

MARIANNE HIRSCH, LEO SPITZER

«THE RUSSIAN YEAR»

**Our dilemma can best be exemplified
by a joke circulating at that time:**

“Two trains meet on June 28 in a station between Bucharest and Czernowitz, one going South with refugees from Czernowitz, the other going North with returnees to Czernowitz. Looking out of the windows, across the tracks, two brothers recognize each other. One is on the train going North toward the newly Soviet Northern Bukovina, the other joined ethnic Romanians fleeing south from territories that had been annexed by the Soviets. As the trains pull out of the station in opposite directions, the two brothers simultaneously yell to one other, gesticulating wildly: “Meshigenner!” (“You fool!”)

—Carl Hirsch

The Hitler-Stalin Pact and its Aftermath

The Hitler-Stalin Pact (or the Ribbentrop-Molotov Nonaggression Pact) had profoundly devastating effects on the inhabitants of Cernăuți and the Northern Bukovina. It was this agreement that opened the way at the end of June 1940 for the Soviet takeover from Romania of Cernăuți and the region in which it was located. The ensuing twelve-month period of

Soviet rule entailed radical political, social, and economic transformations and was capped in its concluding weeks by the deportation of thousands into the Soviet expanses—persons who, for social or security reasons, were deemed suspect by the Communist authorities. The majority of these deportees were Jews. Soviet rule here was then abruptly interrupted by the German-Romanian invasion of the Soviet Union and the re-imposition of Romanian authority in this region in late June 1941, accompanied by intense reprisals and a series of massive Romanian deportations of Jews and other “undesirables” to the area between the Dniester and Bug rivers that came to known as Transnistria. In hindsight, the Hitler-Stalin Pact also marked the moment when all hopes of “belonging,” “citizenship,” “permanence,” and “home,” that Cernăuți /Czernowitz Jews might still have held were even more drastically disappointed if not shattered. Within months of its announcement, Jews here realized that they would be marginalized, excluded, displaced, and persecuted equally on either side of this new and ultimately unstable political divide. They truly belonged nowhere.

Much, of course, has been written about the Hitler-Stalin Nonaggression Pact and about the events surrounding it that led to the outbreak of World War Two. But its specific implications for the population of Cernăuți and the Northern Bukovina were not immediately apparent—not even to its German co-signers, as it now seems clear. The Pact, negotiated and signed in Moscow by Hitler’s Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and his Soviet counterpart, V.M. Molotov, was, as George Kennan so aptly observed, “relatively innocuous in itself, although highly sensational as a political gesture.”¹ It declared the mutual renunciation of aggression by the USSR and Germany and affirmed that each would remain neutral in a conflict in which the other was attacked by a third party. Shocking as this was at the time in political terms for Great Britain and France—and for liberal and left-leaning persons throughout the world who had looked to the Soviet Union as a military counterweight to Nazi territorial expansionism during the late 1930s—it was the secret protocol that was attached to the Pact that had the most dire international consequences. Once implemented, this protocol divided Eastern Europe between Germany and the Soviet Union into

¹ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), 332.

“spheres of influence” and defined zones in which each would take exclusive responsibility “in the event of a territorial and political rearrangement.”² The Soviet sphere of influence under this agreement was to include Finland, the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, the eastern two-fifths of Poland, and the Romanian province of Bessarabia.³ The remainder of Eastern Europe, to the west of the Soviet sphere, was to be Germany’s.

The Jews living in Cernăuți and the Northern Bukovina could not immediately imagine the ominous future that the Hitler-Stalin pact heralded for them. Even after Germany’s attack on Poland a week after the Pact was signed—which immediately led to the outbreak of World War Two and to the “territorial and political rearrangement” that “permitted” German and Soviet moves into their respective spheres of influence—Bukovina seemed peripheral to the main territorial interests of the leading powers. The neighboring province of Bessarabia, on the other hand, had long been an issue between the Soviet Union and Romania—and it was as an appendage to the resolution of Bessarabia’s political status that Northern Bukovina and Cernăuți /Czernowitz were drawn into the fray.

Bessarabia had been part of the Russian Empire for more than a century from 1812 until 1918, until it was annexed as a province of the Kingdom of Romania in the aftermath of the Bolshevik seizure of power and the Paris Peace Conference border rearrangements that had ended World War One. Although initially too weak to contest the annexation effectively, the Soviet Union never recognized Romania’s right to Bessarabia and the issue of “ownership” of Bessarabia remained a point of contention between the two countries for more than two decades. Then, at the end of June 1940, while Germany was involved in its Blitzkrieg through the Low Countries and France, the Soviet Union sent an ultimatum to Romania, demanding the immediate restoration of Bessarabia to its control, along with Bukovina—a province that had never belonged to Russia. Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov justified the latter, insisting that “Bukovina [was] the last missing part of a ‘unified Ukraine’; for this reason, the Soviet government must attach

² Ibid.

³ The secret protocol was modified in September 1939 to include Lithuania in the Soviet sphere. In return, the Germans received a larger portion of Poland. See Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, 332, etc.

importance to solving this question simultaneously with the Bessarabian question.”⁴ While some German pressure on Romania’s behalf forced the Soviets to limit their demands to Bessarabia and *northern* Bukovina, Molotov further justified the takeover, declaring:

The transfer of Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union could constitute in only an insignificant degree ... a means of compensation for the tremendous damage inflicted on the Soviet Union and the population of Bessarabia by twenty-two years of Romanian domination in Bessarabia.⁵

The Soviets demanded that Romania evacuate its military and civilian governmental authorities from these areas within a period of four days beginning June 28, 1940, and that the principal Bessarabian and Bukovinian cities of Kishinev, Cernăuți, and Akkerman be totally free of Romanian forces by the end of the first day. They also requested a Romanian guarantee that, in the process of troop and civilian withdrawal, the railroads, airports, telegraph installations, parks, and other important strategic and industrial installations not be damaged.⁶

Seeking a response to the Soviet ultimatum, the Romanians turned to Berlin for help. The Nazi government, however, advised the Romanian government not to resist the Soviet demands and to bow to Molotov’s ultimatum.⁷

The Romanian Crown Council then reluctantly agreed to withdraw, and began to pull out their military and civilian authorities. By two in the afternoon of June 28, Soviet troops were crossing the Romanian border into Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. The ensuing take-over by the Red Army was, as David Dallin later noted,

⁴ Quoted in Nicholas Dima, *Bessarabia and Bukovina: The Soviet-Romanian Territorial Dispute* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1982), 27.

⁵ Quoted in David J. Dallin, *Soviet Russia’s Foreign Policy, 1939–1942* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 237.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 237–238; Dima, *Bessarabia and Bukovina*, 28.

⁷ Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, 339–340; Dallin, *Soviet Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 238; Dima, *Bessarabia and Bukovina*, 29–30.

executed with unusual speed and unusual methods, considering that these territories had been ceded by agreement and not as a result of war. Airplanes dropped parachutists and small tanks over the territory ceded, as a symbol of Soviet occupation, and these were soon followed by infantry paced by large tanks. Within two days the Soviet forces had reached the western boundaries of Bessarabia and Bukovina, and the occupation was a *fait accompli*.⁸

The Soviet arrival in the Romanian-ruled territories immediately set in motion the massive two-directional shift of population reflected in the joke that Carl Hirsch remembered so well, and that serves as the epigraph for this essay—*into* the Regat (Old Romanian Kingdom), the core area of the Romanian kingdom, and outward, *from* the Regat, to regions taken over by the Soviets. Within a week after June 28, some 200,000 Romanian refugees from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina crossed the borders into Romania. Alternatively, masses of Romanian citizens—perhaps more than 100,000, including many Jews, Communist sympathizers and officials, and persons with family links in Bessarabia or Northern Bukovina—moved to the Soviet occupied territories. In addition, some 80,000 *Volksdeutsche*—mainly long-term German rural settlers—were evacuated from Bessarabia, and some 30,000 from Northern Bukovina.⁹

In their hasty retreat from Bukovina and Bessarabia into the Regat, Romanian military forces took with them as much equipment and moveable property as possible. But some troops and officers, angered and embittered by what agitators presented to them as a great national humiliation, sought vengeance by violently attacking the civilian population—especially Jews—in towns and villages through which they were retreating. Looking for scapegoats and stirred up by antisemitic hatemongers who accused local Jews of assaulting retreating Romanians and of facilitating and supporting the Soviets in their takeover, soldiers, aided by local peasants, plundered homes and property and beat, raped, and killed Jewish inhabitants.

⁸ Associated Press cable from Bucharest, June 30, 1940, paraphrased in Dallin, *Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy*, 238.

⁹ Dallin, *Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy*, 239; *New York Times*, June 30 and July 1, 1940.

More than at any previous moment in history, Jews in Northern Bukovina found themselves in a particularly precarious position as a consequence of all these events. Even though the Jewish population had suffered from Romanian antisemitism and initially had welcomed the Soviet takeover as a possible salvation, and although the underground communist movements counted many Jews among their members, thousands of Jews would be stripped of their material possessions and persecuted by the Soviet authorities as “capitalist enemies of the State” in the course of the ensuing “Russian Year.” And yet, at the same time, a segment of the Romanian public—especially those with civilian or military ties to Bukovina, Bessarabia, and their urban capitals—also viewed Jews living there as potential, if not active, “communist enemies of the State,” culpable for facilitating and sustaining a regime that had so ignominiously stripped Romania of its territory and national glory.

Annexation

The events of June 28, 1940 required a split-second decision by Cernăuți Jews, the choice between two “spheres of influence”—between fascism and communism, Antonescu/Hitler or Stalin. For leftists and communist sympathizers, the choice was obvious. For others, it was more difficult to make a quick choice, and the decision they ultimately made became more difficult to understand and to explain in retrospect. “It will always be a mystery to me why I preferred to stay in Cernăuți instead of fleeing to Bucharest,” writes Manfred Reifer, a Jewish politician who as a member of several Zionist organizations and as a Jewish deputy in the Romanian parliament, knew he would be targeted by the Soviet authorities. “Was it the law of lethargy, or the hope that one would be able to choose later, or the fear of the Iron Guard’s rule in Romania? May be it was the curiosity to experience a socialist state that led me to remain in my native city? I understand it as little today as I did then.”¹⁰

For Carl Hirsch, who had been working on a railway engineering project in southern Romania at the time, these days in June 1940 were among the most significant in his youth:

¹⁰ Andrei Corbea-Hoisie, ed., *Jüdisches Städtebild Czernowitz*, (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp, 1998), 243.

I was in a kind of confusion. I had left all my things behind in Silistra [on the Black Sea coast] except my documents (which I had taken along in a briefcase), I had lost contact with my brother, but I went to the Bucharest Railway Station and took the train to Czernowitz.... In all stations we met trains going the other way full of refugees from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, mostly ethnic Romanians. Around noon the next day, we arrived at Adancata, around 25 km south of Czernowitz and were informed that there was no continuation to Czernowitz by train. Together with a group of other similar adventurers, I started on foot.... After staying overnight in a small town, we continued our walk the next morning. We didn't meet any remnants of the Romanian army, they had left on the 28th, and on this morning of the 30th, we met the first Soviet troops just south of Czernowitz. They probably were elite troops, blond youngsters on fine horses; we greeted them enthusiastically.

In our view, and in that of most Jews from Czernowitz, there were two positive aspects to the upcoming Soviet rule of Bukovina: one was our sympathy toward the Soviet experiment shared by most of the liberal community throughout the world, and the other was the fact that this was our salvation from the coming German rule of Europe. Even wealthy Jews who at the time did not suspect that Siberia might be their next home were carried along by fear of German rule.¹¹

Of course, neither Carl nor his friends knew at the time that their "sympathy toward the Soviet experiment" would be short-lived and that some five years later, after the Soviets had defeated the Germans and re-established themselves in control of Chernovtsy, he would cross the same border in the other, southerly, direction, and exclaim "Der Schlag soll sie treffen!" ("May they be hit by lightning!") In his memoir, Carl does address some of this profound disillusionment, contrasting what they knew about the Soviet regime before 1940 and what they permitted themselves to know with what they were to learn first hand in due time: "The pact between Hitler and Stalin should have made us think.... We read about the trials in Moscow

¹¹ Hirsch, "A Life in the Twentieth Century," 58.

in the late thirties.... I knew there was something fundamentally wrong in it, but....” This fore- and backshadowing in his and others’ narratives is interspersed with descriptions of the first days of Soviet rule and the sense of relief and hopefulness felt by so many Jews.

In witnesses’ written narratives and oral accounts of this difficult year, the authors struggle to disentangle their conflicting memories, contradictory emotions, and strained allegiances. As Florence Heymann writes: “It seemed that the Soviet year had marked their spirits even more powerfully than the following years, when Romanians and Germans invaded the city and dragged the Jewish population into the hell of the Shoah.”¹²

The radical ideological shifts citizens underwent during this period, the high stakes that were attached to being on the “right” side, and a sense of the arbitrariness of those circumstances mark the memoirs and testimonies of survivors. “The new regime began to function and the citizens were made to repent for their respect for the laws of the state to which they used to belong before the Soviet occupation,” writes Manfred Reifer. “They were put on trial and they were prosecuted.... Everyone rushed to break with the past, to abandon tradition, and to accommodate to the spirit of the new order.”¹³ But, in retrospect, even more seems to have been at stake. In the present atmosphere of disillusionment with communism in post-Soviet period, they encounter difficulty in explaining their enthusiasm, however short-lived, for the Soviet annexation. In their narratives, they must both expose and justify themselves. They must acknowledge the positive changes that were introduced by the Soviets, and they must convey their initially positive emotions towards the Soviets, their attraction to the international appeal of communist revolutionary ideals, and their empowerment as participants in a movement that promised vast social changes at a moment when fascism and vehement antisemitism were on the rise. At the same time, they must express their later skepticism and disillusionment with the Soviets, the growing fear, suspicion, and persecution. All this requires no small amount of narrative skill, combining suspense with irony and self-questioning. Pearl Fichmann, for example, describes these days in her memoir thus: “In the first week or

¹² Florence Heymann, *Le Crépuscule des Lieux: Identités juives de Czernowitz*, (Paris: Stock, 2003), 272. Our translation.

¹³ Corbea-Hoisie, ed., *Jüdisches Städtebild Czernowitz*, 244.

so they brought Moiseiev company dancers, who performed in the central square of town.... Soon after came a group of outstanding Jewish writers, who delighted us with readings of their poetry and also sang some rousing, Jewish revolutionary songs. Within the next few years all these writers were put to death."¹⁴

The Russian Year

Indeed, their disillusionment increased at a rapid pace, although it was constantly mitigated by the disturbing news of Hitler's war, which served as an unsettling counterpoint. More and more, Chernovtsy Jews came to see that, like other European Jews, they were trapped between two deadly regimes in which they were undesirable others— in one regime they were objects of persecution, deportation, and eventually annihilation; in the other, of repression and suspicion. They had to face radical changes in the fabric of their daily lives, in their sense of personal, professional, and group identity, and they had to do so in the frightening context of a rapidly expanding war.

The Soviet military regime that initially took over the city was quickly replaced by a Soviet civilian regime that worked hard to institute a policy of "Ukrainianization." The top jobs in Chernovtsy were given to officials brought in from Moscow and Kiev; local Ukrainians came to hold secondary offices. Some Jews who had lost their positions due to Romanian anti-Semitic laws were reinstated by the Soviets, but the policy of Ukrainianization generally barred Jews from most high-level jobs.¹⁵ Among the Jewish population the only ones who received visible positions of authority were those who had been activist members of the secret Communist Party—persons like Sarah Grinberg and Mikhail Doktorovich, whose deep political involvement with the Communist underground only surfaced during this time. They and a small number of other similarly rewarded people were then able to help friends and relatives find employment and to offer protection from some of the persecutions and harassments that ensued.

¹⁴Pearl Fichmann, *Before Memories Fade* (Booksurge Publishing: 2005), 61.

¹⁵ Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung in der Bukovina: Die Durchsetzung des nationalstaatlichen Anspruchs Großrumäniens, 1918–1944* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2001), 363; Dov Levin, "The Jews and the Inception of Soviet Rule in Bukovina," *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 6, no. 2 (1976), 55.

Work was mandatory for anyone over eighteen, but many found it difficult if not impossible to find jobs and had to survive by selling their household goods.¹⁶ Employment became the measure of “proletarianization,” which was reinforced by a new dress code that shunned expensive-looking clothing, ties, and jewelry—all symbols of a bourgeois lifestyle that had become dangerous to display.¹⁷ Some, like Manfred Reifer could only secure the necessary employment in exchange for bribes: “I was denounced and thus could not be considered for teaching positions in primary or secondary schools. But through a Ukrainian I knew I came into contact with a school inspector ... he arranged a teaching position for me in exchange for a winter coat, a pair of shoes, and a hat. The deal worked out: I delivered the goods and he the job.”¹⁸ Soviet currency was introduced in September and because individuals were not allowed to exchange more than 1,000 lei (at a fixed rate of 40 lei per ruble), most middle-class families lost their savings overnight.¹⁹

Initially, the Soviet annexation was perhaps most difficult for older people, especially for the affluent. Pearl Fichmann describes her parents as apprehensive and distressed: Fichmann’s father had already sold his small store before the Communist takeover, and was lucky that the Soviet overseer who had been assigned to their house registered him as a “clerk” rather than an owner. Property owners, bankers, businesspeople, and merchants were issued identity cards marked “39,” and for many that number would later translate into a one-way ticket to Siberia. Bundists and members of illegal Zionist organizations alike also had “39” inscribed in their passports—in their case, a coded indication that they were considered dangerous and forbidden from residing in potentially strategically vital areas. On the other hand, professionals such as engineers, teachers, lawyers, and workers were issued an identity card marked “40” and were thus classified as “useful to the state.”²⁰

Interestingly, women from bourgeois Jewish family backgrounds fared somewhat better, in part perhaps because they had more regularly interacted with local Ukrainians employed as household employees or

¹⁶ Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukovina*, 358.

¹⁷ Levin, “The Jews and the Inception of Soviet Rule in Bukovina,” 60.

¹⁸ Corbea-Hoisie, *Jüdisches Städtebild Czernowitz*, 245.

¹⁹ Carl’s last salary as an engineer in Romania was about 5000 lei per month.

²⁰ Gold, *Geschichte Der Juden in Der Bukovina*, vol. 2, 12.

in the marketplace, and had learned the Cyrillic alphabet and enough of the language to communicate with them in Ukrainian. But even they, like homemakers from less well-to-do backgrounds, were unable to manage food-shopping on their own after the Soviet takeover; they had to call on their children and elderly relatives to help them stand in the innumerable queues in the markets and stores. In the course of the year, food, even bread, grew increasingly scarce; such items as sugar and butter were rarely available. The illegal yet flourishing black market that emerged eased matters slightly for shoppers—at the risk, however, of police intimidation and arrest.²¹

Younger people seeking employment or education were required to learn Russian. Schoolchildren were given a few months to master this language in state schools. Jewish children were also allowed to attend schools in which Yiddish or Hebrew was a language of instruction (one of the exceptions to the hegemony of Russian), but there were many primarily German- and Romanian-speaking Jewish children who knew none of the authorized languages. Nevertheless, attendance at Yiddish-language schools grew considerably over the course of this year, and the quality of education in them improved, even though there were not enough Yiddish-speaking teachers in Chernovtsy to instruct all the children who required the language to qualify for continued attendance. By the end of the year, many children still spoke a Yiddish difficult to distinguish from the Bukovina German they spoke at home.²²

University students were immersed in courses taught in Russian by professors who were brought to the city for the purpose of transforming the university. As Pearl Fichmann writes: “The teacher was faced with an unusual task; namely, teaching a class at a university where practically nobody understood him or the textbook. After every few sentences he stopped to ask: ‘Sie verstehen, Genossen?’ (Do you understand, comrades?) This was the extent of his German.”²³ But the university students were less intimidated by the linguistic challenges than by the rigid Stalinist political education to which they were subjected. As the university’s positive atmosphere began to erode as a result of the first arrests and deportations,

²¹ Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukovina*, 357, 358.

²² Levin, “The Jews and the Inception of Soviet Rule in Bukovina,” 65.

²³ Fichmann, *Before Memories Fade*, 59.

all teachers and classmates came to be suspected as potential informants. “We feared each other,” writes Fichmann. Conversations became more codified, suspicions grew. “The student David Seidmann ... had been anonymously accused of concealing a Zionist past and continuing to engage in Zionist propaganda. When his companions learned of the accusation, Paul [Celan] spread the word that it was necessary ‘to protect their colleague at any price from deportation to Siberia,’ which was the expected punishment.”²⁴ One particular teacher appears in several narratives as especially charismatic and therefore suspicious:

He played the piano and recited poetry, to our delight. He dared recite Yesenin, a symbolist poet, a poet not accepted by the official line. Officially we were supposed to admire Mayakovsky, who glorified the Soviet Union.... Whether this Russian teacher was truly critical of the party line or whether he was trying to play a game initiated by the NKVD will forever remain a question in my mind.²⁵

Non-communist Jewish social and political organizations had to be disbanded. Some, like the Hanoar Hatzioni and the Betar, had counseled their members to flee from the Soviets into Romania, and indeed, some of the members who remained in Chernovtsy were eventually arrested and deported, as were the remaining activists of the Bund. Others, such as the Hashomer Hatzair, continued their activities underground. “Harassment, interrogations and arrests were the lot of the Zionist leaders and activists in Northern Bukovina,” writes Dov Levin.²⁶ And yet, Jewish, especially Yiddish, culture was allowed to develop, albeit in a much more limited way than the Yiddishists in the 1920s had initially hoped. Yiddish theater groups from Kiev and Kishinev gave guest performances during this year. But Yiddish newspapers were limited to the Kiev *Shtern* and Jewish writers could only publish socialist-realist works in Russian or Ukrainian. The holdings of Yiddish libraries were examined and “unsuitable” books were removed.

²⁴ Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan: A Biography of his Youth*, trans. Maximilian Bleyleben (New York: Presea Books, 1991), 112, 113.

²⁵ Fichmann, *Before Memories Fade*, 63.

²⁶ Levin, “The Jews and the Inception of Soviet Rule in Bukovina,” 58.

Most distressingly, according to Zvi Yavetz, during the early months after the Soviet takeover school children were taught not only to praise Stalin and the Revolution, but also to refrain from criticizing Hitler and Germany—in accordance to requirements stipulated in the Hitler-Stalin Nonaggression Pact. Dorothea Sella mentions a shocking detail in her novel/memoir about this period:

On November 7, 1940 we celebrated the anniversary of the October Revolution for the first time [in Chernovtsy], by participating in the required demonstration.... We were lined up, and waved energetically as we passed the main platform, when I noticed, next to Soviet generals and honorees, a group of *Wehrmacht* officers. The smiles that they exhibited struck me as unpleasant and oppressive, because of the irony that they just barely concealed.²⁷

Nonetheless, Sella's communist friend Andi refused to pass judgment on the wisdom of the Nonaggression Pact at the time, assuring her that "Stalin knows what he is doing."²⁸

Still, except for the most die-hard communists, it was not a question of *whether* one became disillusioned with the Soviet regime but of *how soon* one became aware of the extent of its corruption and deception. Class and age were factors affecting the speed of that awareness and its ensuing disillusionment. "I have to say that none of my classmates was distressed that the Russians nationalized all our goods," observed Zvi Yavetz. "On June 28, 1940, I was the son of a millionaire. On the 29th, that of a pauper, because he had nothing left."²⁹ Carl Hirsch, from a much humbler class background, noted that initially "we didn't feel the invisible hand of the KGB. Sure, there were many victims, such as the owners of expropriated factories, shops and apartment houses, but this didn't touch us directly; we saw it as social justice that these shops and industrial plants now belonged, as we were told, to the people."³⁰ The expansion of the European war,

²⁷ Sella, *Der Ring des Prometheus*, 19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Yavetz.

³⁰ Hirsch, "A Life in the Twentieth Century," 65.

moreover, may have moderated the Jews' criticism regarding developments in the city itself: no matter how flawed, the Soviet regime still represented salvation from Hitler and the Nazis. Access to news about the war, however, was both curtailed and censored by Soviet authorities. Possession of a private radio was illegal, and listening to broadcasts was a secret and dangerous undertaking. The one available newspaper, "Radian'ska Bukovina" (Soviet Bukovina), published only official propaganda with little news about German operations in Poland and elsewhere. As long as the Hitler-Stalin Pact remained officially sanctioned, the Soviet press did not publish a single article about the persecution of Jews in the territories occupied by German troops.³¹

Still, personal freedom was increasingly curtailed in the newly-acquired Soviet territories: "Suddenly I became aware that the citizen was a kind of prisoner," Pearl Fichmann writes.³² Official identity cards featuring the label "Jew," the requirement of travel permits for even the shortest trips, arbitrary arrests and deportations, mandatory participation in public demonstrations and meetings, and the invasion of privacy made people feel more and more exposed to the pervasive surveillance of the state. Although synagogues were permitted to continue their services, Jewish students felt they could not observe religious holidays; in an act of defiance, Pearl Fichmann fasted on Yom Kippur for the first time in her life in 1940. Still, Carl Hirsch writes that "In retrospect, it was a fairly quiet time until the spring of 1941, when the invasion of Yugoslavia initiated a new period of war activity abroad. We felt secure behind the shield of the mighty Soviet army. We were not very happy with the way Communism was implemented in the Soviet Union, but still believed that the situation could improve."³³

Deportations

But then came the fateful day of June 13, 1941, less than three weeks before the Soviet retreat from the region. War between the Soviet Union and Germany was now imminent. In Chernovtsy NKVD units entered thousands

³¹ Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukovina*, 366; see also Levin, "The Jews and the Inception of Soviet Rule in Bukovina."

³² Fichmann, *Before Memories Fade*, 60.

³³ Hirsch, "A Life in the Twentieth Century," 67.

of households, gave the inhabitants an hour to pack, herded them into open trucks and transported them to the city's main railway station for deportation. The next morning children and young people were gathered from schools and universities to be deported along with their parents.

Who was deported? Of the 3,800 people arrested on June 13 and in the following few days in Chernovtsy and its neighboring villages, 80% were Jewish. They were considered "enemies of the regime": holders of "passport 39," land and property owners, rich farmers, members of outlawed political parties and youth movements, and generally anyone thought to be a German sympathizer.³⁴

"From our apartment building they deported a couple with a ten-year-old daughter," Pearl Fichmann writes:

The father had owned a small furniture store that had been nationalized by the government. Across the street from us they deported a family whose son and daughter were known communists. The father, Mr. Ippen, was a socialist, and the son had been killed in Spain as a volunteer fighting on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. It was said that the entire family was non-grata because the son was supposedly a Trotskyite. The daughter and son-in-law were communists, but because they lived in her parents' apartment, they were taken away with everybody else in the house. The place was then sealed and later a commissar or an officer moved in and inherited the entire household.... Many Russians considered it a fact of life that people would disappear by the favor of their government.³⁵

Manfred Reifer describes his own near deportation:

Six armed NKVD officers stood before the door, rang the bell insistently, and demanded entry. My wife and I felt paralyzed and could not bring ourselves to go to the door.... They [eventually gained entry,] surrounded my bed, and told us to pack underwear and clothing and to accompany them. I tried to refuse, telling them I was sick and undergoing treatment, that I had just had a difficult operation and was nearly blind, thus

³⁴ Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukovina*, 363–366.

³⁵ Fichmann, *Before Memories Fade*, 66, 67.

incapable of traveling. I showed him my papers from the clinic indicating that I had a heart condition as well. However, they insisted that everyone told such stories, that we should get dressed quickly and take our things along, because in our new residence there would be good doctors who would take care of my health.

After several attempts to transport him to the railway on a stretcher in the pouring rain had failed, Reifer was brought to the hospital. When he woke up, he heard a radio news report about the “masses of people who were voluntarily seeking to resettle somewhere, away from Czernowitz.” Notes Reifer: “‘Of the thousands who wanted to relocate, only some could be accommodated,’ the announcer said. I now understood the mendacity of the Soviet propaganda machine.”³⁶

There was little time to assess the impact of these deportations and the dangers they posed for former property owners or members of groups like the Zionist Youth movement, Hashomer Hatzair. By Sunday, June 22, Germany had launched its invasion of the Soviet Union, war had broken out on a massive scale, and Chernovtsy was again on the front line. The city’s Jewish population was confronted with potentially mortal danger. Nevertheless, in retrospect many Czernowitz Jews came to judge the deportations of June 13, 1941, in Dov Levin’s terms, as “the epitome of everything that occurred under the Soviets in 1940–41” and to regard them as “the symbol of that eventful year.”³⁷

“I was deeply outraged when I passed the station on my way to a textile plant [on June 13] and saw all these people in cattle cars waiting to be shipped to Siberia,” Carl Hirsch testified. “I said to myself that I would never forget nor forgive this lack of humanity. But, you know, it’s strange. As soon as the massive Nazi deportations began in October [of the same year]—and they also left from this railroad station—I did forget. Remember, by late June the Soviets had already left the city. And we were faced with a choice, to flee with them, or to stay here, waiting for the Germans to come.”³⁸

³⁶ Corbea-Hoisie, ed., *Jüdisches Städtebild Czernowitz*, 251, 252, 254.

³⁷ Levin, “The Jews and the Inception of Soviet Rule in Bucovina,” 59.

³⁸ Hirsch, “A Life in the Twentieth Century,” 68.