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# **Strid i sekelskiftets skånska betstykke**

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## **galicisk arbetskraft och svenska reaktioner**

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Nedanstående text berör den svenska importen av galicisk arbetskraft i början av 1900-talet och hur denna var tätt sammanlänkad med den tyska och danska importen av polsk arbetskraft. En viktig skillnad föreligger dock mellan Sverige, å ena sidan, och Danmark och Tyskland å den andra; trots att importen skedde på samma sätt i de tre länderna skiljer sig de svenska reaktionerna mot importen från de övriga två. Medan Danmark och Tyskland lagstiftade om invandringen och även försökte kontrollera den med hjälp av gränskontroller, statlig rekrytering av utländsk arbetskraft och speciella lagparagrafer som endast tillät de utländska arbetarna att vistas ett visst antal månader i landet, avstod Sverige helt från liknande insatser. Merparten av artikeln behandlar därför just hur de tre länderna reagerade mot reaktionen och på vilket sätt de svenska reaktionerna skiljer sig från de danska och tyska.

De aspekter som tas upp i artikeln är relaterade till min avhandling som handlar om det svenska nationsbygget i ljuset av sekelskiftets migrationsströmmar. Just frågan om *varför* Sverige inte lagstiftade om importen medan Danmark och Tyskland gjorde det är något jag inte kunnat förklara på ett bra sätt och jag hoppas därför att texten kan leda till en vidare diskussion angående denna fråga.

## Introduction – Polish turn of the century labour migration to North Europe

By the turn of the last century the usage of seasonal labour, often from Galicia, was a prominent feature in European economies.<sup>1</sup> This usage of East European labour had its background in the substantial Polish work migration - between 1860 and 1914 the total number of Polish migrants, moving within the Polish countryside, to other regions of Europe, and across the Atlantic, involved roughly ten million people.<sup>2</sup> Within Europe, Imperial Germany was by far the largest user of this seasonal Polish work migration and the number of workers migrating to Germany was unprecedented by any other European national context. Lesser known than the migration to the German lands is the migration of Polish workers to the beet fields of Denmark and south Sweden. Smaller in scale than the corresponding migration across the Atlantic or to Germany, Polish workers were still an important addition to the agricultural sectors in these countries.

Denmark used Galician agricultural workers between 1893 and 1929 in a direct attempt to copy the German system of *Sachsengänger*. After the initial import of 400 Polish women to Lolland in 1894, the procedure of bringing in workers from Poland to the Danish beet fields took off properly and in 1914 the total number of Polish workers in Denmark amounted to 13 000.<sup>3</sup> The import of Galician workers to the south of Sweden began somewhat later than in Denmark. In 1903 the kaolin factory in Bromölla, Skåne, hired the first 60 Galician seasonal workers to come to Sweden. Over the coming years this figure increased successively and by 1911, 1400 Polish workers worked within the south Swedish agricultural sector and 400

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<sup>1</sup> Galicia (full title: title Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria ) was, at least in Sweden, collectively used to denote the origin of all seasonal labourers, irrespective of where on Austrian and Russian lands they really came from. In 1900, 54.75% of the population of Galicia were Poles living in west Galicia under different names. In addition to this, Ruthenians lived in the east and Germans, West-Slavs (Czech and Slovaks) and Jews also inhabited the territory. Since 1886 Galicia had existed as an autonomous part of Austria-Hungary, exhibiting far reaching political independence with its own Parliament and council. Still, formally the region was under Austrian-Hungarian Imperial rule. See: Johannes Nichtweiss. *Die ausländischen Saisonarbeiter in der Landwirtschaft der östlichen und mittleren Gebiete des Deutschen Reiches : ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der preussisch-deutschen Politik von 1890 bis 1914* (Berlin, Schriftenreihe des Instituts für allgemeine Geschichte an der Humboldt-Universität, 1959). p.86. See also: *Nordisk Familjebok. Nionde Bandet* (Stockholm, Nordisk familjeboks förlags aktiebolag, 1908). p.599.

<sup>2</sup> Ewa Morawska. "Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy, 1880-1914" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (April, 1989). p.247. See also; William Thomas & Florian Znaniecki. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. (Boston, Richard G. Badger, 1918-20).

<sup>3</sup> George Nellemann. *Polske landarbejdere i Danmark og deres efterkommere - et studie af landarbejderindvandringen 1893-1929 og indvandrernes integration i det danske samfund i to generationer*. (København, Nationalmuseet, 1981). p.313. See also Henrik Zip Sane. *Billige og villige?- Fremmedarbejdere i faedrelandet ca. 1800-1970*. (Naestved, Farums Arkiver og Museer, 2000).

within the industry.<sup>4</sup> What is rather peculiar with the Swedish import is that the owners and managers at the first places where Galician workers were used were all Danes.<sup>5</sup> This is significant as it indicates that these owners had a previous knowledge of the possibility of using Galician workers and had access to the already existing infrastructure of Galician work import in Denmark. Thus, whereas the Danish import was a copy of the German organisational structure, the Swedish experience was more of a transfer of the Danish structure to Danish estates and factories in Sweden. Having experienced this form of work production since 1893, with an established infrastructure, networks and easy access to agents via the press, Danish owners introduced this manner of organising the production of sugar beets also in south Sweden. The Danish background is therefore crucial for an understanding of the development of the south Swedish import of Galician workers.

This points to one of the defining characteristics of the labour import, which was its transnational character. The Polish workers were of course physically crossing geographical borders in their migration, but also the networks and recruitment channels transcended national borders. The Scandinavian countries, for example, drew substantially on the German organisational structure and the German experience of the import. These transnational aspects are apparent in how Danish estate and factory owners copied the German *Sachsengänger* system, used German agents in the recruitment of labour and later introduced Polish workers also to the beet fields of south Sweden. Thus, the relationship between Polish workers,

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<sup>4</sup> With regard to the Swedish historiography on the Galician workers, Lars Olsson has published widely on the issue. In addition to his many articles in Swedish, Olsson has also produced a piece in English on the role of the labour migration in the outbreak of the First World War. See: Lars Olsson. "Labor Migration as a Prelude to World War I" in *International Migration Review* (Vol. 30, No. 4, 1996); Lars Olsson. "Galiziska roepigor i Skåne" in *Kulturrådet* (6:1990); Lars Olsson. "Det var bara galizier i kaolinen" in *Hembygden & Världen. Festskrift till Ulf Beijbom*. Lars Olsson, & Sune Åkerman (eds.). (Svenska emigrantinstitutets skriftserie no.13, 2002); Lars Olsson. "Skånska godsägare och galiziska betflickor" in *"Sicken turk" – om invandrarnas svenska historia* (Stockholm, Riksförbundet för Hembygdsvård, Årsbok 1990). Tomas Hammar has analysed the Galician work import in relation to the Swedish erection of border controls and the Swedish legislation on immigration. Tomas Hammar. *Sverige åt svenskarna. Invandringspolitik, utlänningskontroll och asylrätt 1900-1932* (Stockholm, Caslon Press Boktryckeri AB, 1964). Samuel Edquist has used the Galician workers in an article to point to how the national was an over-arching ideology at this time that influenced all layers of society. Samuel Edquist. "En historia om främlingar. Om effekterna av nationalistisk historieskrivning" in Anders Florén & Åsa Karlsson (eds.). *Främlingar – ett historiskt perspektiv* (Uppsala, Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia 19, 1998). Håkan Blomqvist has included the reactions against the Galician workers in his chapter on the external dimension of the socialist nationalist ideology. Håkan Blomqvist. *Nation, ras och civilisation i svensk arbetarrörelse före nazismen* (Stockholm, Carlssons, 2006). In addition to this, Göran Rosander has provided an article on the Galician work migration in the encyclopaedia like book edited by Ingvar Svanberg and Harald Runblom. Göran Rosander. "Galizier" in Ingvar Svanberg & Harald Runblom (eds.). *Det mångkulturella Sverige – En handbok om etniska grupper och minoriteter* (Stockholm, Gidlunds Bokförlag, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Lars Olsson. "Det var bara galizier i kaolinen" in *Hembygden & Världen. Festskrift till Ulf Beijbom*. Lars Olsson, & Sune Åkerman (eds.). (Svenska emigrantinstitutets skriftserie no.13, 2002). pp.277-280.

German agents and Danish and Swedish estate owners point to the interconnectedness of the labour import business, and one can possibly talk about one common market for this kind of North European seasonal labour import. Consequently, the national experiences of the import were far from isolated from each other, but were intrinsically linked with channels running between and across the different contexts.

### **The import as a zone of conflict and the ensuing state reactions**

Because of the close links between the recruitment processes and the organisation of the beet production in these national contexts, it is perhaps unsurprising that the same kind of problems and conflicts arose in all the three national settings in relation to this import. As the Danish and Swedish estate owners copied the system of seasonal work import from Germany, with the help of German agents and using German contracts, it resulted in the Scandinavians also taking over the same kind of problems found in Germany. Basically, the root of these problems can be located in the manner in which the Polish workers were recruited. Private agents signed contracts between themselves and the workers, which tied the latter group to the agent and left the owners of the factories and estates without any responsibility for the workers. There was little state control and the contracts were written in such a manner that they left the workers without any significant rights. In all three countries this led to conflicts between the workers on the one hand, and the agents and estates on the other. Breaches of contracts were thus common. As a consequence, debates followed on how to direct the growing problem of the Polish seasonal labour. Interestingly, Denmark and Germany enforced laws on the issue, and also targeted the manner in which the workers were recruited, moving from individual agents to a single state authorised common organisation. In Sweden this did not happen. Though the question was discussed thoroughly over the years in the Swedish Parliament, there was never any enactment of laws and there was no stricter immigration control by the state.

### **Danish and German reactions and legislation**

Initially, the contracts used in Denmark were either German or direct translations of German contracts. In the light of it being German agents doing the recruiting, this is perhaps rather unsurprising. The original Danish contracts were thus copied directly from the German originals and both versions were highly unfavourable to the Polish workers, who stood

without almost any legal protection. Unsurprisingly, a large number of conflicts between the Polish workers on the one hand, and the agents and estate owners on the other, followed. In Denmark, the many conflicts led to a Protective Act being passed in 1908 that called for a change in the way foreign workers were treated in Denmark. The background to the Act can be found in the substantial debates in the Danish Parliament that followed from the import. Especially the Social Democrats tried to bring the question to the table as they found it appalling how the Polish workers were treated. It was not, however, until a broader political consensus around this issue developed that the question was properly researched. What probably accelerated this development was the decision of the Galician authorities, in 1904, to restrict the possibilities of recruiting Galician workers. This led to difficulties in getting enough labour to the beet fields and thus created further incentives, also from the perspective of the land- and industry owners, to direct the problem. The *Law no 229 regarding the Usage of foreign Workers to work in some enterprises and the public Control thereof* thus came about with the objectives of guaranteeing the rights for the foreign workers. The Act was enacted on 21 August 1908 and was commonly known as “the Pole law”.<sup>6</sup> After the introduction of the law it became obligatory to use a state authorised contract written in Danish and with extended rights for the seasonal labourers.

As a consequence of the law and the introduction of state authorised contracts, the recruitment of seasonal labour started to shift from a large number of unregulated private agents to a smaller number of state authorised agencies. The *Sukkerroedykernes Forening til Framskaffelse af Arbejdskraft* was by far the largest and it is significant that it co-operated closely with the Danish state. H.E. von Beck, who was one of the leading figures in the organisation, was also involved in the founding of the *Landsudvalget for Anvendelse af udenlandske Arbejdere*. The organisation was founded in 1908, had representatives in both Royal and State quarters and had as its main mission to protect the interest of both the employers and the foreign employees. In the period before the First World War the organisation should perhaps best be regarded as a checks and balance instance for the keeping of the Protective Act. It distributed the authorised contracts (and thereby controlled who imported Polish workers) and later, from 1915, it mantled the role as sole importer of workers. Consequently, the main effect of the 1908 law was the gradual control of the import by the

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<sup>6</sup> George Nellemann. *Polske landarbejdere i Danmark og deres efterkommere - et studie af landarbejderindvandringen 1893-1929 og indvandrernes integration i det danske samfund i to generationer*. (København, Nationalmuseet, 1981). pp. 55-85.

Danish state. After 1912 when a revision of the 1908 Act enforced stronger controls of the Polish workers, introducing for example a book of residency, state control became even more prominent. Significantly, the change came about principally because the Danish Conservatives had asked for an introduction of the same kind of forced identification as was in place in Germany.<sup>7</sup>

The Danish measures should therefore be read against the background of the German decision to start controlling the Polish migration of labour. Initially, the recruitment of seasonal labour to Germany took place on a private basis where individual agents recruited Polish workers. Increasingly, this practice proved problematic. Not only were the Galician workers, bound by contract to the agent and not the estate or factory, often treated badly, it was also feared that these Polish workers were to settle permanently in Germany and thus threaten the Germanisation project of the eastern provinces. In 1905 therefore, this system started to change and the recruitment of seasonal workers was gradually taken over by the establishment of the Central Office of Agricultural Workers (*Deutsche Feldarbeiterzentralstelle*). This was a private organisation, albeit heavily funded by the Prussian authorities, with the mission to supply seasonal workers with proper contracts to German estates, and to make sure that these workers returned back to their home region after the end of the season, the so called “*Karenzzeit*” (introduced in 1890, this measure forced Polish workers to return to their home regions for the winter months). In 1908 the Central Office of Agricultural Workers was given the exclusive right to import Polish labour.<sup>8</sup>

It is significant that this change in how the seasonal workers were recruited came about at the same time as forced identification was instituted and stricter border controls began. The introduction of an identity card for the workers was to prevent unauthorised transfer of work places, previously a quite common practice, and also to better control the immigration. Especially the highly influential *Deutscher Ostmarkenverein* had been working for a stricter control of the Polish immigration since 1894.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, forced identification, stricter

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<sup>7</sup> George Nellemann. *Polske landarbejdere i Danmark og deres efterkommere - et studie af landarbejderindvandringen 1893-1929 og indvandrernes integration i det danske samfund i to generationer*. (København, Nationalmuseet, 1981). pp. 34-42, 44, 60, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Sebastian Conrad. *Globalisierung und Nation im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (München, C.H.Beck, 2006). pp. 134-136

<sup>9</sup> Johannes Nichtweiss. *Die ausländischen Saisonarbeiter in der Landwirtschaft der östlichen und mittleren Gebiete des Deutschen Reiches : ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der preussisch-deutschen Politik von 1890 bis 1914*

border controls, and state controlled recruitment were all measures introduced in Germany during a relatively short time span in order to control, and preferably restrict, the import of Polish workers to German lands.

### Swedish reactions and legislation

The first workers arrived in the beet fields of south Sweden in April 1904. Six days later the import was brought to the attention of the parliament where a fierce debate followed. The debate originated with Fredrik Thorsson from the (socialist) *Skånska Lantarbetarförbundet* in Ystad wanting to question the Prime Minister on the import of foreign labour. Thorsson worried that the imported workers were to be called in as strike breakers at a number of south Swedes estates that were in blockade. His request was refused, which led to an intense debate between Socialists and Liberals on the one hand and Conservatives on the other. At the centre of the debate was the question on whether it was suitable “in the light of our national, social and cultural interests” to bring in foreign labour from East Europe in a labour market conflict.<sup>10</sup>

Put differently, the question in this initial debate was whether there was a need for a Swedish immigration law. This question was directed by the Swedish Minister for the Civil Service, Hjalmar Westring, who stated that Sweden implemented the 1860 principle of the free exchange of peoples, and there was no need to divert from this path. This was a controversial statement, not least for the Social Democrats who protested against the decision as the law did not provide any protection against the competition from foreign labour. What they demanded was instead the exclusion of scab labour and foreign workers who worked on wages below the general Swedish level. The conservatives were against any such controls, most likely to protect the interest of the south Swedish estate and factory owners, and in the end the socialists’ protests were useless.”<sup>11</sup> It was not until much later that the Swedish debate resulted in a legislative change; the 1913/1914 Swedish Aliens Law, more commonly known as the 1914 Deportation Act. The Act was different from both the Danish and the German as

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(Berlin, Schriftenreihe des Instituts für allgemeine Geschichte an der Humboldt-Universität, 1959). pp.81ff., 143ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet* 20 April 1904.

<sup>11</sup> Tomas Hammar. *Sverige åt svenskarna. Invandringspolitik, utlänningskontroll och asylrätt 1900-1932* (Stockholm, 1964). p.397.

it did not try to control immigration (more than from certain groups; “the gypsies”), but established the continued free movement across the Swedish borders.

There were thus no restrictions for Galician workers to enter into Sweden and a central committee to control immigration was never established. Likewise, the usage of forced identification or books of residency was never introduced in Sweden. The administration of the enforcement of the act was left to the local police, and it would take until the outbreak of the First World War until a special security section for alien supervision was established.<sup>12</sup>

### Concluding discussion

With regard to the German context it has been suggested that the contracts used, how the state decided that the Polish workers *had* to leave Germany during a certain prescribed period of time (*Karenzzeit*) and how forced identification became obligatory for the Polish workers, were all uniquely German phenomena.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, the rationale behind this, to prevent a too deep penetration of Polish culture on German lands, part of the Germanisation policy, was of course particular to Germany. However, the fact that the Danish state also initiated legislation that resembled the German, though perhaps not as strictly formulated, and also tried to centralise the recruitment and leave it to one, state related organisation, suggests that the German experience was perhaps not that unique.

The German situation was of course different from the Danish, because it bordered Polish lands and the Polish migration came to consist of more than seasonal labour.<sup>14</sup> But despite taking into account that the sheer volume of the Polish migration was much larger in Germany, the legislative and parliamentary developments in Denmark do seem to suggest that the issue in many respects resembled the German. The *Landsudvalget for Anvendelse af udenlandske Arbejdere* very much worked in the same manner as the *Deutsche Feldarbeiterzentralstelle* and the usage of a book of residency in effect worked as the German forced identification. The *Karenzzeit* could be said to be a German particularity but

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<sup>12</sup> Tomas Hammar. *Sverige åt svenskarna. Invandringspolitik, utlänningskontroll och asylrätt 1900-1932* (Stockholm, 1964) pp.41ff; 386-387.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Conrad. *Globalisierung und Nation im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (München, C.H.Beck, 2006) pp.128-129.

<sup>14</sup> Permanent settlement of Polish-speaking people took place on a large scale in the Rhein and Ruhr region (so-called *Ruhrpolen*), which added further weight to the concern that the Polish existence on German soil was too large.

actually, after 1908, the Danish “Pole law”, 1§, stipulated that Galician workers were to stay in Denmark *no longer* than 15 December. This phrasing suggests that, just like in Germany, central authorities wanted to prevent the permanent residency of Polish workers on Danish lands.

Following from this, what becomes especially interesting is that Sweden never initiated the same kind of legislation as Germany and Denmark did. Neither was the import controlled as strictly as in Denmark and Germany, and in the contracts used in Sweden, 1§ stated that the Polish workers had to stay in Sweden *at least* until 15 December. Perhaps these differences are not as surprising in the light of Sweden not bordering Poland and that the actual numbers of Polish workers in Sweden were quite modest, never exceeding 2000 people. However, after the initial debates the risks and dangers that were taken up in relation to the import were always related to the general threat the existence of foreign elements in Sweden posed and were never put in relation to a certain quantitative threshold after which it would be necessary to target the problem. Rather, the work import was discussed with the same kind of rhetoric as in Germany where the national interest, often interpreted in racial and cultural terms, was at the centre. Nationalism, xenophobia and racial theories can thus be identified in all the national debates and reactions to the import so the question still remains *why* Sweden never enforced any legislation with regard to the import whereas Denmark and Germany did. Is it enough to point to the modest numbers of the Swedish import and the geographical distance between Sweden and Polish lands, or is there something more behind this discrepancy? This paper offers no answer to this question but welcomes further discussions on the issue.