

# ‘Malenkey Robot’ in the Carpathian Basin, in Hungary – Data, Facts, Interpretations, Connections

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**Abstract.** Interpretation problems related to the notion of ‘malenkaya rabota,’ POW, internee, GULAG and GUPVI. Ways of classification of the victims of ‘malenkaya rabota’ in the Carpathian Basin, various groups and types. Determination of the effective number of the groups, and of the total number of those deported as civilians from the 14.7 million inhabitants of the Hungary of the time, based on different data, and the difficulties of definitions. The interpretation and implementation of the central Soviet commands. The connections between the deportations. Similarities and differences between the deportations as internee and as POW. Manageability of the data, interpretation of Soviet and Hungarian archive data and the reasons why they are different. The real value of Soviet archival sources. The determination of the losses attributed to ‘malenkaya rabota’.

**Keywords:** POW, internee, deportation, ethnical clean-up, German, Soviet, NKVD, GULAG, GUPVI, camps

In the Second World War, as opposed to earlier wars, more civilians were killed than the number of the soldiers killed in military actions. And in the so-called ‘liberated’ areas occupied by the Soviet Union, which named itself a ‘liberator,’ for hundreds of thousands there was not a period of peace and freedom that would come but a period of deportation, forced labour, captivity, and humiliation.

250-300 thousand civilians were deported for ‘malenkij robot’ from the contemporary Hungary to the Soviet Union.

The expression of Malenkey robot originates from Russian malenkaya rabota (маленькая работа), meaning ‘a little work’. The members of the Soviet military forces used this expression mostly to justify the dragging away of civilians. The Soviets promised that the civilians would have to go only for a few days’ work behind the front line or they promised a few minutes’ long identification procedure. In fact, the Soviets deported the civilians to forced labour in the Soviet

Union. They tricked hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. These lies were told in order to prevent potential protests, defiance, and attempts to flee.

This is why these two words became known in the public mind in Hungary and later, as a consequence, also among historians, to mean the dragging away of masses of civilians and their captivity in forced-labour camps in the Soviet Union, lasting for several years.

However, due to the late access to contemporary Soviet documents, there are many today – even historians researching that period – who mean ‘malenkij robot’ differently. Most of them mean people deported to GULAG-lagers as political prisoners, or people including them. At the same time, there are some who mean only the deported Germans by this expression, i.e. people who were internally deported, even though more people were deported than the internally deported for forced labour from Hungary to the Soviet Union on the pretext of the lies of ‘malenkij robot’ (little work).

Most of the civilians captured in Hungary were carried off by the Soviet armed organizations as POWs, while a minor part of them were carried off as internees. Documents found in Russian archives also demonstrate that it always depended on the commands of the higher organizations whether the civilian captives were named POWs, internees or just detainees. So, for example, part of the civilians collected by the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front, Marshal Malinovsky, 12,933 persons, were taken out from the register of the POWs and put into the register of the internees. (Varga 2009: 156) The confusion in the interpretation of the difference between POWs and internees was also enhanced by Order No. 1798-800 S. (Secret!) approved by the Council of the People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1941, which said: ‘*The following are to be qualified as POWs: all persons belonging to the armed forces of the states at war with the Soviet Union who fell into captivity during military actions, as well as the civilians of these states interned to the Soviet Union.*’ [italics – Z. B.] (Varga 2006: 55) And indeed, POWs and internees were no more separated when they were transported back to Hungary. The trains which transported them arrived home uniformly as POW deliveries, while in Hungary, which was under Russian control, the issue of the internees was allowed to be mentioned only in the frame of the POW issue.

But what facts of the civilian population’s deportation in large numbers were there in the background; and what are the exact numbers?

First of all, the Soviet Union had a huge workforce demand as the rebuilding of the European part of the country destroyed in the battles needed a lot of workforce too. At the same time, the Soviet Union suffered immense human losses during the Second World War; according to the latest researches, this meant 27-30 million people. Furthermore, it maintained the biggest army of the world, including 11.3 million people in mid-1945. (Gosztonyi 1993: 226) Thus,

the Soviet empire suffered from an immense workforce shortage. The captives, at the same time, meant free-of-charge workforce in large numbers.

The principle of collective guiltiness had been taken as an ideological base for the acquisition of such workforce from abroad by that time. Although the application of this principle against the Hungarians was officially denied by the leaders of Stalin, the principle was still applied in the practice.

Stalin already stated during the discussion he had with the British Foreign Secretary Eden on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1943: 'Hungary should be punished.' (Ránki 1978: 14) A few months later, the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Molotov, wrote in his answer dated the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1943 upon inquiry of the British diplomacy: 'The Soviet government thinks that for the armed help rendered by Hungary to Germany (...) the responsibility should be taken not only by the Hungarian government but more or less also by the Hungarian population.' (Juhász 1978: 158–159)

In addition, three more reasons or explanations were named for the deportations from the revised Hungary of that time. Accordingly, the civilian persons carried off in large numbers can be divided basically into three groups:

- 1) supplement to the number of POWs
- 2) ethnical clean-up
- 3) being interned as Germans.

1.) There were two motives for the supplement to the number of POWs. One of these was an official one originating from an order of the highest level and the other one was a subjective decision at local levels.

I can see the outlines of a decision of the highest level from the documents available, according to which the Soviet armed organizations had to collect all men who saw service since 1941, and take them as POWs. In this respect, the Soviet town commander of Budapest, Chernishov, did not palter but stated frankly that those 'who saw service since 1941 will be instructed to report and will be taken to prison camps.' (AMH MD 1274/gen. – 1945)

At the same time, the implementation took place without the consideration of the various aspects. The supplement to the number of POWs was achieved in a very varying way, by means of the most various kinds of delusions. Moreover, in many places, not only those were deported who did military service after 1940, but also men between 18 and 50 of military age, and in many cases this age limit was neglected as well.

The Transdanubian POW camps were also filled up by population from the neighbourhood. The Lord Lieutenant of Vas County wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in a letter dated the 8<sup>th</sup> of May: 'I report that several concentration camps were established in the area of the county by the Soviet troops which marched in. These camps were set up and filled up in the same way as in the

other parts of the country. The whole population of some villages were rounded up under the pretext of setting them to work...' (AVC PLL 75/1945)

But not only men of military age were carried off! In the district of Ivánc, every man between 16 and 45 years had to report at the village hall with 5 days' food and 2 sets of underclothes. (NAH POWD of MFA 27.338/pol. – 1945) According to the order of the Russian security organizations in Szigetvár, the boys and men aged 14 and 50 were also rounded up in the Western part of Baranya County. (NAH POWD of MFA 27.832/pol. – 1945)

In most settlements, the population had to report on pain of being shot in the head, or in case of their failure to report, prospects of retaliatory measures were held out against their families.

Regarding the decisions at the local level, those responsible for the deportation of the population were commanders of higher Soviet units, that is, of fronts, armies, army corps or divisions, who usually explained the delay in the achievement of the goals set by their superiors with the higher than expected staff number of the enemy forces.

So, for example, because of the protracted battle of Torda (in Romanian: Turda), about 10 thousand civilians were deported from the neighbouring towns and villages, among them 5 thousand people from Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) and more than 10 thousand from the region of Nyíregyháza and Debrecen because of the armoured battle of Debrecen, which ended in an operation failure for the Soviets.

However, the deportation of the population that happened on the ground of the battle in Budapest exceeded all proportions seen until and after that. It seems to be likely that the self-justifying machinations of Marshal Malinovsky lay behind the immense deportations as the main motive.

Stalin urged Malinovsky to occupy Budapest. He wanted them to occupy the Hungarian capital while marching. The Budapest operation dragged on over 108 days, and the Soviets managed to occupy the Hungarian capital as late as the 13<sup>th</sup> of February. (France could resist the armed forces of the Nazi Germany only for 43 days!) The prolongation of the duration of the operation was very inconvenient to Malinovsky, especially as by that time the armoured spacers of the I. Belorussian Front led by Marshal Zhukov had already approached Berlin within 60 km. And Moscow did not understand what caused the delay and they became more and more impatient. (Rákosi 1997: 141–142) Malinovsky, in fear of the retaliation, explained the prolongation of the duration of the siege with the large staff number of the enemy German–Hungarian forces. According to his report, during the Budapest battle, the loss of the enemy German–Hungarian defending army was in total 188 thousand people, out of which 50 thousand died and 138 thousand were captured. (Zaharov 1973: 262)

As opposed to this, the German–Hungarian defending army encircled in Budapest consisted of around 79 000 persons, and considering the intensity of

the battle and the high death rate of the Germans, only a maximum of 35-40 000 people could be captured by the Soviets. So, around 100 000 POWs were missing, and these were replaced by the Marshal by civilians carried off from Budapest and the surrounding agglomeration. (Bognár 2000: 77–87) Astonishing! However, the figure of around 100 000 is also confirmed by the White book published in 1950 in the western emigration, which was accepted by the UN as authentic. (MHBKH 1950: 9)

By all means, the winner had a serious problem due to the difference between the real figures and the fictitious ones when giving account after the siege, since the general had to hand over the POWs to the GUPVI (Main Department for the Affairs of POWs and Internees) of the NKVD or to send them over to the reception points of this organization within the army. (Galickij 1990: 42)

The civilian population was taken from the air-raid shelters of the already occupied blocks of houses, residential districts or factories, from flats and from the streets with the promise of screenings or just some little work, malenkey robot. Mátyás Rákosi, the General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, also wrote the following in a letter: 'On some days, thousands of workers going to the factory or coming from there are collected in the streets and carried off to various camps as POWs.' (Püнкösti 1992: 77) What is more, the ambulant patients of various medical institutions were not taken care of either.

Civil servants in uniforms, such as postmen, railwaymen, BSZKRT (the public transportation company of Budapest) employees or just policemen, were carried off with special preference, as the persons in uniforms among the large number of civilian captives came in handy to the Soviet military leaders coping with POW-shortage and these men in uniforms could be stamped easily as being members of some special armed body fighting against the Soviets.

The Marshal applied other 'tricks' as well in order to further gloss over his fraud and to make it look more likely. For example, in a letter written to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the following can be read: 'Recently, the Russians dress Hungarian POWs into German uniforms, trying to mislead the world by saying that they are carrying German captives...' (NAH POWD of MFA 30.002./pol. – 1945)

The identity of the captives did not matter for the Soviet soldiers and their superiors; the only thing that counted was the numbers.

Several partisans were captured by some Hungarian soldiers fighting on the Soviet side as members of the Volunteer Regiment of Buda. (NAH POWD of MFA 27.760./pol. – 1945)

What is more, a lot of Jewish people deported into the Nazi Germany, who survived the horrors of the concentration camps, were carried off to the camps of another inhumane empire of a different type, right on their way home or upon their arrival in Budapest, despite the fact that they had a certificate of Russian and English language. And not only men were deported but also children of 13

years old like Dezső Elter and also men above 50 years of age like the father of Dezső; Dezső and his father were carried off together from the air-raid shelter of a factory in Budapest. Civilian residents were deported in large numbers also from the agglomeration surrounding Budapest. (Bognár 2004: 99–112)

By the end of March, the total number had not yet reached the figure reported by Malinovsky, so the deportation of civilians gained a new momentum. Colonel Hátszeghi wrote about this in the following way in his report dated the 29<sup>th</sup> of March: ‘the male population has been deported in large numbers again for the last 4-5 days.’ (AMH MD 20.326./pres. – 1945) The deportations from Budapest and the surroundings lasted for more than 2 months after the end of the combats, that is until the middle of April.

As a result, an average 25-30% of the inmates of the POW enclosure in Hungary were from the civilian population, but there were also POW enclosures, such as the one in Gödöllő, where around 85% of the captives were civilians. In addition to the memories of the people concerned, this is also confirmed by the report of the Swiss embassy, which writes that in the POW transit camp in Gödöllő, called a ‘concentration camp’ by the report, ‘around 40 thousand internees are detained and they are deported from there towards the east for an unknown purpose’. (Bognár 2012: 72)

Around 150-170 000 men were taken into Soviet captivity as civilians from the Trianon area of Hungary.

2.) The other reason was the ethnic clean-up. If we examine the deportations in the areas beyond the Trianon borders, which were reannexed in the period of 1938–1941, then we can see clearly that in the areas of the neighbouring countries which entered into an alliance with the Soviet Union or changed sides the deportation in large numbers of the civilian population was tried to be used for the removal and intimidation of the Hungarian population and this way for the ‘solution’ of the Hungarian issue.

In any event, at least 60-80 thousand Hungarians were deported for ‘malenkij robot’ with the purpose of ethnic cleansing.

3.) In the case of Hungary, the third specific reason due to which the deportation of the civilian population grew to a considerable size is different from the previous two in two essential circumstances. First, here deportations extended not only to the male population but also to women. Second, these people were mostly not mixed amongst POWs, but they were carried off as internees, or, as named at that time, deportees to separate transit places from where they would be transported in separate trains to the Soviet Union to be placed in internment camps, still separated from the POWs.

The central, documented basis of deportation of German origins was order No. 7161 of the Soviet State Defence Committee (SDC) dated the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1944, signed by Stalin himself. This order included the following provisions:

1.) *All German men of 17-45 years and women of 18-30 years able to work who are staying in the areas of Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia liberated by the Red Army have to be mobilized and interned for the purpose of directing them to work in the Soviet Union. [...]*

4.) *It shall be permitted for the Germans to be transported to take with them warm clothes, reserve underclothes, bed-clothes, household utensils for personal use and food, in total up to 200 kg per head. [...]*

6.) *All Germans shall be directed to the renovation work of the coal mining industry of the Donyec coal basin and of the iron smelting industry of the South. [...]*

10.) *The collection and internment of the Germans shall be implemented in December 1944 and in January 1945, and the transportation to the workplaces shall be finished until the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1945. (Vida, 2005: 65–67)*

Stalin gave a command to the People's Commissar of the Interior, Lavrentiy Beria, to take preliminary steps for this order. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, Beria ordered to take the census of the persons of German nationality living in the areas occupied by the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Fronts. For the implementation of this task, three groups consisting of operative officers of the NKVD, the NKGB (People's Commissariat of State Security), and the SZMERS (Soviet military intelligence organization) were commanded to the specified area.

On the results of the action, Beria made his report to Stalin on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December. According to the report, a total of 551 049 people of German nationality between 16 and 50 years of age were registered in the assigned areas: 240 436 boys/men and 310 613 girls/women. On the following day, the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1944, Stalin issued the command for the deportation of several thousand, for the most part innocent people, to forced labour.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, the two Ukrainian Fronts which had occupied Hungary made their ill-famed execution command No. 0060 in accordance with the order of the SDC dated the 16<sup>th</sup> of December.

According to the plan of the generals, the general headquarters were established in Bucharest and the assigned, occupied area was divided into 10 operative zones, out of which 6 fell into Romania and 2-2 fell into Hungary and Yugoslavia. In Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, no zones were established due to the low number of people of German nationality. (Varga 2009: 147–151)

The problem with the 10 districts or zones is that they do not include the South Transdanubian region, densely populated by Swabians, from where a lot of people were deported with reference to command No. 0060.

Deportations were carried out by NKVD auxiliary squads assigned to the front governments. The generals of NKVD made a time schedule for the implementation of the deportations. However, the deportations started earlier as planned, both nation-wide and region-wide, and they also lasted longer than planned.

Deportations in the region commenced in the most western areas occupied by the Soviets and they brought forward the start date of the 'operation' by 6 days.

Thus, deportations from Hungary and Northern Transylvania took place from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1944 to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1945 in three waves and with the addition of more than 18 regional centres and collection camps.

According to command No. 0060, 'all people of German origin who are able to work' were obliged to report in the specified place and time 'for communal labour to be carried out in the areas directly behind the front.'

Several problems arose here already. Firstly, the command was not about German citizens or people of German nationality, but people of 'German origin'. So, the basis of the deportation was neither a committed guilt, nor the chosen self-identity or the mother tongue, but the racial discrimination, which was also applied by the Nazi Germany and which was disapproved of by the democratic world, furthermore, also by the Soviet Union – at least in words. The people saw the events at that time in the same way, too. Even Ferenc Erdei, the secret Communist Minister of the Interior of the Temporary National Government stated 'the fact that this is the same as the way Hitler treated the Jews'. (Izsák–Kun 1994: 35)

The criteria of the racial discrimination were not centrally specified, so the commanders who implemented the collection of the people had a wide scope for the definition of 'German origin,' that is for selecting the people to be put on the list of deportees.

József Révai, one of the leaders of the communist party, put it this way in a letter: 'The procedure implemented for the transportation of the German population who are able to work, unfortunately, did not have the effect that it was supposed to. [...] What happened was that in most places the commanders took the family names and the fixed quotas as a basis. If there were not sufficient amount of German people available, they carried off Hungarians. They carried off such people who could not speak German or who were provably anti-fascists or who had been imprisoned or interned; all these things did not count. It also happened that secretaries or leadership members of the communist party or even members of the national assembly were carried off, just because they had German names, and furthermore, some people with purely Hungarian names were also carried off. Basically, there were too many local overacting, which is of course unavoidable to a certain extent in case of such a procedure.' (Izsák–Kun 1994: 35)

At the same time, it was included in command No. 0060 – as opposed to command No. 0036, which disposed of the deportation of the Transcarpathian Hungarian and German male population –, in accordance with the central order of the SDC that 'the mobilized persons should take with them: warm clothes, two pairs of shoes in wearable state, three sets of underwear, bed linen and a blanket, kitchen utensils and food for 15 days. The total weight should not exceed 200 kg per person.' (Zielbauer 1990: 33) As a consequence, the civilians

who were deported as persons of German nationality had much better chances for survival than those who were deported on the basis of command No. 0036 or as a supplement to the number of POWs since the latter groups were not prepared for the transportation at all. They were carried off in many cases just in jackets, shoes, without food and kitchen utensils, and their marching and transit camp accommodation was also longer and more miserable. It is likely that this part of the command was included due to the high death rate experienced among the Sub-Carpathian civilians.

Those who were carried off as internees spent maximum one or two weeks in the collection/ enclosure camps, and then they were transported further. Those civilians who were taken off as POWs were taken to POW enclosures, where they spent quite a long time – usually two months but in some cases as many as 6-7 months – before being packed into carriages.

The civilians, who were deported in large numbers – no matter whether they were deported as POWs or as internees –, were taken in GUPVI (Main Department for the Affairs of POWs and Internees) camps. These camps, just like the GULAG camps, were ultimately under the control of the NKVD, but there were significant differences between the two camp systems. The most important difference was the way how people were taken there. The inmates of GUPVI camps were carried off in large numbers, regardless of their personal identity, and the focus was nearly exclusively on meeting the plan figures. On the contrary, the inmates of the GULAG camps were taken off individually under strict escort, mostly on the basis of personal convictions on made-up charges.

According to the report on the results of the deportations, altogether 112 480 persons, including 31 923 Hungarian persons, were started on the way to internment camps in the Soviet Union, while for the transports they used 103 trains with 5 677 carriages. The People's Commissar of the Interior also proposed some awards to be given to the NKVD officers and soldiers since 'they successfully fulfilled the special assignment from the government.' (Polian 2004: 254–260)

At the same time, if we think about the fact that instead of the originally assessed 551 049 Germans able to work 'only' 112 480 people were deported to the Soviet Union from the specified regions, the question can be raised why the NKVD officers and soldiers should have deserved praise, since the number of people 'mobilized' was quite far from the possibilities.

Researchers who became sceptical towards the communist documents due to their earlier experiences have a suspicion that the figures in the Soviet documents are not complete and they are only partly true. As Stalin himself said: 'Apart from the incorrigible bureaucrats, who else on earth would exclusively rely on written documents? The rats in the archives, at the very most!' (Werth 2001: 208)

The completeness and genuineness of the Soviet figures are questioned by the contradictions and 'strange things' mentioned above and in the following sections.

Firstly, Article 6 of Order No. 7161 said that ‘All Germans shall be directed to the renovation work of the coal mining industry of the Donets Coal Basin and of the iron melting industry of the South’ still during the implementation; part of the deliveries went to the mountains separating Europe and Asia, which is the Ural and the Caucasus.

Secondly, if we take the figures in the reports as basis and divide the number of deportees, that is 112 480, by the number of the trains used for their transportation, we can see that the number of deportees falling into one train is very low (1 092), while a minimum of 1 500 or rather even more people were generally transported in a train. If we divide the number of the 112 480 persons by the number of the 5 677 carriages, then we get an unrealistically low number, somewhat lower than 20 persons as the number of persons per carriages, as opposed to the 35-45 persons mentioned in the recollections. Thus we have obtained half of the real numbers!

Therefore, we must calculate twice the number of Hungarian persons (31 923 Hungarian persons) to obtain a real figure, which is 63 846 ‘mobilized’ Hungarian persons. The well-experienced Hungarian researchers of this topic also obtained similar results.

They estimated the number of persons deported as Germans from the Trianon area of Hungary as follows: Miklós Füzes established an approximate number of 55-60 thousand (Füzes 1990: 39) while György Zielbauer a number of 60-65 thousand. (Zielbauer 1990: 30)

As a result of the privation, the inhumane and anti-hygienic circumstances, and the demanding forced labour, 30-40% of the deportees died, but in some settlements this ratio was 70-90%. Most of them were buried in the neighbourhood of the camps, in unmarked mass graves, rarely in single graves, while a minor part of them were buried along the railways leading to Russia or homewards. And apart from that, there were a lot of people who died within one year after their return to home due to their illnesses contracted during the deportation.

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