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Working in the Enemy's Country

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Raphaël Spina

WORKING IN THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

The Experience of French Laborers in Germany (1940–1945)

From 1940 to 1942, almost 250 000 willing workers decided to go to Germany, usually for short stays. Then, from September 1942 up to the summer of 1944, more than 600 000 French forced laborers were also sent to the Greater Reich. All of them were in contact with German civilians of all categories: with staff and workers in the factories; with omnipotent bosses; with corrupt heads and courteous guards in the housing camps; with landlords, merchants, lonely women; with members of the Catholic clergy helping the underground French Catholic Action. Also, a minority had to deal, often with fatal consequences, with the policemen, judges, and SS who punished their most insignificant misconduct[1].

For once, as far as the volunteers were concerned, the societies of both Germany and France were in agreement on their prejudices. They unanimously despised volunteers. Any volunteer was discriminated against as a traitor, as a man from the *Lumpenproletariat*: he was considered to be dirty, coarse, ill-educated, even alcoholic or violent, not to say a robber and a dangerous man. As to the single female workers, they were all considered as mere prostitutes, although they were in reality distinguished only by the fact that they could choose their lovers more freely in Germany than in France. The reports by Nazi police or by German businesses also considered volunteers as poor workers, with below-average productivity, and much involved in criminality. This portrayal of volunteers was so general that what the French forced workers feared the worst was to be confused with volunteers[2].

In fact, the volunteers mostly came from the inferior classes of society, without the good manners and education expected by the other parts of the population. What's more, half of them were workers, and many were unemployed because of the economic situation in the defeated France (1 million people were without jobs at the end of 1940), or they had been sacked by the laws of the Vichy regime because they were women or foreigners (one volunteer out of every four was a foreigner). Many no longer had families, friends, or relatives to help them. Or they were very young orphans who hoped to sever links with a negligent or brutal tutor, and to start a new life, or unwed mothers who had been rejected by their parents. Eventually, many were in fact former offenders who had subscribed to an employment contract in Germany in order to be released from jail, or who expected to leave the country and to be forgotten. So given these origins and these poor backgrounds, it was no surprise if many volunteers were unlikely to please German society, if they often behaved in a deviant way, and if they caused dissatisfaction to their employers, their working mates, and their hosts. But few Germans and few

1 Up to 6000 French workers in Germany (volunteers, forced workers, or former POWs »transformed« into civil workers) were sent to concentration camps between 1940 and 1945. 450 were beheaded after a mock trial. 30 000 to 50 000 (of whom 1000 would not survive) were interned for a minimum of three weeks in an *Arbeitserziehungslager*, a re-education labor camp, for disobedience, poor productivity, escape attempts, etc. Raphaël Spina, Histoire du STO, Paris 2017, p. 376–377.

2 Ibid., p. 38–39.

fellow citizens considered that their misery was the reason for their antisocial behavior. They preferred the more comfortable reactivation of the long-established class hatred and prejudice against the working class, traditionally blamed as immoral and dangerous.

As for the French volunteers, most of them were soon to be disappointed by their reception in Germany. During their railway journey, they were shocked to be kept under close watch by suspicious German policemen. When they arrived, the first meal was often disgusting. Then the working and living conditions turned out to be far worse than what the German propaganda had promised (dirty housing camps and bad food, and – what's more – sauerkraut and beers were monotonous and too different from French meals and wines)[3]. Moreover, the majority of businesses did not respect the terms of the contracts: the French workers were arbitrarily assigned to jobs and to workplaces that were not the ones stipulated, with lower wages. Sometimes they were also separated from their wives or girlfriends despite what had been promised. The monitoring, the threats, and the lack of freedom were heavily felt. Finally, the inhabitants were hostile to them. In particular, the population at large and their German workmates successfully requested that the foreign workers should be kept underpaid – of course, the Nazi government, the police, and the bosses had no problem in satisfying this spontaneous popular demand. Therefore, even though a French worker usually earned far more in Germany than in France, he was always sure to be paid less than his German workmates for the same work[4]. And the French women were only paid half what the French men were paid, and therefore exposed to misery: they had to rely on any French lover or sometimes on a German partner to survive[5].

So, unsurprisingly, the letters from Germany were full of bitterness, anger, and disappointment, dissuading new candidates from coming[6]. Therefore, the departures from France collapsed at the end of 1941, while the German need for manpower was increasing. For example, in Nuremberg, the businesses treated the French workers so badly and so cynically that German recruiters in the French city of Nîmes decided not to send French workers to the *Gau* (district) of Nuremberg any longer. Any letter written from this place might become a useful weapon for underground propaganda, and ruin any effort to recruit new volunteers[7].

Some French workers rebelled, and were sent to concentration camps. Or they changed jobs without authorization. Or they escaped from Germany: up to June 1942, 45 000 French workers broke their contract, one out of four, and the proportion of broken contracts increased with time[8]. On April 1st, 1942 a general cut in wages for the French workers was announced. Then, on May 20th, all the temporary contracts were extended *sine die.* This meant that those volunteers were, from now on, kept in Germany against their will, including some women who could never have been legally forced to come to Germany from France. A wave of revolts and of escape attempts followed, and almost 3600 French were arrested during the summer of 1942 – 4 out of 100 (4 %)[9]. Some French women even tried to become pregnant in order to be sent back home. But they were, more and more systematically, sacked by their employers, and were refused a return to France by the authorities, because they would have been able to describe the reality of life in Germany. Many of them plunged into poverty and had to seek abortions or to

3 Ibid., p. 48–49.
4 Patrice Arnaud, Les travailleurs civils français en Allemagne, vol. 1, thesis, University of Paris Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2006, p. 200–212.
5 Ibid.
6 Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (AN) 3 AG 2 364; Spina, Histoire du STO (as in n. 1), p. 51.
7 AN 2 AG 461, 11th of September 1942.
8 Arnaud, Les travailleurs civils français en Allemagne (as in n. 4), vol. 1, p. 251–255.
9 Patrice Arnaud, Helga Bories-Sawala, Les Français et les Françaises volontaires pour le travail en Allemagne, in: Centre de recherche d'histoire quantitative (ed.), La Main-d'œuvre française exploitée par le IIIe Reich (international symposium held in Caen), Caen 2003, p. 120.

give birth in disastrous conditions, which often led to the death either of the child, or of the mother, or both. Some 2000 French female workers died in Germany, and 3000 orphaned children survived the conflict. A minority of the children had a German father, and these were kidnapped by the Nazi police to be given to German parents: no one knows what became of them afterwards[10].

So it was impossible to get enough manpower with a limited and declining pool of volunteers. At first, on June 22nd, 1942, the German occupiers and the French tried to launch a new wave of departures thanks to the *Relève*: one peasant POW would be released from captivity if three specialist workers voluntarily went to work in Germany. But at the end of September, only 17 000 specialist workers and 32 500 non-specialists had agreed to leave – predictably, too few. Therefore, *Gauleiter* Sauckel had the Compulsory Labor Scheme (Service du Travail Obligatoire) instituted by the Vichy regime (laws of September 4th, 1942 and of February 16th, 1943). This state coercion proved to be quite efficient: 92 % of the German labor requirements were satisfied by force before the summer of 1943, which led to the exile of more than 600 000 workers, students, peasants, or employees[11].

Upon their arrival in Germany, the French were sent first to 46 sorting camps, where they were assigned to their workplaes[12]. This first contact with Germany and Germans was gruesome: all witnesses reported about the dirt and the discomfort of those camps. They were shocked by the violence of the guards; this was directed more against the Poles or the Soviets than the French, but nevertheless the French were disgusted by the barbaric display of people being beaten up and sometimes summarily shot. The French compared those sorting camps to modern slave markets: any German industrialist, craftsman, or peasant could come and estimate by guesswork who would suit their needs, by considering physical appearance alone. Especially after February–March 1943, when the influx of workers was too big to be managed efficiently, and when improvisation predominated, the workers were often assigned to places or jobs that were not the ones written on their contracts when they left France[13]. A few workers were deceived by the Germans and drafted against their will into paramilitary organizations[14], in the Wehrmacht's *Arbeitsbataillon* in charge of clearing up the ruins of the German cities[15], or the Organization Todt immediately behind the Eastern front[16]. In spring 1943, the management of the new arrivals was so chaotic that some French workers even found the opportunity to choose for themselves the *Gau* or the business in which they would like to work[17].

At first, usually, the French newcomers were badly received by the German population. The German civilians believed that they were volunteers, and that their arrival in numbers meant that many of their own relatives might now be drafted into the army, or that the war would be prolonged. Usually, too, as soon as the French had explained they had been forced to come, the Germans became more friendly with them. Since the conquest of France, Francophobic feelings seemed to be old-fashioned. The major enemy was now the Soviet Union, and the Slavs

10 Jacques Evrard, La Déportation des travailleurs français, Paris 1971, p. 327–328; Fabrice Virgili, Les travailleuses françaises en Allemagne, in: Hervé Joly (ed.), Travailler dans les entreprises sous l'Occupation, Besançon 2008, p. 361, 370–371.

11 Spina, Histoire du STO (as in n. 1), p. 176.

12 Aymé et Brilhac, La Relève. La résistance des ouvriers français, 1943, Free French propaganda leaflet, Nanterre, Bibliothèque de documentation et d'information contemporaine (BDIC), S pièce 11669.

13 AN 3 AG 2 364.

14 AN F 1a 3777.

15 Evrard, La déportation des travailleurs français (as in n. 10), p. 178–179.

16 AN F 22 2030.

17 Evrard, La déportation des travailleurs français (as in n. 10), p. 173; Arnaud, Les travailleurs civils français en Allemagne (as in n. 4), vol. 1, p. 340.

were more discriminated against and more often victims of public and individual racism than the French.

In 1943, the Gaullist secret service in London reported that: the taste for cosmopolitanism does exist in every social class in the Reich, extending from stupid curiosity up to broad open-mindedness. Paradoxically, among the German people, nationalism isn't associated with xenophobic feelings, and among the Nazi elite, the strict racial conception coexists with the call for foreigners, but only if they are used as slaves, of course[18].

Nevertheless, in 1987, out of a sample of 76 ex-French forced workers, only 11 said the German population was »discreetly helpful« with them, while 32 estimated the population was indifferent, 20 suspicious, and 13 aggressive and full of scorn[19]. Pretty much everywhere, since the population ignored how occupied France had to suffer because of their country, many Germans were genuinely surprised that most French workers hated them and did nothing to behave properly[20]. Some extreme incidents proved that popular racism could still exist against the French, especially from brainwashed young people. In May 1943, a French worker in Austria wrote: »the population can't stand us. In the tramways, they spit at us. Some kids throw stones at us. In the theater, the spectators protested against our presence and two policemen asked us politely to leave.«[21] Elsewhere, hairdressers refused to cut their hair[22]. In a village next to Graz, only the inhabitants could use the pavement[23]. In Hoyat (Lower Saxony), the Nazi inhabitants openly considered France as a country of lazy people and as a future German colony[24]. In other places, the Germans didn't even try to pretend to believe in the official policy of »collaboration« between the two countries: »we are the winners, we've got the right to make any use of you which seems good to us.« In this place »which already smells like Prussia, children and women are hostile toward the foreigners and especially toward the French. It is not rare to see in the street some young, two or four years old, Germans spitting at you and calling you *dirty Franzouse* or pointing their wooden rifles at you.«[25]

Part of this hostility also came from the fact the French workers, whether willing or not, were stereotyped as dirty, badly dressed, quarrelsome, even as robbers. This was a partial reality, corresponding to the negative experiences some Germans had with the common French workers they occasionally met. As they had been unable to prevent their own exile, many angry victims avenged it by behaving rudely: they considered their bad reputation almost as evidence of patriotism. In the same manner, they were widely involved in the black market, considered as a compensation for the plundering of France: they felt almost flattered to be reputed for having imported the black market to Germany[26]. Some, particularly among the volunteers, even turned to delinquency or criminality. With more political significance, others took risks by refusing to give any money to the *Winterhilfswerk* (the Winter Help Service), by defacing Hitler's picture, by ignoring the Nazi salute or the Hitlerjugend's parades, or by making fun of Nazi propaganda – gestures which could lead to their deaths.[27]. All these acts were their way of resisting without weapons – of manifesting what the historian Jacques Sémelin would later

18 AN F 1a 3777, 5th of May 1943.
19 Michel Gratier de Saint-Louis, Le STO dans le Rhône, thesis, University of Lyons, 1990, p. 68. A sample of former forced workers responded to a questionnaire sent by the historian.
20 AN F 1a 3776.
21 AN F 1a 3777.
22 AN 3 AG 2 365.
23 AN 3 AG 2 364.
24 Ibid.
25 AN F1a 3776.
26 AN F 60 1452.
27 AN F 1a 3777.

label as some »civilian resistance« (*résistance civile*)[28]. Civilian resistance should be distinguished from passive or non-violent resistance. Indeed, some disobedient behaviors by the French workers show that they were active, including when they stole raw materials (an old worker's deviant practice nicknamed *perruque,* or »wig«), or made products for their own benefit during worktime (*coulage* or »casting«), or whenever they broke or stole anything. They were not non-violent either, whenever they used harsh, aggressive words against some Germans, and they even hurt or murdered some of them. But those misbehaviors were mostly spontaneous and unorganized, and above all, they would not and could not use weapons. By contrast, very few tried to commit sabotage or to join one of the few organized underground networks[29].

Nevertheless, the Germans had an ambivalent opinion of those French civilians. Disappointment was not necessarily the only possible experience. No one denied they were working efficiently, more efficiently than foreign workers from any other nationality. The police themselves considered that there were very few episodes of sabotage and no real attempt at underproductivity[30]. And the *Reichswirtschaftskammer* (the economic chamber of the Reich) considered that the French had the highest productivity among foreign workers, equal to 90 % of the Germans'[31].

The Germans almost never considered the French exiled workers a serious threat to them. The French underground movement and BBC propaganda had repeatedly hoped that the millions of exiled workers would be their »Trojan horse« inside of the Third Reich. But the European forced workers were of too various nationalities – every nationality often despised and stereotyped the others, and the workers limited their horizons and interactions to small groups of people from the same local and professional origins. Thus the mass of foreign forced workers could not organize anything in common. Even inside a single national group, the workers were too heterogeneous from a social, cultural, and political point of view, so that no common uprising could be organized. They were, in any case, too heavily monitored and too strictly repressed by the Gestapo, and they feared denunciations. So that as *Gauleiter* Sauckel once ironically told President Laval, »the Trojan horse [was] nothing but a Greek legend«[32].

The French were not only considered by the Germans as good workers: they were also reputed to be seducing womanizers. Sexual relationships between Frenchmen and German women were not explicitly forbidden, except in the case of adultery with the wife of a German soldier or of a Nazi officer. Almost no German woman was raped by a Frenchman, but many French seem to have cynically considered the German woman as easy prey, and their flirtations as not serious, and as a good way of receiving some material help[33]. Conquering the body of a German woman was even considered as a symbolic revenge for the »rape« of France[34]. But some relationships were more serious, and in 1945, a minority of French came back from Germany with a German wife.

As to the other Germans, the French experienced mixed feelings toward them. Every German might symbolize the enemy who was responsible for their exile. They might wonder if he was not a Nazi or a police informer. They might envy his privileges, since he was granted the best jobs, the most responsibility, the best supplies (in particular, the French workers were not

28 Jacques Semelin, Sans armes face à Hitler. La résistance civile en Europe 1939–1943, Geneva 1986.
29 Arnaud, Les STO (as in n. 4), p. 388–390.
30 Spina, Histoire du STO (as in n. 1), p. 371–372.
31 Alan Milward, The German economy at war, London 1963, p. 274–275; Adam Tooze, The Wages of Destruction. The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy, London 2007, p. 537.
32 Spina, Histoire du STO (as in n. 1), p. 281.
33 Patrice Arnaud, Les STO. Histoire des Français requis en Allemagne nazie, Paris 2010, p. 243–247.
34 Ibid., p. 248–249.

afforded a ration card for textiles or tobacco). They did not accept that any verbal contestation or physical aggression by them against a German could lead them to a camp or to the death penalty, but not the other way round[35]. So they tended to ignore their German workmates, and neither were they desirous to get to know other German people, being discouraged anyway by the linguistic and cultural barriers. The French workers even had difficulty in understanding the German way of working, as the pace of production, for example, was much slower than in France (sometimes four times less rapid). This was resented as absurd, boring, and demoralizing. Why had they been drafted out of their country, if they were to stay under-employed and passive in front of their empty machines[36]?

But collective relationships and individual experiences also varied a lot according to cities, regions, or individuals. The Austrians and the Bavarians were less hated than the Prussians, seen as age-old enemies. Relations were also easier in former Marxist industrial cities such as Hamburg or Hanover. Catholics, workers, or even peasants seemed to adhere less to National Socialism than the middle or upper classes. In the housing camps, the *Lagerführer* or camp commander was generally considered as corrupt and distant; sometimes he was even a spy, or violent[37]. The doctors were too few (one for 10 000 French workers)[38], not competent enough (the best ones were drafted to the hospitals at the front), and far too severe: »the German medical corpsman, who is already hard toward his fellow citizens, behaves naturally even more harshly with foreigners.«[39] Too often, their diagnoses were wrong, they were unable to cure the French workers properly, or they refused to have the sick ones signed off work, accusing them of being lazy and cheating. This behavior was probably responsible for many avoidable amputations or deaths: 10 000 to 20 000 sick French had to be sent back home, sometimes just in time to die within their family, and some 13 000 to 18 000 died from disease in Germany, representing half of the workers who died there[40].

In the factories, the *Meister*, or overseer, was commonly depicted as authoritarian and unsympathetic (as in every factory in the world). The boss, who was according to the law the omnipotent *Führer* of the business (*Betriebsführer*), was greatly feared: if he considered any French worker to be lazy, absenteeist, or rebellious, he could arbitrarily shout at him, insult him, transfer or denounce him, or even beat him, or have him sent to an *Arbeitserziehungslager,* a labor re-education camp[41]. On the other hand, no one ever complained of systematic abuses, and many German were polite and respectful with the French. The old guards or *Werkschutze* of the housing camp or of the factories, for example, were seen as sympathetic and harmless. And among workmates or other civilians, personal links could range from minimal and unavoidable connections to real friendships.

Moreover, as most German civilians were children, women, and old workers, the French felt compassion for their sufferings, especially when all of them alike were the victims of bombings. They discovered that lots of disillusioned Germans were fed up with the war and with the regime, and that many could be helpful – they might even become accomplices in some signs of resistance. Sometimes a shopkeeper helped some French exiles despite the Nazi ideology. Sometimes an old, red factory worker whispered: »Scheiß Krieg«. Sometimes a learned bourgeois would invite some French students to listen to the BBC with him. Some peasants refused

35 AN F 1a 3776.
36 Spina, Histoire du STO (as in n. 1), p. 370–371.
37 Evrard, La déportation, des travailleurs français (as in n. 10), p. 205; Arnaud, Les STO (as in n. 33), p. 192–194.
38 AN F 1a 3776, French report about the life of the STO workers, 20th of July 1943.
39 Ibid., report about the daily life of 1,200 French working at IG Wolfen in Bitterfeld (Saxe), 1943.
40 Ibid.; Helga Bories-Sawala, Dans la gueule du loup, Les Français requis du travail en Allemagne, Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2010, p. 116.
41 Ibid., p. 379.

to use the Nazi salute. Many priests, friars, and nuns helped the French underground Catholic Action. During the bombings, the French often devoted themselves to saving civilians and pulling them from the ruins, forgetting their hate against the enemy and considering only that they had before them fellow human beings in need of help.

From the French point of view too, not everything was a cause of discontent during the forced stay in Germany. Of course, many workers felt upset to be given jobs unrelated to their qualifications and professional experience: any student, civil servant, employee, or peasant could be made a metal worker, which was painful as well as dangerous. And some skilled workers or even engineers felt humiliated to be downgraded (the German system of education and qualifications being more exigent) and given tasks inferior to their capacities[42]. According to an enquiry whose results were sent to Vichy on June 4th, 1943, 35 % of the French workers experienced a feeling of »professional demotion« in Germany, especially 18- to 28-year-olds[43]. This meant, nevertheless, that two out of three French workers were satisfied with their jobs in Germany – most probably, these were the oldest and most qualified workers, who were among the first sent to Germany, and who were given jobs more appropriate to their abilities. Many railway workers from the SNCF weren't disoriented to work for the Reichsbahn, nor many French postmen for the Reichspost. Some French were given training or promotions. In any case, for all French workers, the wages were paid until the last day of the war, and were good enough to allow some solid savings: 250 000 families received from Germany the total sum of 10 billion Francs. Among the European workers in Germany, the French were the ones who sent the greatest amount of money to their families, and the only national group whose financial transfers to the motherland went on increasing with time[44]. Although a minority of the French workers, badly fed, lost up to a quarter of their body weight[45], the German rations were superior to the French ones. Many French even frequently sold their surplus food on the black market[46] – even if many of them resented the total absence of wine in a country devoted to beer[47], and even if the quality of food could vary from one housing camp or one business's canteen to another.

The housing could also be very variable. The French were forbidden to rent hostel rooms. Some of them managed to rent bedrooms in private houses: half of the French managed to get a bedroom in Berlin, two out of three in Schwerin (Mecklenburg), even three out of four in Cobourg (Bayern)[48]. But as the war lingered on, foreigners were increasingly forbidden to rent individual bedrooms, and more priority was given to refugees and to bombed-out Germans[49]. Anyway, at least three out of four French civilian workers in Germany had to stay in housing camps[50]: this was hard to tolerate, as the French were rightly supposed to be quite individualistic. What's more, because of the lack of time or money, some of them had to be stacked into theaters, ballrooms, back rooms of schools or cafés, chalets, and tent camps. In Stettin, more than 1500 French forced workers had to live and sleep on board two obsolete ships, the *Hamburg* and the *Bremerhaven*[51]. In the summer of 1944, a French medical report about the sani-

42 AN 2 AG 81; AN 2AG 586; AN 3 AG 2 365; also Arnaud, Les STO (as in n. 33), p. 69.
43 AN F 1a 3777.
44 Arnaud, Les STO (as in n. 33), p. 60; Bories-Sawala, Dans la gueule du loup (as in n. 40), p. 160; Alan Milward, The New Order and the French Economy, Oxford 1971 p. 275.
45 AN F 1a 3777.
46 Arnaud, Les STO (as in n. 33), p. 205–206; Bories-Sawala, Dans la gueule du loup (as in n. 40), p. 121–124.
47 AN F1a 3777.
48 Arnaud, Les travailleurs civils français en Allemagne (as in n. 4), p. 544.
49 AN F 1a 3777.
50 Arnaud, Les travailleurs civils français en Allemagne (as in n. 4), p. 544.
51 Evrard, La déportation des travailleurs français (as in n. 10), p. 199.

tary situation of the workers of the *Service du travail obligatoire* (STO) presented a unique statistical estimate of the »good« or »bad« *Lagers*: 15 % to 20 % of the camps were said to be insalubrious; 1 % to 2 % were reported to be mostly clean; more than three camps out of four were commonplace, bearable[52].

So living conditions were highly variable, but globally, according to some reports, the situation was most uncomfortable in Berlin and in northern Germany. There, the inhabitants welcomed the French with »an abruptness often hostile, the relationships with the population [were] infrequent and full of coldness; the food [was] scarce, the housing rudimentary«. In southern Germany, in Austria, in the Sudetenland, on the contrary, »the welcome seemed to be cordial, sometimes friendly, the relationships with the inhabitants [were] common and pleasant, the food sufficient, and the housing rather comfortable altogether.«[53] Recent historical studies confirm that the housing was criticized by the French in northern Germany (in Brandenburg more than in any other area), while it was considered acceptable in the south or in Saxony[54]. And since southern and eastern Germany were less bombed than the north, daily life there seemed to be more bearable; what's more, the population was traditionally more francophile in the south. Nevertheless, even if an area such as Silesia was quite far from the Allied planes, it presented the workers with an unpleasant climate and a greater remoteness from France; in the city of Auschwitz, the 2500 French workers housed in the »camp Napoléon« (the biggest French housing camp in Germany) had to put up with the gloomy vicinity of the infamous concentration and extermination complex.

A minority of French workers were also fascinated by German culture and monuments, by the modernity of the enormous factories, and by the advancement of the German welfare state. Some, mostly from the far right, appreciated an anti-democratic regime of order whose crimes and seamy sides they didn't want to consider[55]. A few of them, by ideology or opportunism, even went on to believe in the Nazi ideology and became informers or collaborators[56]. But more often, the French felt nostalgic for their lost country. They rejected the German language, and nicknamed every German a »Boche« (a Hun). They might be respectful to the Germans in public, to avoid punishment: but under the surface, in their inner French circles, they continued to be quite impertinent and to express their discontent. They composed satirical songs against Germans they personally knew or against the Nazi establishment. They went on secretly listening to the BBC and approving it. And their personal letters and diaries (known thanks to the French and German postal controls) were full of resentment and bitterness against Germany and against the French and German leaders. As typical »weapons of the weaks«, their »hidden transcripts« could be quite different from their »public transcripts«, and proved that they had never accepted exile, servitude, and domination[57].

The longer the war went on and the more the German defeats accumulated, the more the reports and the letters mentioned a growing popular hostility against the French, even in the places where they had been well received and easily helped a few months before. In March 1944, an analysis of 1500 letters from French workers concluded that »hatred was growing between French and German workers, the latter being by the way incredibly nervous because of

52 AN F 1a 3776.

53 AN F 1a 3776, report of the French Official Delegation, led by Gaston Bruneton, September 1943.

54 Arnaud, Les STO (as in n. 33) p. 161.

55 Arnaud, Les travailleurs civils français en Allemagne (as in n. 4), vol. 2, p. 1358–1360; id., Les STO (as in n. 33), p. 361–362.

56 Arnaud, ibid., p. 340–347.

57 James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, Yale 1985; Id., Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, Yale 1990.

the Allied bombings«.[58] Many French workers were openly glad when new German disasters were announced, and they didn't hesitate to provoke their colleagues imprudently[59]. After France was liberated at the end of summer 1944, the French workers in Germany were all suspects, as citizens from an enemy country: this led to a peak of repression, since more French were arrested after the liberation of Paris (August 25th, 1944) than since the beginning of the war. The radicalization of total war also meant longer working hours and less food and clothing. The French seemed less and less considered by an exhausted German population. In February 1945, according to a student, »one after the other, all the doors were shut in front of us, whether out of true hate and defiance, whether out of the fear of reprisals«.[60] Exceptionally, on Good Friday 1945, 35 French were even shot by the Gestapo at Dortmund, together with 300 Soviet forced workers[61]. But the French could also feel compassion for the millions of German refugees.

When the German state collapsed, in some factories, the French workers took charge of public order and of the supplies: the Germans had now to obey them, a topsy-turvy situation[62]. They also helped to capture Nazis and their collaborators. Almost no violence was done against the population. In eastern Germany, the French even tried to protect civilians from the revengeful and violent Red Army. But many French also had to rob to survive. And before returning to France, they stole lots of goods from abandoned houses or mansions, as a compensation for their exile[63].

After the war, the former French victims quickly forgot that all of the Germans had not been lenient toward them. They were disappointed to find that their own country – a country they had so much loved and so eagerly celebrated and hoped to see again during their exile[64] – considered them with disdain or suspicion. They felt more respected by the two German states, both by their authorities and by their populations, who offered apologies, and who welcomed them warmly whenever they returned for a pilgrimage. Retrospectively, the former French victims considered their experience of exile in Germany had helped to prepare their two peoples' reconciliation[65].

58 AN F 1a 3776.
59 Arnaud, Les STO (as. 33), p. 149–150.
60 Jean-Louis Quereillhac, J'étais STO, Paris 1958, p. 195.
61 Arnaud, Les STO (as in n. 33), p. 410.
62 Arnaud, Les travailleurs civils français en Allemagne (as in n. 4), vol. 2, p. 1630.
63 Spina, Histoire du STO (as in n. 1), p. 390–391.
64 Ibid., p. 384.
65 Ibid., p. 432–435.