Sergei Kudryashov

Living Conditions in the Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1944

In the summer and autumn of 1941 the German Army captured vast territories of the USSR. The Germans controlled a territory where prior to the war 88 million people or approximately 45% of the total Soviet population had lived\(^1\), including the former Baltic States and blockaded Leningrad in the North-West, the entirety of Byelorussia, large areas of the Smolensk and Bryansk regions in the West and the fertile Ukrainian and Russian lands in the South-West. As a consequence of Nazi occupation, about 55 to 60 million people left their homes. The lands seized were the Soviet economy’s most productive, with a large range of industries and a developed infrastructure. Before the war the area had produced 71% of cast iron, 58% of steel, 57% of rolled metal, 64% of coal, 43% of electricity, 38% of the total pre-war harvest of grain, 84% of Soviet sugar, and had possessed 38% of the Soviet’s total cattle live-stock\(^2\). It is estimated that the occupied parts of the USSR had a pre-war output of $134.2 billion, that is approximately 11% of total Axis GDP or nearly the same as that of Italy ($140.8 billion) and the neutral trading bloc ($143.3 billion)\(^3\). On paper this big slice of Soviet potential could easily be exploited for the benefit of the Reich; in practice, however, it was a different story. There were rapid and far-reaching changes to national and administrative boundaries. Starting in 1939 with the renewed partition of Poland between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, existing national and provincial boundaries were repeatedly redrawn, making comparisons with pre- and post-war economies exceedingly difficult. When in 1941 the western part of the Soviet Union was overrun within the space of a few weeks, the Germans did not retain the Soviet administrative division between southern Lithuania, western Byelorussia and western Ukraine; instead they divided the territory into several different units with civil-

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\(^1\) After a summer offensive in 1942 these territories were enlarged and occupied almost two million square kilometers. The front line reached up to 2500 km in length.


ian administrations. Parts of western Byelorussia became the new district of Białystok, which was annexed to East Prussia, while parts of the western Ukraine constituted the newly created district of Galicia, which was integrated into the Generalgouvernement. In the territory that remained under civilian administration two Reichskommissariate were established: Ostland incorporated the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania together with the newly created Weissruthenien, which combined pre-war Polish and Soviet territories of Byelorussia. Reichskommissariat Ukraine incorporated the former Polish Wolhynien-Podolien district, as well as former Soviet territories in the Shitomir, Dniepropetrovsk, Nikolajew, Kiew and Taurien districts. Plans to extend this network of civilian administration further east were stalled in the autumn of 1941, leaving the remainder of Soviet territory under military administration. The three army groups – North, Centre and South – all established an ‘army group rear area’ (Heeresgebiet), which were further subdivided into ‘army rear areas’ (Armeegebiete). Army Group North exclusively occupied Russian territory south of Leningrad, as well as retaining some control over Estonia together with the civilian administration. Army Group Centre administered eastern Byelorussia and the central Russian regions surrounding Smolensk. Army Group South (later B) occupied the easternmost districts of the Ukrainian SSR extending its grip on the southern Russian regions, ultimately stretching from Voronezh to Stalingrad. In 1942 a fourth army group – army group A – established itself in the Caucasus and Crimea. Moreover, a portion of the pre-1939 Ukrainian SSR was administered by Rumania as the Transnistrien district. If one counts each army group as one region, there were 25 separate occupation districts⁴.

The Blitzkrieg and racial thinking had an undeniable impact on warfare in the East. Though the extent to which the German military was obsessed by Nazi ideas is still up for debate, it is entirely clear that racial thinking and ideological hatred always played an important – or even predominant – role at high administrative and political levels. This was not just the case in small circles around Hitler; this type of thinking also permeated routine planning and economic calculations. For example, German officials who became responsible for economic measures in the East met in Berlin as early as seven weeks prior to the launch of Barbarossa, in order to discuss their tasks. In the course of the discussion they arrived at the notorious and widely quoted conclusion that “X million people will certainly starve, if what is necessary for us is extracted”⁵. Ideological visions cer-

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⁴ I am particularly thankful to Dr Nick Terry for the opportunity to make use of his sources, expertise and vast knowledge of the problem, see Nicholas Terry, The German Army Group Centre and the Soviet Civil Population 1942–1944. Forced labour, Hunger and Population Displacement on the Eastern Front (Ph.D., London 2005). One of the best and most recent German studies is Dieter Pohl, Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944 (Munich 2008).

tainly should not be overestimated. Several plans failed to materialize, and in many instances pragmatism dominated. Nevertheless, German occupation policy in the Eastern territories unfolded in surprisingly close agreement with basic Nazi ideas, such as the persecution of commissars and Jews and selective hunger rationing. This had significant implications for the local population.

The immediate victims of the Blitzkrieg and colonial thinking were the Soviet prisoners of war. Their sizeable number was regarded as a problem that would simply disappear if they were subjected to terror and conditions of artificial famine. In post-war trials some camp commanders attempted to justify themselves by saying that they had come up against huge organisational problems and were unable to guarantee adequate supplies. The summer of 1941, however, had been a warm one, and crops were plentiful. Had the Germans had the desire to do so, they could have induced their prisoners to bring in the harvest, which would have included beetroot, potatoes and fruit. This was not done, however. Moreover, by October 1941, prisoners’ rations were cut further still. Although on paper the prisoners’ rations should have been between 2,000 and 2,200 calories, in actual fact they were at a much lower level, varying between 300 and 500 calories depending on the camp. German documents state rations as being “100g of millet without bread”, “up to 20g of millet and 100g of bread with no meat”, or “up to 20g of millet and 200g of bread”. Reading this today we have to remember that the “bread” referred to bore little resemblance to bread in its traditional form. Rather, this specially invented “Russian bread” consisted of 50% rye bran, 20% beetroot mash, 20% sawdust, and 10% “flour”, made from straw or leaves. It is not difficult to imagine that such provisions, together with heavy labour, rapidly led to malnutrition, illness, physical decline, and consequently a high death rate. Mass cannibalism became a feature of life in many camps. It is not at all appropriate to explain this in terms of bad German planning or a shortage of supplies. Rather, it was the result of a conscious policy. In this context it is particularly important to point out that German leadership prohibited local people from helping prisoners of war. Many inmates recall how the guards stopped attempts by the local population to share their food with prisoners. The sight of people driven to desperation by hunger was a source of amusement to some of the guards, who enjoyed photographing prisoners drinking from puddles, searching through rubbish tips or fighting over a couple of potatoes. The Germans made no secret of their attitude towards prisoners of war, which had a very negative impact on the Slavic population’s morale and behaviour.

Another unpleasant factor of occupation was looting by passing German troops. From a macroeconomic point of view this kind of looting probably did not con-

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6 Richtlinien für die Führung der Wirtschaft in den neu besetzten Ostgebieten. RGVA, 1458-3-153.
8 Many of these photos are kept in the Russian State Archive in Moscow (GARF).
stitute an issue of great importance, but it occurred exactly in that moment which shaped the memories of thousands of inhabitants. Not surprisingly, the Soviet authorities meticulously registered many of these cases, in order to present them as legal evidence against the Germans in post-war trials. During the initial period of war German officers provided inhabitants with printed and pre-stamped receipts in exchange for confiscated property. Signed by a respective officer such receipts stated that a certain amount of food or other products had been taken away in the interest of the Wehrmacht and that the German authorities would later compensate it. To the anger of the peasants, however, nothing happened when they tried to redeem these notes at the nearest field cashier’s office. This policy was stopped fairly quickly and advancing troops either expropriated what they needed without compensation or paid a small amount in Russian rubles, often much less than the true price. Later, the occupying forces adopted the method of compensating the peasants in kind and leaving them greater quotas of produce for their own use, but this was not always the case. Furthermore, the longer the fighting lasted the quicker looting became a problem, not only on a micro, but also on a macro level. In the area of the Centre army group towns and villages were overrun by troops on several occasions. As a result, the land was stripped of any food surpluses over a range of 800 to 1000 km and a so-called Kahlfraßzone was created stretching from Moscow to Poland. In addition, ‘wild’ plundering by individual soldiers often left local inhabitants with very slim chances of survival.

One of Nazis’ obvious miscalculations was their underestimation of Soviet counter-measures. Soviet evacuation and scorched earth efforts strongly influenced occupation policies and seriously impacted on living conditions. In purely numerical terms the number of factories physically removed from the occupied territories was, apparently, not so great: according to Soviet claims 1,523 factories were evacuated intact from the western USSR between July and November 1941. Of these one and a half thousand factories only 109 were from the Byelorussian and 283 from the Ukrainian SSR, while the industrial regions of Moscow and Leningrad, which were never completely occupied, lost 590 factories between them. Thus the gain to the Soviet war economy’s new centre in the Urals was not only the product of plant evacuated from the territory that was then overrun. More significant and devastating in its effect was the Soviet demolition program. Special mobile demolition battalions (istrebitelnye batalyony) were operating in all sectors of the Eastern front. Up until now Russian authorities had kept the battalions’ routine documents classified. However, using German materials and with an

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10 Nicolas Terry, chapter 6; Christian Gerlach, Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland (Hamburg 1999) 258; Pohl, Herrschaft der Wehrmacht 64f., 185–188.
increasing number of archives being accessible in the Baltic States\textsuperscript{12} it is nevertheless possible to evaluate the scale and effectiveness of the ‘programme’. Only in border areas and in some other rare instances did Wehrmacht troops manage to take Soviet factories intact. In all other regions more significant industrial properties were either totally or partially destroyed. German economic staff surveying the results of Soviet evacuation and scorched earth policy were greatly impressed by the systematic devastation they found. In Vitebsk, a city of 170,000 inhabitants, the Germans found all industry ‘completely destroyed’, including a textile factory which had employed 15,000 workers. The most important textile factories in Vyazma, Smolensk and Orsha were found bare of machinery and tools. Other plants, such as the paper factory in Borisov, would require three to four months to be restored for production. In Mogilev extremely precise demolitions meant that otherwise intact factories could not be reconnected to the power supply, so that production could not be restarted and the plants were only useful as scrap. Reports from the Bobruisk region in the south observed that destruction became progressively more severe as one traveled eastwards. In Bryansk and the neighbouring town of Ordzhonkidzegrad the Kirov and Profintern works, which had manufactured guns and locomotives respectively, were evacuated in good time together with the entire workforce of 30,000 and 300,000 tons of raw materials. What was left behind in the Kirov works was essentially scrap and was removed by the German Organisation Schu in May 1942. The gigantic machine tool factory in Orel was similarly found completely empty of equipment. With many factories thus lacking machinery plant sites came not to house productive enterprises, but instead played host to prisoner of war and civilian internment camps. In symbolic terms the most notable example was perhaps the conversion of the Ford Works in Mogilev into a concentration camp\textsuperscript{13}. Taking into account such intended destruction, which was exacerbated by ‘natural’ damage from bombings and air raids one can easily see a salient difference between the Western campaign of 1940 and the Eastern Front of 1941 – with severe consequences for the conditions of life in the occupied territory.

Many scholars stress the existence of a range of different attitudes among the population and the ambivalent character of German policy\textsuperscript{14}. But it must be


\textsuperscript{13} Terry, German Army Group Centre, Chapter 2.

underlined that all the occupying authority’s orders demanded total obedience and diligent behaviour from local residents. Codes of behaviour introduced in the occupied eastern territories left the local population almost no choice other than to take a friendly approach towards the Germans. It was extremely difficult to remain neutral and the only alternative was to join the opposition movement. Thus, given the circumstances it was much easier to collaborate than to resist. In eastern Byelorussia, Eastern Ukraine and in many regions of Russia citizens were from the outset obliged to greet officers of the German army in a certain way: men by taking off their hats and women by bowing. A penalty applied for breaking the rule, a first time offence, for example, could cost 50 rubles (5 RM). Marshal Law was introduced all over occupied Russia. Restrictions varied and depended on the time of the year and proximity to the front. Usually inhabitants were prevented from leaving their places of residence between 9 p.m. and 4 a.m. in the summer, between 6 p.m. and 5.30 a.m. in October, November and February, between 5 p.m. and 6 a.m. in December and January and after 7 p.m. and before 5 a.m. in March15.

In areas under military rule it was strictly forbidden to leave villages and towns on one’s own initiative or without proper documentation. Those breaking the rules were shot, regardless of sex and age. In order to obtain permission to leave one’s town or village one had to see a local German commander. In exceptional cases, if ‘a trip was in the interests of the German Army’ a police escort might be provided. This again made friendly behaviour towards the Germans necessary. Peasants were allowed to graze cattle only in specially designated areas or within a distance no more than 100 meters from the village. The Germans prohibited many pre-war forms of rural daily life: the collection of berries and mushrooms, hunting and fishing, boating, cycling and skiing. All bicycles and skis had to be brought to collection points. Hunting and skiing was punishable with death. Penalties for the consumption, production and sale of any home-made alcoholic beverages were severe. Though justified with anti-partisan warfare by the Germans, these oppressive measures considerably impaired the well-being of the rural population. In order to minimise the impact of the losses the only choice was to go into the service of the German Army or local administration16.

It was strictly forbidden to provide shelter or accommodation for any newcomers to the village. All inhabitants from the age of 14 upwards had to be registered. The German authorities introduced two kinds of registration lists: List A for those who had already settled in the area before 22 June 1941, and list B for those who had arrived after the beginning of the war, or who were foreigners and Jews.


16 Viktor M. Gridniev, Bor’ba krestjanstva okkupirovannyh oblastei RSFSR protiv nemetsko-fashistskoj okkupatsionnoy politiki 1941-1944 (Moscow 1976) 48-157.
Surviving Jews were marked with the letter ‘E’ or ‘J’, foreigners with ‘I’, ‘A’ or ‘F’, former Red Army soldiers with ‘C’ or ‘S’; communists and people with links to the Party with ‘K’. Those who had a Soviet passport had to obtain an obligatory attachment for it setting out all personal data including their ‘letter’, both in Russian and in German. Persons without any documentation, but included on the lists, were strictly obliged to apply for one. This cost both money (3 rubles) and time. All registered inhabitants had to keep their passports on them at all times. This registration procedure was introduced everywhere in occupied Russia and existed until the last days of the occupation, with minor variations\(^{17}\). Registration was a vital element of Nazi occupation policy. All mayors and elders were made personally responsible for it. It became an important duty of their daily routine. Unregistered individuals had very few chances of living in the occupied areas. Normally they were captured and after screening sent either to the labour columns (camps) attached to the Army or to prisoner of war camps.

When dealing with trade under the German occupation one has to clearly distinguish between trade from the point of view of the occupying power and trade as an integral part of local economic life. Many sorts of German ‘trade firms’ appeared to be involved with trading activities in the East. Their prime aim was to meticulously register any ‘given’ resources, to safely transport them to the Reich and to eventually sell them for a higher price\(^{18}\). The Soviet trading network had operated on the basis of centralized stocks with regional warehouses serving as major distribution centres. The bulk of all Soviet shops was concentrated in towns and only a very small number also existed in large villages (selo). Usually villages (even big ones) had no shops whatsoever, leaving peasants no choice but to go shopping in nearby towns. After the Red Army’s retreat and the initial period of looting many stocks had either been depleted and destroyed or consumed by the Wehrmacht, leaving no basis for the supply to local shops\(^{19}\).

In zones under military government it was the economic inspections’ (Wirtschaftskommandos) duty to establish new warehouses and supply essential goods to local shops. The warehouse managers could use the Reichskreditkassen’s credits to purchase the products they needed from native producers. In areas under civilian authority the city councils’ trade department or Gebietskommissariate simi-

\(^{17}\) All these measures were publicized in the local press. Some papers (‘The Bell’ in Smolensk, ‘For Motherland’ in Pskov, ‘The Voice of Crimea’) had a very large circulation, estimated at thousands of copies. The total number of all newspapers printed in the occupied East in all languages was up to 400. Approximately one third of them were circulated in the territory of the Russian Federation. Nowadays many papers are preserved in the state Russian Archives (GARF, RGASPI and RGVA).

\(^{18}\) According to various estimates 250–300 German firms were operating in the East. For the final reports of some of them see: RGVA, 1458-40-158/159/160.

\(^{19}\) ‘Meat and fat provisions for the Russian population are no more guaranteed, as there are no cattle to slaughter’, wrote a German official in his overview report for September 1942. The National Archives (TNA), GFM files, Frame 266038.
larly assumed responsibility for local trading. Indeed, a number of shops were re-opened in all large Soviet cities (Kiev, Minsk, Pskov, Smolensk, Rostov etc.). However, it soon became clear that there was little to sell because of the universal lack of all essential products, and money rapidly lost its value. Many shops turned into centres which distributed food using ration cards or simply stood empty with colourful Nazi flags and portraits of Hitler on their facades. Going to the local market was often the only way of sourcing food.

Trading activity was inevitably concentrated in city markets (bazaars) and on the black markets, which often operated in the same place. German policy towards local markets was not uniform. In some places (zones of partisan activity and close to military operations) they were strictly forbidden, in other places (Crimea) they were prohibited and later re-opened. In the Russian territory they were permitted in towns, but could only operate on Sundays and only during the first half of the day. Before going to the market a farmer (in Minsk) had to prove that he had paid all his taxes and that all other necessary duties had been fulfilled. In the Donetsk region (Ukraine) each peasant had to obtain a pass from a local military commander. Entering the market without a pass could cost 5,000 rubles in penalties or six days’ imprisonment. The occupying power tried to control or fix prices almost everywhere (Pskov, Smolensk, Kursk etc.). Breaking the rules could lead to arrests, confiscation and other penalties. The result, unsurprisingly, was black marketing which existed in all towns. A common way of trading was by exchanging goods. Urban inhabitants brought pieces of clothing, other manufactured goods, on rare occasions also precious metals; visitors from the countryside traded various kinds of food, usually flour, sweet corn, bread, milk, home-made alcohol, sometimes meat (poultry or, more likely, horsemeat). To give a sense of prices, 1 kg of horsemeat cost around 500 rubles (50 German occupation marks), one glass of flour 40 rubles, and a glass of sweet corn 25. This meant that one shopping trip to the market could consume a month’s salary.

The scale of salaries was very diverse and greatly depended on the local authorities, the composition of the population and the industrial ‘value’ of the region or town. In general a qualified worker could earn up to 400–450 rubles per month. The average wage of mechanics, draughtsmen and typists was about 400 rubles; bookkeepers earned 500, workers or managers in responsible positions

21 So-called ‘only for Germans’ shops are not considered here.
24 See collection of documents on price regulations in Ostland. RGVA, 1458-40-71
650–900, highly qualified specialists up to 900. This scale, however, did not apply to the Reich’s racial and political enemies. Moreover, a considerable number of Russian citizens between the ages of 15 and 60 (and sometimes even children as young as 10 or 12) were forced to work in the Organisation Todt without any payment at all.

In some regions of the Ukraine, a peasant would have to trade four (!) cows in order to obtain a suit. In large Soviet cities (Minsk, Kiev, Smolensk etc.) a small number of shops existed which even sold manufactured goods, but their range of products was very limited. The occupying power had to take care of Russian urban inhabitants by introducing food ration cards for working persons and their dependants. As with salaries, no uniform scale was imposed and rations varied from region to region. In Lutsk and Rovno each adult received 214g bread per day, 170g for children. In Minsk every working person got a daily ration of 200g, dependants 100g. Similar rations were made available in Bryansk and Smolensk. It is important to note, however, that these were the official ration levels and rations were not always distributed at this level. Moreover, bread was not always delivered on time\textsuperscript{25}, unsurprisingly leading to hunger, malnutrition and a high death rate.

Strict regulations and a lack of essential products inevitably resulted in the emergence of black markets. Money had almost lost its capacity for exchange on the black market and was in many places replaced either by precious metals or by tobacco and salt. The German reaction towards black markets was initially very negative\textsuperscript{26}. In some cases black market speculators were detained by the Sicherheitsdienst and subsequently shot. However, the German authorities soon found their own soldiers and officers involved in black marketing. Bazaar trading and black marketing were seriously damaged by forced labour mobilization. Sometimes Germans surrounded a local bazaar, searched all visitors, expropriated their property and sent the younger people directly to the Reich\textsuperscript{27}. Though the phenomenon of black markets never disappeared there is no reliable data to evaluate them in monetary terms. However, their social impact is undeniable, as the existence of black markets increased many citizens’ chances of survival and offered the occupying forces a good opportunity to buy “cheap things”\textsuperscript{28}.

Another vital element of the occupation policies was taxation. The Germans not only preserved the former Soviet tax system but also introduced new taxes to squeeze as much as possible out of the population. A kind of poll tax had to be paid by all families, which amounted to 100 rubles per year for every working person. The tax on wages was fixed at 10%. Each farm was taxed, the sum varying

\textsuperscript{25} See various reports from the occupied Eastern territories prepared by the Sicherheitsdienst officials (Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten). National Archives (Kew), GFM files, frames 266030–266097. Original documents could also be seen in the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA), Collection (Fond) 500, Inventory Index (Opis) 1, File (Delo) 776, 791 and 504-2-12.

\textsuperscript{26} Various instructions and orders are in RGVA, 700-1-49/50.

\textsuperscript{27} Zagorulko, Judenkov, Krah ekonomicheskih planov 183.

\textsuperscript{28} RGVA, 700-1-72.
from 30 to 50 rubles. Income, land and property taxes also required regular cash payments. Their size varied from region to region. In the territory of the Russian Federation the German military commanders also introduced medieval-style taxes. A high tax on dogs (200 rubles for the first, 300 for the second dog) could still be justified by the general desire to eliminate them as a possible threat to the Army. But a chimney tax (common in Europe of the Middle Ages but never used in Russia) or a tax for every window facing the street could only be regarded as a form of booty.

In addition, contributions in kind were imposed on both the urban and rural population. The local commander usually decided what products he would demand. As a result there was no uniform approach and the size of contributions varied considerably. Often meat, milk, eggs and grain were demanded. In some places vegetables, potatoes and honey were added to the list. An average peasant family had to supply 16kg meat, 75 litres milk and 20 eggs per month. With the exception of meat, which in many places under military command was directly consumed by the Army, leaving little for other local needs, many Russian peasants could meet these demands. However, promises to limit contributions were rarely kept. Thus many other contributions and ‘special obligatory deliveries’ were on occasion introduced in the occupied East. These were sometimes a compulsory delivery for a holiday (Christmas or Easter), for a party, to support ‘German victory’, to help ‘orphans or the handicapped’, or to maintain the police etc. In addition, one has to take into account numerous collections of different kinds of manufactured goods for ‘military purposes’. During the initial stage of the occupation these tended to consist of radio-sets, lamps, bicycles and skis. Later they consisted of warm clothing and linen. As a rule the procedure was simple. A local German commander issued an order, summoned the local elders and set a deadline by which the elders had to fulfill the order. If they failed to do so, reprisals were to be expected, either against them or against a particular village. If the demands were not met, this might also be used by the Germans as a plausible excuse for a pillage.

The Soviet ruble was preserved and remained the principal currency in many occupied regions. It was still used on local markets, even in Ostland where it was almost totally replaced by Reichskreditkassen (RKK) notes within a short amount of time. The exchange rate was fixed at 10 rubles to 1 RM; the official pre-war rate had been 2.12: 1. Despite German distrust of the ruble the 10:1 exchange rate suited them very well, because it reduced the cost of labour, raw materials, foodstuffs and finished goods to an often absurdly low level. A hundredweight of grain cost 2.50 RM in Russia compared to 20 RM in Germany.

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29 Local German military commanders’ orders were widely used in the Soviet Union during post-war trials of Wehrmacht personnel. Many original documents can be found in the collection of the Central Staff for Partisan Movement. RGASPI, Collection (Fond) 69, Opis 1–2.
30 RGVA, 1458-40-39; Leitendes Wirtschaftskommando Orscha, Lagebericht no. 6. Issued on May 27, 1942, NA T77/1141/682.
commerce were kept fixed at their 22 June 1941 level; labour employed by the
German Army cost even less; to employ an unskilled labourer cost the Wehrmacht
20 RM a month, a skilled worker 34 RM, a child labourer just 8 RM, of which
there were many. A small number of RKK notes spent through official channels
could thus go a very long way; the same sum spent on the black market, however,
yielded practically nothing. This combination of low production costs and high
consumer prices makes any meaningful comparison between the Reichsmark and
the ruble largely impossible, because the official exchange rate neither reflected
the high cost of living nor could it be used for an accurate comparison of produc-
tion costs.

In the Ukraine a ‘Ukrainian State Bank’ was established on 1 June 1942. It is-
sued a new Ukrainian currency, the karbovanets. By the end of 1943 seven billion
worth of karbovanets had been printed, virtually replacing the ruble. Although
the main motivation behind the Ukraine’s monetary reform was political, it was
also quite successfully used as an instrument of confiscation; Ukrainians were
only allowed to exchange a limited amount into cash. Banknotes with a value
higher than 20 rubles were also exchanged, but the sum was deposited into a ‘sav-
ings account’ from which it was almost impossible to withdraw money. To meet
the demands of German firms in the Ukraine the Central Industrial Bank was cre-
at in Rovno with 17 branches and about 200 small subsidiaries in the *Reichs-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax</th>
<th>Size in rubles</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Payment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal tax (ages 16–60)</td>
<td>55–100</td>
<td>Kursk</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Smolensk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Rostov</td>
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<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Kharkiv</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income tax</td>
<td>10% of wages and any other income earned</td>
<td>Applied everywhere</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land tax</td>
<td>0.20 for every sq. metre of built up area, 0.05, if not built up</td>
<td>Pskov</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>200 per family</td>
<td>Smolensk</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>150–550 per family</td>
<td>Kursk</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building tax</td>
<td>1% of the building’s value</td>
<td>Pskov</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pets tax</td>
<td>25–40 per dog</td>
<td>Pskov, Kursk</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>200–300 per dog</td>
<td>Bryansk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>150–200 per dog</td>
<td>Smolensk</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<td>5–40 per cat</td>
<td>Smolensk</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<td>Turnover tax</td>
<td>10–50%</td>
<td>Pskov, Bryansk</td>
<td>Byelorussia</td>
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</tbody>
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Sources: RGVA, 1466-19-335; Analytical report prepared by the Soviet Intelligence. GARF, F. R-5446, Op. 43, File 53; Zagorulko, Judenkov, Krah ekonomicheskikh planov.
How did ordinary people overcome the hardships of occupation? Survival strategies varied and a lot depended on the German authorities. The best way to survive, namely to work for the Germans or for local administrations, was only open to 20–25% of the population. The unemployment rate was generally very high during the whole period of occupation. Jews, the most hated of racial enemies, had almost no chance. The only options open to them were either to join the resistance movement or to disguise their ethnic origins. A common method of survival for male members of the population was to join the German army or police force. This would have been a very difficult decision for many to make, demanding moral strength and a firm will. The war on the eastern front was noted for its extreme barbarity and bloodshed, with the number of dead enormous; consequently the decision to wear a German uniform could also severely influence one’s fate. The Reich’s leadership understood all this and strove to characterise collaborating Soviet citizens as ‘volunteer freedom fighters’. This was particularly important in view of existing agreements (The Hague and Geneva Conventions) which prohibited the use of prisoners of war against their own country. In calling former prisoners and local people ‘volunteers’ the German propaganda machine gave the impression that the occupying power was not responsible for it, and that it was only ‘helping’ citizens of the USSR to unite in a ‘just war of liberation against Bolshevism’.

For city dwellers who were unfit for service, did not like working for the Germans and were unable to find work elsewhere, one option remaining to them was to move to the countryside. This happened in many areas during the initial period of the war, but was not of much help in the last stage of the occupation. Moreover, rural parts of northern and central Russia themselves faced famine. ‘Good connections’ (blat – in Russian) could also only benefit a limited number of people. Dealings on the black market could save lives, but not a significant number. This meant that over the course of a longer occupation a non-working person had increasingly slim chances of survival. The mortality rate was very high and total losses are very difficult to calculate. In 1944/45 the Soviet police registered 39 million people living in the newly liberated territories32. If we take the minimal figure of 55 million living in the same area during occupation, the likely loss looks appalling, even if we exclude forced labourers in the Reich as well as collaborators and others who fled with the Germans.

32 Aleksandr Epifanov, Otvetstvennost za voennye prestupleniia, sovershennye na territorii SSSR v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, 1941–1956 (istoriko-pravovoi aspect) [Responsibility for war crimes committed on the territory of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War (historical and legal aspects)] (Volgograd 2005) 382–385.
Summary

This article focuses on various aspects of the German occupation of the USSR (the Reichskommissariate Ostland and Ukraine), paying particular attention to the living conditions of the population. The racially and politically biased attitude of the occupiers, the elimination of the Soviet supply and welfare system, and the virtual destruction of numerous economic objects severely aggravated the living standards of millions of people. The Wehrmacht’s plunderings turned their lives into an everyday struggle for food, causing significant suffering and death.