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FORCED LABOUR IN BANAT UNDER OCCUPATION 1941-1944¹

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ABSTRACT

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

Key words

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11 Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 426.

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

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

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

“Compulsory labour” in the real sense of the word was introduced in Banat at about the same time as in the rest of Serbia, i.e. in the spring of 1942¹⁶, although the reasons were not exactly the same. Since Serbia was expected to primarily supply the Reich with ore, central Serbia was primarily supposed to provide the miners for Bor, Kostolac and other mines as well as workers for construction sites around them. Banat, which had no mines, on the other hand, was expected to be an exporter of agricultural products to Germany and partly to feed Belgrade. That is why it had to provide the labour force for agriculture. The intention was that “compulsory labour” conscripts would replace the Volksdeutsche who were recruited into the *Prinz Eugen* Division of Waffen SS which was established in early 1942.¹⁷ The households of ethnic Germans could get as many workers as they gave soldiers. Since the agricultural production had high priority, the non-German agricultural households that had lost their own labour force to war captivity, death or disappearance in combat were also able to get compulsory workers. They were, however, entitled to

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

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

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

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

only one worker regardless of the number of absent members of household.¹⁸ In addition to farming, the compulsory workers also performed tasks that were indirectly linked to agricultural production, such as road building and repair, canal digging and cleaning, etc.¹⁹ Some were also sent to work in Serbia.²⁰ The compulsory workers were entitled to wages. During the occupation, the Banat authorities issued about 40 decrees, orders and regulations on “compulsory labour”, and all of these acts were based on the Decree of the Serbian government on compulsory labour and restriction of the freedom of employment of 14th December 1941.²¹ Based on it, in June 1942, the Banat District Chief ordered the conscription of certain workers to perform compulsory service and the use of conscripted workers to make up for labour shortages in industries essential for the war effort and in agriculture. Like in the rest of Serbia, the National Service for the Reconstruction of Serbia was also established in Banat as a specific prelude to the “compulsory labour”.²²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

serve in the military units.²⁴ It was in line with the official German propaganda which claimed that the Germans “defended Europe from communism,” and that nations which did not participate in it with weapons in hand, should contribute to the “common cause” by means of their work. In Banat, as in the rest of Serbia, “compulsory labour” was formally time restricted, but the term of service grew longer with time: it was 45 to 60 days in 1942, between 138 to 190 days in 1943, and up to 210 days in 1944.²⁵ This depended on the amount of work and on conscripts not reporting for work regularly. The number of weeks and working hours differed from municipality to municipality. A conscript was not allowed to leave the workplace before their replacement arrived, which often happened with delays. The Volksdeutsche families who were assigned compulsory labourers were obliged to treat them fairly. The employers were obliged to feed the workers, wash their clothes, provide them with accommodation and contribute up to 200 dinars for their medical treatment. The local district administration covered the latter cost starting from May 1943. Violation of these provisions by employers entailed likely fines or loss of workforce. Still, many landlords did not treat the workers assigned to them fairly, which was one of the reasons for the mass escape of conscripts which could not have been prevented neither by being sentenced to forced labour after completing their “compulsory labour” service, which was introduced in March 1943, nor by corporal punishment.²⁶

13,500 non-Germans worked in the Volksdeutsche estates in 1942.²⁷ In March of the following year, district chief Lapp re-issued the order on referral for “compulsory labour” of all men and women between 16 and 60 years, whose labour force had not been fully exploited in their farms or companies. They were supposed to be employed in other people’s farms or companies. This order replaced the standard employment contract and wages were supposed to be standard or equal to those paid at the work place. The labour force was to be assigned to the vital industries which had labour shortages. The notorious alcoholics, slackers, asocial types, convicts and Roma were to be organised into special work brigades for public works. It was planned that workers would be paid according to their ability (whatever that meant), except for persons in forced labour. Mostly young men aged between 17 and 25 were taken into account, while the clerks, students who regularly attended school, annual farm servants and sole providers were spared. Conscripts were entitled to a reduced rent, food, clothing, free laundry service and medical care. Workers

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

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

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

27 Shimizu, *Deutsche Okkupation*, 428.

who worked in their own clothes, were later financially compensated for it. Conscripts were given the right to free transport to the place of work and back, and it was to be financed from the District Authority Fund for the planned economy. Contempt of this order was punished by fine or labour of up to 20 days.²⁸ On 31 January 1944, a similar order was issued for the year 1944.²⁹ In Banat, like in Serbia, escape from “compulsory labour” was common, but due to lack of police personnel, it was mostly impossible to catch the runaways. In order to counter the fleeing, in January 1944, the District Chief Lapp introduced a two years’ forced labour punishment, a fine, or both.³⁰ Nonetheless, in March 1944, hundreds of conscripts failed to show up for their compulsory service, so the district prefecture demanded that they be detained by the police.³¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Serbia, but the German authorities did not keep the promise.³⁵

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

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

35 Sajti, *Hungarians*, 334.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

58 Idem.

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

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