly became radicalized and the government bitterly turned against its citizens of German ancestry, using them as scapegoats for the defeats.

German newspapers and publishing houses were closed. It was forbidden to speak German in public, and Germans were not allowed to gather together in groups larger than two persons. The German language was forbidden in schools, churches, and by soldiers in the Tsar’s army. Ministers who continued to preach in German were arrested and exiled to Siberia.²⁷

Others were dismissed from their jobs or expelled from societies and clubs. ‘Germans are bad for Russian industry’ became a popular wartime expression and there were many manufacturers who ordered the dismissal of every German. ...German works were removed from the repertoire of theatres, concert halls and opera houses. German place-names were Russified. St. Petersburg was renamed Petrograd...²⁸

During the long period of suspicion and prejudice before the war years, the German colonists repeatedly affirmed that they were loyal subjects of the Tsar and they demonstrated this at every opportunity.²⁹ As the ultra-nationalist backlash mounted during the war, the German community continued to avow its loyalty and even to display an exaggerated patriotism. “People with German surnames applied to the Imperial Chancellery to change them. Many emphasized their Russian patriotism and identity in their new surnames: Romanov, Novorusskii (‘Newrussian’), and Shmidt-Slavianskii (‘Schmidt-Slavic’).”³⁰ About 250,000 ethnic Germans served in the Russian army, yet even they were treated with suspicion. Soldiers with German surnames were transferred to the Turkish front, and most were removed from major leadership positions.³¹ As defeats mounted on the battlefield, the media charged that the generals were traitors. General Rennenkampf sought to demonstrate his patriotic zeal by demanding that all his officers with German surnames swear a special loyalty oath.³²

Even more ominously, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had plans drawn up already by August, 1914, at the beginning of the war, for the mass expulsion of ethnic German settlers throughout the entire western border region of the empire and the seizure of their property, as well as that of all

²⁷ Neutatz, 1993, p. 430.

²⁸ Orlando Figes & B. Kolonitskii, Interpreting the Russian Revolution, the Language and Symbols of 1917, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 159.

²⁹ As an example, recall how the colonists went to great lengths to demonstrate their loyalty during the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Beresan colonies in 1910.

³⁰ Figes & Kolonitskii, 1999, p. 159.

³¹ Ingeborg Fleischhauer, ***Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion***, Stuttgart: **Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte**; Nr. 46, 1983, p. 25.

³² Figes & Kilonitskii, 199, p. 159.

citizens of enemy states.³³ Public opinion greatly supported such an action. The groundwork had been laid for a drastic lashing out at the German ethnic minority.

By the second month of the war the Russian army had already begun mass expulsions of German settlers from the Baltic and Polish regions and their relocation beyond the Volga. At the same time, legislative preparations were made for larger scale action. In November, 1914, the Minister of Internal Affairs submitted legislation forbidding German colonists to acquire land in rural districts.³⁴ This was followed by a second “liquidation” law on February 2, 1915 establishing zones along the entire Russo-German and Russo-Austrian border, varying between 100 to 150 *werst* wide, extending from the northernmost tip of the Baltic sea to the Rumanian frontier, and from there along the Black Sea to the Caucasus, encompassing some 25 provinces. Within these zones, all persons subject to the terms of the first law were mandated to sell their properties acquired since June 1, 1870 to the Peasant Land Bank. They were granted a period of 10 to 16 months (depending on which zone they were in) to liquidate their property, and anything not disposed of by that deadline had to be sold at public auction.³⁵ The Council of Ministers granted exemptions for those who had become citizens before 1880, converts to the Orthodox faith, veterans who had served in the military or those who had an ancestor who had done so. The lands that had been granted to the German “mother colonies” early in the nineteenth century were also exempted.³⁶ The nationalistic press was elated over these measures designed to “liberate Russia from the German yoke,” although they regretted the exemptions and demanded that all ethnic Germans be included.

Military conditions continued to worsen and the mood of the populace grew darker. In early May, 1915, the armies of the Central Powers broke through into Galicia. By the end of the summer the Russian armies had been expelled from Poland, they were rolled back as far as Riga and 14 of the western provinces were occupied. In May, 1915, anti-German pogroms erupted in several cities, an eerie precursor to *Kristalnacht* under the Nazis. Mobs rampaged for three days in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other areas, looting and burning some 759 German shops, murdering and injuring many people.³⁷

As the scale of atrocities ratcheted upwards, local governors and officials in the western region, in cooperation with Russian military commanders, seized the opportunity to ethnically cleanse the border provinces of Poles, Latvians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Jews, ethnic Germans, and others who had been targeted as “disloyal collaborators” with the enemy.³⁸ The collapse of the Russian army was

³³ P. Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking, Refugees in Russia During World War I*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 22. See also Detlef Brandes, “From the Persecutions in the First World War Up to the Deportation,” in Gerd Stricker (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas: Rußland*, Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1997.

³⁴ Rempel, 1932, p. 54.

³⁵ Rempel, 1932, pp. 54-55.

³⁶ Brandes, 1997.

³⁷ Brandes, 1997.

³⁸ Gatrell (1999, p. 22) notes that “[t]he sources speak menacingly of population ‘cleansing’ (*ochishchenie*).” Mass relocation of populations was certainly a very direct way to remove some of the ethnic thorns in the empire’s borderlands that had plagued tsarist authorities since the nineteenth century. Gatrell characterizes these forced mass migrations during the war as a tool for the nation-building process, a method for promoting the

viewed as a “betrayal” and “reprisals” had to be taken. As the army retreated, they took hundreds of civilian hostages, including the leadership of the German, Polish and Ukrainian communities who were suspected of “criminal intentions.” In May, 1915, all Jews in Kovno and Kurland provinces west of the Kaunas-Bauske line were ordered to leave their homes and move east. About 200,000 were expelled from this region.³⁹

Mass deportations of ethnic Germans escalated in the spring of 1915. The supposed 10 month grace period that was allowed by the “liquidation law” was ignored and within a few weeks between 150,000 to 200,000 Germans had been forcibly uprooted in the Polish provinces, Volhynia, Kiev, and Bessarabia and shipped eastward. As Weeks notes,

[M]ass deportation was already well under way before the Great Retreat, and it would be a mistake to assume that the mass deportation projects were merely an appendage to the policy of scorched earth... [T]he most important factor explaining why colonists were singled out was the rapid move by the government toward a major program to permanently expropriate German landholdings. These laws, which were well on the way to final drafting when the first deportations occurred, transformed mass deportations from a temporary security measure into a program to permanently transform the demography of landholdings and nationality in vast territories along the western and southern borders and extending far behind front lines.⁴⁰

Initially the wives and children of those serving in the military on the front were allowed to remain on their farms (some one-third of the population), but by 1916 they too had been forcibly deported. The trek eastward under armed guard took as long as four months. By the time they reached their destination they were exhausted, malnourished, and ill. At least one-third, an estimated minimum of 50,000 people, died as a result of this mass violation of human rights.⁴¹

“crystallization of Russianness” by enhancing awareness of “otherness” from the empire’s targeted ethnic minorities (p. 163). Latvian nationalists were well aware of this. They charged that the forced migration of their compatriots during the war was part of a plan by tsarist authorities to extinguish their ethnic identity, that Siberia was “the graveyard of Latvian identity” (Gatrell, 1999, p. 158).

³⁹ Gatrell, 1999, pp. 21-22, 31.

⁴⁰ Theodore R. Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1915, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996, p. 162 and p. 165.

⁴¹ Rempel (1932, pp. 49-67) cites 50,000 deaths, but some estimates are as high as 100,000. See also Fr. Rink, “*Die Vertreibung der Deutschen Kolonien aus Wolhynien 1915/16*,” *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Rusland*, 1966, pp. 61-65. A brief account is also available in Adam Giesinger, From Catherine to Khrushchev, Winnipeg, Manitoba: Marian Press, 1974, p. 272. It should be noted that Fleischhauer has argued that these deportations were not “anti-German” because other ethnic groups were also targeted, and she even justified the operation by asserting that it was a “temporary” evacuation necessitated by “realism” (see the summary and discussion in Sinner, 2000, p. 8). This rather naïve argument runs contrary to virtually all past and current analyses by historians, such as by Weeks (1996), Gatrell (1999) and Lohr (1999), and it flaws her otherwise excellent writings on German-Russian history. Sinner points out that although other minorities were also targeted, this does not preclude the reality of

On December 13, 1915 the Council of Ministers expanded the liquidation laws to include the state lands that were originally granted to the German mother colonies. The zone of confiscations was also expanded to include Finland, 29 provinces in western and southern Russia, the entire Caucasus and the Amur regions as far east as Saratov and Samara. The colonists were mandated to sell their property to the Peasant Land Bank, which would then reallocate it to ethnic Russians. The Bank was empowered to set its own devalued price for the lands (ranging from 20% to 60% of the pre-war value), payable as bonds redeemable after 25 years, which could not be sold in the interim. This amounted to a form of de facto confiscation. Community owned properties were to be transferred to the Bank without compensation. By Feb. 6, 1917 the law had been extended to include virtually the entire Russian empire, including the Volga and Siberia, excluding only uninhabitable regions. A special corps of state police was dispatched to South Russia to facilitate the liquidation process. They compiled an inventory of 3,500,000 dessiatines of land subject to confiscation. An estimated 500,000 dessiatines had already been seized by March, 1917.⁴²

Fortunately for the colonists, the regime of Nicholas II fell at that point. Their faith in the tsarist regime had been shattered and they greeted its downfall with elation.

The Provisional Government

For a brief eight month period a Provisional Government attempted to hold the country together under a coalition of liberal-leftist parties, with Mensheviks and later Kerensky playing leading roles. They disbanded the tsarist police, issued decrees affirming democracy, freedom of the press, the right to strike, and the abolition of all restrictions based on “class, religion, and nationality.”

Lenin recognized that the Bolsheviks couldn’t seize power at that point because they were yet a small minority, so he advocated patient propaganda. A major opportunity was provided by the Provisional Government’s insistence on continuing the unpopular war with Germany. As defeats on the battlefield mounted, the brief honeymoon with the Provisional Government collapsed. By June, 1917, the Russian army was in disarray and soldiers began deserting en masse. The situation soon became unmanageable. Strikes mounted in the cities. The Russian peasantry lost faith in the government when it became apparent that the promises for land redistribution were empty rhetoric. In the political vacuum of 1917, the people simply began taking matters into their own hands. The peasants began expropriating land without government approval. Local nationalist movements sprang up in Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and they began unilaterally declaring autonomy. The government recognized the independence of Poland, which was a moot point because it was no longer under their control. Armenia

anti-Germanism, especially given the long buildup of anti-German rhetoric and policies during the tsarist era. By analogy, the reality of anti-Semitism during the Nazi regime was not precluded by Nazi acts against the Gypsies and other targeted groups. In all instances of genocide throughout history the perpetrator regimes attempt to justify their atrocities (e.g., similar Nazi arguments that the Jews were “Communist sympathisers” and “dangerous partisans”).

⁴² Rempel, 1932, p. 62; Long, 1988, p. 232.

was granted self-rule and Finland's constitution and parliament were restored, although recognition of its formal independence was withheld.⁴³

The Bolsheviks seized the initiative by advocating all these causes, despite the fact that some of the issues ran squarely against their own ideology. They had not favored redistribution of land into private plots, as the peasantry demanded, but rather the nationalization of resources and consolidation of land into cooperative farms. The Bolsheviks drew most of their support from soldiers and the urban proletariat, and they distrusted the peasantry as backward, reactionary, and obsessed with the kulak acquisitive mentality. Nevertheless, they bided their time and went along with the spontaneous partitioning of the land. The land seizures were basically peasant led initiatives associated with no particular party, although the Socialist Revolutionaries had been the strongest champions of radical land redistribution.⁴⁴ Werth characterizes the Bolshevik "Decree on Land" in 1917 as little more than an "effort to hijack the Socialist Revolutionary program."⁴⁵ Besancon similarly notes that in these early years, Bolshevik policies were dictated more by the "art of compromise." Their bottom line was to make "...temporary concession to practical considerations...in order to allow the ideology to retain power while awaiting the opportunity for complete victory when conditions permit the withdrawal of concessions."⁴⁶ Lenin was a supreme political tactician. "In his quest for power he let no ideological hindrance stand in his way...land to the peasants, factories to the workers, peace to the soldiers and bread for everyone."⁴⁷

The Political Attitudes of the German Colonists in 1917

Although the German-Russians had largely distanced themselves from the earlier political upheavals of 1905, they too were swept up by the momentous changes of 1917. Fleischhauer has provided an overview of the spectrum of political feeling among them during this time period.⁴⁸

Initially the German-Russians had great hope in the Provisional Government, as did the other national minorities and the peasantry as a whole. A "Pan-Russia Union of Russian Citizens of German Nationality and Mennonites" formed under the leadership of Karl Lindemann and his colleagues in Moscow, in collaboration with a similar group in Odessa.⁴⁹ The Union sought to foster unity and to restore the national honor and constitutional rights of the German-Russians (their slogan was

⁴³ For a detailed summary, see N. Werth, "A State Against Its People," in Stephane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panne, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartosek, and Jean-Louis Margolin, The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 43-44.

⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick, 1994, p. 23.

⁴⁵ Werth, 1999, pp. 47, 51.

⁴⁶ Alain Besancon, "Nationalism and Bolshevism in the USSR," in Robert Conquest (ed.), The Last Empire, Nationality and the Soviet Future, Stanford University: Hoover Institute Press, 1986, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Neil Harding, "Lenin, Socialism and the State in 1917," in Edith Rogovin Frankel, J. Frankel, & B. Knei-Paz, Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 288.

⁴⁸ Ingeborg Fleischhauer, "the Ethnic Germans in the Russian Revolution," in Edith Rogovin Frankel, J. Frankel, and Baruch Knei-Paz (eds.), Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 274-284.

⁴⁹ Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 51.

“liquidation of the liquidations!”).⁵⁰ They demanded the removal of discriminatory legislation, the right to use their mother tongue, and the restoration of their own schools and institutions of higher education. Feeling betrayed by the Octobrists, who had voted with the nationalists for discriminatory legislation and the infamous “liquidation laws” early in the war, most Germans allied with the Kadets and Trudoviki (Kerensky’s followers), the leading players in the Provisional Government.

The creation of ethnic homelands with local self-rule had emerged as a rallying cry among national minorities, but the wide geographic dispersal of the German-Russians prevented them from reaching unanimity on this issue. Each regional committee developed a different platform in response to its own local political conditions. The Central Committee of the Union was based in Petrograd, with branches throughout the country wherever there was a substantial local German population. A group of Baltic-German Octobrists under the leadership of Baron Meyendorff favored a local “independent liberal” platform. Lindemann’s group in Moscow favored the development of a broader national list of German candidates cutting across the spectrum of political parties, to be supported by German voters throughout the country. The groups in Odessa and Saratov disapproved of an ethnic list and they favored unity with broader multi-ethnic democratic parties such as the Socialist Revolutionaries and, above all, the Kadets, which advocated minority rights. There was strong support in the Volga region for the creation of a German homeland with self-rule, also a popular issue with the branch in Omsk, Siberia. The Mennonite assemblies in South Russia were generally similar to the Saratov committee, especially in their views on land reforms. All branches of the Union generally advocated democracy, the right to moderate sized private estates, and limited land redistribution for the needy.⁵¹

There was also a fledgling “Union of Volga German Socialists,” spearheaded by Socialist Revolutionaries in May, 1917, which included both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. It later became the core of the Communist party among the Volga Germans, with a strong infusion of support from German and Hungarian prisoners of war.⁵² The Bolsheviks scored some victories in the cities of the Volga region, drawing support from the German-Russian mill workers and above all from the returning soldiers.

According to Long, the Volga colonists had little interest in the more radical political agendas, nor were they much drawn to the German Union, the leadership of which he characterizes as urban intellectuals, clergy, and merchants.⁵³ Overall the Volga colonists “...espoused non-Marxian or peasant socialist viewpoints directed at radical land and social reforms...”⁵⁴ The Socialist Revolutionary platform, which focused more on land redistribution, was “less odious” than the other parties. “Neither of the Social Democratic groups, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, held much appeal for the Volga Germans.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Fleischhauer, 1992, p. 275.

⁵¹ Fleischhauer, 1992, p. 276-77.

⁵² Giesinger, 1974, p. 258. See also Brendes, 1997.

⁵³ Long, 1988, p. 236.

⁵⁴ Long, 1988, p. 239.

⁵⁵ Long, 1988, p. 235.

Outside the Volga colonies, most German-Russians were also “...moderates and liberals adhering to a non-socialist program...”⁵⁶

Some of these regional differences in political leanings likely reflected varying local circumstances and socioeconomic conditions in the German settlements. In the Black Sea colonies the system of land tenure had been based on impartible inheritance, which enabled families to keep their farms intact and to pass them down to the youngest son. In the Volga colonies the farmlands were periodically redistributed according to the *mir* system, which was based on the “soul” count of a village. As their population had grown, the size of their shares had diminished and by the end of the century they were struggling with “pauperization and proletarianization,”⁵⁷ perhaps on a larger scale than in the Black Sea region. The notion of a German homeland was more viable in the Volga region and in the more isolated German settlements in Siberia. The Volga colonies were clustered and contiguous, “[l]ike a pearl necklace, 204 German villages...lined up along the Volga river for a distance of 200 kilometers...,” with a combined population of 750,000 and a surface area about the size of the kingdom of Saxony.⁵⁸ In comparison, the option of a concentrated homeland was not as feasible in the Black Sea region where the German settlements were scattered into various non-contiguous enclaves (Beresan, Glückstal, Liebental, etc).

The Union submitted a petition to the Provisional Government to revoke the discriminatory wartime measures and to provide compensation to the Volhynian Germans for the loss of their property. The general land-liquidation decree was suspended on March 11, 1917, but to their great dismay it was not outrightly revoked. As disappointment with the Provisional Government mounted, the sympathies of the German-Russians drifted to the political Left, as was happening in the rest of the country. By September a consensus had emerged, now also accepted by the Odessa group, that Lindemann’s strategy of developing an ethnic list of German candidates was essential. Other ethnic groups, such as the Ukrainians, had developed their own “national” lists of candidates. The problem with this strategy was that the German lists were not politically viable in broader electoral contests due to the limited size of their population.

Fleischhauer⁵⁹ has summarized available statistics for what is known about election results for the national Constituent Assembly. Of the total 715 deputies elected to the Assembly, 37 (over 5%) can be identified as ethnic Germans. This was a significant achievement considering that Germans comprised only 1.4% of the empire’s population. However, these representatives were not elected as advocates for a specifically German ethnic agenda. Of the 175,000 German-Russian votes that were cast, fully 130,000 of them went to candidates on the German national lists, but none of those candidates managed to get elected, and no representatives of the German Union made it to the Constituent Assembly. The ethnic German delegates on the Constituent Assembly had gained their seats as representatives of broader political parties, and some were even endorsed on other non-German national lists. The breakdown by major party affiliation of the German delegates included 16

⁵⁶ Long, 1988, p. 243.

⁵⁷ Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 42.

⁵⁸ Karl Esselborn, “Introduction: About the German Heritage on the Volga,” AHSGR Journal, Spring, 2000, p. 25.

⁵⁹ Fleischhauer, 1992, pp. 280-284.

Socialist Revolutionaries, 14 Bolsheviks,⁶⁰ and 4 Mensheviks and Internationalist Social Democrats. Fleischhauer summarizes the German voting trends as revealing support for private ownership of moderate sized estates, cultural freedom within the framework of a democratic republic, and advocacy of ethnic homelands with self-rule in some regions, which she describes as “a basically Kadet programme.” The Bolsheviks never did not draw strong support from German voters, although Fleischhauer notes that there was a relatively high percentage of ethnic Germans among the Bolshevik delegates. This may be explained by the fact that they appeared as the peace party, eager to withdraw from the devastation of the First World War.⁶¹

The Rise of Bolshevism and the Civil War

By the first summer after the great Revolution of October 25, 1917 (old Russian calendar), the Bolsheviks had become embroiled in a Civil War, pitting the Red armies against the White-guards that had organized in the outlying regions with support from Britain, France, the USA, and Japan. A third force, the so-called Greens, primarily army deserters and peasants, formed temporary coalitions with the Whites for mutual defense. The Reds found themselves locked in a desperate battle to hold the former Russian empire together. Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and other areas had declared their independence. In December, 1917, Red forces pushed into Ukraine and captured several cities, including Kiev and Kharkov.

The fledgling Communist government was hampered in its efforts to reassert control by the ongoing disastrous war with Germany. The war was finally brought to an end by the treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, but the peace conditions and the ensuing events were a major setback. The Russians were saddled with an enormous war debt, the independence of Ukraine, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania was confirmed, and those territories had to be cleared of Red troops. The new Ukrainian government, recognizing its vulnerability to the Reds, invited German and Austrian forces to enter the country in exchange for promises of grain. The Central Powers agreed to do so, and by the end of March, 1918, they had occupied Ukraine as far as Rostov on the Don.

The German colonists at first greeted the occupation forces with ambivalence, but soon realized they were protectors. During this interlude the survivors of the Volhynian Germans, who had been deported en masse in 1915, began returning and many received assistance from the German army in reclaiming their confiscated properties. Due to the massive looting and destruction that had taken place, only about one-third were able to resettle on their estates. The others were taken to Germany, where they found employment in agriculture, or were placed in refugee camps.⁶²

Hindenburg had designs to annex the occupied Russian Baltic provinces under German control. Baltic-German nationalists eagerly endorsed this notion and proposed that all the ethnic Germans in Russia, some two million people, should be relocated there. This plan would provide for the protection

⁶⁰ Drawing her conclusion from surnames, Fleischhauer (1992, p. 281) claims that 39% of the Bolshevik delegates were ethnic Germans.

⁶¹ Fleischhauer, 1992, p. 282.

⁶² Rink, 1966, p. 65; Giesinger, 1974, p. 272.

of the *Volksdeutsche*, anchor Germany's hold on the Baltic, as well as resolve the perennial "German question" the Russian empire had wrestled with since the nineteenth century. The Ukrainian government favored such a solution, since it would free their lands for "inner colonization." Although the German colonists recognized their dangerous circumstances, they didn't approve of such a grand relocation scheme. In the spring of 1918 the colonists convened conferences, with delegates attending from settlements in Bessarabia, Cherson, the Crimea, and other areas as far east as the Don. They proposed a compromise plan, calling for the creation of a German state in South Russia, with full German citizenship rights and protection from the *Reich*. This plan was in accordance with the precedent set by the other major national minority groups, which had declared their independence in 1917. As a fall-back plan, they proposed that the *Volksdeutsche* be evacuated to Bessarabia if necessary, which had fallen under Romanian control.⁶³

The armistice of November 11, 1918 resulted in the annulment of agreements at Brest-Litovsk. Following the withdrawal of the German and Austrian armies, the Ukrainian government collapsed and the country became a battleground, with Reds, Whites, and Greens vying for control. The Communists descended on the area, targeting the entire Ukraine with a vengeance.

The Communists implemented a set of policies (later referred to as "war Communism") in territories under their control, which included the nationalization of all economic resources, centralized planning of the economy, the abolition of money, and compulsory labor services. A "food dictatorship" was proclaimed and a "food army" was organized under the control of the People's Commissariat for Food Supply. Procurement brigades targeted the livestock, farming implements and other essential property of the wealthier farmers (*kulaks*).⁶⁴ At first these operations were little more than disorganized foraging expeditions, but in January, 1919, a broader requisitioning system was imposed.⁶⁵ Each province was assessed an amount of grain, for which villages were held collectively accountable. Grain quotas for Ukraine were set higher than in the other regions under Red control. Free trade was abolished and the peasants were not allowed to sell any surplus. After quotas were met, surplus had to be turned over for a receipt, which supposedly could be exchanged for industrial goods.⁶⁶

In response, many peasants refused to till their lands beyond their own basic needs and grain hoarding escalated. September, 1918, marked the onset of a period aptly known as the "Red Terror." The use of violence to enforce compliance quickly ratcheted upwards and terror became a virtual means of government for the Communists. They extolled mass murder as an ideological tool, claiming that

⁶³ Fleischhauer, 1983, pp. 30-32. Pinkus and Fleischhauer (1987, p. 156) estimate that a total of about 120,000 German-Russians managed to leave during the Revolution, the Civil War, and the German occupation. About half of them emigrated to the Americas.

⁶⁴ Bertrand Patenaude, "Peasants into Russians: the Utopian Essence of War Communism," *The Russian Review*, vol. 54, October 1995, p. 554. Before 1917 the word *kulak* (lit. "fist") was an insult applied to exploitative outsiders. It came to have great political significance during the Communist era. The term was applied so broadly that if a family owned a couple horses and cattle, and sold its produce on the open market, it risked being labeled *kulak*.

⁶⁵ Werth, 1999, p. 92.

⁶⁶ Werth, 1999, p. 95.

anything was permitted in their quest to bring about the new utopia.⁶⁷ Businessmen, shop-owners, intellectuals and, in general, all those who owned anything, were targeted as enemies of the state.

Peasant insurrections erupted throughout the grain-belt regions in 1919 and 1920. During this upheaval, Denikin's White forces advanced in Ukraine and briefly consolidated control of much of the area. They too lived off the land, ransacked villages, and committed atrocities, although not on the same scale nor with the same degree of organization as the Reds.⁶⁸ After the withdrawal of the White forces, independent bands under Makhno seized control of the eastern regions and those under Grigoriev took control in the west near Odessa.

The German colonies were caught in the middle of the chaos and they were a lucrative target for these marauding armies. Makhno was a notoriously "embittered hater of Germans" and his forces looted the Mennonite colonies in the Molotschna and Prischib regions with a vengeance.⁶⁹ In desperation the colonists formed home-guard units against the interlopers, be they Reds, Whites, or otherwise. Some colonists volunteered to serve with the White armies, which they generally preferred as the less destructive option in this impossible situation.⁷⁰

The Reds began systematically decimating the German colonies in the summer of 1919. The sturdy colonist wagons were confiscated, then used to haul away looted goods. Severe damage was inflicted on the Liebental, Kutschurgan, and Beresan enclaves. The colonists put up a brief heroic defense, but they were crushed with heavy losses. When the Bolsheviks arrived in the colony of Katharinental, many of the residents fled to the neighboring Ukrainian villages, with whom they had good relationships, but this time they were not taken in. They fled over the Bug river, but soon were overtaken by the White army. To their great good fortune, the Whites drove back the pursuing Reds. When the Katharinentalers returned to their village they found a grim scene of death and destruction.⁷¹ A letter, dated October 5, 1919, gives a graphic description of these events which overtook them as well as many other German villages:⁷²

The Bolsheviks have caused horrible damage in the colonies around Odessa. In Kleinliebental and Grossliebental, about 50 men were killed, in Selz 88. Those are only a few villages. On the other side of Odessa, over to Nikolajew, it was just as bad. The worst of all was in Rastatt, where 78 houses were burned and 39 men were killed. München suffered little damage. Worms suffered much, and 33 houses were destroyed, including the schoolhouse, the pastor's quarters and the community building. Thirteen persons were killed, including 3 women. Great losses were suffered in the wealthy district of Landau. Landau itself had 14 victims, Speier 4; both had little damage to their buildings. In comparison, Katharinental and Karlsruhe were heavily damaged. In Katharinental 62 houses were destroyed and 70

⁶⁷ Werth, 1999, p. 59.

⁶⁸ Werth, 1999, pp. 81-2.

⁶⁹ Cited in Sinner, 2000, p. 16.

⁷⁰ Fleischhauer, 1983, p. 32; Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 52.

⁷¹ J. Philipps, *Die Deutschen am Schwarzen Meer zwischen Bug und Dnjestr*, North Dakota State University, Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, 1999, p. 119.

⁷² This letter, written by Heinrich Thauberger, described as a "representative on the Central Committee in Odessa," was originally published in the *Dakota Freie Presse* and reprinted in the North Dakota Herald on July 2, 1920.

men were murdered, in Karlsruhe 55 houses -- out of about 200 -- were burned and 58 men were killed. The prosperous village of Schoenfeld suffered especially heavy losses. The church was also heavily damaged. In addition, a steam-mill and seven steam threshing-machines were burned. The losses in Schoenfeld alone were assessed at 15 million rubles. In Sulz, only 2 houses were destroyed, but 25 men were shot as hostages. In Steinberg 3 men were killed. In Krasna 22 farmsteads were burned. In all these colonies, the damage to industry was much greater. The bands that passed through, as well as the surrounding farmers, looted the farmsteads, businesses, and houses, usually without exception. Whatever was moveable was carried off. The people live in empty dwellings, and there is nothing left to purchase. The people are waiting in hunger for supplies. The shortage of food and clothing has made the prices rise. A pair of draught-horses costs 100,000 rubles. We have attempted to speed assistance for those in need in various ways, but by ourselves we can cover only a small portion of the damage that has been suffered by businesses everywhere.

The revolt was thrust upon the colonists very maliciously, and for a very specific reason. It began at Grossliebental -- a large colony 20 *werst* from Odessa. In the second half of July, in the middle of the harvest season, a mobilization of ten age-groups⁷³ was ordered. Both the German colonists and the Russians refused to comply. The Russian farmers were left in peace, and not a hair on their heads was hurt. On the other hand, the German colonists were declared to be counter-revolutionaries, and it was decided that they should be punished. In order to carry out the punishment, the Spartakists, a group of Austrian, Rumanian, and Baltic Jews who had established themselves in seats on the Central Committee, volunteered to take charge of the German colonists. Grossliebental was supposed to pay 200,000 rubles, 30 of their best horses, and 65 of the wealthiest citizens -- their bourgeoisie [*Burschui*] -- to be taken as hostages. When the Grossliebentalers did not fulfill these demands, the Spartakists planned an incident on Sunday morning, when several respected citizens, on their way to church, were seized and shot. The people's patience finally snapped. The bells tolled loudly. The Spartakists rushed up and shot at the tower. But the residents of Grossliebental ran in from all sides with clubs, shovels, stones, scythes, and rifles. Within 10 minutes, 17 Spartakists lay in their own blood. One escaped and managed to hide. He was found the next day and taken before the war tribunal for the proper judgment, and he was legally shot. And now the struggle of the Liebental district to ward off the masses of Red troops began, which lasted scarcely a week before it ended because the colonists had run out of ammunition for their two cannons and their rifles, and they had to surrender their villages to the Reds. It happened likewise in Kutschurgan -- Odessa-Kischinew railroad -- and in Barasan -- on the Bug. Few colonists fell in open battle. Most were driven into their houses in the villages and then treacherously shot. The offer of an armistice by the Reds had deceived most of the colonists. There is absolutely no doubt that if the colonists, who in many places were supported by the Russian farmers, had enough weapons and ammunition, the Reds would have lost the battle. We mainly have the French to thank for the fact that they lacked both. They wouldn't affirm our self-defense rule, and they declared candidly that they didn't trust the German colonists to have any weapons, with emphasis placed on the word "German." As a result, our self-defense organization was paralyzed. Now,

⁷³ Literally, *zehn Jahrgänge*. This probably meant groups of young people or school classes of the same age, conscripted for labor.

we are busy reorganizing the defense force. However, the work is difficult and there are many disappointments, but we hope that we will still achieve something.

Another letter, dated December 12, 1920, provides further details on the brief but unsuccessful attempt at self-defense by the colonists in the Black Sea region:⁷⁴

In Sulz, on a summer day during the previous year, 35 men were murdered in a gruesome fashion. You may ask: for what reason? I answer you: because they owned 50 desjatin or more of land, and thus were declared to be fair game by the Reds. At first the Bolsheviks demanded a contribution of one million rubles. The amount was collected and turned over to them. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks forced a group of men to be taken as hostages in the hands of the Tartars. At that time I appeared with colonists from the neighboring villages in order to drive away the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks opened fire on the captives and killed 35 men. Of our relatives, uncle Johannes Weber and Lukas Weber fell, the latter leaving behind a wife and 6 little children. My father was arrested in Odessa, but fortunately he got away from there. If you happen to know a cross-section of the well-off men in Sulz, then you would have a list of those who were shot.

The Civil War dragged on for three years. The Reds had largely triumphed by the end of 1920, except in the Far East where the Whites hung on until 1922. By the end of the war the country was in ruins and economic life had come to a virtual standstill. The population of European Russia had dropped from 72 million in 1914 to 66 million by 1920.⁷⁵

The Famine of 1921-1922

In 1919, with the Whites already in retreat and the tide of the Civil War turning in their favor, the Communists decided to impose their blueprint for the transformation of society on a grander scale. Initially they had condoned the spontaneous land redistribution movement that broke out in 1917, when peasants began plundering the wealthier families and subdividing their estates. In order to further the cause of "class conflict" which was regarded as a necessary precursor to social equality, groups of the village-poor, the so-called "village proletariat," were encouraged to seize whatever they wished. Soon, however, this stage of near anarchy was brought under control. In March, 1919, the Eighth Communist Party Congress proclaimed that all resources in the country were public property under the control of the state. In the fall of that year plans were made to shift the food policy away from procurism to expansion of collectivized production and compulsory labor services.

But it was already too late, the damage wrought by the rampant plundering during the Civil War had crippled the countryside. The situation reached emergency proportions during the drought and crop failure in 1920, which soon escalated into a massive famine that dragged on through 1923. The Volga region, southern Ukraine, and the northern Caucasus were devastated. At least 5 million people died as a result, over 1 million of them in Ukraine. About 300,000 ethnic Germans were among the victims, half of them in the Volga region where the death toll took about one-fourth of the local

⁷⁴ This letter was written by Friedrich Weber, reprinted in the North Dakota Herald on January 14, 1921.

⁷⁵ Fitzpatrick, 1994, p. 25.

population.⁷⁶ The Communists had major responsibility for this disaster. They had steadily increased their requisitioning quotas to the point where in many cases the peasants faced starvation. Requisitioning continued during the drought, leaving the peasants with no seed grain or reserves. While people starved by the millions in the southern regions, there was ample grain to feed those in the north, and during the second year of the famine grain continued to be exported to the West. A report, dated September 30, 1921, provides grim details:⁷⁷

...[T]he drought caused more devastation in Bolshevik Russia than in tsarist times. The grain market at this time has ceased to exist because the Bolsheviks have annihilated the large Russian landowners. The Bolshevik mismanagement was set in place. The redistribution of the land didn't result in the enrichment of the farmers. Horses and cattle were driven off and annihilated during the Civil War. Other inventories were abandoned to decay. The "Committees of the Village Poor" asserted frightful demands on the property-owning farmers. As a consequence of all these factors, the harvest yields became smaller and smaller.

The situation of the farmers became miserable. Since they couldn't be won over to the cause, they were turned into forced laborers for the Communist state. The foundation for the problems lay in the Communist doctrine itself, in the deepening starvation, the endless confusion, the blockade, and the total mismanagement. The farmers were thoroughly drained of their resources. They were forced by fire and sword to turn over their food supplies. The resources were stretched too thin. Only the Soviet power mongers imagined that these policies would prevent their own collapse. The forced expropriations were later repealed, and a more realistic tax was instituted, but by then it was too late.

And what are the present consequences of the Bolshevik mismanagement? This spring, throughout Russia, a fateful drought set in. The Soviet regime and its controlled press dismissed the seriousness of the situation in a casual, self-deceptive fashion. The Soviet dictators announced a "decree for a battle against the drought." Naturally decrees cannot change the miserable situation. Now (at the twelfth hour), when the people are fleeing the starvation, the *Bednota* newspaper is reporting about commissions, measures and collections which are supposed to relieve the need in the areas where there is starvation. It is notable that in the Soviet press reports on the assistance efforts, they have nothing to say about the fruits of the so-called "paradise" that was created by the "benefactors of humanity."

The zones of starvation include the Volga district, especially the Gouvernements of Samara and Saratov in which the German Volga colonists dwell, the largest portion of the Don region, the northeastern part of Kuban and Terek, as well as parts of the Gouvernements of Woronesch, Simbirsk, Pensa and others, up to the northern Gouvernement of Wjatka and Perm. In short, all of south and central Russia has become a victim of the failed harvest.

⁷⁶ Arkadii Adolfovich German, Nemetskaja autonomiia na volge, 1918 – 1941. Part 1, Autonomnaia oblast, 1918 – 1924, Saratov: Saratov University Press, 1992. Figures were cited in a brief review of this two volume work by Donald Raleigh, posted on internet, September 10, 1997.

⁷⁷ Report by Richard Patzner, printed in the North Dakota Herald, Sept. 30, 1921.

The Bolshevik paper also includes a host of letters from the starvation regions, with much notable content. One farmer writes from the Wolk district in the Gouvernement of Saratov: “we have eaten half of our seed-grain. The summer crop can hardly be sown. Rye and winter-wheat have failed. The people are eating everything possible: acorns, grass and even dirt. Death is everywhere. The fallow fields are not plowed. If help does not come soon, our entire village of 2,500 souls will perish.” --

Eda Bauer, from the Gouvernement of Pensa, writes: “in our district of Saran, most farmers don’t have any bread. Whoever has a cow, eats grass along with the milk, and whoever doesn’t have one, eats only grass. Most of the horse-sorrel [a wild plant] has been eaten. For weeks at a time, a person lives only on that. The people are so weak that they collapse after twenty steps.” A property owner from the Gouvernement of Ufa writes, among other things: “our entire population of 14,000 souls in the community of Aktaschewskaya, district of Menselinsk, is starving, and is eating elm bark, linden leaves, and grass. Three-quarters of the summer fields remain unsown, due to the shortage of seed. The winter seed is hopeless. If no help comes, the fields will remain untilled because the horses can hardly move, and there is a shortage of seeds.”

Another letter, dated January 1, 1922, provides details about conditions in the Beresan colony of Karlsruhe:⁷⁸

I want to thank you for being so kind to us. The money you are going to send me is almost worthless here, no matter where it is from.⁷⁹ [But] your good intentions are sacred to me. Russia has more paper money than the whole world, so there is no shortage. But of bread, there is the greatest of need. This winter millions will die of hunger, our village has 85 homes, one of the more productive ones, and now more than 400 are without bread.

As Werth notes,⁸⁰ the onset of the famine finally brought the peasant rebellions to an end. Uprisings against the Communists continued through 1920 in Samara, Kazan, Ukraine, and other agricultural regions. There was a final attempt at armed rebellion in the Volga region in 1921, when crowds of desperate, starving peasants stormed food storage warehouses. The Communists crushed the rebellion, with an estimated loss of 35,000 lives. The disaster grew to such proportions that charges began to mount, both within the country and among foreign observers, that the Soviet government was trying to starve out resistance. Reluctantly, in July, 1921, the government finally authorized a committee to deal with the emergency and to distribute foreign aid to the famine victims.⁸¹

The New Economic Policy

Faced with this general disintegration of economic life, the Communists realized that they couldn’t proceed with their utopian blueprint for collectivization of the nation. Lenin, who had previously announced in 1918 that “no mercy” should be shown to the smallholders because they were

⁷⁸ Letter by John Renner, translated by Cindy Goldsworthy and posted to GR-Heritage e-mail list, March 12, 1999.

⁷⁹ By the end of 1920 the ruble had lost 96 percent of its pre-war gold-standard value (Werth, 1999, p. 92). By January, 1923, prices had increased 100 million times in comparison to 1913.

⁸⁰ Werth, 1999, p. 95.

⁸¹ Werth, 1999, p. 122.

simply “afraid of discipline and organization,” now reversed course and proclaimed that they had to “remake the small landowner” in order to revive the economy and undo the damage.⁸²

The Communists were torn with factionalism about how to proceed. The debate revolved around doctrinal differences on the extent to which control should be decentralized. Trotsky and his faction wanted to create a true “worker’s democracy” with power vested in labor unions and other local organizations. Lenin believed this was idealistic and premature, given Russia’s lack of an “advanced capitalistic proletariat,” and he felt that control had to remain centralized. However, he was pragmatic enough to realize that at this point they had to accept a compromise.

Lenin announced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in March, 1921. In historical retrospect, the NEP era is remembered primarily for the economic reforms that were introduced, but political centralization proceeded apace in a somewhat schizophrenic fashion. In his quest to create a “united and monolithic” party, Lenin systematically purged the party apparatus of dissidents and curtailed political freedoms. A campaign to confiscate church property was launched, priests and Socialist Revolutionaries were sent to concentration camps, writers and intellectuals who had “assisted the counterrevolution” were banished.⁸³

In the economic arena, however, the NEP brought the period of “war Communism” to an end and important concessions were made to the peasantry. Market activity was permitted once again to relieve the desperation and growing hostility of the people. Some of the businesses that had been expropriated were returned to their original owners. In 1921 the rampant grain requisitioning was replaced with a “tax in-kind,” although it still remained absurdly high in some areas (in Pskov province it was two-thirds of the harvest).⁸⁴ Private commerce was allowed and farmers could sell their surplus, which provided incentive for them to till their lands with greater efficiency.⁸⁵ In 1922 efforts were also made to prop up the worthless paper currency, known as *sovznak*, by minting the *chernovets*, a gold coin that came in various denominations. People were also allowed to openly sell precious metals and gems.

Slowly the economy revived and some of the farmers began to achieve a modest prosperity, although the extent to which the economic recovery of the NEP era affected the German colonies appears to have been spotty. Vossler notes that the Glueckstal colonies were still in dire straits from 1921-1926. Many letters were written to their relatives in the Dakotas, pleading for their assistance.

⁸² Werth, 1999, p. 65; B. Patenaude, “Peasants into Russians: the Utopian Essence of War Communism,” *The Russian Review*, vol. 54, October 1995, p. 570.

⁸³ Werth, 1999, p. 128. There is still a tendency in the former Soviet Union to idealize Lenin for the economic liberalization policies of the New Economic Policy, which were in stark contrast to the harsh excesses of his successor, Stalin. However, as Werth points out, it should not be forgotten that Lenin was the father of domestic terrorism and his policies set the stage for Stalin’s later abuses of power. The number of political executions carried out during Lenin’s reign (as many as 140,000, according to Richard Pipes) vastly exceeded those of the tsarist police.

⁸⁴ Werth, 1999, p. 119.

⁸⁵ J. Philipps, *The Tragedy of the Soviet Germans (A Story of Survival)*. Bismarck, N.D.: Richtman’s Printing, 1983, p. 47. Werth (1999, p. 160) states that during the NEP peasants sold between 15 and 20 percent of their production, kept 12-15 percent for sowing, 25-39 percent for their cattle, and the rest for their own consumption.

Philipps, who was born in a Black Sea colony and who later served as an agronomist during the 1930s, states that each family in the Odessa area was allocated 5 hectares of land, plus 2.5 hectares per person, and some livestock.⁸⁶ Some of the letters written by the Glueckstalers add a human dimension to what that meant in subsistence terms:

The forty or fifty dessiatines owned by industrious farmers in the near past had been greatly reduced to only two dessiatines for each soul over nine years of age. That amounted to about five acres, including yard, pasture, and vineyard, as letter writers were quick to point out. "We are allowed almost no land at all," wrote Adam Wanner of Kassel to his brother in North Dakota. ". . . and we can't rent any either." Less than twenty farmers in Kassel had draught animals. Most had been taken away in the regime's property redistribution scheme. So, just as their ancestors of a century earlier, men hooked themselves up — in twos and in threes — to pull a plow through the fields.⁸⁷

The great famine lingered on in some areas late into the 1920s. In the Glueckstal colonies there was only one successful harvest between 1921 and 1927. Some regions had a bumper harvest in 1925, although agricultural prices remained low. By 1927 the economy as a whole had recovered to the level where it had been in 1913, before the war years. Despite efforts by the Soviet regime to trumpet its successes, a dangerous trend had become apparent by 1927 -- the percentages of crops being turned over to the authorities had been steadily dropping.⁸⁸ Other indicators were also not positive; for example, only 38.6 percent of school-age children were literate in 1928, whereas in 1914 the figure had stood at 80 percent.⁸⁹

Soviet Policies Toward the Ethnic Germans

Since 1923 the Soviets had officially adopted a policy of *korenzatsiia* ("nativization") vis-à-vis their national minorities, within the federalist framework of the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ This policy had evolved over a period of some 30 years, and not without much debate and controversy. Marx and Engels hadn't provided any workable models for dealing with ethnic pluralism because they had assumed there would eventually be a "brotherly merging" of all nations under Communism. Bolshevist rhetoric generally reaffirmed this theme, although their policies were often dictated by the "art of compromise" when necessary to promote the interests of the party.⁹¹

Pinkus and Fleischhauer identify three stages in the evolution of Bolshevist ethnic policy.⁹² Near the turn of the nineteenth century the tsarist regime was locked in a downward spiral in its relations with the non-Russian minorities, facing their growing protests and demands for self-rule, aggravated by Great

⁸⁶ J. Philipps, *Die deutschen Bauern am Schwarzen Meer*, Fargo, N.D.: Germans from Russian Heritage Collection, 1994, p. 56. One hectare is equivalent to 2.47 acres, slightly less than one dessiatin which equals 2.7 acres.

⁸⁷ Ron Vossler, "We'll Meet Again in Heaven," *Germans in Russia Write Their Dakota Relatives (1925 – 1935)*, Fargo, N.D.: Germans from Russian Heritage Collection, 2001.

⁸⁸ Werth, 1999, p. 142.

⁸⁹ German, 1992.

⁹⁰ See the discussion by J. Otto Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR, 1937-1949*, Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1999, p. 3.

⁹¹ Besancon, 1986, p. 6.

⁹² Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, pp. 53-59.

Russian nationalism and Russification policies. The national minorities had gravitated in increasing numbers to the liberal parties which championed their causes. The 1903 platform of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks and Mensheviks) called for the creation of a democratic republic with “regional self-government for localities with special conditions of life or a particular make-up of the population,” and the right of persons to obtain an education in their native languages.⁹³ Between 1903 and 1912 liberal political debate revolved around two alternative models for accommodating ethnic pluralism – a more radical plan to turn the empire into a “federation” of national states, and a more centrist model allowing the formation of self-governing ethnic territories within the state framework. Lenin was opposed to both models, since he regarded nationalism of any sort as an enemy to unity that should be suppressed. He noted that both Marx and Engels had been “strictly critical” of the nationalities question. Ethnic differences were an anachronism, a throw-back to the particularism of the past that would inevitably be outgrown and replaced by a single culture based on modern, “scientific socialist principles.” Even worse, ethnic identity was “false consciousness,” a figment of bourgeois capitalist propaganda. “Nations” were not natural entities that should be granted autonomy, but rather they were just “...abstract notions that exist only in an overall theory...”⁹⁴ Because Lenin rejected both of the “moderate” solutions, he was left with extremist alternatives: either allow total independence, or none at all.

Between 1913 and 1917 the issue of self-rule by the national minorities drew broader support in the liberal parties, but Lenin argued as before that ethnically based territories would promote permanent divisions of the country. In 1914, while the country was at the peak of wartime patriotic fervor, he warned against the resurgence of ethnic chauvinism and “national pride” among the Great Russians, emphasizing that ethnic divisiveness from any source, including that of the majority, must be kept subservient to broader socialist interests.⁹⁵ Self-rule by the ethnic Germans was completely out of the question. In no way should “...the Germans in Lodz, Riga, Petersburg, and Saratov unify into a nation. Our task is to struggle for complete democracy and the removal of all national privileges, the German workers must be united with the workers of all other nations...” Stalin likewise found it unthinkable that the Germans should be allowed to unify into a national group since they were an “extra-territorial minority” in origin.⁹⁶ As the left wing of the social democrats continued to advocate for flexibility on ethnic self-rule, Lenin and Stalin reluctantly came to accept it as part of the right of a people to “determine their own destiny,” but with the caveat that this should be allowed only for those groups that didn’t strive for national independence, and only if their territories were integrated into a broader regional framework subordinate to the state. The federalist option should be allowed only in very special cases, such as in the Baltic region.

The third stage of Bolshevik thinking on the nationalities issue set in after they successfully seized power in 1917. They faced a dilemma at that point. On Nov. 15, 1917, the “Declaration of Rights

⁹³ Program of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, August 1, 1903, cited on internet, www.dur.ac.uk/~dml0www/Russhist.html.

⁹⁴ Besancon, 1986, p. 3.

⁹⁵ John B. Dunlop, The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 4.

⁹⁶ Both quotes from Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 57 (my translation).

of the Peoples of Russia” proclaimed “complete equality to all the nationalities inhabiting Russia,” including (ideally, at least) the “right to self-determination up to and including secession and the formation of independent states.”⁹⁷ They had risen to power as the so-called “emancipator of peoples,” but now they faced the challenge of keeping that title which had become part of the Bolshevik platform.⁹⁸ If a national group chose to declare its independence, the Bolsheviks had to rely on the presence of revolutionary socialist parties to guarantee that they would someday return to the Soviet orbit. Another important provision of the declaration in 1917 was that the national minorities had the right to use their own languages for instruction in village schools. The Germans and other minorities welcomed this because prior to the Revolution Russian had already supplanted their native tongues in many of their schools.⁹⁹

Rosa Luxemburg, a contemporary observer, wryly noted that Lenin’s proclamation of the right of national minorities to determine their own fate was like a battle cry after the October Revolution, which sharply contradicted his otherwise “outspoken centralism” in politics. Her assessment was that “...Lenin and his comrades clearly expected that, as champions of national freedom even to the extent of ‘separation,’ they would turn Finland, the Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic countries, the Caucasus, etc., into so many faithful allies of the Russian Revolution.” As she noted, this strategy backfired as “one after another, these nations used the freshly granted freedom to ally themselves with Germany against the Russian Revolution.”¹⁰⁰

Pinkus and Fleischhauer regard the 1917 Declaration of Rights as a “tactical” decision by Lenin, a compromise during the nation’s transitional stage toward final unity.¹⁰¹ The rights that had been so vigorously proclaimed quickly became eroded during the ensuing Communist Party Congresses. Stalin argued in 1918 that self-rule should be restricted to the workers. In 1919 Bukharin proposed that the Communist Party was sufficient to represent the legitimate wishes of the people. Others went even further, rejecting the notion of self-rule completely, pointing to the secessionist history of Ukraine as an example of the dangers involved. Finally, at the Eighth Party Congress it was suggested that self-rule had only a “demonstrative” but not a “real” meaning. By the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, it had become a dead issue and Stalin criticized those who insisted on including it on the agenda for discussion.

The USSR was officially formed in December, 1922, after the cessation of the Civil War. Six “union republics”¹⁰² were initially recognized: Russia, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and

⁹⁷ Ponomarev *et. al.*, 1970, p. 136.

⁹⁸ Besancon, 1986, p. 6.

⁹⁹ As late as 1926, 94.9 percent of Germans in the USSR still declared German as their mother tongue. This figure was undoubtedly higher in the more isolated agricultural colonies (Fleischhauer, 1986, p. 61).

¹⁰⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, “The Nationalities Question,” cited on internet at: www.marxists.org/archive.

¹⁰¹ Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 60. Besancon (1986, p. 6) also characterizes Bolshevik nationalities policy at that time as a “compromise” designed to bring “an extra boost of force” to the party, after which it would be withdrawn.

¹⁰² During the Soviet era an entirely new administrative vocabulary was invented. Individual farms were merged into the *kolkhoz* (collective farm), which were part of a *raion* (plural form *raiony*, derived from the French term meaning “area” or “region,” roughly equivalent to the tsarist *uezd*), above which was

Armenia. The latter had already proclaimed their independence after the Revolution, but unlike Finland and Poland they were unable to defend it successfully. After being reconquered in 1920-21, they were reconstituted within the framework of the USSR. The proliferation of union republics continued until 1936, with the recognition of the Kazakh and Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republics, bringing the total to eleven.¹⁰³

At the petition of the Volga German Communists, they were the first ethnic group to receive recognition as a national **oblast** on October 19, 1918. On February 20, 1924, they were elevated to the status of the “Volga-German Autonomous Soviet Republic” (ASSR). Five German “national **raiony**” were established in Ukraine by 1925, and the number grew to eight by 1931.

Pohl feels that “the Germans benefited from **korenzatsiia** [nativization] more than any other extraterritorial nationality in the Soviet Union.”¹⁰⁴ It was hoped that a model Soviet German republic would strategically encourage an eventual Communist revolution in Germany. Model collective farms operated by Soviet Germans became “showplaces of ‘Teutonic Communism’ displayed to Western tourists.”¹⁰⁵ They were allowed their own local administration, and German was their official language of bureaucracy as well as in the classroom. However, even in the Volga German Republic they comprised only a minority of the party apparatus and of the higher echelons of power (32.6 percent in the 1920s). Very few ethnic Germans actually joined the Communist party (in 1927 there were only slightly more than 5,500 party members of German ethnic origin in the entire USSR).¹⁰⁶ The “German

the **oblast** (“province,” roughly equivalent to the **guberniia** of tsarist times), and finally the “republic,” the highest unit within the USSR. Special terminology was also developed for ethnically homogeneous regions. Some ethnic groups were organized into an “autonomous republic,” directly subordinate to one of the 15 primary “union republics” of the USSR. A **krai** was a border region containing several ethnically autonomous **oblasts** (Fitzpatrick, 1994, p. xiv). At the lowest administrative level, 500 inhabitants of the same ethnicity were required for the establishment of a “national soviet,” while 10,000 were required for a “national **raion**” (Benjamin Pinkus, “From the October Revolution to the Second World War,” in Ingeborg Fleischhauer and Benjamin Pinkus, The Soviet Germans, Past and Present, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986., p. 39). The average **raion** in the 1930s had between 40,000 – 50,000 people, with about 100 officials (Fitzpatrick 1994, p. 174). The Volga German Republic was also organized according to this administrative structure. In the Black Sea region, Crimea, the Caucasus, and Altai there were 15 German **raiony**, 8 of which were in Ukraine (see Giesinger, 1974, p. 282). Several “mixed” nationality **raiony** also existed, with the same rights as the ethnically homogeneous enclaves. The equivalent German terms are as follows – villages (**Dörfer**) or locales (**Örter**) were organized into a **Rayon** (German spelling), which were part of a **Kreis**, organized into a **Bezirk** (Walth, 1996, p. 327)

¹⁰³ Clarkson, 1969, p. 636

¹⁰⁴ Pohl, 1999, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ Pohl, 1999, p. 30.

¹⁰⁶ Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 73. Some figures on the relative ethnic composition of the Bolshevik party are illuminating. Werth (1999, p. 48) notes that in October, 1917, there were only about 2,000 members of the party in the entire country. Pinkus and Fleischhauer (1987, p. 73) state that before 1917 there were only 89 persons of German descent who were members of the Bolshevik party, in comparison with 964 Jews, 1,454 Letts, and 292

Section” of the party was “a sort of head without a body, composed of local activists working amid a hostile population that was either banding together against them or, at best, indifferent to them.”¹⁰⁷ The majority of the early German members of the party were **Reichsdeutsche** prisoners of war, and many of the most committed activists were in fact emigrants from Germany, highly committed Communist ideologues who had little in common with the colonists.¹⁰⁸

The ethnic Germans took the first faltering steps toward cultural recovery during the NEP era, when -- for awhile at least -- the heavy hand of the Communist regime relaxed a bit. As Fitzpatrick notes, “after the predatory incursions of Bolshevik requisitioning brigades during the Civil War, the NEP period was characterized by relative calm and a subdued, even minimal, administrative presence of the new regime in the villages. Communists were rare birds in the countryside of the 1920s.”¹⁰⁹ Philipps, who experienced these events first-hand, also comments that in the Black Sea colonies “the farmers were able to heal, to a great extent, the wounds and the destruction brought on by the Civil War...The farmers began to adapt themselves to the new system, they forgot about the misery and suffering of the past and prayed for a long and serene life. And thus passed a number of tranquil years.”¹¹⁰

The new “autonomous” German regions struggled to forge a national identity, carefully tailored to fit the officially approved framework of socialism. As in Western Europe, regional folk-heritage provided fertile soil for the cultivation of political identity. Efforts were made to revive musical expression and to promote regional ethnic languages. Grandiose cultural festivals were held, celebrating local folklore and folk-dancing. A German language press was reestablished and a literary tradition began to take root, albeit in a controlled fashion. German newspapers reemerged, bearing titles such as **Unsere Wirtschaft** (Our Industry), **die Trompete**, **die Saat** (The Seed), **Sturmschritt** (March), **die Rote Fahne** (the Red Flag), and **Zum Kommunismus** (Toward Communism). In Ukraine a German writers’ society was organized, known as “the Proletarian Farmer-Writer Plow” (**der Pflug**), with 13 members (including Hermann Bachmann).¹¹¹

Russian music had stagnated since the Revolution. Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky, Prokofiev and other composers had left the country. Most writers of importance, such as Gorky, Alexei Tolstoy, Bunin, and Kuprin also fled Russia during those years. A few, such as Pasternak, remained and they were allowed to produce creative works provided that they didn’t challenge party ideology.

Poles. In 1917 there were 197 German Bolsheviks; in 1918 there were 402; in 1919 there were 597; and in 1920 there were 644.

¹⁰⁷ Fleischhauer and Pinkus, 1986, p. 37. Pinkus and Fleischhauer (1987, p. 75) also note that this was true for the other “National Sections” of the Communist party as well.

¹⁰⁸ Fleischhauer and Pinkus, 1986, p. 58. See also Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 72.

¹⁰⁹ Fitzpatrick, 1994, p. 26.

¹¹⁰ Philipps, 1983, p. 48-49.

¹¹¹ Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 141. See also Fleischhauer and Pinkus, 1986, where some statistics are provided on p. 56. From 1919 to 1922, at least 24 German newspapers and periodicals appeared in the Volga region and other parts of the Soviet Union. One of the earliest was **die Wacht**, described as an organ of the “Volga German Communist Party,” the first issue of which appeared on March 16, 1919 in Saratov.

As the economy recovered during Lenin's NEP, the Communists kept anxious watch for signs of resurgence of the old individualistic, kulak capitalistic mentality. They knew it was antithetical to the ideals of collectivization and, if left unchecked, would undermine their socialist plan.

The Stalinist Era

Stalin had served as Commissar of Nationalities under Lenin, but he opposed the liberalization policies and emphasized that nationalist self-determination must always be subordinate to the party. In 1922 Stalin criticized ethnic minorities for not wanting to assimilate and unite with the Russians. After Lenin died in January, 1924, a power struggle ensued for the next four years. In 1926 Stalin issued a warning to the Ukrainian Politburo that their process of "Ukrainization" was going too fast for his liking.¹¹² Late in 1927, Stalin was elected General Secretary of the Communist party. This sounded a clear death knell for the period of liberalization.

Stalin introduced his first Five Year Plan in October, 1928, which remained in effect until 1933. The hallmark of Lenin's NEP had been its toleration of private commerce and its efforts to stimulate agriculture in order to resolve the food-crises faced by the nation. Under Stalin the priorities were reversed. Rather than promoting the agricultural sector, there was a head-long rush to implement the Communist blueprint for industrializing the USSR, with centralized planning of all sectors of the economy. By 1928 only 1.9 percent of the gross agricultural production in the country was derived from local *kolkhozy* and the larger state managed *sovkhozy* collective farms. Sweeping plans were announced that within five years this would be increased to 15 percent. By 1929 the number of collective farms did in fact increase nearly four-fold, although most were still not true "communes." At best, they were agricultural co-ops, with the dwellings, gardens, and livestock privately owned and the land only nominally owned by the community.¹¹³ By late 1929 the pace of collectivization rapidly accelerated. Lands that had been allocated during the NEP era were taken away. Markets became controlled and farmers had to sell crops at fixed prices once again.

In response, agricultural yields in 1928 and 1929 plummeted. The peasantry slaughtered their livestock in vast numbers. In the Volga and Black Sea regions 25 percent of the cattle, and more than half of the pigs and sheep were slaughtered in the first three months of 1930.¹¹⁴ By February, 1930, the rising peasant hostility forced Stalin to briefly retreat from the dizzy pace of forced collectivization. New directives were issued that collectivization should be "voluntary." However, this simply triggered a stampede to leave the *kolkhozy*, with the number of member households dropping by almost two-thirds

¹¹² Serbyn emphasizes the crucial role played by Ukraine in the temporary "retreat on the nationalities front" by the Soviet regime during the NEP era of the 1920s. The Ukrainian peasantry had largely resisted Russification efforts. During the political struggles of the 1920s Kremlin leaders found it expedient to lure their support by recruiting "indigenous" cadres and promoting use of the local language. Although the autonomy of Ukraine was not a viable political issue at that point, the Ukrainian cultural revival inevitably took on those overtones, a specter which had also haunted the earlier tsarist empire (Roman Serbyn, "The Causes and the Consequences of Famines in Soviet Ukraine," text posted on internet, www.mwukr.ca/causes.htm, Dec. 19, 1999).

¹¹³ J. D. Clarkson, *A History of Russia*, second edition. New York: Random House, 1969, p. 593.

¹¹⁴ Fitzpatrick, 1994, p. 49.

across the country within two months.¹¹⁵ The regime would not tolerate such “resistance.” Gangs of Communists descended on the villages, haranguing, threatening, and arresting the kulaks. Those who refused to join the kolkhoz were summoned to the village Soviet and informed that they would be taxed, which in most cases was higher than the asserts of the farmer. They were given 24 hours to pay, otherwise a confiscation brigade would be sent to their farm.¹¹⁶ All livestock were taken to be stabled in the *kolkhoz* collectives, all fields and machinery had to be communally owned.

By the end of 1930 the regime had won its war against the peasantry. In the country as whole some 58 percent of the peasantry had been forced to join *kolkhozy*,¹¹⁷ and in Ukraine the figure stood even higher, at about 70 percent of the rural population. The regime paid a price for these heavy handed actions. There was growing hostility among the peasantry, whose suffering had been enormous. The kulaks had been harassed, dispossessed, sent off to forced labor camps, and many were outrightly murdered under Stalin’s ruthless plan to liquidate them as a class. Of the estimated 5 million kulaks in the Soviet Union, about 3 million were exiled to Siberia during the forced collectivization. The ethnic Germans were disproportionately targeted because, as one Communist official stated in 1930, “there was often a common, widespread opinion that the German village was composed solely of kulaks.”¹¹⁸ Philipps, who experienced these events first-hand, states that “a good one-half of the German farmers were counted among the wealthy and they had to give up all their products and savings to the Soviets.”¹¹⁹ According to Pinkus, Germans were less than 1 percent of the nation, but they comprised about 14 percent of those condemned as kulaks, some 700,000 of the total 5 million. In the German colonies, one-third of the families lost their male family head. In some Russian villages circumstances were almost as bad. The consequences were disastrous.

The rationale for the collectivization of agriculture was that the economy would blossom after the private farms were consolidated into larger, supposedly more efficient communal “grain and meat factories.” Forced collectivization, of course, simply made it easier for the authorities to set quotas and to confiscate whatever they wished. The new collectives were notoriously inefficient and prone to sabotage by the resentful peasantry. In 1931 the amount of acreage in cultivation in the USSR did increase and the harvest was good, but productivity was lower than it had been in any of the six previous years. The number of livestock continued to decrease dramatically.¹²⁰

Climaxing these developments, another terrible famine gripped the countryside in 1932 and 1933, claiming at least 6 million victims, including an estimated 350,000 ethnic Germans.¹²¹ Ukraine was especially heavily impacted, with losses of some 4 million. Evidence indicates that this famine, in contrast to the one in 1921-22, was deliberately prolonged by the Communists as a means to break the will of the peasantry. According to some first-hand accounts the harvests were good in some areas,

¹¹⁵ Clarkson, 1969, p. 594.

¹¹⁶ Philipps, 1999, p. 126.

¹¹⁷ Clarkson, 1969, p. 594.

¹¹⁸ Fleischhauer and Pinkus, 1986, p. 47.

¹¹⁹ Philipps, 1999, p. 121.

¹²⁰ Clarkson, 1969, p. 595.

¹²¹ Werth (1999, p. 159) cites a figure of 6 million. Walth (p. 36) cites a figure of 10 million.

nevertheless the peasants were driven to starvation because 40 percent or more of their crops were confiscated.¹²²

The Suppression of the German National Territories

Soviet policy on ethnic affairs reversed course under Stalin and Russian nationalistic themes rose to prominence once again.¹²³ Communism was equated with Russianism, synonymous with “Soviet patriotism.” As during tsarist times, the study of the Russian language again became obligatory for all ethnic groups and only Russian art, music, and literature was promoted. The image of Peter the Great was lauded as a role model for modernization of the state and the building of a strong military. Tolstoy’s writings depicting Russian military victories were extolled. Even Ivan the Terrible became hailed as an historical precedent for Stalin’s heavy hand.

Control over the “autonomous” ethnic republics and territories systematically tightened and all alternative bases of power within the Communist party were crushed. In January, 1930, all national sections of the party were abolished.¹²⁴ The leaders of the German Section of the party were accused of “nationalism” and purged, along with officials in the Volga German Republic and in the German National Soviets and the National Raions. The ethnic republics survived, but they were under the strict control of the Party Central Committee and the Politburo.¹²⁵ Stalin’s secret police targeted anyone of influence among the ethnic Germans during the 1930s. Spurred by fears of Hitler’s Germany, educators, writers, students, clergy, industrialists, and even simple farmers were accused of being “German spies and terrorists.” At first they were imprisoned, but as Stalin’s “Great Terror” reached its peak people were executed on a massive scale.¹²⁶

¹²² Personal communication, Ron Vossler, November 8, 1999. See also Werth, 1999, p. 146, and Sinner, 2000. Serbyn (1999) charges that “the Famine was a conscious instrument of Soviet policy. ‘Food is a weapon’ said Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs.” Serbyn also charges that Soviet officials transplanted Russian colonists into the emptied villages as part of a plan to alter the demographic composition of the Ukrainian countryside.

¹²³ Besancon, 1986, p. 5. See also J. B. Dunlop, 1983, pp. 6-9.

¹²⁴ Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 91.

¹²⁵ Clarkson, 1969, p. 637.

¹²⁶ In 1997 the “Odessa Memorial Society” released a compilation of the names of persons known to have been arrested by the Soviet regime in the Odessa *oblast* between 1919 and 1984. The data were drawn from the archives of the State Security Service (KGB). The first volume is a 752 page publication entitled Martyrs of Odessa: Odessa Memorial Series (Odesskii martirolog: seriia Odesskogo memorials), compiled by L. V. Kovalichuk and G.A. Razumov (ISBN 966-571-065-9). It lists 26,019 names, of which 8,691 were known to be executed. The names are broken down by nationality, including some 56 different ethnic groups. A comparison is quite revealing. The single largest ethnic category of victim is Ukrainian (9,505 arrested, 3,234 executed), followed by Russian (3,957 arrested, 1,228 executed), and then by German (3,459 arrested, 1,797 executed). Considering the relative sizes of these populations in the greater Black Sea region, the number of ethnic German victims is disproportionately large. Germans comprised only about 4 percent of the total Black Sea population near the beginning of the Soviet era, yet they suffered arrest and execution rates matching those of the Russians, and exceeding one-third of those of the Ukrainians. Arrests and executions peaked in 1937 and 1938, which was the height of Stalin’s “Great Terror” from 1934 to 1939. According to ethnic origin, about 39.7% of the victims (presumably during this entire time period) were Ukrainians, 17.9% were Russians, 15.4% were Germans, 7.9% were Jews, 5.7% were Moldavians, ,

The Prosecution of Bachmann and his Academic Colleagues

Bachmann had endeavored to inject propaganda themes into his writings at various points, but it was obviously not enough. A sea change in policies governing artistic creations had set in and his dialect literature and wry portrayals of characters and social circumstances were out of synch with the times. Under Stalin artists were expected to promote “socialist realism,” an official utopianism touting glowing accounts of the collectivized peasant masses as “heroes of labor.” Socialist “realism” was a misnomer because it was actually very unrealistic. There was a “pollyanna” quality to the Soviet media, with everything portrayed as moving upwards and onwards to a bright “worker’s paradise.” Fitzpatrick describes the mood of simplistic idealism at that time as the “Potemkin village” mentality. She likens it to “Hollywood-style movies, full of song and dance and good cheer, set in the Potemkin village.”¹²⁷ Pinkus and Fleischhauer comment on the ideological strictures that writers faced:

Numerous works ... of German literature in the second half of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s focused on depicting the suffering and the wretched lives of the former German colonists, the participation of the German farmers in the October Revolution and the Civil War, the struggle against religion in the German villages, the construction of the new socialist life on the ruins of the forever annihilated old world, and the collectivization, which was portrayed in gleaming colors with optimistic perspectives for the future. The Party member, the young Communist teacher, the agronomist of the newly founded kolkhoz, the small farmer and the soldier are the positive heroes of this type of German literature in the Soviet Union.¹²⁸

The literary model for this style of German propaganda literature was German Expressionism, noted for its stark caricatures, expressed in the distinctive speech of the German colonists.¹²⁹ Privately, wry humor against the regime flourished as a form of passive resistance, just as in Nazi Germany. Publicly, however, writers like Bachmann who combined humor with sarcasm and modest social criticism risked being labeled as individualists, malcontents, or even worse.

Recent articles by a Russian scholar, Galina Malinova,¹³⁰ provide details on the arrest of Hermann Bachmann and his colleagues in Odessa in 1934 and the suppression of the ethnic German cultural movement. Given the harsh police-state climate of the times, it took little to arouse the suspicions of the Soviet authorities. The pretext was provided by the research activities of Dr. Georg Leibbrandt,¹³¹ of the *Deutsches Ausland Institut* (DAI)¹³² in Stuttgart. Leibbrandt was a native of

3.5% were Poles, 3.4% were Bulgarians, and 2% were Greeks. Detailed figures on the “Odessa Martyrology” are available on internet at: <http://home.earthlink.net/~martyr/index.htm>.

¹²⁷ Fitzpatrick, 1994, p. 262, 268.

¹²⁸ Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 143.

¹²⁹ Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 144.

¹³⁰ Galina Malinova, “From the Early Days of Stalin’s Great Terror: Repression of Those Researching the Local History of the German Colonies,” in *Martyrs of Odessa: Odessa Memorial Series (“Odesskii martirolog: seriia Odesskogo memoriala”)*, Odessa, 1997. Malinova’s article is summarized by Vladimir Soshnikov in *RAGAS Report*, vol. IV, no. 4, Winter 1999, pp. 3-7. See also Malinova’s article, “The Case of the German teachers’ Anti-Soviet Organization within the Odessa Pedagogical Institute (Year 1934), available on internet: <http://home.earthlink.net/~hmehrman/martyr/case3.htm>.

¹³¹ A brief synopsis of Dr. Georg Leibbrandt’s life is provided by Fleischhauer, 1983, p. 33.

Hoffnungsfeld in the Odessa region. He volunteered for the German army in 1918 and left the country with them at the end of the war. After completing graduate studies in theology and philology, he became a professor at Leipzig University. Under the auspices of the DAI, Leibbrandt visited the USSR in 1926, 1928, and 1929 to conduct historical research on the German colonies. In 1928 he traveled widely, visiting colonies in the Odessa region, the Crimea, the Caucasus, the Volga German Republic, and other areas. At that time Leibbrandt did not manifest any overt antipathy toward the Soviets. Supposedly he had even declared that “the German colonists in the USSR lived much better than peasants in Germany.” Leibbrandt returned to Russia in 1929, to conduct research for a planned encyclopedia dealing with Germans living outside the Reich. There he contacted several teachers in the German branch of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute to see if they were interested in contributing articles for the planned volume. The Soviet authorities regarded him with great suspicion and placed him under surveillance.

In 1934 the Odessa regional secret police (GPU) claimed to have exposed a “German fascist anti-revolutionary organization” instigated by Leibbrandt, based in the Odessa Pedagogical Institute. This so-called subversive organization “... had planned the distribution of rebel cells, the separation of the ethnic German population from the Soviets, sabotage and subversive activities, and had prepared an armed revolt against Soviet authority.” The linguistics and historical research conducted by scholars at this Institute, it was charged, was simply a “convenient” way to conduct spy work and to organize rebel cells among the German colonists to sabotage the Soviet economy, kill cattle, damage agricultural implements, and agitate against collectivization.

Scholars contacted by Leibbrandt five years earlier in Odessa were arrested. These included Robert Mikwitz and Alfred Ström, professors in the German branch of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute; Herbert Steinwandt, the manager of the department of the Central Scientific Library and employee of the Archeological Museum; Franz Adler, Wilhelm Fritz, Albert Reich, Eduard Beitelspacher, Sebastian Untemach, Otto Zwicker, Hermann Bachmann, and Edgar Trompeter, teachers at Odessa Highschool; and Albert Fichtner, a factory employee.

During Bachmann’s interrogation he tried to phrase himself warily, avoiding ideological traps and buzzwords, but to little avail. He acknowledged that he and Schirmunski had “...associated with kulaks, preachers, and individual teachers, who assembled the youth and organized singing of nationalistic and religious songs.” He acknowledged that he and Schirmunski emphasized the value of the old German songs to the youths, which his interrogators characterized as “nationalistic agitation.” In his textbooks he was accused of using “...a selection of apolitical examples for illustration of grammatical materials and exercises that distracted the students away from class-consciousness.” It was charged that his stories in the journal, *Sturmschritt*, improperly emphasized “form” instead of “content” by leaving out “class struggle,” and consequently he was guilty of “distorting the class-struggle

¹³² The *Deutsches Ausland Institut* (the German Foreign Institute, perhaps more descriptively translated as the Institute for the Study of Germans Abroad) was founded in Stuttgart in 1917 for the purpose of fostering cultural contact with the millions of Germans who had emigrated throughout the world. Both Dr. Georg Leibbrandt and Dr. Karl Stumpp were employed by the DAI. Later, in 1940, the DAI became subordinate to the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (Walth, 1996, p. 69).

in the German colonies in Russia.”¹³³ When he was quizzed on his views about the great famine ravaging the countryside at that time, Bachmann gave a convoluted answer:

Calling the famine of 1933 an ‘aggravation in nourishment’ the cautious Bachman[n] characterized his sentiments ... thusly, ‘Although in Nikolai-pole and in all the neighboring German villages no one died from starvation, and I do not even know that any Mennonite Germans swelled up from hunger, there were only isolated incidents of severe shortages with a few slackers. But constant conversations arose and were supported about the general famine of the population.’¹³⁴

Malinova summarizes this bizarre show trial by noting, “So the Odessa OGPU [state police] completed a crushing defeat of the German scientific study of local lore in the Ukraine.” The verdict was pronounced on February 26, 1934. All members of the “criminal band” were sentenced to 3 to 5 years in labor camps. Some of the accused later received additional sentences, and some died in exile. Victor Schirmunki, the renowned Leningrad academician, was also arrested in February, 1933, and held for one month, but he was released with orders to remain in Leningrad. He was repeatedly arrested in 1942 for similar alleged “criminal” activities.

Years later all these people were pronounced innocent. On December 25, 1968, the Odessa Regional Court recognized that the members of the so-called “German band” had been falsely arrested and the verdict of the GPU secret-police trial of 1934 was formally overturned.

Some suspicion lingers even today over Georg Leibbrandt’s activities during his visits in 1928 and 1929. This stems from his later involvement with the Nazi regime when he was appointed “Director of the Eastern Department” under Rosenberg of the Foreign Policy Office of the party in October, 1933.¹³⁵ Charges have recently been made that Leibbrandt participated at a high administrative level in planning and implementing the crimes of the Nazi regime.¹³⁶ Resentment also lingers in Russia and Ukraine over his acquisition of documents from the Odessa archives in 1928 and 1929. As Malinova points out, however, at that time Leibbrandt had official permission from the Central Archival Administration in Moscow, as well as from representatives of the Odessa government, and “it is clear that Dr. Leibbrandt took archives from the USSR legally by permission of a special commission of the Soviet Ministry of Education.” These events took place well before the Nazi regime came to power in Germany, at a time

¹³³ “Form” versus “content” were political buzzwords at the time, dictating the constraints within which artists were allowed to work. Ironically, Stalin had served as Commissar of Nationalities under Lenin. The guidelines he dictated in 1925 stipulated that ethnic literature could be “socialist in its content and national [i.e. ethnic] in its form.” Writers were allowed to use their local language for literary purposes and the heroes in their stories could have ethnic names, but beyond this the content was subject to strict scrutiny (Pinkus and Fleischhauer, 1987, p. 144). The charges against Bachmann were that he had reversed these priorities by emphasizing the German language, songs, and folkways rather than socialist propaganda. The charge of “distortion” of Communist doctrine was a convenient codeword to indict anyone who ran afoul of the party line. Trotsky, for example, was accused of “distorting the history of the struggle for the October Revolution” and expelled from the party in 1927.

¹³⁴ This citation and the above details on Bachmann’s interrogation were taken from Malinova, “The Case of the German Teachers’ Anti-Soviet Organization...,” pp. 6-7.

¹³⁵ Fleischhauer, 1983, p. 48.

¹³⁶ Eric J. Schmaltz and Samuel D. Sinner, “the Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies, v. 14, no. 1, Spring 2000, pp. 28-64.

when the Soviet government sold off not only archive documents, but even treasures from the Imperial Hermitage Museum. Malinova concludes that “Soviet investigators were unable to find any evidence of hostile activity by the *Deutsches Ausland Institut* in the USSR.”

It should also be noted that the arrest and prosecution of German intelligentsia in the Odessa area in the early 1930s was part of a broader attack on ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union and on non-Orthodox religious clergy. Many show trials were held, with the common theme being alleged crimes against the state. In 1929-1930 Polish Roman Catholic clergy were accused of creating a counter-revolutionary “Polish military organization” in the Ukraine. In 1930-31 German Catholic priests in the Volga region were accused of forming a “German Catholic Union,” likewise described as a “fascist” counter-revolutionary organization. Persecution of the Roman Catholic clergy continued throughout the 1930s, culminating in mass exiles to labor camps and executions.¹³⁷

Within a few short years after the arrest of Bachmann and his colleagues, the thriving German colonies, which had existed for almost two centuries in Russia, were eliminated by the Soviet authorities. The brief revival of German folk culture that Bachmann memorialized was snuffed out. On August 28, 1941 a ukase was issued by the Supreme Soviet that dissolved the Volga German Republic and all other German autonomous territories. Their property was confiscated and the entire ethnic group, some 1,200,000 people, was deported at gun point to the work-camps of Siberia and Central Asia. Between 1941 and 1946 at least 300,000 lost their lives. To justify this mass violation of human rights, the ukase collectively indicted the German population as spies and traitors, a recurrent theme at various points since the nineteenth century Russian national debate about their ethnic minorities. Although the colonist chapter in the story of the German-Russians was brought to an abrupt close, the people themselves have endured and adapted. Today they continue to create new chapters in one of the greatest – yet still not widely known – epics of mass emigration in modern history. The remarkable tale of the Tsars’ invited Germans continues to unfold as their descendants create new lives in their diaspora throughout post-Soviet Russia, Ukraine, the USA, Latin America, and in Germany.

¹³⁷ I.I. Osipova, Hide Me Within thy Wounds, the Persecution of the Catholic Church in the USSR, forthcoming by the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University.

