

## 10. Playball of the Mighty

After the First World War all Germans who lived in the region of Romania had joined together in the "Association of the Germans in Great-Romania". Their representatives in the parliament sought with all means to pursue all interests of the German minority. They did this above all, by negotiations with the Romanian parties who appreciated the increase in votes by the German citizens and therefore were always ready to make concessions. In the mid-twenties Fritz Fabritius, cavalry captain, retired, had brought to life the "Help Yourself" (Selbsthilfe). In the beginning this organization was a savings bank for buildings, but soon it also took on ethnic and social problems. Out of this emerged the Movement of Renewal which joined together with the Wanderers (Wandervogel) in 1931, which, through the labor camps, attracted many young people. In the year a labor camp was also set up in Gross-Kopisch. The swampy meadows of the parish in the Pfaffenln below the village were drained. The men of Gross-Kopisch had participated with enthusiasm. The experience of lived fellowship bore fruit and produced a new courage for life. In the subsequent winter a large vineyard of the parish was cleared and again planted with vines. The sense of valuation by the parochial and village community was re-balanced. The basis for this recovery had been laid a few years earlier through the building of the auditorium. Soon thereafter the church community was debt free, so that the vacant position for a pastor could be filled again. Some farmers followed the example of increased effort in their own business and thus improved their own economic well-being.

In the year 1935 a split into two camps occurred within the renewal movement, a moderate under Fritz Fabritius, and a radical under Dr. A. Bonfert. Both relied on the ideas of ethnic renewal in Germany. A distressing brotherly discord erupted which widened into a spiteful battle about the leadership, a battle about the use of power in miniature. Gross-Kopisch remained untouched by it.

There also had been controversies in our people about differences in opinion, but no brawls with bloody heads and no involvement of an external power. When, now in this case, the leaders of the quarreling parties were ordered to Germany and to stay there, and their supporters received the instruction to stop the fight, the Romanian political circles pricked up their ears. They viewed this as interference in the sovereignty of their state. More than until now many increasingly questioned our loyalty. The treatment of Germans by the authorities and especially by the military was shaped more and more by chauvinism in everyday life. The hate poured over the heads of the Saxons like a sea of flames in these years. The hostility towards the German rulers was directed towards the Germans one encountered every day, to whom one could manifest one's emotions without restraints. People were spurred in such an attitude by occurrences whose purpose was not revealed to us. Pre-military Romanian youths brought secretly weapons into the villages. For what purpose this happened, the Saxons learned at the end of August in the year 1939 after the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact had been adopted and Romania thereby lost its backing. The Pact had brought a cool-down of the atmosphere. Now it was found out that a barn with empty surroundings in the one village had been under closer surveillance, a barn to which the Saxons would have come running in case there had been a fire. In Gross-Kopisch a military position had been excavated on the Dromeldenreg; a place from which the whole district inhabited by the Saxons could be inspected, and which still can be seen today. Against whom were such measures been taken, if not against the Saxons? Then previously adopted plans were dropped again and the weapons were again secretly carried away. In this way the Pact of the two Great-Powers was of greater significance than most suspected then and even today are able to believe.

When on the first of September 1939 the Second World War broke out most Saxon men had already been drafted for work.

They worked on railway lines and fortifications. Very few served under arms because the leadership of the military did not trust them. When Romania joined with Germany and the joint attack towards the Soviet Union was carried out, the Ethnic-Germans (Volksdeutschen) were incorporated into the combat troops of the country. In the Vienna Arbitration Romania had to transfer North-Siebenbürgen to Hungary, while the Soviet Union earlier had already occupied Bessarabia and the North-Bukovina. Several men from Gross-Kopisch had participated in the retreat from these Romanian districts, which was experienced as very painful by the Romanian people.

At the end of 1940 by decree the "Ethnic-German Group in Romania" was established. This group could, as the juridical power with rights to public law, establish schools and other cultural institutions, and could raise contributions for their maintenance. This was an autonomy for cultural affairs like our people had had bevor the dissolution of the National University. Based on this right the group took over all of the parochial school system. When the leader of the Ethnic-

Group, Andreas Schmidt, who had been installed by Berlin, made a claim for total leadership for all aspects of our ethnic traditions, the trust in the leadership by the Ethnic Group dwindled in wide circles of the Saxon population. The forced retirement of bishop Glondys and an open declaration against the Christian faith awakened an outrage in the ranks of the faithful Christians. Already the installation of a leader for the Ethnic Group was a violation of our democratic practice. We had been used to vote for our officers since the time of our first settlement. An ominous step in this direction already had been an agreement, coming from Germany, with the government of Antonescu about the drafting of our men into the German Armed Forces (Wehrmacht). Some were happy to escape from the venomous pressure to which they had been subjected for many years. But the German politicians made a fateful diplomatic mistake with this. The government Antonescu started a trade in human beings, of which our people are still the object decades later. Our men were released from the Romanian army and drafted for the German army by the mixed Romanian-German commissions.

p.100

Fourteen men from Gross-Kopisch continued to stay in the Romanian army, while eighteen reported for duty in the German army.

It was an uncanny burden for the soldiers. Almost at once they had to live in two different camps in hostile position to each other since a truce had been established between Romania and the Soviet Union on August 1944. One camp was homeless in a foreign country; the others lived without rights in a homeland of which they had been robbed gradually. Both lived in the agonizing uncertainty whether they would come together again at some time.

There was mourning about the loss of thirty-three young men, who became victims of the war as fallen or missing-in-action soldiers. Even heavier than the loss was the fact that thirty-three men remained in the foreign country because the Romanian government renounced their citizenship and prohibited their return home, despite the transfer from one army to the other had been taken place on the basis of an interstate agreement between two states. Neither the Saxons nor the leading Romanians had seen a violation in it against the loyalty and faithfulness towards the fatherland Romania. Discrimination, maybe even corporeal maltreatment, to which one was exposed as a German in the Romanian army had made it easy for most to switch banners. When the war ended they were held responsible equally for the actions of the government as well as for the offenses of individual chauvinists.

In 1956, when the Romanian citizenship was again granted to all former citizens of Romania living in foreign countries, it was too late for many people from Gross-Kopisch to return home. They had found work and a home abroad. A separation from the family was for many sealed. They had also learned what happened to those who had returned home. They had been persecuted, had lived in foxholes below barns and bales of straw, with the daily danger of being detected, imprisoned, and carried off to forced labor.

p. 101

Although this was changed in 1952, only a few had found work in their home village. Some had found occupation in the industry in the cities and could only be home on weekends to be with their family.

The news about the deportation of many inhabitants of Saxon cities and peasants from Banat were also not reassuring. Among the Saxons this applied to families who had lost their businesses or trading companies through a take-over by the state, but who still lived in their apartments. This was an attempt to free up living space for workers migrating here from other parts of the country. Former owners were branded as exploiters, had to leave their residence and city and settle elsewhere. In this way they were not only robbed of their home but they were also forced to short-sale or store their furniture and other things of value, their last reserve, in unsuitable places where they were ruined. Until the time these evacuees were allowed to return into their family village even the last reserve there had been depleted, because in most cases the people were old and without work. Even farmers who had been rich previously were affected by this measure. A family Bruss from Rosenau came to Gross-Kopisch. From the same village two brothers Truetsch found a transient residence in BIRTHÄLM. In their family village they had owned well-run farms and beautiful homes. This had been enough cause to evacuate them and occupy their homes with foreign people. Their land had already been seized earlier to degrade them to day laborers.

In the same year, to create a border zone to Yugoslavia entire villages from Swabia were resettled and unloaded from the railway carriages and placed on the open fields of the River Danube plain, where they had to dig holes in the ground for the winter. Years later all of them were allowed to return to their homesteads. Some were happy if they were conceded a place in a garage as a dwelling. The news of this reached across all borders...

p. 102

....and carried a greater weight than the reinstatement of the certificate of state citizenship because a government with such a treatment of the Germans in their homeland had lost its credibility. After the war most Romanians had the opinion

which supposedly had been expressed by the leader of the National Farmers' Party: "The Saxons, the stronghold of the German imperialism must be annihilated." It was also said he had concocted the plan to carry out a resettlement within the state in such a manner that in each case one German family was to be moved forcefully into a Romanian village. He was removed from the government before he could realize such a plan. No wonder that also in Gross-Kopisch a Romanian woman said one should fill the village fountain with the Saxons. But there were also more rational people who urged moderation or, at least, stood apart. All spitefulness, all hostilities, and all evil notions smashed into pieces, in view of God's mercy holding his protective hand above our people at this time as well.

During the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1944 King Michael read with a shaking voice an appeal to the people in which he informed them of the conclusion of a truce with the Soviet Union and the dissolution of an alliance with Germany. With this the new conditions, which had been imposed on the country, were read. Among them were two which affected the Germans in Romania especially hard. One stated that Romania committed itself to intern all Germans who were on its territory. Their second duty to the country was to deliver one million workers to the Soviet Union for the reconstruction of war damages. Already in September all Germans were registered in lists. Nobody knew why. Some men were also placed in camps. At the beginning of December this also applied to Rector Martin Bielz, but he was discharged again because of inability to work. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1945 all men present in the village between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 45<sup>th</sup> year and all females between 18 and 30 years of age were arrested. This happened on the same day all over the country to all Germans.

p. 103

Now it became clear why they were registered months earlier. The next morning they were driven to the railway, guarded by Romanian youths armed with sticks and lead them into the county city of Schäsburg. There they were cooped into cattle cars and then deported for work to Stalino, in the plain of the Donez. There were sixty persons from Gross-Kopisch. Their directory is in the appendix.

When the deportation of the Germans was finished the action was stopped. They were the only ones who were delivered to the Soviet Union. In the meantime Romania had entered the war against Germany at the side of the Soviet Union. Therefore there remained, besides the Germans, only the Romanian prisoners-of-war for the reconstruction as long as they had not been enrolled in the combat divisions "Tudor Vladimirescu" or "Avram Jancu", which had been founded in Russia for Romanian volunteers and who were fighting the German army. The prisoners-of-war which were left in the Soviet Union together with the deported Germans formed by no means a million people. How was it to be understood that the Soviet Union refrained from her original request? There were two reasons. First, their Western alliances were incensed about this plan and directed notes of protests to their governments. On the other hand enemies had become allies and by distancing from a "justified" request one could feign generosity which degenerated into "selfless friendship" in the years after the war, and which was constantly indoctrinated into the Romanian people.

Then in the fall of 1945 the first transport of sick Germans unable to work from the Soviet Union was shifted to Frankfurt-on-the-Oder with the justification their relatives would be resettled from Romania also to there and they would be meeting them there. But this did not happen. The government in Romania apparently had changed its mind. One did not want to lose their capacity for work. Perhaps one also considered an account on of how much was owed to them.

p. 104

The Saxons had contributed much not only on an economic basis but also in the intellectual-cultural realm to the national and cultural development of the Romanian people in Siebenbürgen. Despite this their situation remained unclear, their right to full citizenship uncertain, they could not vote, and the Statute for Minorities from February 7<sup>th</sup> 1945 had no validity for them. They did not own any rights and therefore were exposed totally to the arbitrariness of the local power people and the mercy of the old and even more so of the newly arrived Romanian co-inhabitants.

Not only the physical but also the spiritual strength of the Germans was wanted but also their possessions which they had acquired because of it over the centuries. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1944, the Decree-Law No. 187 was published about the Agricultural Reform. As an introduction in the first chapter it was stated:

"The Agricultural Reform is a national, economic, and social necessity for our country. The agriculture of Romania must be based upon the small productive property which belongs to those who cultivate it. "

The property of the farmers should have a size of five ha. The necessary agricultural land that would make it possible to supplement smaller farms or to create new ones of the stated size shall be obtained by expropriation as stated in the second chapter. There it says: "For the purpose to distribute land to the farmers and for creation of vegetable gardens close to the cities, as well as for the establishment of agricultural schools and research farms, the following agricultural properties including their total inventory go over into the stewardship of the state:

- a) Lands and agricultural property of any kind belonging to German citizens, Romanian citizens, persons who by appearance or by law were of German heritage, and those who had collaborated with Hitler-Germany.”

To this the Regulation of Implementation from April 11, 1945, in Article three, gave the following explanation as to the category of collaborators: “

- a) Those Romanian citizens who belonged to the SS-Association of the German army, as well as their ancestors and descendants.  
b) Those Romanian citizens who had joined the German or Hungarian army.  
c) Those Romanian citizens who had belonged to the German Ethnic Group.....

p. 105

...the agricultural possessions of all of these persons including all establishments belonging to the business, the live and dead inventory and, indeed, not only in the villages but also in the cities are transferred to the treasury of the state in order to be handed out to those farmers who were entitled to the distribution.

The implementation of the decree of the article 3a of the law is procured with the agreement of the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission accordingly to article 8 of the Armistice Accord...”

Based on this law all possessions were taken from our people. Exempt were only the few who had fought in the Romanian army against Germany. They could keep the house and farm as well as five ha land, together with cattle and agricultural appliances. There were only eight men and two war-widows, whose husbands had been killed in action in the Romanian army. From all others house and farm, the land, cattle, all work equipment, and machinery were taken away. Seven Romanian settler families from the Erzgebirge came to Gross-Kopisch. They were assigned Saxon houses. Local Romanians and gypsies also changed their housing, moved to Saxon farms, painted the gables of the houses with the oriental double cross and considered themselves in God's name the owner of the house including all of the rest of the supplies of stored grain, potatoes, lard, bacon, and meat that had been left there for the elderly and their grandchildren who had stayed at home. In the summer half-grown youths mowed all day for beggars' wages, enough perhaps for a liter of corn flour, the meadows for the new landlords, which had been the property of their parents. When a farm of the state was established with the surplus of the expropriated Saxon land, the so-called reserve of the state, some men and women found there work as day workers.

p. 106

If one imagines the difficulties with which individual women fought, whose husbands had stayed out there in foreign land one can fathom how much loyalty, yes, how many sacrifices and deprivations had been asked of them until they had raised up to six children and sent them to school with the meager wages from their hands work. This was a quiet heroism of our Saxon mothers, in front of which one must bow in deep reverence! If they found locally no work, they marched over two and three mountains to other state farms to work in the vineyards there and often did not return home to their children until dark. What good fortune if there was also an old little grandmother in the house.

Even in these times of lawlessness the Protestant-German school continued to function. The church had been able to take it over again. But through a decree from the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1948 the minister of education was authorized to discontinue the operation of the foreign, that is, the private school. Two weeks later a new decree appeared which stated: “For the purpose of good organization and functioning of the public national education and for the purpose of expansion and democratization of the education, all mobile and immobile holdings of the church...which were a part of the operation belonging to the former schools of education....become property of the state.” According to the previous decree they should be utilized under the title of a tenant granted by the minister of education. So fast, one reform was replaced by another.

On the first of September 1948 the state elementary school in Gross-Kopisch began their lessons in the Protestant School. It had been expropriated with the entire inventory. On the surface nothing seems to have been changed. The same children were instructed by the same teacher, who had been taken on by the state, in their native language. But the lesson plan was totally different. In the preparation of the text books the catchphrase realized: In the form National, in the context International. This way, in the guise of the German language foreign literary products had been translated twice. In the case with Russian texts, these were translated first into Romanian and then into German.

p. 107

The same thing occurred with all non-fiction books. The provision of school books was free and sufficient. In Birtihalm for the children of the senior classes a school center was built, sometimes with a boarding school. The children from Gross-Kopisch went to school by foot. In some years a workers' bus was scheduled so that the students could ride in it. But because of the lack of fuel nowadays it was discontinued again.

The school reform was not the only reform changing the life. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1946 King Michael had resigned from the throne and left the country. Romania had become a republic. When the Romanian Party of the Workers under the leadership of the Communists assumed power, Romania was declared a People's Republic on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1947. In the fall of 1948 not only the schools, but also the factories, banks, and the tenements in the cities were nationalized.

In the field of agriculture the goals established by the Agricultural Reform were exceeded in the year 1949. The collectivization was launched because the agricultural productivity fell far behind the needs of the country, and the peasants could not fulfil the quota of products on fruit mandated by the state. A Collective Industry and Commerce was set up in Gross-Kopisch as well. Among their members were ten Saxons, six of them had kept their land during the expropriation. Now they relinquished their land voluntarily because the levies of agricultural products mandated by the state were too high. In the year 1962 all farmers were forced to join the Collective Industry and Commerce. Some Saxons without land were admitted for their capacity as workers. They were second class members, so to speak. They did not have the same rights as those with land who had joined. Their question: "Where then are our land, our cattle, and our tools?" always stimulated green anger and spitefulness, although the question was justified. They had been expropriated, while others brought their property into the business and profited from it.

p. 108

In the beginning the farmers in the collective fared better than the individual farmers. They had been assigned the best land, received agricultural machinery from the state for a payment in wheat. Therefore the harvest was good. From the harvest a certain percentage was dispensed to the state, the rest was distributed according to the performed work days to the members. They had their livelihoods, although for many tasks they could not finish it in one day but had to work two days for it. But when the total area marked for agriculture was worked on by the collective the average yield was lower because now more of poor soil with fewer yields had to be tilled which had been done by individual farmers until then. Therefore the younger men tried to migrate into a city which was made more difficult under the condition of requiring an authorization to do so. Soon there was a lack of field workers. Only those who did not have the necessary education, who was too old or physically disabled, and therefore was not accepted by the industry, stayed in agriculture. Among the Saxons soon only a few retirees worked in the fields, women whose husbands were employed in the city, and experts. The women took over root crops to work on because they received natural produce as payment from the proceeds. With the corn and the potatoes they received they fed a pig for their family and thus secured their need for fat and meat.

In the year 1949 a German Anti-Fascist committee was established. Since then its mouthpiece, the newspaper "Neuer Weg – New Way" came out. After the formation of the National Labor Front this paper became their organ. It had the task to direct the German readers towards the line of the Communist Party. The Decree No. 81 was given to the administrative organizations in 1956 which directed them to give a house as property again to the Germans. This could be their own if it was not used for public purposes, otherwise it could be another. Everybody could only receive one, even if more than one had been expropriated. He received a document of ownership and had to register it – naturally for a fee – into the Land Registry.

p. 109

The house was no longer subject to inheritance through the father, neither was it reparation for a wrong committed earlier, but one received the gift of a house from the state by an act of mercy. Therefore nobody needed to wonder that the garden was not mentioned in the document of ownership and one had to pay a lease for it to the Council of the community. That the Romanians could have several houses and gardens also nobody had to wonder about, because they owned them legally as their inheritance and as they had not received them as a gift! With this type of argumentation an incurred injustice should be made palatable to the affected person, meaning, putting up a falsehood as believable truth.

At a Congress of the Party the leader of the state spoke about possible mistakes committed towards the German populace. But nobody thought about reparation, which would have been the only way to make a guilty plea believable, except that the statute of minority now was validated for all Germans in its totality. Now they were considered and treated as citizens with equal rights. On the fifteenth of November 1968 the Council of the workers of German Nationality was founded. It should defend the interests of the Party in their ranks. All children have the right to education. Elementary and Middle Schools with German as the language of instruction were maintained by the state. Accordingly, candidates for High schools could take the entrance examination in German, if they wanted, and if a High School teacher was present at the relevant school who could speak German. There are many successful German High School Graduates. But then they

were assigned a position somewhere in the country and thus were torn from the community of their own people. It was not uncommon that they entered into a mixed marriage and got lost to our people, because when the man/woman has two ways to choose, most often he/she chooses the more comfortable one. The young workers visit a vocational school after the tenth grade and, after finishing their schooling receive a position in the firm that had educated them. As long as they are young they commute and live in the village in their familiar community.

p. 110

Later on they move to the city and now live closely packed in an apartment house together with Romanians and others. The every-day language in the apartment house, at the workplace, and in the street is Romanian, the language of the majority. The children also speak Romanian during play; it becomes more familiar for them than their native language. If one speaks with the parents about the future you keep hearing the anxious question: "What will become of our children?" There is a natural process that occurs without human interfering or fault and which eventually leads to denationalization. This was clearly recognized and expressed by the Romanian leader of the state. He said there would come a time when only one language will be spoken in the whole country, the language of the socialist fatherland. This will not be commanded but pursued single-mindedly, without pressure, because otherwise one could count on resistance. Preferably one would let educate the children in their mother tongue about the origin and the development of the Romanian people. Their own heritage is concealed. But the person who would want to speak about the accomplishments and the history of the Saxon people will be branded as a Nationalist. One educates for Internationalism but remains under one's flag nationalistic, forbidding not only to use German names for villages in German newspapers, but one eradicates even those Romanian names if they reveal that they were derived from German names of their original founders. Nothing can do more damage to a people as to when it is being robbed of their history and national conscience. If it gets so far that it no longer knows its past, loses its self-confidence, no longer loves its tradition, language, and customs, then it is in danger to give itself up. Whether this is a gain is more than questionable! The greatness of a nation exists especially in the diversity and acknowledged differences of all of its peoples, with freedom and equal rights for all! This insight would have been a blessing also for the Romanians. It could have granted certain autonomy to the other residents of the state, and could have bestowed to the Germans some cultural autonomy so that they could invest all of their strength into the well-being of the fatherland.

p. 111

Only a free independent man is happy and ready to put all his/her creative capacity into the service for the community. And the second truth: A folk that suppresses another folk – in whatever kind this may happen – is not called for leadership. Even the last dweller in a village would finally get this insight. Then the living together of the people would be peaceful and the question: "What will become of our children?" would not have to be accompanied by the concern that they may lose our beliefs and our way of life.

The most painful wound of our people is the disruption caused by the war. After the war many men stayed in foreign territory, founded another existence there, while their family stayed at home. Many marriages broke apart under the burden of such a long separation. When, finally, reunification became possible, many emigrated, others waited for the permission to leave the homeland. Almost all wanted to do that.

No less tragic is the scattering of the people who initially had stayed at home, now left their home searching for work, and, surrounded by a blend of many different groups of people in the city, lost the security of the close-knit community of faith and traditions that had been there before.

We have become a people on a quest for a homeland. In view of this situation one has to ask the burning question: What is to happen of our home community of Gross-Kopisch? Nobody can give an answer to this question.

Only God knows!

It is Him alone who determines the fates of men and peoples. He lets them find freedom, security and happiness, or fight, suffer, and perish in the yearning for these.

