

# THE DEPORTATION OF CZECHOSLOVAK CITIZENS TO THE SOVIET INTERNMENT AND PRISON CAMPS, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THEIR REPATRIATION, 1945–1950<sup>1</sup>

*By Milada Polišenská*

Czechoslovakia had not been at war with the Soviet Union. Its status, officially, was that of a liberated ally. In some way or other which I never fully understood – as a result, perhaps, of the great popularity Beneš enjoyed in the Western countries – the impression got about in the West that an independent government was being re-established in that country. It was an assumption for which I saw no evidence ... What little we were able to learn, furthermore, about what was occurring in that part of Czechoslovak territory occupied by Soviet forces made it evident that every device of infiltration, intimidation, and intrigue was being brought into play with a view to laying the groundwork for establishment of a Communist monopoly of power in that country ...

George F. Kennan: *Memoirs*, vol. 2, 254f. (Boston 1967).

On May 8, 1944, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union concluded a treaty on the relationship between the Czechoslovak government and the Soviet commander-in-chief after the Red Army's entry into Czechoslovak territory during its liberation. The treaty stated that after the end of immediate military operations, all power would be in the hands of Czechoslovak authorities. In particular, paragraph No. 7 of this treaty stated that the civilian population would be under Czechoslovak jurisdiction, even in cases of crimes against Soviet soldiers. However, after the Red Army's arrival in the early spring of 1945, the treaty was not honored and its provisions were violated.

At the end of military operations in Czechoslovakia, Soviet authorities began a campaign to arrest and deport Czechoslovak civilians to the Soviet Union. The regions most affected by deportations were Central and Eastern Slovakia, and Prague. The local authorities did not ignore these events and repeatedly requested a halt to such operations. On June 5, 1945, General Bohumil Boček, Chief of the General Staff of

---

<sup>1</sup> My research on the repatriation of Czechoslovak citizens from the internment and prison camps in the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1950 was made possible by a generous grant from the Central European University, awarded in 1992 and 1993. This article is an enlarged version of my paper "The Deportation of Czechoslovak Citizens to the GULAG, 1945–1950", presented at the Conference on Central and Eastern Europe, University of South Florida, Sarasota, Florida, on April 3, 1997. The first results of my research on this topic were published in my article "Pohlčení stalinskou mocí. Českoslovenští občané deportovaní do internačních táborů na území SSSR a československé ministerstvo zahraničí 1945–1950" [Czechoslovak citizens in the Soviet internment and prison camps and the role of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, 1945–1950]. *Mezinárodní politika* 11 (1991) 26f.

the Czechoslovak Armed Forces informed the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the arrest and deportation of Czechoslovak citizens by the Red Army. Boček asked the Foreign Ministry to take the steps to halt the arrests and requested that the treaty of May 8, 1944 be respected by the Red Army. Boček demanded that deported Czechoslovak citizens be returned immediately<sup>2</sup>. These protests failed to generate any positive response.

From the beginning, the Czechoslovak and Soviet positions in respect to repatriation of deported civilians were contradictory. The Czechoslovaks demanded that all of their deported citizens be unconditionally returned. The Czechoslovak government asked that the Soviets submit a list of individuals they had detained, and concentrate them for repatriation. Czechoslovak diplomats pushed for the adoption of this plan of action, but with little effect; the Soviets refused to solve the dispute in this manner. The Soviets required the Czechoslovak side to provide the lists of the names and addresses of the deported and interned people. Only after these materials, including identification numbers, names and locations of camps, were provided would the Soviets start negotiations<sup>3</sup>. Soviet demands led to an impasse for it was impossible to meet these conditions. How could the family members or the Czechoslovak government know the identification and the location of the camps in which the deported persons were kept? During the summer and fall of 1945, as the documents in the Foreign Ministry's Archives in Prague demonstrate, the family members of the internees were still trying to find out what happened and where their fathers, brothers, and daughters had disappeared. In cases where whole families were deported, or even whole villages, like Vyšný Blh in Slovakia, the search for Czechoslovak citizens was even further delayed. Often, people did not realize that their family members or neighbours had been deported to the Soviet Union. Many people disappeared without a trace. Overjoyed that the war was over and anxious to assist their Slavic brothers, men volunteered to help the Soviet liberators as interpreters, to repair their cars, or to reconstruct damaged railroads and highways. After they finished their tasks, however, many did not return home and were deported.

The inflexibility of the Soviet negotiators, plus the need to act forced the Czechoslovak government into meeting unreasonable Soviet requirements. Starting in the middle of 1946, the Czechoslovak government was able to develop quite effective methods in this respect. At the same time, the Czechoslovak diplomats did not abandon the position that it was a moral duty to intervene for every deported Czechoslovak citizen without exception, and continue to demand that the Soviets had to unconditionally release all Czechoslovak deported civilians. However, starting from the middle of 1947, growing pressure by Communists within the Czechoslovak government led to a complete change in official attitudes toward this problem, and to the adoption of the Soviet position requiring selective repatriation. The goal of this article is to examine the peripetia of the struggle for the repatriation of Czechoslovak citizens from GULAG (*Gossudarstvennoe Upravleniye Lageryami*; State Administration of the Camps) and

<sup>2</sup> Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (further AMFA), U.S.S.R. 1945-1959, box 37, folder 4.

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Czechoslovak Embassy in Moscow from October 15, 1945. AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945-1959, box 37, folder 3.

to document the gradual incorporation of Czechoslovakia into the Soviet sphere of influence.

Although the Soviets argued that it was impossible to register the Czechoslovak internees because they were dispersed all over the huge territory of the Soviet Union, my research indicates that the Soviet regime did not want to release the interned Czechoslovaks this way. An examination of documents on the administration of the NKVD (Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del; People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) camps<sup>4</sup> suggests that Soviet organs were actually able to compose the list of the Czechoslovak internees, and could have passed the data along in Czechoslovakia. GULAG records clearly show that in the camps, registration of internees by national groups was a routine. The Soviet authorities did have the records available, and it was possible for them to submit the names of the people whom they had arrested and deported from Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the Czechoslovak deportees were not as widely dispersed as the Soviet diplomats claimed. For the most part, they were concentrated in a few camps in the Donbas area of the Ukraine, and in the Dzhaudzhikau and Nuzal camps in the Northern Osetiya. They also were in several places in the Vologodskaya oblast, in particular in the Cherepovets camps. My research indicates that it certainly would have been possible for the Soviets to organize the transfer of all deported Czechoslovaks back to their homeland. As the Czechoslovak Embassy in Moscow reported, both the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs ("MID", Ministerstvo Innostrannykh Del) and the Governmental Repatriation Office refused to take any steps toward the repatriation of these citizens, unless the Czechoslovak authorities submitted the current address of the persons to be repatriated<sup>5</sup>.

The first indications of the locations of the camps and the names of people interned there appeared during 1946, when some of them happily returned and the first messages arrived. Until then, family members tried everything possible to find out where their relatives were. People wrote letters to institutions in Slovakia (mainly to the Presidium of the Slovak National Council), and in Prague (such as Red Cross, Presidential Chancellery, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Social Welfare) to search for their loved ones. This correspondence was forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was in charge of the agenda of repatriation. Most of these letters were written by wives or by parents. The ages of the deportees ranged from sixteen- and seventeen-year old boys and girls to seventy-year old men.

Due to Soviet intransigence, individual interventions were the only alternative left to repatriate those deported. The chance to be repatriated depended on whether the person was lucky enough to inform someone in Czechoslovakia about his or her location, and whether this information was submitted to the Ministry of Foreign

---

<sup>4</sup> I have examined particularly the record group "NKVD Administration of Prisoners of War and Internees" (UPVI NKVD SSSR: Upravleniye dlya voennoplennyykh i internirovannykh Narodnogo komissariata vnutrennikh del SSSR) in the Center of Storage of the Historical and Documentary Collections (Tsentr khraneniya istoriko-dokumental'nykh kollektsey) in Moscow (former Central State Special Archives). I also researched in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and in the Gossudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii in Moscow.

<sup>5</sup> AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945-1959, box 37, folder 3.

Affairs. As the flow of requests for intervention grew, local governments were instructed how to proceed. The data from letters of family members or local authorities (mostly local burgermeisters, local police stations or professional circles, such as the Association of the Slovak Railroad Employees, and the Association of the Slovak Teachers), were summarized in the lists and transmitted through the Czechoslovak Embassy in Moscow into Soviet hands. The Soviet Embassy in Prague was used much less frequently for transmitting the information.

On March 26, 1946, the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Moscow, Jiří Horák, saw the Soviet Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Vyshinsky (the notorious chief prosecutor of the political trials of the 1930's) and asked him to intervene on behalf of the Czechoslovak internees. Horák's Memorandum of Conversation<sup>6</sup> illustrates the hopelessness of the situation:

I have negotiated with Vyshinsky on Czechoslovak citizens interned in the U.S.S.R. I stated that in this matter, we already had submitted to the Soviet Foreign Ministry three notes, a detailed memorandum and I intervened seven times orally in person and stressed the problems our Government is dealing with. Vyshinsky answered that according to the data of Soviet authorities, there are only 513 persons left in the Soviet Union, which is the number stated in the Soviet note from January 30. Against his statement I argued, that our Government was receiving continuously new lists of interned persons, and besought the Soviet Government to solve the whole situation in a great-hearted and high-principled way. Those who are guilty will render an account to the Czechoslovak courts. Vyshinsky objected that it was almost impossible to determine the locations of the persons dispersed in the huge territory of the Soviet Union. I argued that according to our information there were in the Stalin Works # 234-241 several hundred of interned Czechoslovak citizens. Vyshinsky promised this would be examined and said we will be informed. To the high-principled way of the solution, he said that he would discuss the question with other respective authorities.

Horák concluded his memorandum by noting the Soviet lack of cooperation and said, "I consider this to be one of the top priorities of the Embassy, which will work on this problem with maximum effort" (translated from Czech by the author).

In 1946, all attempts to persuade the Soviets return the deported Czechoslovaks or at least to submit the precise lists of their names, failed. Therefore, the Czechoslovak government launched a large campaign of registration of all the missing citizens. Every three months, the local police stations and local governments had to announce all missing persons and had to submit the names and data of those who returned. The forms were to be returned periodically to the Foreign Ministry, which summarized them and transmitted them to the Soviet Union. This was the only way to bring home as many of the deportees as possible. Without this initiative, the number of those who were finally repatriated would have been much smaller. It was an effective answer to the Soviet unwillingness to inform the Czechoslovak side about whom the Soviet authorities had arrested. In the second half of 1946, the first people finally returned from the Soviet Union and, thanks to the information they provided, more precise names and locations of the camps were available.

---

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum of Conversation of Ambassador Jiří Horák from March 26, 1946. AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945-1959, box 37, folder 3.

The Czechoslovak government struggled to analyze the fragmentary information and to organize it systematically. On April 19, 1946, the Foreign Ministry sent a secret analysis of the known data on deported and interned people to the Ministry of National Defense<sup>7</sup>. This report divided the Czechoslovak citizens interned in the Soviet camps into two categories: prisoners of war, and civilians who were arrested in Czechoslovak territory by the Red Army or by the NKVD and deported to the Soviet Union. These two major categories were broken into subcategories such as „persons considered, by the Soviet authorities, to be prisoners of war.“ Among them were civilians who had been deported by the Germans to Hungary to labor on fortifications. The advancing Red Army captured many of these individuals.

Unfortunately, the Czechoslovak position itself was weakened as the domestic political tensions grew. The gradual pressure from Czechoslovak Communists, supported by the Soviet Union, influenced many crucial and politically sensitive questions, including the agenda of repatriations. Vladimír Clementis, one of the top Communist leaders, appointed from 1945 to 1948 as State Secretary to the Foreign Ministry, constantly undermined the position of the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Moscow. By 1947, the Communist influence in the Foreign Ministry was obvious. Within the Ministry of Interior, the Communist position was even stronger. In the Spring of 1947, the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry's officers in charge of the agenda of repatriations noticed the first major signal that the Czechoslovakia's governmental repatriation philosophy might have been challenged. In March 1947, the Ministry of Interior suddenly claimed the right to decide whether negotiations for repatriation of individuals should commence. The Foreign Ministry's desk officers considered the demand of the Interior "as not very convenient, because it weakens our position in the negotiations with the Soviets. Our stand which we hold against the Soviets is based on the paragraph number seven of the treaty from May 8, 1944"<sup>8</sup>. The Foreign Ministry finally stopped openly arguing with the Interior Ministry, so "that unnecessary abstract debates do not postpone even more the return of the interned people to the home country, which would result in a loss of moral values"<sup>9</sup>.

This first serious conflict between the Interior and the Foreign Ministries in the matter of repatriations concentrated thus in the debate on the "statement on national and political reliability". The Foreign Ministry's approach was that "it is necessary to intervene for every Czechoslovak citizen if the statement on national and political reliability of that person issued by the local national committee is included in the file"<sup>10</sup>. The purpose of this statement was to confirm whether the person had collaborated with the Nazi regime or not. The result of this debate was a compromise, which was in fact a victory for the Communists, since the Ministry of Interior was authorized to approve preliminary lists of persons on whose behalf the Foreign Ministry would intervene.

<sup>7</sup> Secret urgent information of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Ministry of National Defense from April 19, 1946. AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945-1959, box 37, folder 4.

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum for the State Secretary Vladimír Clementis from March 18, 1947. AMFA, U.S.S.R., 1945-1959, box 38, folder 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.



Many of the deported people, in particular in Slovakia, had been, more or less, working for the government of the Slovak State, or were members of the Hlinka Guards during World War II. On the other hand, many victims of deportations were politically indifferent people. The resistance fighters against Fascism, even Jewish survivors of the Holocaust who just returned from the concentration camps were arrested by the NKVD and deported to the Soviet Union.

Many people were deported as victims of neighborhood jealousies and grudges after being pointed out to the Soviets as supporters of Nazi policy. The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry continued to repeat at every occasion that the potential guilt of deported people must be investigated and judged by Czechoslovak courts, and that therefore even the alleged Nazi collaborators must be repatriated.

During the first months of 1947, the repatriation program finally moved forward. The Soviet Government's Representative for the Repatriations, General Golubiev, agreed that the repatriation would be carried out in the Luisdorf camp (near Odessa). The repatriation had to be observed by an officer of the Czechoslovak Embassy. Usually it was the second secretary, Emil Schulz, who needed to ask months in advance at the Soviet Foreign Ministry for permission to visit the camp. This example illustrates how the Soviet bureaucracy slowed and complicated the return of deported civilians. The policies of influential Czechoslovak authorities, for example those of the Ministry of Interior, played into the Soviet hands. The Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior required that an extra step should be included: a final approval issued by the Ministry of Interior in Prague to each candidate for repatriation. This meant that an extra step was unavoidable after all the paperwork was completed. The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry struggled to avoid this requirement and argued that it would be an unnecessary duplication of procedure. Finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior concluded a compromise solution. They agreed that a permission from the Ministry of Interior would be required just in "dubious cases, as for example in the case of a person not speaking Czech or Slovak ..."<sup>11</sup>. From this camp in Odessa, the repatriates were transported by train to the station at Čop on the Czechoslovak-Soviet border, where they were released into the hands of Czechoslovak authorities. The other route was through the camp in Sighet, Rumania. The majority of repatriations was completed between the fall of 1946 and fall 1947.

The Communists in the Ministry of the Interior applied constant pressure on the desk officers of the Foreign Ministry to make the repatriation as selective as Moscow wanted. The Czechoslovak diplomats were in a very difficult position, since the Czechoslovak side was far from united and undoubtedly undermined by the Communists. The conflicts between the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Interior reached a climax later in 1947. On November 21, 1947, a major interministerial meeting was held in the Foreign Ministry in Prague<sup>12</sup>. Officials responsible for repatriation met in the Černin Palace to discuss the repatriation from the Soviet Union. This meeting was critical due to the basic difference in the approaches of the Foreign Ministry and the

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes from the meeting, AMFA, U.S.S.R., 1945-1959, box 38, folder 7, file number 240.893-I-1.

Ministries of Interior and Defense. The participants included the chief of the Foreign Ministry's Fifth Department, which was in charge of repatriations from the Soviet Union, Dr. O. Pára, and desk officers Dr. Jan Danko and Dr. Bartoň. Minister-Counsellor Kašpárek represented the Czechoslovak Embassy in Moscow and contributed his experience with negotiating the repatriation and intervening for Czechoslovak citizens at the Soviet Foreign Ministry. The Ministry of Interior was represented by the chiefs of the departments, Dr. Skořepa and Dr. Chudoba, and by three lower ranking officers. The Ministry of National Defense was represented by Lieutenant-Colonel Gráf, the Ministry of Social Welfare representative was Dr. Šatava.

After a dramatic debate, the representatives of the Ministries of National Defense and Interior pushed through a program in support of the Soviet attitude on the repatriations. The unconditional return of all Czechoslovak civilians deported in the Soviet Union, supported by the Foreign Ministry, was rejected. The arguments of the Foreign Ministry that 900 persons out of 1,500 had already returned, and the process of repatriation which finally started to be productive would be slowed down if the changes were implemented, did not succeed. The selective approach won. The Interior representatives presented the selective repatriation as a matter of national security, and assured participants that they had already approved the repatriation of 4,000 people. If they were to be given the authority, they said, the entire process could be accelerated and would last no longer than one month. After this meeting, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs transferred the agenda of repatriations from its political department into its administrative unit. The issue of repatriations, which was on the top of Ministry's priorities, became now "just a problem of management and transportation."<sup>13</sup>

There were permanent discrepancies between the number of people actually repatriated and those supposed to be repatriated. The Czechoslovak Embassy in Moscow constantly protested to the Soviet Foreign Ministry because it was not given this information. In particular, there was a lack of data on transportation of interned Czechoslovaks. The Soviets submitted figures which did not correspond to what the Czechoslovak border authorities recorded. The differences were enormous, amounting to thousands of people. The highest ranking Soviet officer responsible for the repatriation agenda, General Golubiev, declared on June 11, 1948, that the Soviet Union sent to Czechoslovakia 91,560 people, 44,157 of whom were prisoners of war and interned civilians<sup>14</sup>. It was impossible for the Czechoslovak authorities to verify those figures. A difference of 32,000 people was not explained. The Czechoslovaks declared that by the end of 1948 the Czechoslovak border authorities had checked in a total of 12,246 persons, including both prisoners of war and internees. According to the Czechoslovak data, 2,699 out of that number were Slovaks, 2,318 were "reslovakizants", e.g. Hungarians who declared an intention to change their nationality for a Slovak one; 4,517 were Hungarians, 204 Germans, 58 Ruthenians and 4 were classified as "others". At that time however, the Soviets came forward with another number of repatriated Czechoslovaks: 55,517. The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry was hesi-

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945-1959, box 39, folder 8.

tant to accept the Soviet data. From 1945 to January 7, 1949, according to the Czechoslovak data, the Soviets sent to Czechoslovakia via the railway station of Čierna nad Tisou, 3,426 prisoners and internees. Of these, 931 arrived by September 14, 1948, and later, in seven transportations, another 2,495<sup>15</sup>.

On April 29, 1949, the Czechoslovak Embassy in Moscow announced that the Soviet side had officially declared the completion of repatriations of prisoners of war and interned people. Therefore, the Soviet authorities would not accept lists of prisoners of war and internees any longer<sup>16</sup>. The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry and Ministry of National Defense argued that "our consideration of the repatriation as completed would depend on how many prisoners and interned persons did not return yet"<sup>17</sup>. The Soviets, however, considered the repatriation to be over, and that was decisive. The agenda of repatriations drastically changed. The lists of people to be repatriated ceased to appear. When a repatriation was negotiated, it was always considered as an individual and exceptional case. The hope that the Red Cross could be used to continue repatriations failed. The Czechoslovak Red Cross had a very bad experience with its Soviet counterpart, who demonstrated a complete lack of cooperation. The Czechoslovak Red Cross was in charge of the search for persons overlooked in the Soviet Union in 1948. It sent daily about 15–20 letters to the Soviet Red Cross. However, in July 1949 the Czechoslovak Red Cross reported that no missing person was found whatsoever, no case was completed yet, and that for more than three months no mail had arrived from the Soviet Red Cross<sup>18</sup>.

Upon the conclusion of the repatriation, two Czechoslovak diplomats from the embassy in Moscow, Vaško and Štefan, paid a visit to the chief of the Soviet Government's Office for Repatriation General Golubiev<sup>19</sup>. Counselor Vaško asked him for a final summary. General Golubiev offered the following Soviet data, which again drastically differed from which Golubiev himself had claimed in June, 1948. Now, he said, the total number of repatriated Czechoslovaks was 49,300 persons. Out of this number, 11,971 were prisoners and interned persons, 1,791 Hungarian prisoners of war, and 35,538 were "liberated persons". Golubiev failed to precisely define this last category. The Czechoslovak diplomats pointed out the obvious discrepancies in the Soviet data and Golubiev agreed to verify the numbers and present an official report. However, the major point of the conversation was for Golubiev something else: the repatriation from Czechoslovakia into the Soviet Union.

The Soviets demanded that Czechoslovakia was to deliver into their hands the Russian or Ukrainian nationals who had lived in Czechoslovakia since the 1920s. General Golubiev said it clearly: the cooperation of the Czechoslovak government in bringing the ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians into the Soviet Union would be indispensable. First, Czechoslovakia should submit the lists of the Russians and Ukrainians living in Czechoslovakia. Golubiev warned that

<sup>15</sup> Information of the Fifth Department for the Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimír Clementis from February 9, 1949. AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945–1959, box 39, folder 2.

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum from December 19, 1949. AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945–1959, box 39, folder 7.

<sup>17</sup> AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945–1959, box 39, folder 2.

<sup>18</sup> AMFA, U.S.S.R. 1945–1959, box 38, folder 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.



the local institutions especially might have different personal or other reasons including perhaps the sentimental ones to be not sufficiently willing to cooperate, considering the known fact that the Czechoslovaks have a positive attitude toward the Soviet people who found often in Czechoslovakia their home, married Czechoslovak women and have children. All of them will be summoned to be interviewed and the list of the people to be repatriated will be set up.

Golubiev stated that the Soviet Union would consider the next Czechoslovak applications for repatriation from the Soviet Union according to Czechoslovak cooperation in this matter. The Czechoslovak Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Bohuslav Laštovička (a Communist appointee who replaced Jiří Horák), recommended that the Ministry of Interior "instruct in an adequate way the local authorities on cooperation with the Soviet repatriation mission". Due to Communist infiltration, it was no wonder that the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior did the utmost to cooperate with the Soviets. In 1949, one year after the Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia, when Stalin's personal cult had reached its climax, the Czechoslovak official reaction hardly could have been anything other than cooperation.

How could the Czechoslovak government permit the deportation of its citizens? Did the government work effectively enough for the return of its deported civilians? Given the military and political situations, the Czechoslovak authorities probably could hardly have prevented the deportation from happening. My research documents show clearly that the Red Army and the NKVD units openly violated the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty of May 8, 1944. In many cases the Soviet elements blatantly misused the Czechoslovak local authorities when they asked for temporary labor to work on local routes or railroads. Often, the people who volunteered to help the liberators were deported without reason. However, in many cases the Czechs and Slovaks reported their own neighbors as Nazi collaborators. My study did not focus on the Nazi collaboration as a particular phenomenon. My position is that even in the case of an individual's support of the pro-Hitler regime in Slovakia, the Red Army and the NKVD had no right to deport any Czechoslovak citizens to the labor camps. Czechoslovak citizens were, as the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty of May 8, 1944 stated, under all circumstances subject to Czechoslovak jurisdiction.

The Czechoslovak point of view requiring the unconditional return of all Czechoslovak citizens was fully justified. However, the gradual incorporation of Czechoslovakia in the sphere of Soviet influence caused the policy of some influential Czechoslovak institutions to change. Until then, the Czechoslovak government considered bringing the deported civilians home as quickly as possible to be a priority and a moral issue. All the other questions, such as suspicion of an individual's cooperation with the government of the Slovak State during World War II were to be solved by Czechoslovak institutions after the repatriation. The change in procedure that occurred in the middle of 1947 meant the adoption of Stalinist principles.

The coerced deportation of the so-called "white emigration" was a particularly tragic case. These people, predominantly of Russian, Ukrainian or "Baltic" ethnicity, had lived in Czechoslovakia for decades, mostly since the 1920s. They were Czechoslovak citizens. Many of them were arrested and deported by the Red Army and NKVD elements immediately after the liberation. Others were deported later, as a result of pressure from the Soviet government. There was no chance for their return. In 1945

and 1946, Czechoslovakia frequently intervened for their repatriation. The Soviets stubbornly refused to negotiate, and declared such negotiations to be politically unsuitable. After 1946, the Czechoslovak interventions ceased.

The situation of the deportees was both tragic and paradoxical. Because they were civilians they did not have the status of prisoners of war, but they actually were treated by the Soviets as prisoners of war, even though they were citizens of a friendly<sup>20</sup> country. Once they got into the Stalinist machine, they were *a priori* and automatically considered as enemies of the Soviet state and treated as such. I think that one reason for large scale deportations of the civilian population was the Soviet Union's need for labor.

The main reason for the deportations, however, was geopolitics. Czechoslovakia fell into the sphere of Soviet interests and began to be treated as a satellite. The political context, and in particular the class principle hidden behind the deportation of civilians, is obvious: among the victims of deportation were in particular the Hungarians from Slovakia, Jews, ethnic Russians and Ukrainians from the Czech lands, judges, notaries, teachers, high school teachers, railroad station chiefs, policemen, medical doctors, priests, pharmacists, veterinary doctors, bookkeepers, shopkeepers, high school students. Those were ethnic, political or occupational groups that the Communists considered to be the class enemies or at least the potential betrayers of the working-class interests. Many people living behind the Iron Curtain, nourished only by the Communist interpretation of history, justified the use of prisoners of war for the reconstruction of the Soviet economy. One of the common arguments was that prisoners of war were soldiers of the Wehrmacht and its allies – the Slovak and Hungarian armies –, and therefore expropriation of their labor was correct. The deported civilians were officially considered as collaborators with the Nazis, and their fates did not usually inspire much sympathy among uninformed people. This topic was taboo, and no research or publication about it was possible. The Communist interpretation of the liberation of Czechoslovakia was oriented exclusively on glorification of the Red Army. Communist propaganda, literature, poetry, creative arts, cinematography and historiography depicted for decades a black and white picture of the liberation of Czechoslovakia, and nothing could have been allowed to damage the glorious illusion about the liberators.

The Soviet Union kept the alleged prisoners of war after the deadline for release of all prisoners of war expired in 1948. The Soviets have always denied this fact. The Soviet Union has been openly criticized for this policy. One of the main platforms for

---

<sup>20</sup> The Soviet Union did recognize the Slovak State which was established on March 14, 1939. In July 1941, this recognition was withdrawn by the Soviet Union which recognized the Czechoslovak Government in exile in London. The Allied repudiation, in the summer of 1941, of the Munich agreement, established the political and legal continuity of the First Republic and Beneš' presidency. On December 12, 1943, the Treaty on Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Postwar Cooperation was signed between the Czechoslovak and Soviet Governments. On May 8, 1944, an agreement was signed which stipulated that the Czechoslovak territory liberated by the Soviets would be placed under Czechoslovak civilian control, to which reference has been made at the beginning of this article.

the criticism was the United Nations General Assembly<sup>21</sup>. Of course, any criticism was rejected by the Soviet Union as imperialist propaganda, and the Soviet satellites including Czechoslovakia always stood at the Soviet side. Only under President Mikhail Gorbachev did the Soviet Government publicly admit that POWs were kept in the Soviet Union much longer than the international agreements allowed. However, the perestroika and glasnost leaders refused to admit that civilians from foreign countries were interned in the camps. The situation changed only after the collapse of Communism: in the countries of the Soviet bloc, topics related to the Soviet Union ceased to be taboo, and Soviet archives were finally made accessible to historical researchers.

---

<sup>21</sup> All the German POW had to be repatriated by the end of 1948, but the Soviet Union did not respect this deadline. In 1950, the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, France and Australia stated at the General Assembly of the United Nations that the Soviet Union did not respect the conclusions of the Geneva and Hague Conventions on Prisoners of War and interned persons. In the same year, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer officially asked the Soviet Union to inform him about the fate of more than one-million German POWs who were still missing. In May 1950, the Governments of the United States, Great Britain and France submitted to the Soviet Union a note asking for the establishment of an international institution for the investigation of POWs in the Soviet Union and at the same time mentioned the interned civilian persons who had been deported from their home countries.