

## The categories of forced labor in the Urals during WWII<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** During the years 1941–1945, Soviet laborers were subject to increased coercion. Two new categories of forced laborers appeared: the “labor soldiers” and the POWs. They added to the categories already present in the thirties: the concentration camp prisoners and the “special settlers”. The aim of this article is to describe as precisely as possible the situation of these unfree laborers. The four categories were not separated by clear boundaries, but overlapped, with almost imperceptible transitions.

**Key words:** USSR, Urals, World War II, forced labor, Gulag, concentration camps, prisoners of war, special settlers, labor soldiers.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This article examines forced labor in the Urals during World War II. Forced labor was an important part of Soviet war economy. The Urals region was a great industrial region, which played a great role in the production of weapons during the war and contributed very much to the Soviet victory. It was also a zone of camps and “special settlements”, where people named “special settlers”, deported according to social or ethnic criteria, lived.

I will show that there were four categories of forced laborers: first concentration camp and labor colony prisoners, second prisoners of war, third “special settlers” and finally “labor army”. The “labor army” included first of all Soviet Germans, who were mobilized according to ethnic criteria. The four categories were similar in that they were managed by the political police. In 1943–1944, approximately 30% of the Uralian workers belonged to this contingent. In fact, the boundaries between these four categories were fluid; however, previous research has often studied them separately, but we get a better understanding of the overall dynamics of forced labor if they are examined together.

To show both the unity and the diversity of forced labor, this article focuses on describing and comparing as precisely as possible the social and economic conditions of the four categories of forced laborers, which I will examine successively.

### First section: the concentration camp and labor colony prisoners

The first category of forced labor is concentration camp and labor colony prisoners. After briefly mentioning the juridical situation of these prisoners, I will examine their economic and social situation. Then I will describe another category of prisoners who in part lived also in the concentration camps: the “mobilized” Soviet Germans or “labor soldiers”. I will end this section by comparing their status with the one of the concentration camp prisoners.

The camp and colony prisoners formed the group of forced laborers least protected by law and the group most dependent on the state: they had practically no rights. They were separated from their family and close relations, had no property and no housing and represented a kind of ideal manpower for a mobilized economy. They worked in almost all branches of war production. The Soviet political police rented this cheap manpower out to enterprises. On January 1, 1943, in the Molotov region, 64% of the prisoners of the labor colonies were rented out, but the precise proportion of camp and colony prisoners compared to regular employees in the Uralian industry is unknown.

The situation of these Soviet prisoners became worse during the war: the mean food ration fell to 2125 calories, while Soviets estimated that a worker doing physical labor needed 3000 calories. According to Russian historians, 825000 prisoners of the Gulag camps and colonies died during WW II, mainly from hunger and diseases caused by hunger<sup>2</sup>. In

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<sup>1</sup> This article, which uses Gulag archives, is based on a paper presented at the Conference on prison culture in Uppsala, August 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>2</sup> L.I. Borodkin, A.A. Tsepkalova, “V srok I dosrochno: kontingenty Gulaga na stroitel'stve Celiabinskogo metallurgicheskogo zavoda” *Ural'skii istoricheskii Vestnik*, 2011, n°1 (30), p.55.

1942 and 1943, when famine raged, the mortality rate reached over 20%.

The intensification of labor, which was the primary aim of the concentration camp directors, had serious consequences for the health of the prisoners, so that in the winter of 1942–1943, the Soviet government's production goals were in danger in a great number of enterprises.

A second category of people were detained in the Uralian concentration camps from September 1941: the "mobilized" Soviet Germans or "labor soldiers". This "labor army" was formed during the war; its members were mobilized by the war commissariats and comprised a great number of politically suspect people. Among these outcasts, there were Soviet Germans, who were victims of a particular form of repression according to national criteria, that targeted the citizens belonging to nationalities "hostile to the Soviet Union". According to one estimate, the total number of these mobilized persons reached around 315,000. We have data about the mobilizations of these Soviet Germans in January and February 1942: the "labor soldiers" were sent into 12 camps, 8 of which were located in the Urals. These 8 camps received over 70,000 persons. These laborers were employed in two sectors: cutting trees and building factories.

The notion of Germans seems to have been defined rather largely: if the concerned persons were essentially Soviet Germans, non-Soviet Germans were also prisoners: so, in 1944, a German from Prague was prisoner in the concentration camp Cheliablag<sup>3</sup>. He demanded to be released as foreign citizen, but he did not reach his objective: as a German, he had to be interned, such was the official answer. A Russian whose father was a German could also be detained<sup>4</sup>: E.A. Bender, engineer, was an excellent foreman in Cheliabmetalurgstroi: he demanded to be demobilized, but it was useless: the question of his nationality was left open, but the authorities refused to demobilize him.

In a number of Uralian concentration camps, you could also find in the "labor columns" of Germans Polish citizens, who were to be handed over to the military commissariats and sent to the First Polish Army<sup>5</sup>.

More complicated was the case of these women in Vosturallag who should not be in the "labor columns" by national criteria, but did not possess any identity document, because they came from regions occupied by the Nazis<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation) F. R 9414, op.1, d.1207, l. 59 (August 8th 1944).

<sup>4</sup> GARF F. R 9414, op.1, d.1207, l.66 (November 29th 1944).

<sup>5</sup> GARF F. R 9414, op.1, d.1207, l.65-65 ob.: September 22th 1944, data of September 1th 1943.

<sup>6</sup> GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1183 l.54 (third quarter 1943).

I shall describe briefly the condition of the mobilized Germans in 1943, using reports about three Uralian camps<sup>7</sup>: Bogoslovstroi (construction of an aluminum plant), Vosturallag (tree felling) and Usol'lag<sup>8</sup> (tree felling): these reports were written by persons in charge of these camps. The composition of the latter was very variable: in Bogoslovstroi, there was only one German woman, who was employed as nurse by the central hospital of the camp; the contrast was striking with the two other camps, which counted approximately one third of German women. In Vosturallag, women worked also as woodcutters and carried out agricultural work: they lived apart from the men<sup>9</sup>.

The mobilized Germans lived in zones separated from the prisoners. The majority slept in huts, on beds "of the wagon system", that is on the model of the train couchettes<sup>10</sup>.

Contrary to what is often said, the camps did not use only unskilled labor: they exploited also the knowledge of specialists<sup>11</sup>:

	<i>Number of specialists</i>	<i>Number of specialists used in their specialty</i>
Bogoslovstroi	3332	2797
Vosturallag	1251	468 (76 in a near specialty)
Usol'lag	1021	259 (120 in a near specialty)

All in all, there were 24,387 specialists in the camps and construction sites of the NKVD<sup>12</sup>: the 5,086 specialists not used in their specialty were employed in doing "general works", i. e. they carried out the heaviest, unskilled tasks.

At work, the Germans were organized in "detachments", which were divided into "columns" and "brigades". Their wage depended on the fulfillment of the production norms, which determined also the quantity of food, particularly of bread, allotted to them<sup>13</sup>.

How did the Germans react to the situation which was imposed to them? Escape seems to have been the most frequent form of protest of the Germans. From March 1942, these escapes were punished very severely, usually by death.

<sup>7</sup> GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1183 l.13-15, l.51, l.53-54, l.111, l.117-119.

<sup>8</sup> Usol'lag was remarkable by a high mortality rate: 1,162 persons died between 1/1/1943 and 1/10/1943 for a total number of 8,922 persons, due to "abnormal conditions of life". See *Ibid.*, l.109 and 111.

<sup>9</sup> GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1183 l.13, 15, 51, 54, 111.

<sup>10</sup> Yet, this information does not appear in the report on Ussol'lag. GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1183 l.13, 51, 119.

<sup>11</sup> GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d. 1183 l.15, 54, 119.

<sup>12</sup> GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1207 l.24.

<sup>13</sup> GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1183 l. 14, 53, 117-118.

In two camps, our sources mention the presence of clandestine groups:

- ✓ in Cheliablag<sup>14</sup>, 18 Germans have been arrested: they were members of a organization of “spying” and “diversion” which prepared an armed revolt,
- ✓ in Ivdel’lag<sup>15</sup>, an “anti-Soviet diversion group” of 12 Germans aimed to sabotage the production of manganese ore and of wood,
- ✓ In Usol’lag<sup>16</sup>, Germans have been prosecuted for “sabotage”.

We must not conclude from this information that the Germans resisted actively to the regime of the camps, for the quality of these data is very dubious: the political police could fabricate accusation files to demonstrate that its presence was necessary and so justify its funding. We must also remember that the police authorities were obsessed with sabotage.

The construction site of the Cheliabinsk metallurgical plant (CMZ) was one of the most important of the Gulag industrial construction sites. It was linked to the Cheliabinsk corrective labor camp (Cheliablag), which from the end of 1941 provided workers to the trust Cheliabmetallurgstroi (CMS). This trust was organized in 1941 to build the CMZ: it then bore the name of Bakalmetallurgstroi. In fact, the decision to build this plant was made in 1934; the work began, but it was stopped. The war industry needed big quantities of metal: in August 1941, it was decided that the construction of the CMZ was a shock priority. In November 1941, Cheliabmetallurgstroi became subordinated to Osobstroi NKVD, and then to Glavpromstroi NKVD. The first part of the construction was ended in February 1943; at the end of 1944, the plant had a full metallurgical cycle. The construction site was so important that it required many workers. The labor force comprised free wage earners (mean percentage 17%), prisoners of the Cheliablag (5000 to 15000), mobilized Soviet Germans (20000-23000) and, from 1943, POWs (8000-12000)<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> GARF F. R 9479 op.1 d.130 l.11-11 ob.(March 5<sup>th</sup> 1943).

<sup>15</sup> GARF F. R 9479 op.1 d.157 l.104, 104 ob., 105, 105 ob. (December 1<sup>th</sup> 1945).

<sup>16</sup> GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1183 l.114 (October 1<sup>th</sup> 1943).

<sup>17</sup> See L. I. Borodkin, A.A. Tsepkalova, “V srok I dosrochno”..., p. 49-54. This article, very rich in data, uses federal and regional (Cheliabinsk) archives to trace the history of the construction of the CMZ. See also G.Ia. Malamud, V.M. Kirillov “Mobilizovannye nemtsy” na stroitel’stve predpriatii chernoi metallurgii Urala, in 50 let Pobedy v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine: Materialy nauc. konf., Ekaterinburg, 1995; E.P.Turova Dokumenty Ob’edinennogo gosarkhiva Celiabinskoi oblasti o sovetskikh nemtsakh na stroitel’stve Celiabinskogo metallurgicheskogo zavoda (1941-1945) in Nauc.-inform. biul. Mezhdunar. assoc. issledovatelei istorii i kul’tury rossiiskikh nemtsev, M., 2000, n°3 (23).

If we take as an example the concentration camp Cheliablag<sup>18</sup> and compare the situation of its prisoners to that of “mobilized” Germans, they appear to have been fairly similar. The main difference was that the Soviet Germans could receive visitors and parcels, and had to buy bread, tea, soap and so on, like regular citizens, while the prisoners were given these products for free. In December 1943, this concentration camp enclosed also “labor mobilized” from Central Asia<sup>19</sup>: they enjoyed special working conditions: their working day was reduced to 4h30mn when the temperature was under -20°C by still weather or under -15°C when the wind blew; it was reduced to 6h30mn when the temperature was under -15°C by still weather or under -10°C when the wind blew. During all the winter, the production norms were much lowered for this category of “labor soldiers”.

#### Second section: the POWs

The 2<sup>nd</sup> kind of forced labor was POWs. After a general introduction, I will first look at the Urals and then focus on a smaller area within the Urals, the Sverdlovsk region. I will end this section by comparing POWs to concentration camps prisoners.

Until the end of 1942, very few Germans were prisoners of the Red Army, but after the capitulation of the Sixth Army in Stalingrad, the Soviets had to manage great numbers of German prisoners, often in a poor physical state<sup>20</sup>. The rapid advance of Soviet forces in 1944 added to the camps hundreds of thousands of new prisoners of war, but the greatest influx occurred during the last months of the war: between January and early May 1945, the number of registered prisoners increased from 700000 to over two millions<sup>21</sup>.

It was dangerous to maintain the POWs near to the front line, it’s why they were sent to the rear, in regions badly needing manpower<sup>22</sup>, like the Urals.

In the Urals, the POW camps were located mainly in the industrial centers: Alapaevsk, Artmovskii, Asbest, Kamensk-Uralskii, Nev’iansk, Nizhnii Taguil, Pervoural’sk, Revda, Rezh, Sverdlovsk, Cheliabinsk, Magnitogorsk, Chkalov (Orenburg), Molotov (Perm’), Solikamsk and so on. They were managed by

<sup>18</sup> For more details about this construction site of the Cheliabinsk metallurgical combine, see Lennart Samuelson, *Tankograd: sekrety russkogo tyla 1917-1953*, Moscow, Rosspen, 2010, p.235-238.

<sup>19</sup> GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1183 l.133 (December 1943).

<sup>20</sup> Christian Gerlach and Nicolas Werth « State Violence-Violent Societies » in Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (eds) *Beyond Totalitarianism Stalinism and Nazism compared*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.166-167.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.168.

<sup>22</sup> V.P. Motrevich « Lageria dlia inostrannykh voennoplennykh i internirovannykh lits na Urale v 1942-1955: chislennost’ i dislokatsiia » in A.V. Speranskii (ed.) *Podvig Urala v istoricheskoi pamiatii pokolenii*, Ekaterinburg, 2010, p.347-348.

the Central administration for war prisoners and interned people (Russian acronym UPVI/GUPVI), created in September 1939 in the Soviet Commissariat of Internal Affairs. In 1945, they were 250,000 POWs in the Urals, who lived in 14 camps. The Sverdlovsk region had the largest number of POWs: 82,300, including 56,800 Germans. At the end of WWII, these camps received interned people, that is civilians arrested in the front zones or in the territories seized by the Red Army in Central Europe. Uralian enterprises constantly demanded more and more POWs and interned people to work in their factories: in 1945, in the Sverdlovsk region, they represented 6% of the manpower of industry, construction and local economy.

As an example, let's take the Sverdlovsk region. There, the camps were created early, in spring 1942 and closed in 1956. 92% of the POWs were Germans, Rumanians and Hungarians, with the largest group being Germans. In 1945, the prisoners considered as physically apt to work comprised only 57% of the total number. The organization of the POWs' labor took as model the Gulag, which provided the UPVI with staff and consultants<sup>23</sup>: the enterprises and the directions of camps signed contracts on the use of the POWs. So, in the Sverdlovsk region, the overwhelming majority of the POWs were rented out by camps to enterprises managed by civil commissariats, which had to give them shelter and basic necessities. During the war, they worked in sectors demanding much manpower and much hard physical labor, such as tree felling, peat digging, construction and mines. In 1945, 38,800 POWs were sent to work outside the camps: they were 4,5% of the 8 ½ million wage-earners of the state sector in the Sverdlovsk region. This proportion was very inferior to the figures in the western regions of the URSS, for example in the Baltic republics, where POWs were more than 20% of the labor force in 1946. The working conditions were very difficult: the length of the working day could reach as much as 10-12 hours, the prisoners performed unhealthy tasks forbidden by international law and safety rules were violated. They were many labor accidents. Like the concentration camp prisoners, the POWs were fed depending on the fulfillment of the production norms, often too high<sup>24</sup>: hunger and sickness were constant menaces for life.

Was the employment of POWs beneficial for Soviet authorities? It is hard to believe that it was, because labor productivity was very low, mainly due to food shortages. No camp in this region was profitable. This is why the wages of the POWs were inferior to those of

the free workers. In fact, for Soviet enterprises, these prisoners offered mainly one advantage: they could be transferred swiftly from one site to the other.

Unlike the concentration camp prisoners, ruled by political police instructions, which often violated Soviet law, the POWs were protected to a certain degree by the norms of international law. The USSR did not sign the Geneva convention on POWs (1929), but early (on July 1, 1941) the Soviet government established regulations on POWs, which remained in force during all the war. This document was in accordance with the Geneva convention, but was much shorter: it gave less guarantees to the POWs. It did not provide for a control by the international Red Cross.

For foreign policy reasons, the directors of the POWs' camps were directed to strictly observe the Geneva convention. Surely, the Soviets have violated the international law<sup>25</sup>: for example, the correspondence of the POWs with their homeland was permitted only in 1945-1946. Yet, the POWs were treated less harshly than the concentration camp prisoners. Their conditions of life were a little better, the level of their food rations a little higher. However, it is certain that the mortality rate of the POWs was high, particularly in 1943 and 1945, although we do not know the exact number of deaths<sup>26</sup>: according to the official statistics, 356687 Germans died (Austrian excluded), which represents 15% of their total number<sup>27</sup>, but V.B. Konasov and other scholars have demonstrated that the Soviets manipulated the data and the German specialist Andreas Hilger thinks that the real rate of mortality might be as high as 30%<sup>28</sup>.

### Third section: the "labor settlers"

The "labor settlers" were the third kind of forced labor. After a general presentation of these "settlers", I will describe their forms of protest.

The "labor settlers" depended on the Gulag Department of labor settlements and special settlements (1941–1944). They comprised various people, deported at different times, according to social or ethnic criteria; they had no passport and were deprived of their civil rights. They were widely employed in the war economy. In the Urals, their absolute number fell from 225900 to 157000 during the war; as their total number in the Soviet Union fell also, the part of the Urals remained equal to 24%. In October 1942, around 22,000 "labor settlers" were employed in more

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.154 et 168.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.154.

<sup>27</sup> Gerlach-Werth, in Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (eds), *Beyond totalitarianism*, p.169-170.

<sup>28</sup> Andreas Hilger, in Jürgen Zaruski (ed.), *Stalin i nemtsy Novye issledovaniia*, p.169.

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Hilger "Nemetskie voennoplennye i ikh opyt soprikosnoveniia s stalinizmom" in Jürgen Zaruski (ed.), *Stalin i nemtsy Novye issledovaniia*, Moscou, Rosspen, 2009, p.159.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159-160 et p.169.

than thirty commissariats and organizations in three Uralian regions: Sverdlovsk, Molotov and Chkalov; they were rented out by the Gulag. According to a resolution of the Council of people's commissars (1931), 5% was taken out of their wages and the money was used by the regional direction of the political police to finance its Department of special settlements. This system lasted until September 1st, 1944, when the state budget began to finance this Department.

The labor settlements had various economic profiles: oil, coal and paper industries, agriculture. At the end of the war, the Sverdlovsk and Molotov regions began to receive people deported from the South: Crimean Tatars, Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians and so on<sup>29</sup>. They were employed in the agriculture and in various industries (construction, forestry and wood work). But these occupations did not always correspond to their skills: for example, in November 1944, twenty-two "mechanizators" of agriculture from Crimea worked in forestry in the Sverdlovsk region.

In 1942, there were 1188 cases of flight from the special settlements for all the Soviet Union: since 1940, flights had become much less frequent than in the 1930s<sup>30</sup>. According to Nasedkin, head of the Gulag, this marked diminution in the number of flights was due to the amelioration of the work of the NKVD informers. In Bashkiria, this network of informers has prevented 12 flights and made possible the arrest of 158 fugitives. An important part of the arrested fugitives was prosecuted.

The flight was impossible without forged documents: so, in the region of Sverdlovsk, 16 special settlers have fled thanks to the aid of three persons: a man, A.I. Shcherban', 27 years old, Ukrainian, and two women, 68 years old, M.F. Sukhikh, without occupation and L.K. Kasserli, Greek, special settler. For the fabrication of forged documents, Shcherban' used blank forms of local Soviets: he took advantage of his position as chief of the military counting bureau of a local soviet. Of course, his services were not free: he demanded bribes from the special settlers<sup>31</sup>.

The diminution of the number of flights does not necessarily mean that the special settlers protested no more. Nasedkin quotes "defeatist" and "anti-Soviet" conversations of special settlers<sup>32</sup>: Salimzianov (kommandatura of Zlatoust, region of Cheliabinsk) said:

"Don't cut more than three cubic meters for two, it will be so: with our wood they will hit less Germans.

They say us that our wood it is shells for the Germans, it will be so: there will be less shells".

Starodubko (Bashkiria) spoke even more frankly about the war:

"If they call me into the Red Army, I yet will not defend the Soviet power, I will defend Hitler, who will give us freedom and a joyous life".

Unfortunately, we don't know how widespread were such forms of expression, which were repressed. Was there any form of active resistance beyond this verbal protest? Our source<sup>33</sup> indicates that the regional Sverdlovsk direction of the NKVD has arrested four special settlers, Armenians of Crimea, who were accused of forming a "counter-revolutionary" group, tied to the Armenian socialist party Dashnak. This group, it is said, helped the Germans in their struggle with the Soviet power and the Red Army: the majority of its members participated in murders of Soviet citizens. But it is difficult to say whether these affirmations are true or not: may be, these are only forged accusations, which result from the Soviets' will to settle a score with the Dashnak party by accusing it of treason: we must not forget that in May 1944, the Crimean Tatars were deported because of their alleged collaboration with the Germans.

We have a document (July 11<sup>th</sup> 1944) concerning 10500 Crimean Tatars deported to the Molotov region. These Tatars were employed mainly in tree felling and paper industry. The NKVD estimated that their "mood" was satisfying. It had at its disposal 143 secrets informers and took a particular interest in people who had helped the Germans: had fought in the Wehrmacht, been mayor or policeman. The informers reported anti-Soviet remarks, such as the following:

"Hitler lived three years in Crimea, there was all you wanted, but Soviet power existed 23 years in Crimea and gave nothing. We do not care, it must not last a long time, Hitler will give us freedom".

Rumors circulated: one said that a deported leader of the Soviet Crimean government had written to Stalin, asking why he had deported innocent people as well as guilty people. According to another rumor, Turkey had come in defense of the Crimean Tatars. Part of the latter wanted to return home and refused to work, but some stated that their deportation to the Urals was justified; others felt they had escaped the worst fate, i.e. shooting when the Red Army drove Nazis away from Crimea.

#### Fourth section: the "labor armies"

The "labor armies" were the fourth kind of forced labor. I will begin with a general definition of the "labor armies", then have a closer look at the "labor soldiers" from Central Asia and at the German "la-

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<sup>29</sup> Lennart Samuelson mentions the presence of Poles near to Sverdlovsk and Molotov, see *Tankograd...*, p.241.

<sup>30</sup> GARF f. R 9479, op.1, d. 130, l.1-1 ob. (flights in 1942) and l.33.

<sup>31</sup> GARF F. R 9479 op.1 d.157, l.17 (January 15th 1945).

<sup>32</sup> GARF F. R 9479 op.1 d.130 l.2-2ob.

<sup>33</sup> GARF F. R 9479 op.1 d. 157 l.18-18 ob. (January 19<sup>th</sup> 1945).

bor soldiers". I examine here those who lived near to the enterprises, not those who were prisoners in the concentration camps (see section I). I will end this section by a brief comparison of Central Asian and German "labor soldiers".

The term "labor armies" is inherited from the period of the Civil War, but is a popular term, sometimes used also in official documents<sup>34</sup>; the official name is "labor mobilized". "Labor mobilization" was a kind of alternative military service: the workers were tied to their working place until the end of the war. In fact, a great part of "labor armies" comprised people considered as politically suspect, according to social or national criteria. "Labor armies" were allotted to enterprises and, as a rule, performed auxiliary works: the conditions of life were hard. At the beginning of 1942, Urals counted approximately 290,000 "labor soldiers": regional conferences discussed about an improvement of their situation, but changed little in terms of their conditions of life. From winter 1941–1942, "labor armies" began to recruit people from Central Asia. In September 1943, more than 60000 Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Tajiks and Turkmens worked in the Urals. It is difficult to generalize about their conditions of life, for the situations were very variable. But many reports underscore their bad health which made many of them incapable of physical labor. In fact, "labor soldiers" from Central Asia were often considered as a charge by the enterprises, because they were not used to cold weather. They were not passive, but protested against their plight in several ways: flight, absenteeism, self-mutilation, refusal to learn an industrial profession and even, in one case, strike. At the end of 1943, the Soviet government understood that the employment of these people from Central Asia was inefficient and stopped the massive mobilizations; in 1944, demobilization began, but it took place in very bad conditions and many people died.

The "labor armies" comprised also Soviet Germans, called "mobilized Germans"; I mean here those who were allotted to civil enterprises, which had to give them food and shelter in special "zones" near their working place. Theoretically, the Germans lived separately from the local population, under reinforced guard and behind fences; for security reasons, they could be employed only in the auxiliary shops. In fact, these rules were not always respected<sup>35</sup>: in 1943, in the Molotov region, Germans lived in worker settlements amid the local population and without guard; they produced and transported explosives, which was forbidden by the instructions of the commissariats, negotiated with the NKVD.

In January 1944, their total number was 118376<sup>36</sup>: 50015 (42, 2%) lived in the Urals: they were concentrated in the regions of Molotov, Cheliabinsk and Sverdlovsk. Almost two thirds of them (61, 9%) had been handed over to two people's commissariats: the commissariat of coal industry (20964) and the commissariat of petroleum industry (10003). It does not necessarily mean that they worked in these branches: for example, the commissariat of petroleum industry managed tree felling enterprises. Besides, 487 Germans worked in a Molotov (Perm') ammunition plant.

We don't have any data concerning the global percentage of women, but we know that in 1944 they represented a marked majority in the petroleum combine of Bashkiria and in three regions: Molotov, Sverdlovsk and Chkalov<sup>37</sup>; on the other hand, the German workforce employed in the enterprises of the Cheliabinsk region was predominantly male. These Germans carried out different types of works: agriculture, underground work in the mines, construction of new mines, construction, tree felling, unloading of coal, and so on; they could also be employed as laborers affected to various tasks. As for the food received, the principle was the basic Soviet one: on January 2th 1943, L.P. Beria decided to establish differentiated food norms for the mobilized Germans working in coal mines: these norms depended on the fulfillment of the production norms<sup>38</sup>.

As a rule, the Germans lived in wretched barracks, like the camp prisoners; their conditions of life (food, clothing) were very bad, much worse than those of the free wage-earners. For this reason, the mortality rate was high and there were many "deserters". At the same time, we have seen that, as was often the case in the U.S.S.R., disciplinary rules were not always observed and this made the Germans' condition less hard.

At least in certain cases, the mobilized Germans lived alone, without their family<sup>39</sup>: in this situation, their wives had to care the children on their place of mobilization: according to a report of August 8th 1945, these kids were in a "heavy situation". It is why the authorities considered demobilizing the German women mothers of young children (less than 12 years) and bringing together the families. May be, the Soviets hoped also that this measure would provide the men with an incentive to work better.

<sup>36</sup> This figure does not include all the Soviet Union : in fact, it includes 27 republics, autonomous republics, krai and oblasti. See GARF F. R 9414 op.1 d.1207 l. 1-5 (January 1st 1944) and l.29-30 (April 1st 1944).

<sup>37</sup> GARF F. R 9479, op.1, d.189, l.6, 19, 29, 35, 38-38 ob..

<sup>38</sup> GARF F. R 9479, op.1, d.104, l.11.

<sup>39</sup> GARF F. R 9479, op.1, d.130, l.27 (August 12th 1943) ; d.157, l.63 (August 8th 1945) and l.66 (November 19th 1945).

<sup>34</sup> GARF F.R 9414 op.1 d.1183 l.14 ( September 15th 1943).

<sup>35</sup> GARF F. R 9479 op.1 d.130, l.22-24.

The “labor soldiers” did not have the freedom to move. If they left their “settlement”, it was considered as “desertion” and punished. However, their condition was different from that of the prisoners: officially, they were classified as a peculiar category of “special settlers”<sup>40</sup>; they had right to leaves and the guard was not armed. In fact, the “labor soldiers” had a paradoxical status: the civil administration of the building sites considered them as soldiers, but for the Red Army they were not soldiers. In some contexts, authorities treated them as free wage-earners, in other as prisoners.

The material condition of Germans and people from Central Asia living in the “zones” of enterprises and building sites was comparable: theoretically, they were subject to a camp regime, but in practice their condition was often better. In fact, their lot depended much on the level of conscience and of competence of the directors of the enterprises which used forced labor. However, the high mortality rate and the great number of evasions show that their situation was far from enviable. Their food ration was smaller than that of free workers, whereas their workday was longer, and their productivity lower; however, their cost was also lower.

### Conclusion

There were four kinds of forced labor in the Urals during the war. All these categories had in common to be managed by the political police. Although free workers were also subject to extra-economic coercion, they were still different from forced laborers because they were not managed by the political police.

The question of the statuses of un-free laborers is a complex one. From the point of view of real social condition, there was no clear boundary between the four categories of forced laborers : in fact, it is impossible to classify them on a sole scale from liberty to slavery. They were separated by nuances, almost imperceptible transitions and it is necessary not to define them

too precisely: they formed a broad spectrum of positions which coexisted in Soviet society, with a shared feature: dependent or non-voluntary work. The official terminology does not help us : the German “labor soldier’s” condition was not the same when he lived in a camp or near to an enterprise. Practice differed from law, as in all societies, but it is necessary to take into account the particular features of Soviet law: the Soviet government created a legislation, which was sometimes secret, but the real situation also depended on instructions from the administration: the Soviet Commissariat of Internal Affairs and the commissariats which employed forced labor. Fairly often, these instructions were contrary to the government legislation and in practice replaced it, so that each administration ruled as it wanted: it contributed to making the lot of the “special contingents” varying according to time and place and probably worsening it.

What was the importance of forced labor for the war economy? There are national statistics only for concentration camps, which in spite of their low productivity have produced during the war between 10% and 15% of Soviet ammunition and 22,000,000 military uniforms. They gave an undeniable contribution to Soviet victory. There is an undeniable continuity between this contribution and the role the camps played in the industrialization of the thirties. In spite of the low productivity, the use of coercion during the war was to a certain degree efficient, in so far as the camps produced some goods, but the cost in lives and suffering was high.

When we study forced labor in the Urals, we must not forget the general context of the war: the workers of the defense industry, who received the best rations, were badly fed, even if the situation was better in May 1945 than in 1943; the population was extremely tired and often sick<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> GARF FR 9479, op.1, d.157, l.27 (August 4th 1945).

<sup>41</sup> Lennart Samuelson, *Tankograd...*, p.243-245.

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