

PEACEFUL PILLAGE

THE CASE OF THE GERMAN 'BUREAUX D'ACHATS' IN OCCUPIED FRANCE, 1942-1943

INTRODUCTION

FOLLOWING THE CAPITULATION OF FRANCE IN MAY 1940, NAZIS ESTABLISHED WIDE OPERATIONS ON THE BLACK MARKET IN AN ATTEMPT TO EXTRACT ALL OF FRANCE'S REMAINING RESOURCES. IN JUNE 1942, NAZI LEADERSHIP, LACKING CONTROL OF SPIRALLING PRICES AND FACING CORRUPTION OF THEIR OFFICIALS ON THE BLACK MARKET, CHARGED COLONEL VELTJENS WITH OPTIMISING THEIR OPERATIONS ON THE BLACK MARKET. VELTJENS SET UP THE REGULATORY BODY ÜBERWACHUNGSSSTELLE THAT GAVE LICENCES TO A LIMITED NUMBER OF PURCHASING AGENCIES. THESE AGENCIES HAVE BEEN RESEARCHED AS PART OF THE GENERAL HISTORIES OF THE BLACK MARKET IN OCCUPIED FRANCE, WRITTEN NEARLY EXCLUSIVELY BY FRENCH HISTORIANS. OUR RESEARCH ENDEAVOURS TO SHED LIGHT ON THE BLACK MARKET EXPERIENCE ON WHICH LESS INK HAS BEEN SPILT: THE GERMAN CLANDESTINE PURCHASING OFFICES.

FINDINGS

I. IT APPEARS THAT THE NAZI LEADERSHIP WAS ENCOURAGED TO ESTABLISH CLANDESTINE PURCHASING OFFICES BY THE RELATIVE EASE WITH WHICH THEY COULD MAXIMISE THEIR EXPLOITATION OF THE FRENCH MARKET WITHOUT THE NEED FOR OFFICIAL CONTRACTS. ECONOMIC PILLAGE THROUGH THE BLACK MARKET ALSO SEEMS TO BE PART OF THE GENERAL BLITZKRIEG STRATEGY.

II. WHILST IT REMAINS UNCLEAR WHAT MADE CLANDESTINE PURCHASING OFFICES SO EFFECTIVE, GERMANS' USE OF FRENCH AUXILIARIES, MOTIVATED BY THE ATTRACTIVE PROFITS ON THE BLACK MARKET, PRESENTS ITSELF AS THE BEST EXPLANATION GIVEN THAT THEY ENABLED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EXTENSIVE GOODS COLLECTION NETWORKS THAT EXTENDED TO EVEN THE MOST REMOTE CENTRES OF PRODUCTION.

III. THE SHIFT TOWARDS TOTAL WAR AND THE SUBSEQUENT NEED FOR MORE RATIONAL AND EFFECTIVE EXPLOITATION OF OCCUPIED TERRITORIES EMERGES AS THE MOST LOGICAL EXPLANATION FOR THE DECISION TO DISBAND CLANDESTINE OFFICES IN APRIL 1943.



METHODOLOGY

PART I.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE GAPS IN THE RESEARCH OF PURCHASING AGENCIES' THROUGH SECONDARY LITERATURE REVIEW.

SOURCES: SANDERS, HISTOIRE DU MARCHÉ NOIR: 1940-1946. & GRENARD, LA FRANCE DU MARCHÉ NOIR: 1940-1949.

PART II.

ESTABLISHMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT ENCOURAGED NAZIS TO ESTABLISH CLANDESTINE PURCHASING AGENCIES?
2. WHY WERE CLANDESTINE PURCHASING AGENCIES SO EFFECTIVE IN EXTRACTING FRENCH GOODS FROM THE INTERNAL MARKET?
3. WHAT MOTIVATED THE DECISION TO DISBAND THE CLANDESTINE PURCHASING AGENCIES IN 1943?

PART III.

ANALYSIS OF THE SECONDARY LITERATURE OF KEY HISTORIANS IN THE FIELD, MAINLY PAUL SANDERS, FABRICE GRENARD AND KENNETH MOURÉ, FOLLOWED BY AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF THE FILE B 49 475-504 OF THE CONTRÔLE ÉCONOMIQUE PRESERVED BY THE FRENCH ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ARCHIVES (ARCHIVES ÉCONOMIQUES ET FINANCIÈRES) AND THE FILE AJ 40 STORED BY THE FRENCH NATIONAL ARCHIVES (ARCHIVES NATIONALES).

CONCLUSION & FURTHER RESEARCH

AT THE END OF 1942, GERMANS HAD A VAST NETWORK OF PURCHASING AGENCIES THAT ALLOWED THEM TO EXPLOIT THE FRENCH ECONOMY SUCCESSFULLY. SHIFT TOWARDS TOTAL WAR, HOWEVER, MEANT THAT THIS MODEL, PART OF THE BLITZKRIEG STRATEGY, NO LONGER SUITED THE NEW WAR STRATEGY, AND MORE EFFECTIVE EXPLOITATION OF OCCUPIED COUNTRIES' RESOURCES THROUGH LEGAL ROUTES WAS NEEDED. THROUGH FURTHER ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY SOURCES, WE STRIVE TO ESTABLISH CONCRETE REASONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PURCHASING OFFICES, DETERMINE THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE COLLABORATION OF FRENCH AUXILIARIES WAS A KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF PURCHASING AGENCIES, ASSESS THE EXTENT TO WHICH CORRUPTION AND INFLATION INFLUENCED THE DECISION TO MOVE AWAY FROM PURCHASING AGENCIES AND ASSESS THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PURCHASING OFFICES ON THE REBUILDING OF THE FRENCH ECONOMY POST-SECOND WORLD WAR.

REFERENCES

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SANDERS, PAUL. HISTOIRE DU MARCHÉ NOIR: 1940-1946. PARIS, FRANCE: PERRIN, 2001.

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