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## ROLE OF MANPOWER OF PRISONERS OF NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN THIRD REICH ECONOMY

From 1942, with the failure of the "Blitzkrieg", when the long confrontation of economy and military power between both fighting parts began, the most important problem of the Nazis economy was to fulfil the demand for manpower increasing from year to year.

The most important kind of manpower foreseen to substitute the drafted German workers were foreign labourers and prisoners of war. Because earlier measures of labour recruitment were not satisfactory, in March 1942 Sauckel was appointed the Plenipotentiary General for the Utilization of Labour with the task to use reserves of the German manpower and to recruit such number of foreign workers and prisoners of war which was necessary to realize Speer's plans of development of the German economy of war. Although between May 1942 and May 1944 the total number of foreign labour and prisoners of war increased from 4.12 to 7.13 million,<sup>1</sup> Germany did not achieve the prewar level of employment. At the beginning of 1944 there was in Germany a manpower lack of 4 million workers.

Did Germany really use all the reserves of manpower, and if not, why those reserves could not be utilized?

One of such unutilized source of manpower were the German women. It is rather well known problem in historical literature, so I should like only to remind, that according to Hitler's opinion, the employment of German women could bring more political and ideological damage than economic advantage.

The second reserve of manpower source utilized hardly at all were Jews. As in the case of German women Hitler and the Nazi leaders decided that the removal of Jews from German social life was more important for ideological and political unity of the Nazi party than the economic profit from utilization of the Jews manpower. In May 1943 Hitler said to the party leaders: "Anti-Semitism which earlier animated our party, must take again the main place in our spiritual fight".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Allan Milward: *Die deutsche Kriegswirtschaft 1939 - 1945*, Stuttgart 1966, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Bullock: *Hitler, studium tyrannii* (Hitler, a Study in Tyranny), Warszawa 1970, t. 3, p. 169.

The third only partly used source of manpower were the concentration camp inmates. Although in Spring 1942 the Nazis planned to use prisoners' manpower in the armament industry and the Economic and Administrative Main Office issued some instructions in this matter for the camp commanders (the best known of them is Pohl's order of April 30th 1942) to the end of the war the prisoners did not play any bigger role in the German war economy.

Himmler as a rule did not oppose, it is true, including the prisoners labour strength into the common economic effort, but at first he did not agree to their employment in the private industry, only in his own economic enterprises. In such manner he wanted to guarantee on the one hand the economic independence of his "state in the state", and on the other hand, to realize the political function of the concentration camps: annihilation of political and racial enemies, and terrorization of the conquered peoples.

In fact, to those purposes the SS had neither technical measures nor a sufficient number of specialists. In spite of the great shortage of manpower in the armament industry during the period from 1942 to 1943 the main occupation of the concentration camp prisoners was the work in stone quarries, camp workshops, agriculture; many rested without occupation. In 1942 every month about ten per cent (8 to 12 thousand) of camp inmates died because of executions, diseases, starvation, maltreatment and overwork; the total number of them decreased from 115 thousand in August to 88 thousand in December 1942.<sup>3</sup>

A further decrease in the prisoners number menaced immobilizing of SS enterprises and a loss of their profit. Because of this Himmler decided to limit the death rate by agreement to sending food parcels for the prisoners and confining of the so-called "euthanasia" program.

The critical labour shortage after the defeat of the Sixth Army before Stalingrad and inability to organize own armament factories forces Himmler to hire the prisoners to other enterprises. Because of those measures the prisoners number increased in Spring 1943 to 200 thousand and a visible development of prisoners employment in the private industry could be observed. The best indication of it is the number of the so-called subcamps. While at the end of 1942 very few subcamps were organized near the armament factories, at the end of the next year some concentration camps had already about ten subcamps.

The importance of prisoners' manpower increased all the more so as the effects of recruitment Sauckel's action weakened. While between May 1942 and May 1943 the number of the employed foreign workers and prisoners

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<sup>3</sup> Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals, Washington 1950, V. 5, p. 381.

of war increased by 2.14 million in the following 12 months it increased only by 870 thousand.<sup>4</sup>

The loss in the first months of 1944 of the major part of Soviet territories caused a very critical labour shortage and a resulting still greater interest in prisoners and Jews manpower occurred.

In this critical situation Hitler decided to use prisoners for building the underground aviation factories and agreed to send the Jews prisoners from the General Government of Poland to the concentration camps on the Reich territory. The most part of those Polish, Hungarian and other Jews were first sent to the Auschwitz camp in order to be submitted to selection thus only the really fit for work were then sent to the Reich.

Between March 31th 1944 and the end of that year the number of sub-camps organized mostly near the armament factories and the industrial constructions increased from 165 up to 500 - 900.<sup>5</sup> According to Pohl, the former chief of the Economic and Administrative Main Office, at the top moment of the concentration camps development, toward the end of 1944 approximately 500 thousand concentration camp prisoners worked in the German war economy, of which about 230 - 250 thousand in private industry and 170 thousand were assigned to the construction of subterranean works.<sup>6</sup> From the middle of 1944 the work in industry became really the main occupation of the concentration camp inmates. In some factories prisoners made about 20 - 30 per cent of the employees. But from the all-German economy point of view the participation of the prisoners in the manpower balance was rather small. In the second half of 1944 the prisoners represented only about 1 - 1.5 per cent of the total labour force of the German economy and about 6 per cent of the foreign workers and prisoners of war. Although because of inhumane living conditions and ill-treatment the productivity of the prisoners amounted, according to the employers' opinion, only to 50 per cent of the productivity level of the German workers, the prisoners were used by industry because they were a cheap labour source, they could be transferred quickly from one place to another, they could be housed in primitive conditions and used without any limits of working conditions and time.

This rather small role of the concentration camp inmates in the German war economy contrasts very clearly with their "achievements" in the extermination field. During the war the Nazis killed about 7 million people in the concentration camps and the so-called centres of annihilation. The death rate in those camps was the highest among all other camps. For in-

<sup>4</sup> Allan Milward: *Die deutsche...* p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> *Trials...* p. 383; Enno Georg: *Die wirtschaftliche Unternehmungen der SS*, Stuttgart 1963, p. 41; Jan Schn: *Obóz koncentracyjny Oświęcim-Brzezinka (Concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau)* Warszawa 1964, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Trials...*, p. 445.

stance, between July 1942 and June 1943, according to the SS sources, 110 812 prisoners died in concentration camps.<sup>7</sup> The daily rate of 302 men beaten to death, shot or passed away in the camp hospitals could be very useful in many factories if alive. It was all the more tragic paradox that in many cases no other reason was given for transferring those inmates into the concentration camps than the one that workers were needed, and moreover those people were very often not "the bandits", it means active members of the resistance movement, but peaceful inhabitants caught during the round-up sweeps.

The inhumane living conditions and maltreatment of prisoners were above all the main causes of manpower losses, and in consequence of the inability of the camps to obtain a considerable number of manpower in the scale of the state. A complete resignation from extermination and terrorizing functions of the concentration camps and a full realization of the economic demands would mean a transformation of the camps into labour camps thousand of which existed in the Reich. But the concentration camps played a too important role in the Nazi power system to make a resignation from them possible without danger for the whole state structure. But, it should be underlined, that the efficient activity of that terrorizing apparatus guaranteed the possibility of exploitation of millions of foreign labourers in Germany and keeping in obedience tens of millions of people in the occupied countries, and, of course, also of Hitler's internal opponents. Because of this the concentration camps go down to posterity not as great labour centres, but as the places of unprecedented crimes.

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<sup>7</sup> Trials..., p. 381.