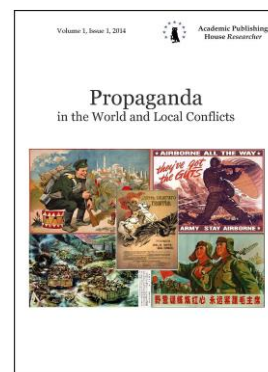


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German Propaganda as an Aiding Factor for the Voluntary Recruitment of “Eastern Workers” in the Third Reich

Nataliia A. Garazha ^{a,*}

^aNovorossiysk branch of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Russian Federation

Abstract

The article researches the problem of the impact of propaganda on the civilian population of the occupied territories of the USSR during the recruitment activities for the Third Reich. Despite the fact that the local population played an insignificant and unenviable role in Germany’s vision of war, the information impact was of particular importance: starting from abduction and deportation of large contingents of workers up to the documented justification of humanity and civilizedness of these activities.

The propaganda system was focused on the “Eastern workers” and was distinguished by a good organization, involved a wide range of methods and techniques with a variety of information channels. Nevertheless, it cannot be attributed to the motivation factors for leaving for work in Germany, based only on the citizens’ idea of the unacceptability of cooperation with the enemy. But the very experience of applying the German propaganda in this direction, the variety of reactions to it from both sides shows the problems of deportation and further employment of Soviet citizens in the Third Reich.

Keywords: the “Eastern workers”, propaganda, the Third Reich, the Great Patriotic War, World War II, deportation, employment.

1. Introduction

By the beginning of World War II, it was clear that propaganda would be the most important factor in the future confrontation due to the almost incredible success of the use of propaganda during World War I, as well as the impact of huge technological progress in the development of communications (radio was the most developed). The experience of ideological influence on the masses accumulated during the period between the two wars was very important, as well as its’ theoretical comprehension. The work of W. Lippman, published in 1922 made a special contribution to the systematization of forms and methods of public opinion managing (Lippman, 2004) and the monograph of E. Berneis, published in 1928 summarized this research for the practice of organized manipulation of the masses (Berneis, 2016). It was the time when the appeal to the psychology was not made with a desire to help to heal a person’s mind (as in Freud’s methods), but for manipulating it in all areas – in politics, business and culture.

* Corresponding author
 E-mail addresses: ngarazha@yandex.ru (N.A. Garazha)

2. Material and methods

The scale and specificity of the phenomenon stir a particular research interest and cause the appearance of a whole range of questions, the answers to which should involve both the historical genetic methodology and the analysis of the ideas of the National Socialist theorists and their vision of forced labor.

3. Discussion

Propaganda became one of the defining levers in achieving the goals set for the National Socialists, it was actively and diversely used in all spheres and in relation to various subjects. After the Nazis came to power, the propaganda “games” acquired exceptional importance in communication, gradually “penetrating all the pores of the society” (Bramsted, 1965: 52). The slogan that decorated the hall of the Congress of the NSDAP in Nuremberg in 1936 eloquently stated: “Propaganda helped us to come to power. Propaganda helps us to hold the power. Propaganda will help us conquer the whole world” (Zhelev, 1991: 90). And those were not just beautiful words, but a profound narrative on Hitler’s key attitude towards propaganda as a means of moving towards the goal - the struggle for the existence of the German people (Gitler).

This message received serious institutional support. On March 13, 1933, A. Hitler, the Reich Chancellor of Germany, signed an order establishing an apparatus for propaganda with the official name “Imperial Ministry of Public Education and Propaganda”. Joseph Goebbels was appointed the Minister of the Office.

The organizational structure of the ministry included 20 departments (propaganda, press, cinema, literature, music, fine arts, special cultural tasks, foreign press, foreign tourism, personnel, army propaganda, etc.). In the beginning of World War II, there were 13 offices (41 by the end of the war), and their status was upgraded to the imperial departments (management of printed publications distribution, management of artistic forms, imperial film archive, imperial photo archive, imperial sound archive, imperial alliance of the German press, etc.). Despite the constantly growing bureaucracy of the propaganda department, it worked quite quickly and diversely (Zalepeev, 2012: 104). In the official description, the Ministry of War Propaganda was described as “a large unit whose initiative and work is felt literally everywhere” (Anikeev, 2000: 218).

Due to the fact that foreign labor was actively used in the German economy (in the pre-war time, based on a more or less contractual system, during the war - forced, relying on the total removal of the population from the occupied territories and the involvement of prisoners of war), this part of the country's life also had to be built into the system of ideology and its propaganda. Moreover, there was a considerable contingent of workers. According to the materials of the Nuremberg trial, Germany used about 10 million of forced laborers in industry and partly in agriculture during the war, both from the occupied territories and from the prisoners of war (Nyurnbergskii protsess). According to P. Polyansky's calculations, the number of people displaced from the territory of the USSR to the territory owned or controlled by the Third Reich or its allies was about 8 million 700 thousand people, of which about 5 million 450 thousand people were civilians and 3 million 250 thousand were prisoners of war (Polyan, 2002).

The immediate proximity of the residence and work of the “Eastern workers” and the Germans caused not only an ideological dislike, but also an interest in each other, and many ideas about the Soviet man could be revised. For example, the police reports referred to very lively discussions, which suggested that “people from the Soviet Union are better, at least not as bad as they were thought to be. Previously, the broad circles of the German public believed that Soviet people are distinguished by godlessness, low level of intelligence and education, disrespect for family values and immorality. Now many Germans were amazed how much they were mistaken in their former convictions” (Predstavleniya naseleniya, 1994: 34).

Therefore, in order to avoid the influence of the “Eastern workers” on the local population, the authorities forbade any contact between them. Measures were taken to isolate the workers, organize their compact places of residence and establish circulars with the strictest prohibition of communication, “except for service duty” (Prestupnye tseli..., 1985: 203). In regard to Soviet prisoners of war who “passed the school of Bolshevism”, it was prescribed “complete isolation ... from the civilian population, both at work and during leisure time...” (Nyurnbergskii protsess, 5: 343).

Repressive measures could have the opposite effect, and their intensity was superfluous in conditions of the country's mobilization and the idea of the unity of the people and the state during

the war. Therefore, propaganda activities aimed at forming a “special” opinion and attitude towards people from the East. It was conducted both among the civilian population of Germany and in the army, parts of which were involved in the process of deporting Soviet citizens to the Reich ([Krasnozhenova, 2015](#)). For this purpose, the Wehrmacht Propaganda Department was created, which controlled and determined the work of the so-called “propaganda companies”. The personnel of these units were staffed from among journalists, agitators, artists, photo reporters and cameramen who got military training. Smaller military units had propaganda detachments. All these units carried out three main tasks: they spread the National-Socialist ideology in the army through front-line newspapers, radio, movies and interviews with personnel; supplied the Ministry of Propaganda, newspapers, radio and agencies with information about the daily life of the German army, which later was used inside the country and abroad; carried out the functions of military intelligence, informing the relevant authorities about the morale of soldiers and officers.

Nazi propaganda portrayed Soviet citizens through the prism of limited social, cultural and racial traits (“... a soldier who met the Soviet Union only in the present war, will hardly believe this. He sees dirty huts full of insects, concrete skyscrapers of industrial cities and does not know that there used to be some culture in the country, a culture completely destroyed by the Bolsheviks” ([GARK. F. P-156. Op. 1. D. 26. L. 10-11](#))). The image of a barbarian horde threatening the prosperity of Europe was consistently built in the minds of the Germans. With its’ massive impact, this idea did not sound so absurd for the Germans, moreover, it helped to justify the lawlessness and violence towards the Soviet soldiers and civilians ([Pfeifer Justin Thomas, 2014: 93-94](#)).

The presence of propaganda ideas in the minds of the Germans is a rather complex issue, but the negative image of Bolshevik Russia as an enemy state played a pivotal role in the educational process ([Malysheva, 2011: 56](#)). In the memoirs of the former “Eastern workers” we find descriptions of their daily life in the Reich, filled with unbearable work, rude treatment and violence. But there are also enough examples when the Ostarbeiters found understanding and even support among the Germans. Z. Bulycheva recalled that the pipe factory in Witten had separate bomb shelters for the “Eastern workers” and the Germans. When the Allied armies carried out a massive bombardment, and the symbolic shelters for Ostarbeiters burned with the plant, German workers rescued Soviet people, letting them into their shelters. Many of them were participants of the First World War and spoke of Russians with respect and even with some nostalgia for those times ([Lichnyi arkhiv N.A. Garazha](#)). Although, these manifestations were especially characteristic at the final stage of the war, when the fate of the Reich was already evident, and the Germans were afraid of reckoning. This is remembered by the overwhelming number of Ostarbeiters. Filonenko Vladimir Ivanovich, resident of the village of Taman in Krasnodar Region worked as a loader at a glass factory in the city of Ilmenau (Thuringia). He recalled that the German population treated them well, in his opinion mainly out of fear of retaliation from the advancing Soviet troops. The woman for whom he worked in the city constantly told him: “Waldemar, tell them that I did not offend you” ([Lichnyi arkhiv N.A. Garazha](#)).

Since the economically motivated interest in large contingents of the “Eastern workers” increased in proportion to the growing tensions of the war, propaganda rhetoric toward Soviet citizens was balancing between the ideological constant about the Untermensch and the support of workers loyal to the Nazis, which the enterprises and Bauer farms badly needed. In the specialized brochures that acted as a guide for dealing with the civilian population of the occupied territories, the accent was made on the fact that not the entire population of the USSR was subjected to the Jewish-Bolshevik influence (“Are the Eastern peoples aligned with Bolshevism?” Soldiers must distinguish a friend from the enemy” ([GARK. F. P-156. Op. 1. D. 26. L. 10](#)), therefore, “those who want to live and die on their land, operate the machines or work in the field of non-manual labor, must be attracted to our side by our benevolent attitude” ([GARK. F. P-156. Op. 1. D. 26. L. 10-11](#))).

Propaganda among the civilian population of the occupied areas of the USSR, Soviet prisoners of war and Ostarbeiters was active and inventive and was applied at all stages: from recruitment and deportation to working process at the enterprises and leisure time organization. A special organization, “Vineta”, was created for the propaganda “treatment” of civilians from the occupied territories and prisoners of war. Formally, it was not a division of the Ministry of Propaganda, but a registered non-profit organization that even had its own charter, but funded through the office of J. Goebbels. Its task was to prepare propaganda materials for the East in order to organize a voluntary departure to Germany for work and to undermine moral and psychological

state of Soviet citizens. “Vineta” produced printed materials and radio broadcasts in six languages (Estonian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian) (RGVA. F. 1370. Op. 1. D. 10. L. 69). Yu. A. Orlov noted that “its existence was considered most necessary, for example, when the citizens of the USSR in Germany exposed Nazi allegations about the conditions of work and life in the USSR in their everyday contacts with the local population” (Orlov, 1985: 124-125).

Due to the Polish precedent, when the forced recruitment of citizens caused the outburst of the partisan movement, the Nazis at first tried to lure Soviet people to Germany, promising them a better life, appealing to their hardships in the USSR during the war and the accumulated resentment of certain sections of the population against Soviet power. The centers of recruiting workers for Germany were the “labor exchanges” (“labor bureaus”), which were opened everywhere in the cities. In 1942, 110 “labor bureaus” operated in Ukraine. German agitators urged the population to take their part in “building new Europe and ensuring the speedy end of the war” in every possible way attempting to lure people with promises of benefits that supposedly awaited them in the Reich: high wages, the acquisition of valuable specialties and getting acquainted with the European culture (Zemskov, 1986: 180). Indeed, there were examples of voluntary departure caused by a difficult situation or sometimes by the young people’s desire of new impressions (“We lived in a hut, poorly, because our father was repressed. When the German authorities offered the city’s youth to go for six months to work in Germany, I decided to see the world. No one could have foreseen that our people would return” (Doronina, 2012: 43) (reminiscences of R.F. Denschikova, born in the city of Stavropol)).

It is not possible to determine the percentage ratio of deportation/evacuation/departure of Soviet citizens as voluntary or forced. For example, in the city of Oryol local residents were forced to sign labor obligations for a “voluntary” trip to Germany. People were kept under arrest for 3-5 days in the basement, forced by threats, beatings and execution. Thus, 1 221 native inhabitants of Oryol were abducted (GAOO. F. 691. Op. 1. D. 123. L. 5). The way to facilitate the forced export of citizens from the occupied cities of the Leningrad region (Slutsk, Pushkin) to Germany was absolutely unique: people were told that they were “returning” to their homeland, as allegedly, they were the descendants of the Germans who moved to the vicinity of St. Petersburg under Catherine II (RGASPI. F. 17. Op. 125. D. 172. L. 39).

At industrial enterprises, the German occupation administration practiced “workers’ meetings” allegedly with the aim of identifying those wishing to go to work in the Reich, knowing for sure that the workers would refuse such a trip. Therefore, they used a different method, for example, false offers of free food or movies. In fact, people who showed up were put into trains and sent to the territory of the Reich (Zemskov, 1986: 6).

The Nazis often resorted to lies, for example, declaring that the remaining members of the volunteer families would be fully provided with everything (Slin’ko, 1965: 222). This later provoked bewilderment among the trusting adolescents taken to the Reich, as, for example, Varya Karnaukhova from Evpatoria wrote: “Dear family, do not worry about the parcels, for you are receiving rations” (28.08.1943) (GARK. F. P-4602. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 7).

We see the intent to present the abduction of Soviet citizens as voluntary trips for a number of reasons, including propaganda. In this regard, the documentation of the voluntarily departure of Soviet citizens to Germany created a favorable background and statistics for subsequent recruiting of the “Eastern workers”, the appearance of the civilized nature of German business and the possibility of justifiable maneuvers in the future.

Since 1942 Germany was improving the system of forced labor, and the executive branch was undergoing further centralization. The most important measure in this direction was the appointment of Fritz Sauckel, Gauleiter of Thuringia “the general commissioner for the use of labor”. In this position, he spoke on behalf of the office, had a four-year plan and in his activity relied on the apparatus of the Ministry of Labor and its peripheral bodies. Also, the Central Planning Office was established, headed by Albert Speer. This institution carried out centralized administration on all issues relating to the economic potential of the country (in the interests of military industry). It also dealt with the labor force (Prestupnye tseli..., 1985: 229).

Since that time, the export of Soviet people to Germany was carried out mainly violently. The methods did not differ in variety and were reduced to repression. The German occupation authorities issued a huge number of orders containing open threats. People, who evaded labor mobilization and ran away, were declared partisans and saboteurs. The practice of detaining

hostages, often members of families mobilized to be sent to Germany, was used to prevent people from escaping. The main method was conducting mass raids on the streets, bazaars and other places of accumulation of people. “Combing” of city quarters and apartments was often carried out at night.

Nevertheless, the vector of propaganda influence continued to play its role, but with a diversified argumentative focus, as it was directed more on the potential of the leaders of the Reich, on the production sector of the German economy, and the world community as a whole. F. Sauckel appealed to the centuries-old experience of the deportations of England and Russia, explaining that Germany included foreign workers in the social community of their country (which never happened before); provided an opportunity to acquire rich work experience and promoted social recovery of Europe (RGVA. F. 1370. Op. 2. D. 284. L. 3). A high-flown propaganda style permeated the records of organizations involved in deportation and labor distribution at enterprises in the Reich. There were frequent references to “providing work in Germany to millions of European workers”, “solving workers’ problems in improving their rations and reviewing the issue of wages” (GARF. F. P-7021. Op. 148. D. 11. L. 33), “providing foreign workers with light apartments, theaters, art and music” (RGVA. F. 1370. Op. 2. D. 284. L. 8), which in fact did not correspond to reality.

A. Rosenberg didn’t participate in the lengthy arguments about the significance of Germany's abduction of the civilians from the occupied territories. He insisted that the method of threats and violence was not productive, moreover, it provoked the partisan movement. A more reasonable belief was that: “after the people realized the feasibility of this, 90 % of them enrolled as volunteers and left the train station accompanied by the music. If you surrounded the villages in advance, it will only awaken the old fear of Bolshevik deportations and it would make it difficult for everyone” (Politicheskii dnevnik..., 2015: 351).

The representatives of the armed forces noted that the “rude statements, for example: “the colonial people should be treated with a whip just as Negroes ... “, “the Slavic people should be kept as ignorant as possible ...” had the worst impact on the will to work than any other activities. Therefore, they insistently demanded to soften the rhetoric of appeals: “If we were to announce our will to the people in an obviously aggressive form with respect to domestic policy as opposed to other issues, then the political leadership in the East should be secretive about the necessary cruelty of the German policy. We must remain silent about the possibly negative treatment of the conquered peoples. Obviously, reasonable German policy can achieve more under certain conditions by minor indulgences and in some cases by some humanity than by open ill-considered cruelty” (GARF. F. P-7021. Op. 148. D. 217. L. 2). Propaganda was supposed to equilibrate violent actions.

What real propaganda methods were used during the deportation, what were the principles and rules of propaganda, and what were the active information channels? The Ministry of Propaganda singled out the following propaganda principles extrapolated to the “Eastern workers”:

1. Cynicism and perseverance,
2. Counter-information method (i.e. immediate response, reaction to the opponent's actions),
3. Repetition of the same statements,
4. Exaggeration and distortion of opponents’ messages,
5. Gloss over everything related to Germany (RGASPI. F. 17. Op. 125. D. 38. L. 66-69),
6. Priority of slogan expressions,
7. The masses are the recipient of propaganda. “Propaganda is the content and form of an idea that has reached the broad masses, and its correctness is measured solely by its real success”

(Mazer, 2007: 223-224, 228).

8. The autochthonous population should be perceived as an actively consumed resource: “no artificial intellectual development of the population, preservation as a labor force”. The interest of Germany was a primary basis for staying in the occupied territory and for interaction with the local population, from which “certain strict government actions follow, depending on the circumstances and in accordance with the behavior of the population” (GARF. F. R-7021. Op. 148. D. 217. L. 1).

Later, these principles were transformed into specific organizational structures and activities, for example, the Crimean propaganda headquarters activities. It worked on the following types of propaganda activities:

- active propaganda. Propaganda work among the population through meetings, demonstrations, posters, leaflets, brochures, reading-rooms, shop windows and by using agitation cars with radio.
- printing. Control of the press and publication of newspapers in German.
- Cinema.
- Radio and telegraph.
- Cultural work. Coverage of all existing theaters, orchestras, local writers. Control over cinemas and libraries, influence on pedagogical literature and management of local teachers (GARK. F. P-156. Op. 1. D. 26. L. 1).

One of the characteristic signs of psychological influence was the use of original propaganda techniques. In the memoirs of the “Eastern workers” of all ages there is evidence of how the local population was irritated by the noise that their wooden shoes were making when the column of workers was moving along the road. Such unnecessary noise was deliberately created on the direct order of the guards. C. Birdsall refers this to acoustic propaganda, which uses resonant urban spaces, in which sound is reflected from walls and other street surfaces. The vibrating sounds, according to the researcher, are historically considered an illustration of the power of the authorities (Birdsall, 2012: 32-33). In the case of Ostarbeiters, this was a domestic irritant in the well-adjusted rhythm of life of the Germans, simultaneously demonstrating the dependence of the defeated enemy on the conqueror.

Printed products differed in a variety of forms, accompanied by texts in fluent Russian (or Ukrainian/Belarusian), illustrations and photographs. But all the texts were conditional, i.e. contained mandatory conditions, which lowered credibility. For example, as in Information No. 1 for workers from the eastern regions stated: “Germany can and will help you. In Germany, you get work and bread. If you work diligently and behave impeccably, you will meet humane, dignified and just attitude” (GARF. F. P-7021. Op. 148. D. 67. L. 2).

One of the forms of voluntary recruitment of Soviet citizens for work in Germany was the Ostarbeiters’s letters home with a description of the “blessings” that they were given in a foreign land. A. Rosenberg at the meeting of the German Labor Front in November 1942 emphasized the psychological significance of this method, ensuring the effectiveness of new workers recruitment.

Promises of the best, civilized and, most importantly, prosperous life in Germany were to be effective for the population suffering from hunger. “... It was not easy at all”, Rosenberg said, “you cannot imagine how big the load was during these days - 3,000 trains with food arrived from the East to Germany; add to this that the entire army in the East is being supplied on site, and this supply does not include what the soldiers are getting for themselves” (Nyurnbergskii protsess, 4: 664). Therefore, the total plunder of only Krasnodar Territory was amounted to 28,764 thousand rubles (damage to enterprises and offices of the Narkomtorg), for the RSFSR this figure reached 347 million rubles, or 75 % of the total amount of damage in the republic. The remaining 25 % was the damage inflicted on the inhabitants of the province, their personal property and economy during the occupation period (GARF. F. P-7021. Op. 147. D. 11. L. 11, 27).

Nazi propaganda actively used the publication of letters in occupation newspapers with favorable reviews of Soviet people who were working in Germany. For example, Maria Glazkova’s letter was published on the front page of the “Maykopskaya zhizn” (“Life of Maykop”) newspaper. In this letter she allegedly conveyed her impressions of the conditions of female labor in the USSR, on the basis of her personal experience, comparing them with the organization and working conditions in the city of Ratenkov in Germany (Malysheva, 2011). The method of contrasting the “virtues” of National Socialism with the negative features of Bolshevism, which has long been approved by the Nazis, is vividly traced in this letter, and it once again convinces us of its propaganda agenda.

The testimonies of female workers who visited Germany were also used in special propaganda programs on the Crimean radio, with the active participation of RLA representatives (GARK. F. P-156. Op. 1. D. 26. L. 27). Those programs alternated with entertainment ones to increase the audience. And this, according to D. Welch, is the most impressive achievement of the Nazis, that was aimed at creating a massive community of listeners (Welch, 2012: 43).

By the middle of the war, there was a decrease in interest in political radio programs in favor of entertainment ones in Germany. For example, the most popular radio program was “songs on demand” - Wunschkonzert. We can judge the effectiveness of this in the occupied territory only on

the basis of the general mood of the enemy's rejection, on the one hand, and on the other, the intensification of the regime of violence by the occupation authorities during the deportation. The collection of letters of the "Eastern workers" from Crimea in The State Archives of the Republic of Crimea demonstrates the young age of the authors (mostly teenage schoolchildren) (the collection totals 1,607 pcs, collected in 15 cases) (Garazha, 2016).

Cinema was another actively used propaganda channel. All the pre-war cinemas operated in the occupied territories, with their programs printed in the newspapers. There were no prohibitions or obstacles for visiting the cinema for the locals. But sometimes a selection of films or presumptive propaganda documentary films caused viewers' negative emotions (ridicule, irritation or boredom). For example, according to the report of the Chief of Police and SS of the Crimea to the Crimean propaganda headquarters "On Films", dated 16.03.1943, the first performance for young people organized by the Crimean propaganda headquarters was held in the "Tsentral" cinema (city of Simferopol). The theater was full of visitors, mostly children from 7 to 12 years. "The mood before the beginning of the session was joyfully tense. ... Advertising contradicted the movie. ... The movie "King Edelweiss" is a love story with an attempted suicide, etc. Many children were bored and some left during the movie. ... The film is boring and is not suitable for children" (GARK. F. P-156. Op. 1. D. 26. L. 9). Further, the Chief of Police and SS of Crimea stressed that the propaganda film about the delivery of bombs to Tunisia caused ironic comments: "I think it is necessary to cut out these images from the weekly sessions".

Since the workers' arrival on the territory of the Reich and their inclusion in the production activities, propaganda work continued. Its main tasks were maintenance of discipline and order in places of compact residence of workers, motivation for work, formation of moods of rejection of the Soviet ideology and authorities. In the auxiliary methodological recommendations for labor camps it was said that "... spiritual upbringing (care) is of the greatest importance for keeping foreign workers capable and joyous with labor" (GARF. F. R-7021. Op. 148. D. 11. L. 76-77). In labor camps talks, concerts and sporting events, films, libraries and foreign language courses, etc. were to be organized. But such leisure activities were not widespread due to the prevalence of violent methods of communication with the "Eastern workers".

Manipulation of values and beliefs, pressure on the most sensitive aspects of the psychology were used by the Nazis as one of the necessary tools of communication with their people as well as the means of their fight against the enemy. This gave this war the character of the Nazi revolt against culture, morality, against man, his right to dignity, honor and, finally, his right of life.

4. Conclusion

Specificity of ideological influence on society and individual personality lies in the fact that it can be used multiply on the same object. During the war, in its different periods and from different sides, Soviet citizens, German occupation authorities and Wehrmacht troops were subjected to mutual ideological influence. The German forces created a precedent of the possibility of involving potential workers from the occupied territories in their propaganda activities, avoiding coercion and maneuvering the moods of the enemy/occupant. The confluence of threats, well-reasoned beliefs and flirting on ethnic, religious and gender grounds became a distinctive feature of the information and communication work of German propagandists, including the work with "Eastern workers".

At the same time, the tasks of propaganda and, in general, its role in the deportation of Soviet citizens to the Reich underwent changes, mainly on the basis of the change in military situation and discussions within the party and the administrative structures on the occupied territory.

Undoubtedly, the mass departure was forced, but the seeds of doubts in Soviet ideology and politics were planted in the minds of some citizens, and extensive documentation related to propaganda work emphasized its effectiveness. Confirmation of the latter had the value of a prolonged strategic orientation.

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