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RUSSIAN ANTI-COMMUNIST FORCES IN THE GERMAN WAR

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RUSSIAN ANTI-COMMUNIST FORCES IN THE GERMAN WAR

I INTRODUCTION

Once the German Army had been unable to win a complete military victory in the East in the opening weeks of the war, it became clear that Germany would have to fight a long, hard struggle to crush Russian resistance. Furthermore, it was equally clear that Germany lacked the military strength and manpower to impose such a decision by military means alone. Even with the total mobilization of German manpower and the use of all the available human resources of the European continent, Germany was unable to raise sufficient troops to carry out military operations and at the same time guard its lines of communication and maintain order in the occupied areas. It was obvious that military action would have to be accompanied by parallel political and psychological warfare.

The groundwork for psychological warfare already existed in the hatred which a large portion of the Russian population, and particularly the peasants, felt toward the Soviet regime. They were prepared to side with the Germans provided German leadership adopted a clear political policy which would take into account the desires of the population, and the peculiarities of the Russian situation. Tens of thousands of Russian prisoners-of-war volunteered for service against the Red Army, while in the early fighting the rate of desertion in the Red Army was exceptionally high, and the peasant population in the villages welcomed the Germans as liberators.

The Germans, however, were unable or unwilling to use this opportunity. Hitler's colonial policy based on the exploitation of the Russian areas as Germany's "India" quickly turned the Russian population against the Germans. The Hitler policy also necessitated the continuation of the collective farm system in order to facilitate this exploitation. The failure of the Germans to liquidate the collective farms more than any other single factor turned the peasants against the invaders and led to their support of the Partisan Movement. This revulsion on the part of the peoples of the Soviet Union was further hastened by the brutal and overbearing attitude of the Nazi occupation authorities who treated them as inferior beings.

Another factor in the German attitude which prevented full utilization of anti-Soviet forces within the U.S.S.R. was the basic Nazi fear that any Russian force which they created to fight against Stalin might in the end turn against them and become a defender of the Russian people against Germany. Within even these limitations the Germans might have made some headway had they ever been able to establish any single policy toward Russia. Instead various government agencies, as well as the German military authorities improvised policy as they went along, thus adding to the confusion and hastening the German defeat. Only in November, 1944, the Germans finally decided, far too late, that the war in the East could only be won if the Russian people were convinced that it was not a war directed against them, but a war to free them from their Communist leadership. The effort which Himmler made to use the movement of the former Soviet General Andrei Vlassov for this end proved abortive, and the Vlassov Movement was engulfed and destroyed in the over-all German defeat.

II GERMANY'S LOST OPPORTUNITY

As early as October, 1942, Brautigam, a high official in the Ostministerium (Ministry for the Eastern Territories) headed by Alfred Rosenberg reported in a secret memorandum that "the feats of arms of our noble army have been neutralized.... by an inadequate political policy" (in the occupied areas and toward the Russian prisoners,) and that, in consequence, "the possibility of a German defeat moves into the immediate foreground."

This estimate of German operations in the U.S.S.R. is confirmed by very considerable documentary evidence recovered in Germany. Germany had an extraordinary opportunity to secure the cooperation of a great number of Soviet subjects. Not only did Germany fail to win such allies permanently, but, on the contrary, converted those persons who were prepared to be her friends into bitter enemies, a phenomenon which was reflected in the steady growth of the Soviet Partisan Movement. The Germans were both unwilling and unprepared to make use of the tremendous numbers of individuals in the U.S.S.R. who were ready to assist the Germans in a fight to overthrow the Communists. The fate of the movement of General Vlassov, a high-ranking Soviet military leader, who later sided with the Germans, is an especially instructive example of this phenomenon, but its significance can only be understood when it is studied in relation to actual German policy.

For almost the whole period of the war in the East there was never, in fact, a unified German policy with a clear objective. Various Nazi leaders, ministries and military authorities had divergent objectives and each sought to carry out a corresponding policy. On the 6th of June, 1942, for instance, Dr. Paul Goebbels, Minister for Propaganda, wrote in his diary, "Concerning our Policies in the Occupied Eastern Areas:- Here everybody is simply governing recklessly, generally one against another, without any clear objective."

In the final analysis, any policy decision was Hitler's responsibility. But Hitler was not informed of everything, and many questions were only brought to his attention after protracted struggles between various Party leaders. On the 1st of June Goebbels wrote: "I have the impression that.... the Fuehrer has not been informed of the true situation by the Ostministerium."

III HITLER'S COLONIAL POLICY

For Hitler and many of the old Nazis, especially for men like Koch and Lohse, who ruled the occupied areas with the title of "Reich Commissars," the German objective was clear and simple. The struggle against Russia was for them an out-and-out war of conquest. Although they also paid lip service to the Crusade against Bolshevism, they would have waged a similar war against any government which was in power in Russia.

Hitler had no detailed plan for the future organization of Russia, but instead a general program in which he believed with unshakeable resolution. A few sentences from his book "Mein Kampf" show what this program meant: "Today there are eighty million Germans in Europe! Only then will that foreign policy be acknowledged to be right when in hardly a hundred years from now two hundred fifty million Germans will live on this continent.... If we today in Europe speak about new territory, land and soil, we can only be thinking about Russia and its satellities."

In September, 1941, Hitler said, in a conversation with Otto Abetz, the German Ambassador in Paris, that, "the new Russia will be our India, but a little bit better situated than the British one. The new German Empire will comprise 135 millions and control a further 150 millions."

The practical implementation of this program in the occupied areas necessitated a colonial policy of the worst sort, and such a policy was, in fact, carried out by both the Reich Commissars in the East. Koch in the Ukraine was particularly brutal. This policy prevented any effort to obtain the voluntary cooperation of the population and any local self-government.

IV POLITICAL IDEAS OF ROSENBERG

Many German leaders and even some old Nazis such as Rosenberg did not approve of the colonial policy. Rosenberg believed the policy of the Reich should have been to achieve a breaking up of the East and its peoples. For him the war against Russia was a war for the destruction of the greater Russian Empire, and for the dissolution of the greater Russian Empire into its national components.

Instead of favoring a division of Russia into colonies, however, Rosenberg wanted a collection of small national states, whose independence was to be restricted but not entirely vitiated by their integration into the European Orbit (the Germans use the term "Grossraum" meaning literally "Great area".) Within the framework of this Orbital concept Germany was not only to be a colonizing power but the leading power of the European Orbit. "An orbital order is essential to the concept of an Empire. Empires in this sense are the leading and supporting powers whose political ideas permeate a specific orbit, excluding the intervention of powers from other orbits." (Karl Schmidt. "Volkerrechtliche Grofsraumordnung," 4th Edition 1941, page 36.) In practice Rosenberg's whole policy was greatly affected by his fear of a future reunification of the various peoples of the U.S.S.R. by the Great Russians.

Rosenberg was prepared to permit the formation of local governments (in the Baltic countries,) and national committees and national armies in other parts of the U.S.S.R., and he recommended such a step in a memorandum he gave to Hitler. He was, however, opposed to any single all-Russian organization, or any all-Russian Army, and was against the installation of Great Russians in positions of leadership in any organization. He was more inclined to exploit the national animosities existing among the Great Russian and other ethnic groups belonging to the Soviet Union. He did not succeed, however, in making Hitler change his mind. When he suggested a change of policy in May, 1943, Hitler retorted that "all history proves that one cannot make allies out of conquered peoples."

V ATTITUDE OF GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC GROUPS

Various government economic bureaus, such as the Wehrwirtschaftsstab (Military Economic Staff,) the Verwaltung des Vierjahresplans (the Four-Year Plan group headed by Fieldmarshal Goering,) and the Reichsernährungsministerium (Reich Ministry of Food) considered the occupied areas from the viewpoint of immediate exploitation, primarily as a source of food for the Army and the German people. The need to maintain Russian food production was of decisive importance, because it prevented the dissolution of the Kolkhozes (collective farms,) and the return of the land to the ownership of the individual peasants. Even during the very first days of the war the great importance of this question was realized, and the Russian experts in the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs emphasized the need for a solution.

One of these experts, Grosskopf, wrote anxiously on the 12th of July, 1941, that "I have just learned.... that the fundamentally opposed attitude of the Military Economic Staff has so far prevented the exploitation of the propaganda value of the agrarian problem." The deciding factor, as far as the Military Economic Staff was concerned, was the fact that any break-up of the collective farms would cause a reduction in agricultural products available for the troops. As a compromise, it was finally decided to promise the peasants that the collective farms would be broken up rather than actually returning the land to private ownership.

However, the mere promise, not only did not quiet the peasant population but, on the contrary, soon aroused a bitter hatred among them against their German liberators. They were quick to note that actual and continued daily operations of the collectives were a direct and complete contradiction to the promised return of the land.

Early in August, 1941, one of the Russian specialists of the Foreign Office, Ungern-Sternberg, wrote: "Division of land among the peasants, or the reconstitution of private property.... would be, beyond all doubt, the most effective propaganda theme for both the Russian civil population and the Red Army. However, it would be invidious to make promises in these questions, which affect the masses most strongly, when, in the long run, there is no possibility of fulfilling them. The Russian, owing to the conditions under which he has lived for the last twenty years, has become a very sober and materialistic thinker and would

take it very hard, if he were to suffer new disappointments in the question that for him is decisive."

Another German observer during the same period warned that "orders, violence, threats of execution, etc. no longer have any effect on the Russian, after all the years that he has seen and heard nothing else anyway -- with the vital difference that in that era there actually were executions in every village and hamlet, because the Soviets had plenty of people for the pursuit of their aims, while we, on the other hand, never will have enough people for such a program. And the Russian peasant today, even before we have begun to make him really happy, has long since comprehended that fact."

In a report of the German Army High Command, dated August 24th, 1941, future developments in the East were foreseen with significant exactness.

"This population will reject everyone who appears to them to be a representative of the Collective Farm System and who therefore represents expropriation and poverty for the individual peasant. It is therefore possible, with very minor concessions, to organize a population which can be very useful.

"If this is not done, then there is the danger that the peasants, especially in view of the hard winter and the incipient war shortages, will fall prey to Communist propaganda and support the Partisan Movement. That will mean an additional heavy burden for the Reich in maintaining the security of these vast areas."

VI IMPLEMENTATION OF COLONIAL POLICY

There were far-reaching differences of opinion among German leaders as to the best method of dealing with the Eastern Peoples -- whether it was possible to achieve better results through mild or through brutal treatment of the population. The Reich Commissar in the Ukraine, Koch, was more responsible than anyone else for the brutal treatment and ruthless exploitation of the Ukrainain population, a logical result of his view that all Slavs were sub-human (Untermenschen.)

An official report of August, 1942, quotes him as saying, "The Ukraine must deliver those things which Germany needs.... The feeding of the Ukrainain civil population, in

comparison with this task, is a matter of total indifference The bearing of the Germans in this instance is determined by the fact that we have to deal with a people that is in every respect inferior. Association with Ukrainians, therefore, is out of the question. . . . These people must be ruled with an iron hand. . . . If these people work ten hours a day, then they must work eight of those ten hours for us."

The Army leaders, who were well aware of what was taking place, were forced to remain inactive while this policy created the best possible soil for the growth of the Soviet Partisan Movement. Even Rosenberg tried to influence Koch to change his policy, but he regarded himself as responsible only to the Fuehrer, and refused.

In July, 1943, Rosenberg took the problem directly to Hitler, who, however, supported the ideas of Koch: "The situation compels us to such a rigorous course of action that we can never secure the political support of the Ukrainians. . . . We are subordinated to the merciless law of war which decrees that we extract supplies and labor from the Ukrainians. Only weak generals can believe that we can secure workers with pretty speeches."

VII EFFORTS AND VIEWS OF MILITARY

The Army leaders, however, were influenced by the fact that, unlike Hitler, they did not by any means consider the German victory a certainty and sought ways to change the balance of power in their favor. Specifically, they were becoming alarmed by the steady growth of the Partisan Movement. In his diary Goebbels noted under the date of May 28th, 1942, a report of the Commander of the Central Army Group of May 14th.

"The situation is becoming constantly more serious," this report stated. "As a result of the daily increasing cases of attempted and successful sabotage and mining of the railroads, the guard over the railroad lines has had to be further strengthened. The result of that is that the areas between the railroad lines can no longer be kept in order. From all sides one receives calls for help against plundering and murdering by Partisans."

Goebbels wrote the following comment about these alarming reports from the Front: "From the East we receive reports of increasing Partisan activity. This has gotten

so far out of hand at the moment, that whole regions of the occupied Eastern Territories must be regarded as imperiled.

"Here we have the development of an extremely serious crisis, which we can only master, I believe, if we change certain features of our Eastern Policy."

A few excerpts from a situation-report compiled by the Army High Command on January 3rd, 1943, reflect the views which many military leaders held.

"The Red Army's will to resist remains unbroken. The Soviets give evidence of increased strength with the slogan 'National War,'" the report stated. "The morale of those parts of the population which are pro-German becomes worse constantly. Guerrilla-controlled areas are growing further.... Lines of communication vital to the war effort are endangered.... Increasing anxiety on the part of our own troops due to the obviously erroneous handling of the population: 'We ourselves are creating the Partisans.'"

Among others the following reasons were given for these developments: "Secret German directives concerning the worthlessness of the Slav Peoples and the necessity for their extermination have become widely known among the Russian people, and provide a fertile soil for hostility to Germany.... Increased Partisan activity and grave errors in the management of the population are damaging German prestige.... Insufficient carrying-out of the New Agrarian Order, no return of former private property...."

Among high-ranking officers of the German Army the conviction grew that "Russia can only be conquered by Russians." Some Germans credit the origin of this theory to General von Brauchitch, German Field Commander in the East, in November, 1941. It was, however, shared from the beginning of the war by a number of other military and civilian leaders especially the Foreign Office experts on Russia (Schulenburg, Hilger and Grosskopf.) It was these experts, as well as the people of the Ministry for the Eastern Territories, such as Brautigam, who most sharply condemned the policy evolved by Koch for the occupied areas.

VIII RUSSIAN VOLUNTEERS IN 1941 - 1942

The lack of any fixed political policy also prevented a uniform policy with regard to the employment of Russian volunteers. To be sure, Hitler issued a number of specific

directives on the subject, but there is ample evidence that in practice these orders were not always followed strictly and that many military units dealt with the problem on their own initiative, without the approval of higher headquarters. An analysis of the measures adopted by such units is necessary in order to gain a complete insight into employment of Russian volunteers by the German Army. Various Army headquarters were inclined from the start to integrate Russian volunteers into German formations. A good description is that given in a memorandum dated March 22nd, 1943, written by the General of Eastern Troops, Hellmich. "The relationship between space and the available forces compelled our people to help themselves," he wrote. "There came into existence the so-called Hilfswillige (those willing to help) and in the course of time the Osttruppen (Eastern Troops.) These were in themselves undesirable expedients to which we were forced by the shortage of personnel, and finally led to a state of affairs which required guidance from above."

Hellmich emphasized that "the employment of local inhabitants in the battle against Bolshevism was begun by combat units, which fact should settle the question as to whether there was need for such assistance." The step was considered a military necessity by the combat troops, and the improvization was satisfactory because for a time at least the results were good.

For Hitler, on the contrary, the question was closely linked to the over-all political problem. In December, 1941, he permitted the formation of Ost Legionen (Eastern Legions.) To carry out this decision the OKW (High Command of the Armed Forces) directed on December 22nd, 1941, that the following legions be created: a Turkistan Legion, a Caucasian-Mohammedan Legion, a Georgian Legion and an Armenian Legion.

On January 18th, 1942, Hitler authorized the unrestricted formation of Tartar units involving primarily Tartars from the Crimea. However, on February 10th, 1942, he expressly forbade the formation of volunteer units from prisoners of war or inhabitants of any occupied areas, except those specified above.

On the 23rd of March the High Command of the Armed Forces issued a decree which gave the basic reason for this policy.

"It is intended that the Turkish peoples and inhabitants of the Caucasus be permitted, after the war, to obtain

far-reaching independence," the observer stated. "For that reason the formation of volunteer legions actively participating in the war of liberation against the Bolsheviks from the citizens of these countries is permitted, whereas citizens of the Baltic countries, the Ukraine, etc., may only be considered for the police services and not for employment at the front."

In August, 1942, the Army High Command issued a secret pamphlet entitled, "Directive concerning Employment of Local Inhabitants in the East." The first sentence reads: "The vastness of the Eastern Area and the absolute necessity for economy in the employment of Germans have compelled us to employ the manpower of the conquered Eastern Countries in the most varied capacities in the service of the Armed Forces especially in the army in the field and in the service of the war economy."

The various nationalities were, however, to be employed in different ways. Members of the Turkish races and Cossacks, who were fighting beside the German troops as allies against the Bolshevik enemy, constituted a special group with the same privileges as German soldiers. Other nationalities -- with the exception of Great Russians -- could be placed in para-military formations to combat Partisans. There was also further discussion of the utilization of persons of all ethnic groups for police and various auxiliary services. On paper, everything was in order, but in the field the various decrees produced a far different result.

IX FAILURE OF EASTERN TROOPS

In September, 1943, a Commander of an Eastern Battalion wrote a letter to the Commander of Eastern Troops stating that conspiracies had been uncovered and mutinies and desertions of whole companies had taken place.

"The recruiting, which was originally conducted in 1941 and early 1942 carefully and accurately by a few politically gifted officers, was undertaken on a mass basis in the course of 1942.... Errors in recruiting have continued to date.... The Eastern Battalions are set to work from the day of their organization. So-called training periods have existed only on paper.... etc."

The Germans who undertook the organization of these battalions were not, according to the author of this letter, able to distinguish between good and bad elements. According

to this report, the ignorance of these German organizers, who had not the faintest knowledge of Eastern peoples, Bolshevism or Jewry, led to the recruiting of "purely Soviet products."

This criticism is sharp, but it does not get at the roots of the difficulty. The defects in recruiting were not only due to the shortcomings of the recruiters but, to an even greater degree to German policy or lack of policy. It was, of course, not stated publicly that only the so-called Turkish peoples and the inhabitants of the Caucasus were to receive far-reaching independence after the war, but the special handling and preferential treatment of the mentioned ethnic groups could hardly go unnoticed by the other peoples of the occupied areas.

The members of the other groups of necessity must have felt that they were being considered and treated as inferior beings. How could they, then, consider their service in the German Army as a battle for their own liberty and that of their homeland?

It was only natural that many of the volunteers were only induced to enter the German service for material reasons -- to escape the horrors of the prisoner-of-war camps, and even in many cases only to get an opportunity to plunder. No wonder, as the Eastern Battalion Commander wrote, that as one battalion after another was organized, "the good elements were constantly diluted until we were confronted by an unsupervisable, impenetrable, incalculable mass."

His last comment refers to the year 1943 (organization of the independent Eastern Battalions -- in contradistinction to the earlier Eastern Legions -- started in January 1943.) The increasingly threatening manner in which the situation was developing had already become easily discernible during the course of 1942.

X SEARCH FOR NEW POLICY

In his memorandum of the 25th of October, 1942, including a discussion of the Eastern Battalions, Dr. Brautigam wrote that: "With the instinct inherent in Eastern peoples the ordinary man had soon found out also that for Germany the slogan: 'Liberation from Bolshevism' was only a pretext to enslave the Eastern peoples according to her own methods."

He added that in order that there should exist no doubt at all on the German war aims, however, German propaganda referred openly to this intention in increasing measure. The conquered territory was claimed publicly not only for Germany as an area of colonization, but even for Germany's bitter enemies, the Dutch, the Norwegians, and others. The economic exploitation was proclaimed verbally and in print and carried out with almost total disregard for the requirements of the indigenous population, and with the greatest lack of consideration.

Dr. Brautigam went on to point out that the populace in the U.S.S.R. had more of an understanding of the measures and duties necessitated by war than the conquered peoples of the West. He added that the Soviet laborer and peasant, who were educated to the highest degree of self-consciousness by Bolshevism, soon perceived that Germany did not regard them as partners with equal rights, but considered them only as objectives of her political and economic aims. This, he said, had disillusioned them indescribably, all the more, since they had placed great hope in Germany.

As early as June 6th, 1942, Goebbels wrote in his diary: "Our policy in the conquered Eastern territories is still not decided.... Fundamentally, in private conversations, everyone is of the opinion that we must seek, by erecting puppet-governments, to secure a more favorable attitude on the part of the population of the occupied Eastern areas. Our attack -- of this all are convinced -- should be directed mainly against Bolshevism and not against Russia."

By chance, Goebbels wrote on the same day that, "the enemy has attempted to break out of the 'Volkov Encirclement' -- a very tense battle indeed." In the Volkov pocket a Russian Army, the Second Assault Army, commanded by General Vlassov, was surrounded by the Germans. Vlassov himself was captured somewhat later, and his army destroyed. After his capture, General Vlassov became one of the most controversial figures in German policy in the East. A number of German groups sought to use the anti-Soviet movement which he later headed in Germany in their efforts to change German policy so as to permit the use of Russians in the war against the U.S.S.R. The so-called "Vlassov Action," his movement, must be carefully considered because it is of far more than historical interest, since it shows the basic weaknesses of the U.S.S.R.

XI GENERAL VLASSOV: THE MAN AND HIS PROGRAM

Many Russian generals were taken prisoner in 1941 and 1942, including several army commanders, but none of these made the same impression as that created by General Vlassov on his captors. Soon after he was taken prisoner, his capture came to be considered an event of great significance. One official observer, Edwin Erich Dwinger of the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs, stated in a secret memorandum: "I have not the least doubt that this man was sent to us by Fate at the decisive moment and that his employment can turn the course of the war completely in our favor." After his first conversation with Vlassov (August 7th, 1942) Hilger wrote that he appeared to be a strong and forthright person, with calm and balanced judgment. On closer acquaintance with Vlassov, Hilger wrote in June, 1943: "General Vlassov is inspired by a burning hatred of the Bolshevik system and Stalin personally. Because of his prestige in the U.S.S.R., and because of his whole background and his spiritual force, Vlassov is certainly a suitable instrument to serve as a counter-balance to Stalin to weaken Stalin's position decisively in favor of the German War Effort."

In another document, Dwinger made the following appraisal, probably somewhat colored by his personal views: "General Vlassov is a farmer, that is to say he comes from that stratum of Russian society which is the most typically Russian. He is a man of high intelligence and also a very loyal person.... The basis and drive for his effectiveness are, in the genuinely Russian sense, religious. Even though he is not, naturally, a member of any church, there can be no doubt that he is motivated far less by political considerations than by a kind of Messianic vision of Redemption (for his people) which has its origin in his sympathy with the terrible suffering of his people which he has had to witness all his life. In spite of this he is very clear-headed, and modest -- although stiffening proudly when one mentions 'Russian slaves.' He is not, consequently, a mere seeker after political glory and accordingly will never become a purchasable hireling and will never be willing to lead hirelings."

Nor was Vlassov an unknown quantity to the German Army High Command, Hilger points out that, "as a soldier he enjoyed the reputation of having played an outstanding and decisive role in the military operations which led to the preservation of Moscow from the German assault in the fall of 1941."

From October, 1941, on Vlassov commanded the 20th Army, which later counter-attacked and advanced northwest of Moscow. In the spring of 1942 his resistance in the "Volkov Encirclement" east of Leningrad was energetic and stubborn. He remained hidden in the forest and swamps after the destruction of his army until he was forced to surrender.

His career in the U.S.S.R. was most successful, in spite of the handicap of his origin as the son of a prosperous peasant who was liquidated as a Kulak during the organization of the collective farms. Vlassov was born in 1901, and completed training for the priesthood, but entered the Red Army during the Civil War. After that, he adopted a military career. He spent about two years as one of the military advisers of Chiang Kai Shek, and then was made Commander of the 99th Infantry Division stationed in Kiev Military District late in 1939 or early in 1940. In the Fall of 1940 his division was decorated for being the best disciplined and best led in the Soviet Union. He was promoted to the rank of "Major General" about January, 1941, and, after his participation in the defense of Moscow, to the rank of "Lieutenant General."

In a conversation with Dwinger, Vlassov quoted Stalin as saying to him in the Spring of 1942 that the Germans were "thank God making so many political errors that he (Stalin) could subsist on their consequences forever, but that this war would be won by the man whom the masses would support the longest." It was Vlassov's idea to win the masses away from Stalin.

Vlassov's ideas, as he presented them to the Germans, are described in many documents, but because of the conditions under which they were written they must be studied carefully. Vlassov wanted to persuade the Germans to adopt his program. Therefore, he had to be guided by his own judgment or that of trusted Germans in order to avoid ideas which were unacceptable to the German Government.

Without some modification of his ideas he could not have achieved anything. Moreover, those Germans who shared Vlassov's ideas sought to make these ideas as palatable for those in power as possible. Thus, for example, Dwinger wrote that Vlassov was "anti-Bolshevist and anti-capitalist," which was quite correct, but he added, "in our sense of the word, therefore, really a National Socialist," which was a false conclusion.

Apparently Vlassov talked frankly to Hilger, a man who had spent forty-seven years in Russia, was entirely familiar with the language and the country, and warmly sympathetic to the Russians. Hilger, quite naturally, did not report officially everything that Vlassov told him. In a recently written study on Vlassov, Hilger summarizes Vlassov's fundamental ideas as follows: "Vlassov's case was the same as that of many other Russians: not until the catastrophe of 1941-42 had taken place did they become aware of the fact that there were still possibilities of freeing the Russian people from despotism and making available to them the blessings of a democratic regime.

"For this purpose, Vlassov allied himself with the Germans, but not because he felt any sympathy for the regime which existed in Germany at that time. He honestly believed that a decisive defeat inflicted upon the Red Army would cause the overthrow of the Soviet Government and that the Germans would achieve this goal.

"On the other hand, however, he was deeply convinced that the Germans would never succeed without the active help of the Russian people. Thus, for the time being the Germans and Russians were natural allies. In his view, such an alliance did not represent a danger for a future Russia because he was convinced that, although the Germans could defeat the Red Army with the help of the anti-Communist part of the Russian population, they would never be in a position to conquer the whole vast country and subjugate it."

These views coincide at all points with conclusions which can be drawn from a careful and critical analysis of the available documentary material. It is of the utmost importance to emphasize that, from the very beginning Vlassov considered a German victory impossible without the help of a Russian anti-Bolshevist army. In his report of his first interview with Vlassov, Hilger wrote that the Russian could not conceive how any victory could be won by the German military forces alone. This statement was made in August, 1942, at the time of the greatest German successes and following a series of grave defeats of the Red Army.

Vlassov warned against underestimating the Soviet powers of resistance. In a letter of August 3rd, 1942, intended for the German Commanders and jointly composed by Vlassov and another Russian officer, Colonel Boyarski, they said: "While taking advantage of the peculiarities of Russia -- the endless distances, the tremendous

resources and the patriotism of the people -- and supported by the Terror, Stalin will never voluntarily retire and will not be prepared to compromise. He will continue the war until he has exhausted all resources and possibilities of defense. There is no possibility of an internal revolution under the existing circumstances."

In that same letter Vlassov formulated his own proposals: The formation of a center for organizing a Russian Army and the start of a Vlassov organization itself.

On the 13th of March 1943, that is to say during the Allied offensive in Northern Africa and after Stalingrad, Vlassov spoke in Mogilev much more frankly to a small circle of Germans. There is a report of this speech made by a representative of the Ministry for the Eastern Territories. According to the report, Vlassov was of the opinion that Germany would lose the war against Russia unless large German armies came to grips with Stalin very soon, and an effective pacification-policy brought about a fundamental change in the occupied areas.

He believed that, without the cooperation of the population of the occupied areas and a systematic undermining of the Russian front based thereon, Germany must lose the war in the course of time because of material and personnel shortages. If Germany cherished no intentions to colonize and enslave them this should be made clear to all concerned by means of authoritative words and corresponding deeds. There were still sufficient valuable non-Bolshevist forces available. Vlassov felt it was still possible to use these forces effectively and regarded this as his task. To accomplish it, however, it was essential to explain the German objectives clearly. The Russians who had a national feeling of honor wanted to know what role they would play. They would, however, under all circumstances oppose any enslavement of the Russian people.

Vlassov believed that he could create an army of 2,000,000 using the anti-Soviet Russian prisoners and civilians in German hands. With their help he believed it would certainly be possible to liberate Russia from Bolshevism. He felt that the fundamental basis for such a Russian Renaissance, however, would be a clearly defined policy which would satisfy the Russian national honor.

Vlassov was sharply critical of German methods in the occupied areas. He had, however, had his own experiences with the problem and knew there were "differences of opinion among the German leadership." For that reason he wanted a

favorable decision from the Fuehrer. Obviously with this objective in mind he called Hitler a "leader of great genius." He added that he hoped Hitler would make possible a rebirth of Russia. The Russians, having received back their national honor, would crush Bolshevism at the side of Germany and build a new Europe in close alliance with the Reich.

Nevertheless, Vlassov realized even in August, 1942, shortly after his capture that the prospect of the revival of a great unified Russian state would not awaken much enthusiasm among Germans. Hilger himself mentioned the point in the course of the first conversation: "The Soviet Officers (Vlassov and Boyarski)" he wrote, "replied that, besides an independent Russian State and a colony there were various other conceivable and acceptable solutions, such as, dominion status, a protectorate, or a protected state with temporary or permanent German military occupation."

To what extent these two officers were sincere it is no longer possible to ascertain. In any event, Vlassov clearly understood that to get permission for his project he had to agree to some compromise solution acceptable to the Germans.

XII FIRST VLASSOV PROJECT (VLASSOV ACTION)

In the initial period, the opposition of the Ministry for the Eastern Territories was quite effective, resulting in several months' delay for the Vlassov Project. A memorandum of the German General Staff dated June 1st, 1943, and entitled: "Development and Situation of Military Propaganda in the East since the Fall of 1942 (Vlassov Project,)" discusses this situation.

It states that after Vlassov had placed himself at the disposition of the Germans -- for the war against Bolshevism -- "there appeared for the first time, in September, 1942, a Vlassov tract which met with such success that Armed Forces Operations Staff decided, with the full permission of the Chief of the Armed Forces High Command, to include in the propaganda plan for the Winter 1942 - 1943 a major propaganda project "from Russians to Russians." To provide a basic platform for the project, Vlassov wrote a proclamation in which a "Russian Committee" summoned all to fight beside Germany against Bolshevism. It soon became apparent, however, that more than the decision of the Armed Forces High Command was necessary to carry out such a plan of

propaganda. The memorandum of the Command Staff stated that the Ministry for the Eastern Territories did not authorize the project until the middle of January, after the most favorable opportunity had passed. Since then, the memorandum continued, it had been in constant operation, with striking success.

The opposition of the Ministry for the Eastern Territories was closely linked to the political views of Rosenberg. As far as Rosenberg was concerned Vlassov was first and foremost a Great Russian, and he was accordingly afraid that the Vlassov Project would become a Great Russian Project, making any future partition of Russia more difficult.

There was considerable negotiation between Vlassov and the Germans concerning his program for a new order in Russia. Vlassov himself maintained that every nationality had an unlimited right to self-determination and should decide for itself whether it wished to remain in a union with the other peoples of Russia or become entirely independent. In March, 1943, he issued a declaration in which, among other things, were the following words: "In the new Russia.... there will be neither national suppression nor rule by force. Each race will receive its national liberty and right to self-determination."

The Russian general declared in various conversations that he fully understood that Russia would have to make great sacrifices. In particular the Ukraine and the Caucasus were involved, since Rosenberg wanted these areas separated from Greater Russia at all costs. In the end, the Ministry for the Eastern Territories finally gave its consent to the propaganda exploitation of Vlassov. A few months later Rosenberg changed to a much more favorable opinion of Vlassov and his movement -- after Vlassov had made a declaration which paralleled Rosenberg's ideas.

On November 18, 1944, Rosenberg sent Hitler a report dealing with a declaration entitled, "Is a National Russia a Danger for Europe?" which Vlassov had sent to the Armed Forces High Command's Propaganda Division in May, 1943. According to Rosenberg, Vlassov acknowledged in this declaration that "The East," united in a single bloc, was a menace to Europe. Vlassov considered that the menace could only be nullified if the peoples and groups of peoples who belong to the bloc entered into a new order as members of a new and larger organization of the European Family of Peoples.

Under such circumstances, the Great Russians would be prepared to surrender the Ukraine and the Caucasus -- in reality this would be no surrender, since the economic and cultural energies of these lands would then be available not only to western Europe but to all Europe and hence also to Russia. This declaration was an obvious adaptation of Rosenberg's ideas. Whether it was sincere or not, this statement helped to win Rosenberg's support for the Vlassov Project.

After an interruption of three or more months, the Vlassov Project became active again in January, 1943. The movement had been given the means to publish a Russian language newspaper called "ZARIA" ("The Dawn".) Vlassov issued a manifesto in the form of an Open Letter in this publication on the 3rd of March, 1943, and proclaimed the formation of a Russian Committee. This committee, however, only existed on paper.

Vlassov also disclosed his program for the future Russia: the so-called "Smolensk Program" or "Vlassov's 13 Points." Finally, also in March, Vlassov was permitted to speak in public assemblies in the occupied areas, and his speeches made a very deep impression on both the Germans and Russians who heard them.

The June memorandum of the Armed Forces Command Staff stated: "This Vlassov Project, which was begun as a propaganda trick, has stimulated a movement which from the enemy's viewpoint, due to its threatening character, raises before his eyes the spectre of civil war."

The memorandum included an appendix of some ten pages of reports concerning the effect of the project, which described how great the success of the Vlassov propaganda had been.

"A large number of reports received from all fronts show the deep impression that the Vlassov Manifesto has made upon the Russian soldiers," the memorandum continued, "and make it quite evident that material assistance has been rendered toward the demoralization of the Russian will to resist and that the enemy's power has been weakened and the tendency to desertion strengthened."

In order to suggest action which they did not dare to recommend, the composers of the memorandum described the effect of the propaganda abroad: "The Vlassov Project has aroused the greatest attention among our allies, our enemies, and neutrals in the months of April and May, and

led to the general opinion among them that this project, if skillfully continued by Germany could give a decisive turn to the war in Germany's favor."

The Vlassov Movement was not continued, however. At the time that the memorandum of the Command Staff was written, the movement started by the Vlassov Project had run into very considerable difficulties. In order to continue the project effectively it would have been necessary to use Vlassov not only for propaganda purposes, but also to give him a leading position in the field of political activity with real influence upon recruitment, organization and other activities of the Russian volunteers.

The propaganda itself, as mere propaganda, was beginning to lose its effectiveness. The fact that public discussion of the project was forbidden in Germany aroused doubt among Russian prisoners-of-war as to German sincerity. Moreover, Vlassov's Manifesto was not allowed to circulate in the occupied areas. The memorandum said that this measure, which was "well known to the enemy," had a negative effect and was generally considered by the Russians as proof that the whole project was only a propaganda trick. The effect of broken promises also boomeranged on the Germans, the Command Staff reported.

"Recently there has been an increase in the.... voices that, because of the so far unfulfilled promises are expressing doubt as to the honesty of German claims," it stated.

The memorandum warned that "the opportunities offered to enemy propaganda by any eventual collapse of the Vlassov Project are incalculable," and concluded that "the dangers which a further delay or, perhaps, reversals in the Vlassov Project may bring are unmistakable, when one considers that approximately 800,000 Russians are in German service as Eastern Troops, that the propaganda for encouraging Russian desertions is founded to a great extent on the Vlassov Manifesto, and that the development of the guerrilla-warfare situation is decisively dependent upon the realization of the German promises."

XIII HITLER'S DECISION

Still, all these arguments did not serve to break down the opposition of the Nazi exponents of a colonial policy. The opinion of the High Command was ignored, as were the

efforts of Ribbentrop, who was strongly influenced by his Russian experts.

Rosenberg later, in November, 1944, pointed out: "At that time, one of the greatest opponents of these efforts was the Reichsfuehrer SS Himmler. He and other leading figures of the Fuehrer's Headquarters expressed the greatest hostility toward the person and the employment of General Vlassov."

Vlassov was subjected to particularly strong attack because of his statement that Russia could not be conquered without the help of Russians. For that reason, support of Vlassov seemed to both Himmler and Hitler a sign of defeatism.

In April, 1943, Hitler, after listening to an explanation by Ribbentrop of the Vlassov Project, commented that "such political actions were not to be undertaken; they were not necessary and were worthless; their only results would be fraternization between our people and the Russians; moreover, they would be considered as weakness."

Finally in January, Hitler issued the following directive:

- 1) "The national committees may not be used for the recruitment of volunteers.
- 2) "Vlassov must never again appear in the occupied areas."

As for the propaganda side of the Vlassov Project, Hitler further stated that he did not object to it but only under the condition that "no German authority is to take seriously the lures contained in the 13 points of the Vlassov Program."

This ended the first Vlassov Project. Vlassov himself was placed in house arrest and had to remain in a suburb of Berlin. He was allowed only a very restricted number of visitors, and was prohibited from engaging in any activity. All further Vlassov propaganda, until the Autumn of 1944, was merely a misuse of his name.

On the basis of his own views, Hitler had handled the matter logically. An honorable collaboration with the Russian opponents of Stalin and his regime, such as General Vlassov, could not be reconciled with his political ideas.

On the 19th of May, 1943, Hitler said to Rosenberg, "We dare not employ any members of foreign races in the Ministry for the Eastern Territories as advisors, for: if they are against their own people, then they are without character; if they are for their own people, then they are dangerous!"

The policy patently applied not only to the Ministry but to all authorities. None of the Germans who knew Vlassov had any doubt but that he was for and not against his own people.

Until the time arrived when Vlassov himself was allowed to be active, his work had been purely propagandistic. There was no Vlassov Army until then. Only the name of the R.O.A. (Russian Army of Liberation) existed, and that was used by the German propaganda to designate Russian units which were integrated into the German Army.

Some of these Russians were sent to France to work on the fortifications with the Todt Construction Organization, while units consisting of persons from the Caucasus and Asia were used for punitive expeditions in non-Russian areas (such as Yugoslavia) and against the French Resistance Movement.

Others functioned as guerrilla bands against Soviet Partisans and openly conducted themselves like bandits. The latter were hated by the local population. Soviet propaganda very cleverly held Vlassov and his movement responsible for this last group, a charge which is still current today among the Russian emigre groups, particularly among the older group, and possibly even in the U.S.S.R. itself.

XIV SECOND VLASSOV PROJECT

A new situation developed after the Allied landing in France in 1944. In Normandy, eight Eastern Battalions which saw combat, according to the opinion of the Fuehrer's headquarters, "fully justified themselves and fought bravely in the heavy battles." These battalions were integrated into German regiments. Von Rundstedt and Rommel were both very well satisfied with the showing they made. As a consequence, interest in possible employment of Russian volunteers was again awakened. For reasons which have not yet become apparent, Himmler now advised the employment of Vlassov and the formation of the Russian Army of Liberation.

Concerning this second Vlassov Project there is comparatively little documentary material available. However, this lack is not of decisive importance because this new Project was clearly undertaken far too late, since the course of the war could no longer have been turned in Germany's favor.

In November, 1944, the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia was formed under the leadership of Vlassov. On November 14th the Manifesto of the Committee was published in Prague. This time it was not a fiction; the Committee actually existed and built up a good organization, though once more certain difficulties arose, because of German fears that Vlassov and his movement had Great Russian tendencies.

Rosenberg and various committees of Russian national minorities shared these apprehensions. This time, however, the conduct of affairs in Germany lay in the hand of Himmler, who was in a position to overcome all opposition.

Vlassov received permission and orders to organize two divisions. Of these two only one was formed before the war ended. It was in action only once on the German side, in the defense of the Oder River Line. The division was then sent to Czechoslovakia, where it changed sides and liberated Prague from the Germans. Vlassov and his staff went first to Karlsbad, and afterwards, as far as can be ascertained, to Fuessen in Bavaria on the 14th of April, 1945, where they remained until the American troops arrived.

The question still remains as to what motivated Vlassov and his supporters to become active at a time when the position of Germany was already hopeless. Certainly they could not have shared Hitler's insane belief that help would be forthcoming from Providence. Their situation was desperate. They knew what to expect from a victorious Soviet Russia. Nevertheless one may assume that the last Vlassov Project was not only a gesture of despair. Many sources indicate that he hoped to establish connections with the Western Allies and gain their support.

This is confirmed by Hilger, who remained in close contact with Vlassov during the entire period. The liberation of Prague by Vlassov's division and Vlassov's own bearing tend to further substantiate this assumption. Finally there exists a document which must be treated with great caution, but nevertheless very interesting. This

document is a report made by a Russian who, as a German secret agent, collected information on Vlassov and his organization.

This report, which was written on the 22nd of March, 1945, describes a conversation which Vlassov had with a German general in the presence of a number of his own officers. One of the officers is supposed to have told about this conversation. According to the report, the German general asked Vlassov his opinion concerning "our common fight" against the "Entente," i.e., the Western Powers.

Vlassov is reported to have replied that he was not even thinking of a fight against the Entente and that, on the contrary, he expected that his interests and those of the Western Powers would soon coincide on the ground of the common fight against Bolshevism. Vlassov was even said to have had the intention, in case of extreme emergency, to lead his troops into Switzerland and to offer them to the Allies from there.

It is clear that such a report cannot be regarded as a dependable source, although it does have a certain value because it is partially confirmed from other sources. What is significant, in any case, is that there is no evidence that Vlassov acted as a German agent, but on the contrary only in accordance with his conception of what was necessary in any struggle against the Stalin-regime and in the interests of Russia, as he understood them.

It is a fact of great historical importance that, after a quarter of a century of Soviet rule, such phenomena as Vlassov and his movement were possible, and that they could have grown to considerable proportions if they had not been prevented from doing so by German policy.